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ABSTRACT

FROM JERUSALEM TO ATHENS:

A MODEL OF CONTEMPORARY EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

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The purpose of this study is to develop, implement, and evaluate a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching in a local church context. Traditional models of evangelistic preaching from Charles Finney to Billy Graham assume a level of Christian knowledge on the part of the audience, not unlike Peter's sermon at Jerusalem (Acts 2). Today's Post-modern seeker resembles Paul's pagan audience at Athens (Acts 17). Secular people have little or no Christian memory. Past evangelism relied heavily upon deductive, linear reasoning, and left-brain oriented communication. The image-soaked age of electronic media demands a more inductive method. The project presents a model of evangelistic preaching characterized as inductive, narrative, and right-brain oriented, while remaining true to the historic biblical *kerygma*. The hypothesis proposes an increase in effectiveness resulting from the adoption of this model.

Extensive literature review examines several related fields of study: classical and modern works on preaching and evangelism; communications studies; the psychology of persuasion; hemispheric brain research; generational studies; and cultural trends in the United States and Canada. Testing the hypothesis, eight messages reflecting a sermon design model were evaluated by using a researcher-designed questionnaire, suggesting patterns of possible significance: Females respond more favorably to the design model than males. Younger age groups tend to respond more positively than older groups. While analysis tends to confirm the hypothesis, adequate assessment may have been flawed by difficulties in

administrating the test among large numbers of those with least previous exposure to Christianity.

The sermon design model, described in terms of *content*, *form*, and *style*, may represent the most valuable contribution of this investigation. Likewise, the comprehensive thirty-two question test instrument enables the translation of otherwise nebulous aspects into quantifiable terms graphically displayed.

While much has been written on the subject of narrative preaching, there is yet little in the literature which specifically links narrative theology and evangelistic preaching. A fully developed theology and practice of narrative evangelism is yet to be developed. This work seeks to contribute towards this much-needed end.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
FROM JERUSALEM TO ATHENS: A MODEL OF
CONTEMPORARY EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

presented by

Henry A. Trickey

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Wilmore, Kentucky

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FROM JERUSALEM TO ATHENS:
A MODEL OF CONTEMPORARY
EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of

Asbury Theological Seminary

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

by

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April 1998

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful thanks belongs foremost to my dear wife, June, for encouraging me, first to undertake Master's of Divinity studies, and then the arduous project of a Doctoral program. June has stood with me in both good and hard times making the completion of this journey a reality. I am thankful she saw more in me than I saw in myself.

I am thankful to Dr. Leslie Andrews, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program for needed counsel and advice without which this project could not have been completed. I am sincerely gratefulness to my mentor and fellow preacher Dr. Donald Demaray for pouring oil on the fire of my enthusiasm by encouraging me through the giving of support, direction, and at times much needed admonishment for the completion of this project. Heartfelt thanks is extended to my internal reader, Dr. Ellsworth Kalas, not only for sharing wisdom and experience in the art of preaching but also for imparting to me something of his own soul. If in years to come there remains something of an echo of his voice heard in mine then I would be grateful as a Timothy to his Paul.

Full acknowledgment is given to former mentor the late Dr. Ralph Lewis, whose work and life's mission helped to inspire this project. In many ways, this work is a continuation and application of his pioneering research in the areas of inductive preaching through narration and right-brain communications. I am honored to have been one of his last students.

Mrs. Carol Hunt deserves credit for the painstaking task of editing this work, making up for my shortfalls in the areas of grammar, syntax, and spelling. I would also like to acknowledge the help of the secretarial staff of Spruce Grove Alliance Church, Darlene Zelensky, and Laura Henkel, for their much appreciated help in the typing of sermon transcriptions and rough notes.

My thanks could not be complete without mentioning the help of my dear friend Marilyn Elliott, not only for her literary expertise in the proof reading of chapters one through three, and for acting as a sounding board for many of the ideas bandied about in this paper, but most of all for her encouragement and prayerful support during this long task.

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory to my father, Walter R. Trickey.

Henry Trickey

CHAPTER 1 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The image of evangelistic preaching has fallen on hard times. The ghost of fictitious Elmer Gantry haunts our collective consciousness in the not-so-fictitious figures of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker. The image of the evangelist is stained. The mere mention of the word “evangelistic” linked with “preaching” is enough to make most people, including some Christians, duck for cover. The image of evangelistic preaching needs restoring.

The model of evangelistic preaching needs renewing. If the world’s opinion of the evangelist has changed, the world itself has changed too. “The environment in which we now live,” says George Barna, “is not even like the one in which Billy Graham ministered so powerfully and remarkably just 40 years ago when he burst onto the evangelistic scene” (Evangelism 16). The model of evangelistic preaching needs reinventing. As the third millenium hastens its approach, the preaching of spiritual rebirth itself stands in need of being reborn.

The Problem

To say that today’s state of preaching finds itself in crisis understates the case. Likewise, a diagnosis of evangelistic preaching suggests an equally critical condition. Ron Hutchcraft, speaking at the 1994 North American Conference for Itinerant Evangelists in Louisville, Kentucky, shared a life experience that dramatizes the problem facing evangelistic communication:

The first teenager I was privileged to lead to Christ in the New York area was a young man named Jeff. He began to come over to our house frequently and became almost an unofficial part of the family. In fact, if the front door was unlocked, he

would just come right in and plop down on the couch in the living room. And I would walk in and say, “Oh hi, Jeff. Excuse me while I get my robe.”

Jeff went off to the army, and as soon as he was discharged, he came over to the house. The door was unlocked, so he walked right in and sat right down. Only this time a strange lady walked into the living room and demanded, “Who are you?” Jeff asked her where Ron and Karen were. With her anger rising, the woman replied, “I don’t know who you are or who Ron and Karen are!” You see—we had moved. Jeff went to the place where we had been before, but we weren’t there anymore!

That is the problem with us North American believers trying to reach the lost around us—we’re going to where they used to live . . . and they have moved! They are not there anymore! (57)

Hutchcraft concludes that most of what appears as evangelistic preaching merely reflects “the illusion of evangelism” (57)! The popular model of evangelistic preaching, as we know it, has served the church well for over 150 years. Charles Grandison Finney, in his revolutionary work Lectures on Revivals of Religion first published in 1836, defines this model. Finney represents the prototype of the modern evangelist. Those who follow, including Dwight L. Moody, William Booth, R. A. Torrey, and scores of others, simply refine his model. The flamboyant Billy Sunday brings the model to new heights of popularity as he cartwheels his way across the stage of history during the early days of this century.

Most notably the model comes to its zenith with the phenomenon of Billy Graham. Graham’s influence over the last fifty years far exceeds the countless millions he has personally addressed, including over five million who have “come forward” in public crusades. Graham’s influence reaches beyond the myriad more who have heard the gospel message through his television and radio ministries. The most profound impact of Graham’s ministry resides in its abiding influence upon the preaching of hundreds of thousands of ministers, both pastors and evangelists, who have emulated the model. These preachers are, in a sense, the little Billy Grahams of the world.

The model epitomized by Graham and others still has much to offer. The traditional model typified by Graham seeks integrity in biblical content, both in its faithful presentation of a crucified and risen Christ, as well as its call to life-changing repentance and faith. The communication principles of the Graham model are noteworthy. The model is persuasive, authoritative, and illustrative. Simplicity, relevancy, and urgency characterize it. The message attempts to address the whole person—head, heart, and will, in almost equal proportions, thus striking a balance and forming a winning combination in the critical area of persuasion. Graham’s preaching continues as effective and blessed of God in the communication of Christ.

However, a problem confronts the modern preacher—to quote the sixties song: “The times they are a changin.”” Boomer and Buster generations perceive the world in vastly differing ways from those born before 1946. Tectonic forces are at work in our culture causing mega-shifts in the subterranean mantle of the world of communications. Most significantly, the present model of evangelistic preaching assumes a Christian memory on the part of its audience. Ample research now exists to show that our mission field has changed. Here in North America we no longer have the home field advantage. A close examination of a typical Billy Graham sermon shows that even his example of evangelistic preaching *par excellence* assumes, either consciously or unconsciously, a certain level of understanding concerning the Christian faith, the Bible, and the basic content of the Gospel on the part of its intended audience. Graham’s choice of vocabulary, as well as the way the Bible is presented in his oft-repeated phrase, “the Bible says,” demonstrates that an audience with some acceptance of Christian truth is in view.

Significant also is the fact that Boomers are the first generation reared from birth by a surrogate mother named “Television.” They live, breathe, and have their being in an image-soaked world. Narrative and picture are replacing logic and linear reason as the primary way to reach today’s world. The traditional model of evangelistic preaching, as we have come to know it, remains deductive and propositional in nature. While illustrative material punctuates the sermon from time to time with a narrative element, nevertheless the overarching design and format of the message reveals a linear logical argument based on left-brain reason.

To today’s sensitive seekers’ ears, the preaching of the good news in its traditional form seems confrontational in tone. Admittedly the nature of the gospel sometimes confronts the hearer. On occasion the messenger’s manner and tone add needlessly to the level of confrontation. The negative and overly authoritarian style of some lacks effectiveness in today’s context. Evangelistic sermons of the past dealt largely with the subjects of judgement, sin, salvation, heaven, and hell. The subtle trap of answering questions that many today no longer ask ensnares the preacher. Mounting evidence indicates secular people have more concerns about the problems of life than the fear of death. Guilt no longer motivates many as a deciding factor in discovering faith. The devastating effect of guilt upon the human psyche remains widespread yet few experience it as religious guilt. The experience of brokenness, however, that comes as a result of out-of-control living provides an opportunity for the gospel to win a hearing. Other factors such as the breakdown of the family leave a vacuum in people’s lives.

In consequence, the need emerges for discovering new points of entry to communicate the validity of the gospel. The concept of “relationship” proves itself an effective and

culturally relevant beachhead for Christian communication. Thus, a relational style of preaching pointing to a relationship with God in Christ demonstrates itself an effective door through which the gospel may gain foothold.

The paradigm shift facing evangelistic preaching today resembles the transformation in the Book of Acts dramatized by the contrasting styles of preaching found in chapter 2 and chapter 17. In the second chapter of Acts, Peter addresses a Jewish audience. They know the Old Testament Bible and they believe it. Thus, Peter's Scripture soaked sermon drips with quotation and allusion from the Bible. The forthright message presents an all-out frontal assault on the soul with heavy artillery.

In Athens we have a different picture (Acts 17). When Paul faces a biblically illiterate audience in the Areopagus, his preaching takes a new turn. He uses a more oblique approach. Paul begins where they are rather than from the starting point of Scripture. Paul captures their attention by pointing to the visual aid of an anonymous idol. He then tells them of an "unknown" God now made known through the witness of creation and more recently through the incarnation of God's Son. Paul declares that God's son, though once dead, now lives and calls the entire world to repentance. Paul leads his audience inductively using illustrations and quotations from their own culture and literature. Most unorthodox of all, Paul actually preaches to his Athenian audience without any direct quotation of Scripture whatever. Yet the message remains thoroughly biblical—albeit of a different form. Paul's preaching remains true to the essentials of the "proclamation" (Gk. *kerygma*). He gives them the "Word," the "Word," and the "Word," without ever telling them so. The message remains the same in Athens and Jerusalem but the method differs.

Jeff, in our opening story, discovers that unknown to him, his friends Ron and Karen have moved. Our culture, we are discovering, has moved also. To paraphrase Judy Garland's Dorothy, "Toto, we're not in Kansas" (or Jerusalem) "anymore!" We have landed by cyclonic force in the wonderful world of Athens! The world has changed from black and white reality to a rainbow spectrum of diversity. The implications of this are profound. The shape of evangelistic preaching is in question. Reevaluation, redefinition, and if necessary reinvention seem the order of the day. Past and present models of evangelism still have much to teach us. While holding fast to the best elements, the need for change is evident. Some aspects of the traditional model are timeless and cross-cultural. At the same time, present trends in culture and their impact upon communication strategies for today demand consideration.

Today's Christian communicator treads a tightrope with the ominous peril of falling to one side or the other. Tension pulls between the communicator's sincere desire for relevance and his or her passion to be biblical. In attempting contemporaneity many preachers succumb to the temptation of diluting the gospel to such degree it resembles more the shallow message of the "Self-Shelf" than the timeless faith handed down from the saints. The message becomes little more than pseudo-psychological froth with a little bit of Scripture sprinkled on top to make it kosher. The *kerygma* and its call to repentance are lost in the translation. The message may be entertaining and even educational. Touching the heart as well as the funny bone, it fails to touch the soul for it lacks spiritual power. Spiritual power is missing because the biblical message is absent. The mega-church, according to Calvin Miller, in his work Marketplace Preaching, stands accused by many of this type of compromise. "We are tempted," says Miller, "to trade the demands of Christ for a larger

crowd . . . a low-demand consumerism and TV cable worship have created the ‘lite’ church” (24-25). Striking a balance between a relevant message and one rooted in the Word defines the quest.

Like a torture victim drawn and quartered, evangelistic preaching today stands pulled in various directions all at once. Jerry Johnston and others vigorously support a return to topical preaching as the means of reaching Generation X. Focussing on issues such as suicide, sex, and other “hot button” topics, suggests Johnston, are the best route to reach the MTV generation. For Rick Warren the “how-to message” proves the way that pays. For Bill Hybels and others the “felt-need” approach provides the answer. Robert Schuller touts “possibility thinking” as today’s translation of the biblical concept of faith. Elements of truth can be gleaned from each of these models. Yet dangers also abound. The message of repentance often disappears. The news of the New Testament *kerygma* evaporates. For Benny Hinn and the power evangelism movement, the ministry of signs and wonders becomes synonymous with evangelism. Others like televangelist John Hagee pompously cling to authoritarian pulpit pounding. Evangelistic preaching has never been pulled in so many directions.

Amidst this cacophony, one note appears conspicuous by its absence. Narrative preaching, which has come of age in the pastoral realm, has yet to make a serious impact in the world of evangelistic preaching. While a plethora of literature abounds on the subject of evangelistic preaching, little has yet been written on the subject of narrational evangelism. The 1994 North American Conference For Itinerant Evangelists (NACIE ‘94) held in Louisville, Kentucky, to which I was a delegate, brought together some 2,000 evangelists from this continent. Ninety-two of the world’s leading theorists and practitioners in the field

of evangelistic communication delivered papers on various aspects of the ministry, including Billy Graham, Luis Palau, Lewis Drummond, George Barna, Dennis Kinlaw, Don Posterski, Charles Colson, Stephen Olford, John Wesley White, Ralph Bell, Bill Bright, Bill Glass, Jerry Johnston, Ravi Zacharias, Joseph Aldrich, and a host of others. The combined compendium of transcripts from this conference form 968 pages of invaluable papers, lectures, and messages on almost every aspect of evangelistic preaching theory and practice. Yet, preaching in the narrative mode received little mention. By contrast, lectures and instruction on sermon design used the deductive model almost exclusively. This proves ironic in the light of Jesus' preferred method of preaching and teaching. Jesus preached inductively through narration to unbelievers and taught deductively to his disciples in private. Today we witness the reverse. Pastors lead the way in learning the skills of narrative communication while evangelists for the most part are stuck in an older and perhaps outmoded paradigm. However, progress continues. The works of former mentor and friend Ralph Lewis contribute ground-breaking research on the subject of inductive preaching through story as outlined in his books: Inductive Preaching, Persuasive Preaching, and Learning to Preach Like Jesus. Lewis' message remains a word for both today and tomorrow.

Richard A. Jensen speaks a timely word on the importance of narration in evangelism in Telling the Story and Thinking in Story. Billy Graham protégé Leighton Ford, in The Power of Story, and son Kevin Ford, in Jesus for a New Generation, both add to a small but growing body of knowledge. Kevin Ford uses the term "Narrative Evangelism" but not strictly in a homiletical sense. Narrative Evangelism for Ford refers to the larger approach to evangelism as a whole including dialogue and one-on-one faith sharing. Others are contributing to this

field of study. Nevertheless, a full-blown theology and practice of Narrative Evangelism is yet to be developed. If this project contributes in even a minor way to this still small but needed body of learning then this study has been well served.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop, implement, and evaluate a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching in a local church context.

The hypothesis is that evangelistic preaching in our contemporary context will become increasingly effective as it moves toward being more inductive, narrative, visual, right-brain oriented, relational and relevant, while remaining true to the historic biblical *kerygma*.

Research Questions

Testing this hypothesis, a series of eight evangelistic messages following our research design model were preached and evaluated by a wide spectrum of congregational participants. The evaluative aspect of the research sought answers to the following questions:

Research Question #1: How do subjects evaluate each of the sermon characteristics of attention, induction, narration, emotion, persuasion, authenticity, relevancy, and relational tone?

Research Question #2: Do subjects differ in their response according to gender, age, years of Christian experience, or years of church experience?

Research Question #3: Which sermons were more persuasive and why?

Research Question #4: What elements of the preaching contribute to persuasiveness?

Methodology of the Study

Out of theological reflection and review of literature (cf. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) flows a proposed design model of contemporary evangelistic preaching—described in general

terms of *shape*, *content*, and *style*. Congruent with this sermon design, eight sermon characteristics were selected as pivotal to the effectiveness of the model. In order to communicate the gospel effectively we need to 1) hear the gospel—*attention*; 2) discover the gospel—*induction*; 3) see the gospel—*narration*; 4) feel the gospel—*emotion*; and 5) do the gospel—*persuasion*. In addition, the messenger must be perceived as both 5) authentic—*authenticity*, and 6) relevant—*relevancy*. 7) Further, the messenger must speak in a relational tone—*relational*.

During the course of the project analysis, described in Chapters 5 and 6, the conclusion was drawn that the characteristic of *persuasion* represents a category unique to itself. More than simply a factor contributing to the effectiveness of the sermon, *persuasion* seems to indicate a measure of the combined effectiveness of the other seven preaching elements under review. Since *persuasion* represents the goal of the evangelistic sermon, the category of *persuasion* becomes a measurement of the bottom-line effectiveness of the sermon as a whole. While *persuasion* continues to be included in designation along with the other seven “sermon characteristics,” the uniqueness of this particular category will be treated in the final chapter.

Following the pattern of the sermon design model, eight messages were constructed and preached. An outreach celebration entitled “Invitation to Life” became the venue of the preaching experiment. The event consisted of a series of sermons delivered on eight consecutive Sundays in which church attenders were encouraged to bring friends and family to service. Following each message the process of sermon evaluation commenced with the results tabulated and analyzed. This project was evaluative in design. Its clear purpose was to appraise, assess, and judge the effectiveness of the proposed model of evangelistic

preaching regarding its intended use—to communicate the life-changing gospel to today’s contemporary audience.

Instrumentation

The creation of a researcher designed evaluation form sought the goal of measuring, as accurately as possible, eight specific elements of preaching deemed significant to the design model. This evaluation form is designated the “Sermon Response Questionnaire” and referred to as the “SRQ.” Each of the eight preaching elements is rated on a modified four-point Likert scale from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with no mid-point. Each element rated asks four questions, making thirty-two questions in all. Following each of the eight sermons, participants filled out and returned the SRQs.

Following the sermon series, computer technology analyzed the accumulated data indicating patterns and trends of significance. The goal of the evaluation component was not so much to assess the preacher (although such feedback was helpful), but to evaluate the model of preaching. The goal of this analysis was the testing of the hypothesis by evaluating the specific components of the model with an eye to how various groups and those of various levels of church background respond. A comparison of response between those of Christian background raised in a “Jerusalem” paradigm, to use our thematic analogy, and those raised in “Athens” with little or no Christian memory became an objective of the investigation. Specifically, if our hypothesis is correct, the data would confirm that evangelistic preaching communicates more effectively with those of the younger generations as this communication style moves toward being more inductive, narrative, visual, right-brain oriented, relational and relevant, while remaining true to the historic biblical *kerygma*. The ultimate goal was to

identify those aspects of the sermon which were most helpful in reaching present generations. The goal supreme was to usher the kingdom of God into the lives of people.

Population and Sample

Administration of the SRQ questionnaire occurred during the week following the sermon delivery and before the next Sunday. SRQs were administered indiscriminately to all those who attended midweek Care Group meetings and attended the previous Sunday. The average Sunday morning attendance for this period was 535. During the same period, the weekly “Care Group” attendance averaged 198. Thus, a ratio of thirty-seven percent of the attending church body were given the opportunity to participate weekly in the evaluative process. From this pool, participants consisted of self-selected volunteers of which thirty-two percent responded. Out of a total church attendance of 4280 over the eight-week period, 514 volunteer responses were received and tabulated. Thus, a response rate of twelve percent was achieved.

Variables

Variables include the composite assessment of the sermon series, assessment of individual sermons, and sub-level assessment of the eight sermon characteristics. Findings are further analyzed in light of age, gender, years of Christian experience and years of church experience.

Delimitations and Generalizability

A number of factors limited the study. The population was limited in scope to a single Western Canadian evangelical church that may or may not be representative of the Canadian population. Population size further limited the study. The sample was limited to the Care

Group population of our church (198 average weekly attendance). The response was limited further by the number of volunteers who complied with the SRQ request.

While the Care Group population represents a diverse group, ranging from teenagers to senior citizens, seekers to seasoned saints, it failed to give an exact representation of the total church population. The option of giving the test indiscriminately to the whole church body during or immediately following the evangelistic sermon was discarded as spiritually insensitive and culturally inappropriate. The safe setting of a Care Group atmosphere with the test administered by a lay pastor representative was preferred as a more suitable venue for the SRQ. In retrospect, this choice of venue for the administration of the SRQ severely limited the test results as it failed to reach the majority of the target audience, especially those of least previous exposure to Christian faith. This aspect of test administration represents the greatest flaw of the project investigation.

Having noted the above, other aspects of the project commend themselves toward generalizability. The sermon design model itself may represent the most valuable contribution of this investigation. Out of theological reflection and extensive review of both classic and current literature in a wide field of study a sermon model is created which takes seriously the historic biblical proclamation in light of current issues in contemporary communications. This model is described in Chapter 3 in terms of *content*, *form*, and *style*. The model moves evangelistic preaching from its traditional form toward the direction of a proclamation characterized as inductive, narrative, visual, right-brain oriented, relational, and relevant in order to be persuasive in communicating the biblical gospel.

The test design of this study (SRQ) demonstrates itself as a valuable tool for future sermon evaluation. While this test instrument was born out of a specific need to evaluate

evangelistic sermons, its value in evaluating sermons of various genres may be applicable. The comprehensive thirty-two question test instrument enables the translation of otherwise nebulous aspects, such as the levels of audience interest and emotional involvement etc., into quantifiable terms graphically displayed. The SRQ exhibits a visible relationship between key components of the sermon and their individual contribution to the sermon's overall effectiveness. The accompanying computer program specifically designed for tabulating the SRQ scores of this project results in a user-friendly tool in aid of sermon evaluation.

Context of the Study

The specific context of this study is Spruce Grove Alliance Church of Spruce Grove, Alberta, Canada, of which I am the senior pastor. Spruce Grove is a small city with a population of 14,271 located on the outskirts of Edmonton, Alberta, a larger Canadian city with a population of 625,500. Spruce Grove Alliance is a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada and as such is conservative and evangelical in doctrine. The worship style of the church is contemporary and upbeat in nature lead by an exuberant worship band. While the church is not seeker driven as in the Willow Creek model, the terms "seeker friendly" and "believer sensitive" are descriptive. The church population varies in age and work background representing mostly middle class suburbanite families with children. The church body is for the most part ethnically homogeneous, representative of the community. The church is evangelistic in nature. The vision statement of the church reflects this purpose: "Jesus our Focus—People our Mission." J. David Schmidt, associate staff pastor of Willow Creek, once described the mission of his church in these terms: "Willow Creek is a Billy Graham Crusade with a permanent address" (261)! It is in this spirit that I wish to fulfill my calling as pastor/evangelist. Presently the church is

experiencing a period of growth in which the Sunday morning worship attendance has grown from approximately 400 to 550 in one and a half years.

In the last year the preaching ministry has expanded beyond the walls of the church via radio. The Sunday morning message, professionally formatted into a half-hour program, produces a radio broadcast entitled “Journey of the Soul.” “Journey of the Soul” is then broadcast on AM 930 of Edmonton and 88.9 FM located in Calgary. The programs appear on Sunday evenings at 6:30 PM and 7:30 PM respectively. The combined listenership of the two stations is approximately 350,000 per week, although the number of listeners at any give time remains unknown. The two broadcasts cover an area serving most of the population of the province of Alberta.

Christian broadcasting is relatively rare in the Dominion. “Journey of the Soul” ministries exists as one of the only evangelistic broadcasts in the province of Alberta originating in Canada. The bulk of religious broadcasting in Canada consists of American imports and mostly weighted with a Southern accent and geared for American culture. The mission statement of our broadcast is fitting: “Canadians reaching Canada for Christ.” For this reason the review of literature includes a section on Canadian studies examining the unique psychological and religious landscape of the land due north.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 represents an in-depth theological reflection on the subject of evangelistic proclamation. The development of a contemporary theology of evangelistic preaching is crucial before any formulation of a practice of evangelistic communication can proceed. Chapter 3 continues the study as it relates to the ongoing flow of related research and literature. Chapters 2 and 3 combine to form the heart and soul of the dissertation seeking to

anchor the design model firmly within a thorough examination of both theory and practical application. Chapter 3 is more than simply a review of literature. It represents an attempt to synthesize past and present models into a projected future shape of evangelistic communication. Chapter 4 shows the design of the preaching project and its proposed evaluation. Chapter 5 reports on the study. Chapter 6 completes the dissertation with a summary of the findings and their interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

I. Proclamation of the Historic *Kerygma*

Any discussion concerning the nature of evangelistic preaching must begin with a clear understanding of the “evangel” preached. Understanding the gospel and making it clear remains the primary purpose of the evangelist’s ministry.

Defining *Kerygma*

C. H. Dodd’s classic, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments, was a groundbreaking and seminal work in the field of *kerygma* studies. Dodd made extensive study of the proclamation of the gospel in the book of Acts and in the epistles and distilled an essential core content of the gospel message. Dodd distinguished between “preaching” (*kerygma*) and “teaching” (*didache*). Dodd defined preaching as the proclamation of the gospel and teaching as the explanation of the gospel to believers. *Kerygma*, according to Dodd, is preaching and its content: a “public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world” (7). Dodd defined *didache* as ethical teaching, apologetics, or exposition of theological doctrine normally addressed to believers, while preaching (*kerygma*) is directed to unbelievers. According to R. Alan Streett, if Dodd’s observations are correct, “much of what is defined as preaching in twentieth-century pulpits is really teaching” (23). Dodd makes the distinction clear:

For the early church, then, to preach the Gospel was by no means the same thing as to deliver moral instruction or exhortation. While the church was concerned to hand down the teaching of the Lord, it was not by this that it made converts. It was by *kerygma*, says Paul, not by *didache* (teaching morals), that it pleased God to save men. (8)

Dodd's quest was to uncover the content of the New Testament *kerygma*. Examining the preaching of Peter, Stephen, and others in the early chapters of Acts, Dodd discerned six basic elements:

1. The age of fulfillment has dawned; the messianic age has come.
2. This new age has come about through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in fulfillment of prophecy.
3. By virtue of the resurrection, our Lord has been elevated to the right hand of God as messianic head of the "New Israel."
4. The Holy Spirit is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.
5. The messianic age will reach its consummation in the return of Christ.
6. The *kerygma* in Acts always closes with an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the assurance of salvation in the "age to come." (24)

Dodd notes the particularly Jewish nature of the *kerygma* in the early chapters of Acts. This *kerygma* proclaims Christ within Jewish culture and to the Jewish mind-set. Dodd summarizes: "We may take it that this is what the author of Acts meant by 'preaching the kingdom of God'" (15). As Dodd's study moves its way through the New Testament, he points out a contrast between the Jerusalem *kerygma* and the Gentile *kerygma*, particularly in the preaching of Paul in the later chapters of Acts and throughout the Pauline epistles. The apostle often speaks of "my gospel." Dodd summarizes Paul's gospels as follows:

1. The prophecies are fulfilled, and the new age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ.
2. He was born of the seed of David.
3. He died according to the Scriptures to deliver us out of the present evil age.
4. He was buried.
5. He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.
6. He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of [the] quick and dead.
7. He will come again as Judge and Savior. (17)

While the basic content of Jewish and Gentile *kerygmas* remains the same, Dodd notes that they are cast in significantly different metaphors. To the Jews, Jesus is Messiah (Gk. *christos*). To the Gentiles, he is Son of God and Lord (Gk. *kurios*).

Not all agree with Dodd in his narrow definition of the *kerygma*. Michael Green, in *Evangelism in the Early Church*, contends that Dodd makes the *kerygma* too wooden and fixed. Nevertheless, he affirms three basic points that the first century church proclaimed as essential in their evangelism:

1. They preached a person. Their message was unapologetically Christocentric. This Gospel message centered not so much on his life and public ministry; rather, it centered upon his death and resurrection.
2. The early church proclaimed a gift: the gift of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
3. They looked for a response from those who heard. They must repent. They must exercise faith. They must undergo baptism seen as the seal of God's offer of forgiveness. (150)

James Stewart casts the *kerygma* in a pragmatic context. His purpose seeks the *kerygma*'s bearing on present-day questions. He applies the essentials of the gospel to the present human condition. For Stewart, a vital relationship with the living Christ defines the Christian experience. Experiencing Christ is the heart of the message. Thus, the evangelist must simply preach Christ. From this pragmatic perspective, Stewart presents the essentials of the gospel proclamation:

1. The evangelist proclaims the incarnation. "God has come right into the midst of the tumult and shouting of this world" (14).
2. The evangelist proclaims forgiveness.
3. The evangelist preaches the cross—which speaks of atonement, guilt bearing, and expiation. The cross also speaks of victory over demonic forces.
4. The evangelist preaches that Christ has been raised. We proclaim the resurrected, living Lord. This was the theme of every early Christian sermon. "This was indeed the very core of the apostolic *kerygma*," Stewart argues (104). He calls Christianity, "a religion of Resurrection" (110).
5. The evangelist simply proclaims Christ. The Christian faith is not a proposition or a philosophy but a relationship with a Person. A Person is preached. Christianity is a personal relationship with God through a living Christ. (14-15)

Stewart concludes that the gospel is simple but not simplistic. A child can find God through the gospel, yet the message is also profound beyond the comprehension of even the greatest minds.

Each version of the *kerygma* discussed thus far focuses on a common denominator: the centrality of the cross and significance of the resurrection. Each of the above would agree that the Easter event defines the undisputed heart of the good news. The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 summarize the focus of this proclamation:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (NIV)

Authors from various theological backgrounds concur with the centrality of the cross and resurrection. P. T. Forsyth writes in The Cruciality of the Cross: “Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there. . . . You do not understand Christ until you understand his cross” (qtd. in Stott The Cross 43). Emil Brunner, speaking of the cross says, “it is the Christian religion itself; it is the ‘main point’; it is not something alongside of the center; it is the substance and kernel, not the husk” (40). British evangelical John Stott makes a similar claim: “Christianity is a religion of the cross. The crucifixion is at the center of our faith” (The Cross 143).

The resurrection also dominates the *kerygma* as an essential theme. The cross and resurrection are inseparable. Resurrection gives meaning to the cross event. From a scriptural perspective Paul places great weight on the resurrection of Christ. He says: “[I]f Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Cor. 15:14 NIV). “The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” according to Michael Green, “is the cornerstone of Christianity” (‘Forward’ in Ladd, I Believe 7). Ladd expresses the eschatological significance of Christ’s resurrection: “The resurrection itself did not only mean the revivification of a dead corpse; it meant the radical transformation of the body of

Jesus from the world of nature to the world of God” (I Believe 125). Neville Clark also takes an eschatological view of the resurrection of Christ. “The empty tomb stands as a massive sign that the eschatological deed of God is not outside this world of time and space or in despair of it, but has laid hold on it, penetrated deep into it, shattered it, and had begun its transformation” (qtd. in Ladd, I Believe 128).

But not all agree that the cross and empty tomb are the heart of the gospel message. Craig Loscalzo takes a departure from Dodd’s classic interpretation of *kerygma*. The gospel focuses more on the life of Jesus, he argues, than his death and resurrection. Jesus himself proclaimed the good news, Loscalzo points out, while he was still living. Unless Jesus preached a different gospel, the good news must mean more than simply the death and resurrection which was yet to come at the time of Jesus’ earthly preaching. The good news, for Loscalzo, points to the event of God breaking into history and includes Jesus’ message of the kingdom. Loscalzo defines this kingdom as both the reign and rule of God brought about through the ministry of Jesus, God’s Messiah. God’s coming to earth in Jesus, according to Loscalzo, is in itself the basis of the good news. “Jesus’ ministry itself, as he understood it, was the genesis of God’s *evangelion* to the world” (Evangelistic 41).

The logic of Loscalzo’s argument bears merit. It broadens the scope of *kerygma*. But is Loscalzo’s radical change in focus valid? The proclamation in both the Acts and the epistles focuses almost entirely on the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus. Indeed, references to the pre-crucifixion life and ministry of Jesus are almost non-existent and thus conspicuous by their absence.

Perhaps Robert Mounce gives us a more balanced reinterpretation of Dodd’s *kerygma*. Mounce reduces his survey to its simplest outline:

1. A proclamation of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, seen as the fulfillment of prophecy, and involving man's responsibility.
2. The resultant evaluation of Jesus as both Lord and Christ.
3. A summons to repent and receive forgiveness of sins. (Essential 42)

Does Dodd, like so many seminal thinkers, overstate his case in order to make a point?

Instead of seeing *kerygma* and *didache* as separate from one another, further studies suggest an overlap of meaning. Thus Mounce defines *didache* as "the expounding in detail of that which is proclaimed" (42). Donald Demaray reflects upon Stott and Mounce and concludes that "*kerygma* is foundation and *didache* superstructure. *Didache* instructs converts; equally true, *kerygma* penetrates non-Christian minds. Telling the mighty *kerygmatic* acts of God builds up the converted, too. *Kerygma* and *didache* belong together" (38).

So, whether one defines *kerygma* in narrow terms as Dodd, in broad terms as Loscalzo, or in a more balanced approach as Mounce and others, the primary message of the Gospel proclaims the saving act of God in Jesus Christ. Evangelistic preaching rightly understood equals *kerygmatic* preaching. It must be faithful to the apostolic witness. The evangelistic message is primarily a proclamation. Christ is its prevailing theme: his life, his death on a cross for our sins, his resurrection, and our response of submission to him through repentance and faith.

Translating *Kerygma* for Today

If liberal Christianity consciously demythologizes the gospel, an equal, yet infinitely more subtle danger threatens as evangelicals unconsciously empty the *kerygma* of biblical content while sanctimoniously clinging to a high view of Scripture. Cultural syncretism endangers the purity of the gospel. Syncretism denotes the temptation of diluting the sharp wine of the gospel to the bland taste of contemporary culture. Syncretism blends culture and gospel to the gain of culture and the loss of gospel. The term syncretism describes the ever-

present enticement of “dumbing down” the gospel in order to make the message more acceptable. Both follies, liberal demythologization and evangelical syncretism, while widely divergent, have the identical motivation—relevance. The desire to make the gospel relevant for today motivates both distortions. Bultmann and others strip the gospel of its miraculous cloak, desiring to make the news acceptable to the modern scientific mind. While clinging tenaciously to belief in the supernatural, some in the evangelical camp are guilty of being seduced by the same siren, yet in slightly different guise. Desiring sensitivity to the felt needs of seekers above truth, the gospel stands in danger of compromise. It stands in peril of being drained of its content and of its power.

A serious question challenges evangelistic preaching today: “How far can the *kerygma* be adapted without distortion?” “How far is too far?” Much “evangelistic preaching” today bears little or no resemblance to the apostolic *kerygma*. Drummond summarizes the present dilemma:

Many so-called evangelistic sermons today seem rather bereft of any real content of the full *kerygma*, that is, the Gospel. . . . Mere appeals to the imagination, the emotions, or what have you, are not what the New Testament means by preaching. . . . I have a firm conviction that the evangelist who aspires to preach the Gospel must be very careful to present the full essential content of the whole *kerygma* in every evangelistic message. Great Gospel preaching, to use an old cliché, must be filled with *kerygmatic* content if it is to be true biblical preaching. (“What is the Message?” 39)

Thus, the quest for relevance endangers truth by threatening to step over the line in redefining the gospel. Calvin Miller, in Market Place Preaching makes a commendable attempt to deal with this issue, yet his definitions of *kerygma* and *didache* are arguable. Miller defines *didache* as instructional preaching. Miller describes *Kerygma* as “the force in the sermon that exhorts or motivates” (21). But are we to believe that motivational preaching is the equivalent to New Testament *kerygma*? Miller’s definition appears too loose.

Likewise Bill Hybels favors topical preaching to reach seekers: “Our approach would tend to be more topical and more directed at some common ground—at the needs of unchurched people, showing the relevance of Scripture to the plight of mankind.” Among Hybels’ examples are: “Telling the Truth to Each Other,” “Fanning the Flames of Marriage,” “Parenthood” and “Breaking the Chains That Bind You” (“Preaching to Seekers” 72). There can be no question that such preaching interests the hearer towards a hearing of the gospel but is such preaching a proclamation of the gospel itself? Where does market place preaching end and market driven preaching begin in a world of consumerism?

Noted youth evangelist Jerry Johnston, in a lecture to fellow evangelists at NACIE '94 (North American Conference for Itinerant Evangelists), recommends a similar approach to Hybels as a model of “evangelism of the future.” Johnston’s messages are topic based, centering on widely experienced dilemmas such as suicide, sexual promiscuity, dysfunctional family background, addictions, etc. Most of the sermon gives discussion to the dilemma from its human perspective. Then in the final moments of the message, Johnston presents Christ as a possible solution to the human dilemma. The popularity of this approach continues to grow especially within the mega-church world. While few would contend the validity of such an approach under the wide umbrella of preaching, whether such a method truly deserves the name “evangelistic” remains questionable. “Pre-evangelism” would seem a more fitting description. After all, how much of the New Testament *kerygma* can be proclaimed in the closing moments of a message?

Ed Rowell in a recent article echoes a noteworthy warning against baptizing a self-help gospel:

For most of a decade, the “how-to” message has been touted as the way to reclaim congregational interest. Messages like “How to Rekindle Romance” and “Winning

over Worry” are standard weekly fare in many churches “If you listen to much of our preaching,” quips Duke University’s Will Willimon, “you get the impression that Jesus was some sort of itinerant therapist, who, for free, traveled about helping people feel better.” (95)

While the approach recommended by Hybels, Johnston, and others may seem innocuous enough, subtle tendencies are disconcerting. In focussing almost exclusively on the human situation, the transcendence of God is all but forgotten. The mystic side of faith expressed by Paul’s pet phrase “in Christ” all but disappears. The question of “works salvation” is also evoked. By reshaping the evangel in the form of the how-to message, do we transform the mystic faith into a moralistic religion? If the principles, often described in terms of steps (i.e. “Seven Steps to a Happy Marriage”) are followed will all be well? Has Sunday morning become a sanctified version of the TV sitcom “Home Improvement?” The emphasis today is on practical Christianity. There is need for it, but if overemphasized, perhaps it reduces the Christian faith to a guide for daily life. What happens to the radical gospel that sometimes makes life more difficult? What fills churches may or may not necessarily save souls. The hunger of people to buy self-help books and attend expensive motivational seminars is not necessarily evidence of people’s desire for personal salvation and spiritual growth. Once more the ancient heresy of Pelagianism (salvation through human effort) raises its serpentine head.

Jeffrey Boyd challenges the prevailing mood of preaching in his book Reclaiming the Soul: The Search for Meaning in a Self-Centered Culture. Boyd charges that we have sold out the gospel to the worldview of the secular mental health movement. We have succumbed to the “triumph of the therapeutic.” Boyd’s summarizes his prevailing theme: “Self-denial is central to Christian psychology, whereas self-fulfillment is central to the assumptions of secular psychotherapists” (xix). Christianity’s accommodation to pop psychology, in Boyd’s

thinking, has led the church in the wrong direction. After all, we can hardly imagine Jesus saying, “Follow me and fulfill yourself!” Today’s theme song of self-fulfillment seems foreign to the message of Jesus. Boyd argues that the message of Jesus represents a radical reversal of our present day cultural expectations. As with Henri Nouwen, the pathway of Jesus leads to “the way of downward mobility ending on the cross” (62).

From Jerusalem to Athens, America and Beyond

While following chapters continue the theme of “contemporizing” the gospel, the primary issue is theological in nature. To what degree are we at liberty to alter the ancient *kerygma* to communicate effectively with the audience of today?

Dodd’s distinction between the “Jerusalem *Kerygma*” of the early chapters of Acts and the “Gentile *Kerygma*” of later Acts and the Pauline epistles has already been noted. Even a casual comparison of Peter’s message at Pentecost (Acts 2) and Paul’s message at Athens (Acts 17) shows that while the essential content remains unchanged, the form is altered. As noted before, Jesus is not normally called the “Son of God” in the early chapters of Acts, not that the concept of Jesus as God’s Son was unknown but that a distinctly Jewish audience was in view. To the Jewish audience the Old Testament terminology of Jesus as Messiah was more relevant and communicable. To their Gentile audience, the metaphor of Son of God was more appropriate.

But this raises a thorny issue. If the early apostles felt at liberty to change the metaphor of Christ in moving from one culture to another, then do we not also have freedom to do the same with our modern world? Does the *kerygma* need reshaping again for this present age? If so, then how much liberty do we have? No doubt the Jerusalem counsel of Acts 15 involved more than petty matters of circumcision and eating of food with blood—it set the

gospel free from its cultural moorings. It released the gospel like a caged bird to fly freely to all cultures and all countries, for all time immemorial.

Thus, the *kerygma* continues, from Jerusalem to Athens, to Africa, to twenty-first century America and beyond. The transformation of the *kerygma* within the Bible itself gives reason for liberty to translate the gospel for today. But liberty is not license. As with any translation, accuracy of transmission with limited distortion defines the goal. As with the translation of a language, where an exact equivalent is impossible, a dynamic equivalent may be permitted. Thus, in the New Testament itself “Messiah” becomes interchangeable with “Son of God.” Faithful proclamation of the *kerygma* in language and metaphor understandable for today’s world defines the preacher’s task. The goal requires balance, faithfulness to the Bible and sensitivity to culture (Stott *I Believe*, Greidanus)

The Christian communicator needs a clear understanding of the essentials of the *kerygma* for today. Such an understanding aims at faithful communication of the New Testament gospel for today’s cultural context. The essentials of such a *kerygma* might take the following shape:

1. Who Jesus is—God’s self-disclosure in His eternal Son.
2. Why Jesus came—To bring us into a living relationship with God.
3. What Jesus did—He died and came to life again as God’s saving act in history to make possible both our forgiveness and eternal life.
4. Our response—Commitment to God expressed in repentance and obedient faith.

In one sentence, the gospel relates the story of God’s redemptive act in Christ, necessitating a response. Such an approach takes seriously the incarnation of God in Christ. Jesus our Emmanuel reveals “God with us.” This approach takes seriously the relational aspect of a life of faith. God can be experienced personally. This approach affirms the centrality of the cross and resurrection as the saving acts of God in time, space, and history.

Further, such an approach earnestly seeks a response of life-changing repentance and genuine faith.

II. An Existential Spiritual Event

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” (Acts 10:44 NIV). An element of mystery surrounds the preaching event which lies beyond our understanding. The preaching event enters the domain of religious experience. This is the miracle of preaching: that the written Word proclaimed becomes the spoken Word and unctonized by the Spirit becomes the Living Word. In that moment, the possibility exists for the listener to hear another voice—the voice of God to the soul. Thus, the preaching of the *evangel* holds the possibility of an event-in-time existential encounter of the first magnitude! In that moment a relational *gestalt* happens. Man encounters God. In a mystic sense, God becomes present in the proclamation. The goal then, of evangelistic preaching is not simply explanation but proclamation, not instruction only but spiritual conversion. Preaching engages a spiritual assault on the soul at point-blank range. The determined goal is nothing less than the bringing of men and women, boys and girls into a religious experience of God, there and then.

Preaching as Religious Experience

The gospel is high drama. Lewis Drummond states this view forcefully: “True evangelization is an event: an event wherein God meets sinners. Proclamation is a form of God addressing Himself to people in their need” (Word 217). G. Friedrich agrees: “The gospel does not merely bear witness to salvation history, it is itself salvation history, for it is only in the preaching of the gospel that salvation is accomplished” (2:731).

Fred W. Meuser writes concerning Martin Luther's understanding of preaching:

“Through the spoken word the power and victory of Christ invade life today. Preaching is therefore not only about the saving acts of God. The sermon itself is a saving event” (26). Preaching does more than just talk about help. Preaching is help. In Luther's view preaching ushers in the very presence of God. Hans P. Ehrenberg sheds further light on the Reformer's theology of preaching. Luther believed that through preaching God comes to his worshippers. God offers himself, with his forgiveness and redemption, in the preaching of the Word. As Luther put it, “It is through the sermon the Christ cometh to you and you will be drawn to Him: for the preaching of the divine Word is not our word but God's” (qtd. in Ehrenberg 50).

James Cox also speaks in strong terms of the mystery of preaching: “It has to do with another world impinging upon our own, with a transcendent purpose. The gospel we preach is the proclamation of God's saving activity for us human beings” (94). Likewise for Loscalzo the message is not “an impersonal lecture about God but a relevant encounter with God” (Preaching Sermons 15).

The Bible itself gives credence to this dynamic view of preaching. In the book of Romans the gospel is called “the power (Gk. *dunamis*) of God”: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed” (Rom. 1:16-17 NIV). Paul declares that God purposes to save people through the “foolishness of preaching” (1 Cor. 1:21 KJV). The Word comes in “demonstration of the Spirit's power” (1 Cor. 2:4 NIV). The reason for such a demonstration is clear: “so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power” (1 Cor. 2:5 NIV).

A High View of Preaching

Such a theology as we propose calls for a “high view of preaching” (Demaray 35).

Years ago Donald Miller, in Fire in Thy Mouth, summed it up: “To preach the gospel, then, is not merely to say words but to effect a deed” (17). Preaching is sacramental. It allows us to experience the “numinous”—the presence of God. Karl Barth expressed it as the “Holy Otherness” of God—the “*mysterium, tremendum et facunus*” (qtd. in Drummond Word 27).

Yet, not everyone shares this high view of preaching. Much church growth literature says surprisingly little about preaching. Carl George, in How to Break Growth Barriers, depreciates the science of rhetoric and likens the next generation of preachers to coaches: “What the coach says is not very important compared with what the players do when they go back on the field” (80). At times George comes perilously close to questioning the future of preaching which he sees as secondary to the task of leadership:

Am I suggesting that the pulpit event is no longer necessary? No. A message, even a scholarly one, can be very helpful in identifying and understanding the truths of Scripture. . . . While the role of the sermon is significant, it stands in the same relationship to the critical task of caring as a franchiser stands in relationship to the McDonald’s counter person. (196)

Statements such as the above exemplify the low view of preaching shared by many today. Preaching is viewed as simply instructional—a teaching event and no more. Preaching, for many, equates with a coaching huddle, not a prophetic moment, least of all an in-time spiritual event in which a person’s soul is brought into direct contact with the Spirit of God.

A high view of preaching as religious experience is not just idle theory. Experience verifies theology: In a rare but rapturous moment the preacher becomes strangely aware of something inexplicable even as it happens. Almost detached from the event, as if standing

passively outside of oneself, the preacher hears the message pouring from his or her own lips in an effortless torrent, a Niagara of words. Feeling the tug of the reins—an invisible but real cord of connection links preacher to congregation. The audience leans forward in engagement with the preacher. Tears well in the eyes of congregants not because of some cheap sentimentalism but because of “The Presence.” The Lord has come into his Temple and all but the most hardened and skeptical know it. Such an experience, known even once, can make one believe in the power of preaching.

The Preacher as Prophet

Those who maintain a high view of preaching see the preacher as prophet or prophetess, speaking on Christ’s behalf. The prophet does not talk *about* Christ, he or she speaks *for* Christ. Christ speaks through the prophet. Karl Barth knew of the prophetic element of preaching: “Preaching is ‘God’s own Word.’ That is to say, through the activity of preaching, God himself speaks” (54). Richard Jensen, in Thinking In Story, suggests that at some time during the message the proclaimer will speak to the congregation on Christ’s behalf in present tense proclamation. This kind of proclamation, he suggests, “is worlds removed from preaching that simply explains what it was that Christ said and did at some point in the past. Understanding is not the goal. Proclamation is the goal” (73). Along the same lines, preaching, for Fred Craddock, is a continuing part of the process of revelation. Craddock defines preaching as “making present and appropriate to the hearers the revelation of God” (Preaching 51).

Lucado, takes the metaphor of prophet a step further. He refers to Theodore Roszak’s definition of the preacher as shaman, “that luminal figure through which strange powers

seem to play The sermon is dropped down into that mystery . . . a sharing of this mystical experience—something more than the didactic” (140-141).

The Preacher as Priest

If the preacher is prophet he or she is also priest. Clearly the message of the evangelizer is one of reconciliation:

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:19-20 NIV)

Peter Brunner suggests that every sermon should sound the note of absolution (132-133). In a more recent work, Richard Jensen makes a similar point. He suggests that preaching is “the public practice of absolution; the public practice of the Office of the Keys” (Thinking 74). In practice this means that preaching is transformed from a discussion of past history to a present tense event. For example, in preaching on the paralytic who was brought to Jesus (Mark 2:1-12), the preacher might choose to bring the sermon to a climax in verse 5 where Jesus says to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” But instead of simply telling what happened then, the evangelist will proclaim what God is doing now. At some epiphanal moment in the sermon, the preacher holds out his hands in blessing and says to the congregation in present tense voice with declarative force, “Beloved, your sins are forgiven. In Jesus Christ you are clean.” In this moment the preacher speaks for God. Those who hear the Word with faith and genuine repentance receive the absolution. This active, empowering declaration of forgiveness characterizes the biblical concept of “proclamation.”

III. A Collision of God's Story and Ours

The proclamation of the gospel involves a spiritual event, the intersection of our story with His Story. In the intersection of stories we experience God. One of the great contributions of the latter part of this century has been that of *narrative theology*. Narrative preaching has come of age. According to George Bass, “preaching began to turn ‘the narrative corner’ at the beginning of the 1970s” (83). A host of theologians and practitioners have contributed to a growing body of literature on the subject. In particular, several writers have contributed seminal works in the burgeoning field of narrative preaching, including Eugene Lowry, David Buttrick, Fred Craddock, and Ralph Lewis.

The Contribution of Narrative Theology

Narrative theology recognizes “story” as the basic form of biblical thought. Systematic theology, a product of a western mind set, is all but foreign to the Bible. When the Bible wants to teach it usually speaks in story. Alister McGrath, in an article entitled “The Biography of God” states, “Narrative is the main literary type found in Scripture” (23). Larsen in The Anatomy of Preaching summarizes the evidence: “75 percent of the Old Testament is narrative”(90). “Remove the narrative content from Scripture,” says Ralph Lewis, “and only fragments remain” (“Triple Brain Test” 157). “Thinking in Story,” as Jensen puts it, is a valid way of approaching communication of the biblical text because that is the way most biblical texts were “stitched together in the first place” (Thinking 61).

Don Wardlaw argues that our traditional form of didactic preaching is more Greek than biblical. Christian preaching was originally narrative, the recollection of what God in Christ had done, was doing, and would do to intervene in human affairs, but when Christianity spread into the Hellenistic world, the structure of “discursive rhetoric” was adopted. “In

contrast to first-century narrative preaching, reflection became the basic sermon framework in the second century.” According to Wardlaw, this discursive style or reflective shape of the sermon has remained the dominant form of preaching to the present. He states his case: “The Greeks have stolen into homiletical Troy and still reign” (11-13).

The narrative preaching movement recognizes the connection between form and content. “There is no avoiding the fact,” says Craddock, “that the medium is a message, if not the message” (As One Without 145). For Craddock, the form itself is as much a part of the message as the words themselves. “Form is not simply a rack, a hanger, a line over which to drape one’s presentation, but the form itself is active, contributing to what the speaker wishes to say and do, sometimes no less persuasive than the content itself” (Preaching 172). In another place Craddock says, “The form of such a sermon is therefore a part of the warp and woof of the message itself” (Preaching 198). John Ciardi compiled a volume of poetry with the title How Does a Poem Mean? The title says it all. Structure is as much the message as the words that comprise it. “To squeeze out the essence of a poem can detract from its meaning” (Cox 73). Thus, if the text itself is in the form of story, and in the communication of that text the story aspect is obliterated, then much of the message is lost. Carl Zylstra, in his Ph.D. dissertation, “God-Centered Preaching in a Human-Centered Age,” makes a similar point. Speaking of our penchant for propositional preaching he warns that the message “becomes transformed into an intellectual topic” (144). Long and Killinger agree: “The ‘three points-and-a-poem’ style . . . if it is the only style used . . . communicates, over time, that the Christian faith is a set of propositions” (106). Buttrick proposes that the real problem with most propositional preaching is that of design. He maintains that we simply do not think in categories:

Though categorical sermons are easy for preachers to jot down, they are intrinsically tedious for congregations. In our lives, we do not think our largest thoughts categorically. Instead, we reserve categorical thinking for trivia—laundry lists, calendar appointments, cost accounting, and the like. When it comes to making sense out of life, or speaking love, or professing faith, we do not think categorically. (70)

Buttrick makes the case that homiletical form should flow naturally from the shape of the text itself. “There are no stock patterns,” says Buttrick, “into which meaning can invariably be stuffed” (308-309). Likewise, Greidanus proposes that the form of Scripture will determine the homiletical form:

If the text seeks to evoke a “wow!” or a “hallelujah!” from the hearers while the sermon manages to evoke merely intellectual assent or a yawn, the problem may well lie in the form of the sermon: a wrong form can undercut the message of the text and thus distort it, while, conversely, an appropriate form can help the message get across as originally intended. (141)

Following the same line of thought, Richard Jensen suggests that if the text is in the form of story then story should remain the means used to preach it. “Why should we de-story these stories in our sermons and simply pass on the point of the story to our listeners? Why should we rip the content out of the form as our normal homiletical process” (Telling 128)? For this reason so much modern preaching has been lifeless and dead. Like dissecting a butterfly to understand it more clearly, in the process of taking it apart we kill it. Likewise the narrative text boiled down to bare bones of principles and propositions is drained of life and power.

Narrative preaching recognizes the sermon as plot. Various writers, using differing terminology recognize the plot element in sermonic design. Significant is the contribution of Fred Craddock in his emphasis upon preaching as story. For Craddock the short story, not the lecture, provides a model for today’s preaching. Craddock insists that “the short story is the first cousin of the sermon” (Preaching 79). This is true, he says, not only for the narrative

sermon as such, but for all preaching. All oral address should contain a narrative quality. What we learn from observing the short story is the importance of movement. For Craddock, movement is of first importance. Related to the flow of movement is the stress of anticipation and the element of surprise. The plot should not be given away too soon. Suspense holds the listener's attention. "One has only to read short stories to discern how materials can be arranged so as to create and sustain anticipation" (Preaching 166).

David Buttrick, in Homiletic, offers a variation to the idea of sermon as story. He replaces the traditional idea of sermon points with sermon moves. The sermon becomes a sequence of moves within a movement of thought. Thus sermons "travel along from move to move in some sort of plotted scenario" (101). Preaching of the past often viewed sermon design in terms of static structure—one point built upon another, like the completion of a building, one level raised upon another. Such sermons were constructed and laid out visually in sermon notes in vertical fashion. Buttrick rejects this static format. Buttrick views the sermon more like a river than a building. The sermon has flow. It moves. It carries its hearers along with it toward a destination.

The concept of audience consciousness is pivotal to Buttrick's view. The hearer experiences the flow of the sermon within his or her consciousness as an *in-time-event*. "As a result, in hearing sermons, congregations are on a kind of journey in which first one idea, and then another, and still another will form in their consciousness. So, at conclusion, the moving action of a sermon stops" (101). Buttrick suggests the sermon be written, not from the standpoint of the speaker, but with the hearer's consciousness always in view. The sermon writer asks, "How will the hearer experience this message as it is preached"?

Eugene Lowry's short book, The Homiletical Plot, contributes greatly to the field of narrative preaching. Lowry transforms the sermon from lecture into plot. Plot for Lowry is the essential term for a reshaped image of the sermon. "A sermon," says Lowry, "is a narrative art form" (15). He offers a holistic approach to preaching which involves the listener psychologically and emotionally as well as cognitively in discovering the gospel.

Unique to Lowry's approach are the concepts of "homiletical bind" and "radical reversal." Early in the message Lowry engages his audience in the movement of the sermon by what he calls "the homiletical bind," a premeditated attempt by the preacher to build tension through the ingredient of a sensed discrepancy. The preacher creates disequilibrium. The congregation is deliberately thrown off balance, so to speak, by a problem or conflict to be resolved. Like any good storyteller, the preacher's task is to "bring the folks home," that is, to resolve matters in the light of the gospel (15). This bringing of the people home involves what Lowry terms a "radical reversal." Conflict is resolved by an unexpected twist in the plot. Stories in general often take this shape. The standard form of dramatic plot is well known: 1) situation; 2) complication; and 3) resolution. This resolution usually involves a twist or reversal of sorts. Foster-Harris, in The Basic Patterns of Plot, asserts that, "the answer to any possible problem or question you could pose is always in some fantastic manner the diametric reversal of the question" (6). "Truth," Plato said, "is a radical reversal" (qtd. in Lowry Homiletical 49). So also is the form of story. The reversal turns thing upside down.

If reversal is a common element of story in general, the concept exemplifies itself in the gospel. "There is a radical discontinuity," insists Lowry, "between the gospel and worldly wisdom which itself constitutes the underlying reversal" (Homiletical 60). This aspect of

reversal is active in the parables of Jesus, which always have a twist. The returning prodigal is not shut out but honored with a banquet. The one stray sheep is not written off, but the whole flock temporarily abandoned. For a roadside victim neither clergy nor churchgoer bring emergency assistance but a despised Samaritan comes to the rescue. The stories of Jesus always take an unexpected turn in the road. Unfortunately, our familiarity with them often blinds us to the surprise. The role of the preacher then is to recreate as much as possible the original action of the text. The advantage of narrative preaching is that it imitates the gospel itself in the use of reversal. The process of reversal as presented in a sermon is like pulling the rug out from under someone. Sometimes it is necessary to lay the rug before one pulls! Not only do the gospel stories contain reversals, but also the Story of the Gospel itself is one of reversal. The resurrection represents the ultimate reversal of all human history. Through it death becomes life, judgement becomes grace, despair becomes hope, and hell opens up to heaven.

Not all welcome the narrative movement. The preacher's only goal, according to John F. MacArthur is to "exegete Scripture." MacArthur terms this a "principlizing" of the text (121). Likewise, Warren Wiersbe and his son, David, in Elements of Preaching, attempt to reclaim the more traditional method of deductive propositional preaching. Centuries of tradition die hard. Perhaps the theology of Long and Killinger offers a more serious warning: "One of the flaws of the storytelling movement," they caution, "has been to privilege the narrative genre in Scripture. . . . It seems to me that what we've got in the Bible is a collection of genres, each of which was called forth because the richness of the gospel cannot be spoken in a single voice. Narrative voice is very important, but it's not the only voice" (106). The merit of this caution is worth considering. Narrative is not the only form of

biblical truth, nor should it be the only weapon in our arsenal. “Never do anything always,” remains good advice.

The Advantages of Narrative Evangelism

Arguably, while narrative form is not our exclusive method, when it comes to evangelistic preaching it may well be the best option for the following reasons:

1. The gospel (*kerygma*) is God’s story.
2. The gospel is experienced as well as understood.
3. The gospel is a collision of stories.

While much has been written on the subject of narrative preaching in general, the present literature has relatively little to say concerning the connection between narrative form and that unique genre of preaching we call evangelistic. While a few authors offer pioneering attempts in this specific direction, nevertheless a full-blown theology of “Narrative Evangelism” is yet to be developed. Most evangelistic preaching to date, while often having a narrative quality to it by use of illustrations, remains almost exclusively propositional in form. The need exists for both a theology and practice of narrative evangelistic preaching.

1. The Gospel is God’s Story

The gospel, by its very nature, is in the form of story. It is God’s Story with a capital “S.” The *kerygma* as discussed earlier is the story of God’s redeeming act in Christ. Primarily it is the story of God-in-Christ: his incarnation, his life and ministry, his death for our sins, his eternal resurrection and the demand for our repentant faith.

Not only is the gospel itself by definition God’s Story, but the four recorded gospels are composed of stories within stories. Many consider Mark’s gospel as consisting largely of the preaching material of the apostle Peter. It reads like a series of vignettes from the life of Jesus, loosely stitched together. Each of these smaller stories echoes in advance the larger

Story of God's redemption through the cross and resurrection. We can almost hear Peter in the streets of Rome retelling the story of Jesus calming the storm, then using the story as a platform for his evangelistic proclamation. This is how the gospels read. It is probable that this is manner they were used by the early church and are meant to be used by us today, stories of Jesus pointing to the ultimate Story of God's in-Christ redemption.

When the gospels are not telling us the stories of what Jesus did, they record the stories Jesus told. Jesus' primary style of preaching was storytelling. Martin Thielen, in an article aptly titled "Beyond Info-sermons," reminds us that when Jesus wanted to teach people about the love and grace of God, he did not say, "Let me share three principles about God's love." Instead he said, "There was a man who had two sons. . ." Lewis, in Learning to Preach Like Jesus, makes the same point: Jesus taught in stories. So should we.

2. The Gospel is Experienced as well as Understood

The gospel is not simply an idea one understands, but a person who takes hold of one's life. Believing involves more than just understanding the good news, it means experiencing it lest salvation come by the good works of understanding. Entering into God's Story the hearer experiences grace. Stories are metaphors of life. Stories elicit participation. Stories are experiential; they create an encounter with the hearer. They allow us to actively enter into the experience of others. "The power of story" is such, says Kevin Ford, "to infuse the mind with imagery so that it can vicariously undergo the events, experiences and feelings that take place in the story" (225). Cox calls this the "involvement factor" (Preaching 174).

The gospel as God's Story is active, not passive. It does its work in us. "We participate in the life of a story," says Jensen. "As participants in the story we experience the reality of the gospel as it is storied for us. The gospel happens to us. We are there. We are grasped by

grace rather than being presented with ideas about grace which we are required to comprehend” (Thinking 55). Through the gospel storied to us we experience God’s presence. Jensen notes this mystic element of the gospel as story: “The fact that we participate in the life of stories means that stories function to bring God’s presence into our lives. Stories function as a means of grace. The gospel in story is a happening-reality” (Thinking 61). God-stories, according to Kevin Ford, have a profound ability to penetrate the depths of our soul:

Story reaches not just the intellect, which is contained in the thin outermost layer of the human brain—the cerebral cortex. Story reaches to the most deeply buried parts of the human personality, to the emotions, and even to that mysterious, elusive part of us that we know only as the human soul. A powerful story tingles our spine, surprises us with laughter, melts us to tears, moves us to righteous anger, tugs at our heartstrings, rivets our psyche, involves our pneuma, refashions our worldview, colors and filters our perspective, renegotiates our belief structure, calls into question our assumptions and ultimately leaves us a changed human being. (225)

3. The Gospel is a Collision of Stories

Elie Wiesel claims that “God created man because he loves stories.” The gospel is about our story and His Story. We experience the gospel as an intersecting of God’s Story and ours. Ford makes this observation: “Narrative evangelism . . . focuses on a collision of stories. God’s story collides with our story and calls our story into question, forcing us to reconsider the course of our lives and the premises of our worldview. His story forces us to consider a new worldview in which Christ is at the center” (Jesus 220).

Jenson, in an article entitle “How The World Lost Its Story,” suggests that the problem overwhelming the postmodern world is that we have lost our story. In our storylessness we have no beginning—humankind is a cosmic accident; pond scum evolved. Worse, we have no purpose. Why? is the unanswered question welling up within. Worse still, we have no future. We do not know where we are going or if anything lies beyond this microsecond

called life. Thus, we experience ourselves as lost. In the gospel we not only find God, we find ourselves. Moreover, we experience being found. In the experience of the gospel, we are able to find our story in the midst of the bigger Story of God. We discover both our story and ourselves as a subplot in God's eternal Story. "It is a story," says Ford, "with a beginning, a middle and a never-ending end, and the story line of that story is inspiring beyond imagining" (Jesus 225).

In a much-overlooked essay in J. R. R. Tolkien's Tree and Leaf, Kevin Ford uncovers an intriguing picture of narrative evangelism, long before the term was coined. In his essay, "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien, the master of archetype and myth, makes the bold suggestion that all great fairy tales are really echoes of a powerful, wonderful, but absolutely true story: the Christian gospel. Tolkien coins a word to describe an element common in all fairy tales and in the gospel—*eucaastrophe*. Adding the Greek prefix "eu", meaning "good" to the word for disaster, *catastrophe*, he arrived at the term *eucaastrophe*. An *eucaastrophe*, according to Tolkien, describes a sudden happy turn of events in the same way that a *catastrophe* is a sudden and unexpected tragedy. Tolkien went on to say,

The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind that embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving; "mythical" in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable *eucaastrophe*. . . . The Birth of Christ is the *eucaastrophe* of Man's history. The Resurrection is the *eucaastrophe* of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. . . . There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. (qtd. in Jesus 226)

Tolkien concludes that the Christian story is both supreme and true: "Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men—and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused" (qtd. in Jesus 226).

IV. A Call to Repentance and Faith

C. H. Dodd, observed that the *kerygma* was not only a proclamation but also a call to repentance. Peter's message at Pentecost called for an immediate and definite response: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38, NIV). The pattern is consistent throughout the sermons of Acts: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19, NIV). "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30, NIV). "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21, NIV).

Life-Changing Repentance

True repentance (Gk. *metanoia*) involves turning to God in complete submission and surrender. It is a change of mind, a change of heart, and a change of will, a life altering experience of the first degree. Repentance involves a paradigm shift of the highest order, both deep and profound. Both the Old Testament well as a New Testament emphasize the importance of this truth. To the prophets repentance meant essentially to *turn, return* or *turn back*, as in Jeremiah 8:4 and Ezekiel 33:19. Repentance is a constant prophetic theme. Repentance abides at the heart of what we commonly call conversion. Drummond has gone so far as to link the aspect of repentance with the "Lordship of Christ." In his view, nothing less than full surrender to the control of Jesus as Lord qualifies as true repentance ("What is the Message" 41).

The gospel, biblically understood, is a call to repentance. Yet, precisely here much evangelism fails. Canadian evangelist Barry Moore, in a personal interview, responded to

this trend saying, “Repentance is the ‘lost cord’ of modern preaching.” He advocates that if evangelistic preaching is to be redeemed, the call to repentance must to be restored. Martyn Lloyd-Jones would agree with this sentiment. “True evangelism,” he says, “is primarily a call to repentance” (235).

Saving Faith

The issue of repentance relates to the accompanying element of faith. Repentance and faith are inseparably linked in Acts 20:21 and in the evangelistic preaching of Jesus: “‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news’” (Mark 1:15, NIV)! Repentance and faith represent two sides of the same coin. Negatively, repentance is turning from sin. Positively, faith is turning to Christ. Nevertheless, biblical faith (Gk. *pistis*) is more than intellectual belief. It involves trust and commitment.

Raymond Bailey’s definition of faith is helpful here: “Giving as much of yourself as you understand to as much of God as you understand at that moment” (qtd. in Loscalzo Preaching 68).

The Lausanne Covenant reflects the *kerygmatic* proclamation and invitation to both faith and repentance:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as reigning Lord He now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe Evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to Him personally and so be reconciled to God. (Clause IV)

Consistent with this model is the practice of Billy Graham who ends each evangelistic message with a call to faith and repentance. His message aims to persuade. The goal is conversion aided by a public call to personal commitment to Christ. From an Anglican

background John Stott, in The Preacher's Portrait, stresses the importance of calling for a response to the Gospel:

We must never make the proclamation without then issuing an appeal . . . I am not presuming to say what form the appeal should take. Nor am I advocating any particular evangelistic technique or method. I am simply saying that proclamation without appeal is not Biblical preaching. It is not enough to teach the gospel; we must urge men to embrace it. (57)

Damascus Road or Emmaus Road?

Canadian sociologist and Christian apologist Donald Posterski compares what he calls the “Damascus Road Approach” to the “Emmaus Road Approach” (Future Faith 162-163). Evangelistic preaching from the days of Charles Finney to Billy Graham has largely taken the Damascus Road view of coming to faith . The conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus is viewed as the model of Christian conversion (Acts 9:1-9). Paul’s conversion was sudden, dramatic, and climactic. One moment he is on his way to Damascus, a confirmed enemy of the cross on a mission of hatred and destruction, the next instant blinded by a light, and knocked to the ground he confesses Jesus as Lord. Those who hold the Damascus Road model would contend for this as the normal way people become Christians. Emphasis focuses on the moment, the time, and the place when Christ comes and forgives. Conversion is viewed as sudden, dramatic, and climactic. Fittingly the weekly radio broadcast of the most famous advocate of this model is entitled “The Hour of Decision.” In this view conversion is decisive. Conversion is a decision, a watershed moment in a person’s life.

Posterski does not question the legitimacy of the Damascus Road model. The concept has biblical precedent. Experientially, many have come to faith in Christ by means of a crisis spiritual event. However, Posterski proposes an alternative motif. He calls it the “Emmaus

Road” approach. Evangelism, according to this model, is less definitive. “Like the people who walked with Jesus from Jerusalem to Emmaus, they are with Jesus but for a time they do not recognize his full significance. But eventually ‘their eyes are opened’” (Luke 24:13-35) (Future Faith 162-163).

The Emmaus Road model recognizes the *journey* of faith. It recognizes that this journey begins even before conversion, a journey toward faith. While conversion remains an “event” (i.e. “their eyes were opened”—Acts 24:31), nevertheless it also recognizes the process involved. There is a journey *to* faith followed by a journey *of* faith. From beginning to end faith is a journey. If Posterski is correct, then the Damascus Road experience may be the exception rather than the rule. The Emmaus Road model seems to fit the experience of most if not nearly all believers.

Arguably, both the Damascus Road model and the Emmaus Road model are legitimate motifs for evangelism, with the latter being the more normative experience. Understanding evangelism from this broader perspective has merit for several reasons. First, it takes seriously the variety of human personality and experience. We recognize that people come to Christ in different ways. This releases the preacher from the trap of formula salvation, the temptation of restricting the hand of God by demanding that all must come to faith in a patented manner. The recipe of “conversion by cookie cutter” can be abandoned. While a decisive call to repentance and faith is still offered—the emphasis is more on the aspect of journey. No one method of commitment is necessarily relied on exclusively. Secondly, the issue of culture is taken seriously in a broader understanding of conversion. For example, the altar call method of public invitation, while relatively effective in the United States (a culture of extroversion), has not met with equal success in more private cultures. Significant is the

fact that “60% of all conversions in Canada,” according to Posterski “take place in the privacy of one’s own home” (conversation with the author). Compared to the United States, Canada with a reserved and reclusive cultural norm has proved hard ground for crusade-type evangelism. The exception to this might be the Billy Graham phenomenon in which audiences are generally large enough that one can come forward and still remain anonymous.

Recognizing the importance of the journey aspect of conversion has positive advantages. It releases the evangelist from the pressure to produce results in terms of visible professions of faith. Evangelistic preaching need not be judged by numbers. Evangelism is judged fruitful to the degree it faithfully discharges a clear witness to the gospel regardless of the response, positive or negative. It is successful not only in terms of actual conversions but also to the degree that it brings those who hear one step closer to Jesus than they were before.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

No crystal ball can foretell the future of preaching. At best, we draw from the past and critically observe the present discerning wisdom for the future. Therefore, in keeping with the purpose “to develop a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching,” this chapter reviews the body of literature in the following sequence:

1. Learning from the past: An examination of the traditional model
2. The challenge of today: The changing nature of contemporary society
3. Synthesis: A model for the future

This Chapter endeavors to examine a number of fields of study: classical and modern works on preaching and evangelism, communications studies, the psychology of persuasion, developments in hemispheric brain research, generational studies, and cultural trends both in North America and Canada.

I. Learning From The Past

Much can be drawn from the well of tradition with respect to the time-honored art of preaching the *evangel*. Traditionally, the uniqueness of evangelistic speech extends not only to the nature of its content but also to the nature of its communication. The evangelistic sermon differs significantly from the pastoral homily. A number of motivational and emotional factors come into play. The evangelist seeks to master the art and science of persuasion but within a distinctively Christian context. Historically, six factors characterize effective evangelistic preaching: persuasion, authority, illustration, simplicity, relevancy, and urgency.

Persuasive Speech

Evangelistic preaching is persuasive preaching. Robert E. Coleman speaks about preaching for a verdict. Sam Kamaleson expresses a similar view: “The evangelist should expect a verdict in every sermon. He must know that the Spirit of God is striving with Souls. The truth always demands a response” (138). In speaking of his efforts to preach to the will, Stuart Briscoe says, “I’m looking for a response. I want people to act on what is said” (“Filling” 70). Leighton Ford notes that the evangelist preaches in the “indicative mood.” The *evangel* declares what God has done. The evangelist also preaches in the “imperative mood.” The gospel demands what God commands humankind to do (Christian Persuader 118). Evangelistic preaching intends to convince. It aims at nothing less than a life altering experience of the first magnitude—namely, conversion. Evangelistic speech is persuasive speech.

Loscalzo also highlights the persuasive element of evangelistic preaching:

Evangelistic preaching is by nature, persuasive preaching; a desired response is sought, and a conscious attempt is made to influence the attitudes and behaviors of listeners. The intent to persuade is not surprising since the gospel itself is inherently persuasive. Its message intentionally evokes changes in people's attitudes and elicits transformation of their behaviors (2 Cor. 5:17). Motivated by love for people, persuasion toward salvation through the offering of the gift of new life in Jesus Christ becomes the passion of the evangelist. That others might receive God's offer of life is the root of the desire to persuade. Persuasive preaching longs for such an end. (29)

Whenever the subject of persuasion arises, a thorny issue begs answering: “Is persuasion of any form a legitimate motive in preaching?” Suspicion surrounds persuaders the world over, often with good reason. In an age of worshiping tolerance to the exclusion of truth, many despise all forms of proselytization even when well intentioned. Theology, while important, seems less than all determining. The majority of evangelicals who espouse a

theology of Salvation in Christ alone betray themselves as unconsciously universalistic in practice. They live and act towards their neighbors and the world as if faith in Jesus is inconsequential. The sin of imposing one's belief system on another far overrides any anxiety over the possible lostness of others. Against the tide of culture, scripture affirms the legitimacy of evangelistic persuasion. The book of Acts reverberates with stories of people persuading others to faith in Christ (Acts 17:4; 18:4; 19:8,26; 28:23,24). Paul's words are especially revealing: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11 NKJV).

The Head, the Heart, and the Will

Persuasive preaching aims at the whole person, the head, the heart, and the will. Saint Augustine was perhaps the first to apply the pagan science of rhetoric to Christian preaching. He defined the preacher's task as "*docere, delectare, flectere*—to teach, to delight, to influence" (qtd. in Galli 19). Augustine's aimed at touching the mind, the heart, and the will. Lewis, in Persuasive Preaching, contends also that the whole person is the target of evangelistic preaching:

Persuasion bids for both the listener's mind and will; it bids for the entire listener as a unit, as a whole. A sophisticated culture tends to magnify logical elements of life and minimize some of the emotional aspects. But thought and feeling are not antipodes; rather they cooperate. (112-113)

Chapell helps translate this concept into practical sermon design: "[E]xplanations prepare the mind, illustrations prepare the heart, and applications prepare the will to obey God" (Christ Centered 87). While the analogy helps, the relationships are not exclusive. Nevertheless, effective evangelistic preaching often reflects a balance of these very components: explanation, illustration, and life application.

Authentic evangelistic preaching respects the mind. The message takes the form of a reasoned argument aimed at convincing the mind of the truth of the gospel. In conversion, a change of mind precedes a change of life.

Charles Grandison Finney's Lectures on Revival of Religion left a lasting legacy of influence affecting generations of evangelicals around the world. Finney models the prototype of the modern evangelist. Finney, a prophet for his age, recognized the apologetic nature of evangelistic preaching. A former lawyer turned revivalist, Finney would speak to the congregation as if they were both judge and jury. His message developed, each point building on the other, by force of logic. In more recent times, evangelism has adopted an apologetic stance. Josh McDowell, Michael Green, Anthony Campola, and others take this approach. They model the apologetic format in showing the credibility of the truth claims of Christ to the thinking person. A reasoned defense of the faith defines the goal. In other instances, much of what passes as evangelistic preaching merely insults people's intelligence. Faris D. Whitesell laments that "too much so-called evangelistic preaching has been shallow, partisan, and emotional without much thought content" (qtd. in Perry and Strubhar 168).

Evangelistic preaching also aims at the heart. Religion, like love, is a matter of the heart. Any attempt to woo the soul that neglects to take aim at the heart misses the target. Pascal said, "It is the heart that feels God, and not reason. That is what faith is: God felt by the heart, not by the reason" (qtd. in Lewis, Persuasive 106). Calvin Miller boldly asserts that "[e]motion is the stuff of religion. . . . It is pointless to say that great preaching is mainly teaching the Scripture. Great preaching is making the audience feel the Scripture: It is a sensate immersion in such things as the fall, the flood, the cross" (175-6). Put another way,

“there can be no motion without E-motion. Every emotion tends to express itself in action”
(Persuasive 114).

Yet, many Christians feel reluctant to engage the emotional side of man. Modern people question the legitimacy of touching the human heart. Research in the field of human psychology suggests that virtually all major life decisions are an interaction of reason, emotion, and will. Whether marriage, choosing a career, buying a house or even choosing wallpaper, any major decision involves the heart as well as the head. Lewis quotes Faunce in the Yale Lectures saying:

For centuries, Christian teachers have apologized for the emotional element in religion The truth is that our feelings are the mainspring of all we have and are. The feelings are not signs of weakness, they are the motive power in all our living. (114)

Briscoe agrees with the legitimacy of preaching which touches the heart: “If I don’t preach to the emotions, I’m missing a good part of the person sitting in the pew. Since people bring that part of themselves to church, the least I can do is address it with my sermon” (“Filling” 73). Philosopher John MacMurray takes a further step giving the heart priority over the head:

What we feel and how we feel is far more important than what we think and how we think. Feeling is the stuff of which our consciousness is made, the atmosphere in which all our thinking and all our conduct is bathed. All the motives which govern and drive our lives are emotional. Love and hate, anger and fear, curiosity and joy are the springs of all that is most noble and most detestable in the history of men and nations. (qtd. in Pitt-Watson 45)

Right thinking is crucial, MacMurray argues, but so is right feeling: “The truth of the Faith is something that is felt rather than thought by many deeply committed Christian people. . . . Many in our congregation who think unreliably about their faith feel authentically about it” (qtd. in Pitt-Watson 49). Religion then, like love, is of the heart.

The Issue of Manipulation

Any form of communication which touches people at the level of their emotions stands in danger of crossing the line into emotionalism. A fine line separates rational persuasion and genuine emotional appeal from manipulation. Manipulation presents a real danger.

Buttrick describes the oft repeated scenario: First the preacher applies a heavy sense of guilt and then as the congregation quivers in despair, he holds out a “carrot-on-a-stick Jesus with mercy” (454). Buttrick warns that “such strategies, including emotional climaxes, threats of coming wrath, last-chance gospels, and the like, border on manipulation and are a denial of our freedom for God” (454).

Duane Lifen, in an article entitled “The Perils of Persuasive Preaching,” points out five common manipulative techniques among overzealous preachers:

1. Slick and flashy evangelism centered around a flamboyant, pseudo-celebrity type evangelist.
2. Machine-gun, pulpit-pounding style tending to rev up the emotions but bypass the rational faculties.
3. Sad-story laden messages lacking any real biblical substance.
4. Interminable invitations designed to wear down resistance until someone—anyone—responds.
5. Invitations to raise hands for prayer and then requiring all who raised their hands to come forward (17).

The last method overtly manipulates. Having publicly admitted his or her need by raising their hand, the seeker is placed under tremendous social and psychological pressure to comply when the second, unexpected invitation is given. Manipulative appeals massage the ego of the evangelist at the high cost of those the preacher is called to serve. Toxic religion, such as this, ravages souls leaving the scars of spiritual abuse.

Psychologist William Sargant, in “The Physiology of Faith,” documents the possibility of inducing a normal person to the adoption of a nonsensical belief in two ways: The first

involves overexciting the nervous system through music, repetition, and so on. The second means involves sensory deprivation. While evangelicals may not be guilty on the second count, the first presents a real possibility. Excessive emotionalism should be avoided.

Sargent's study calls into question the validity of any response made in an artificially induced emotional state (505-518). Such manipulation disgraces the name of Christ.

Fear remains the standard tactic for some evangelists. Even a casual reading of the early sermons of Billy Graham (1945-1965) will show his frequent use of the motive of fear, fear of death and fear of judgment. Many today question the legitimacy of fear as a motive in persuasive communication. Loscalzo, feels that fear has little place in contemporary preaching: "Evangelistic preaching embodies joy. After all, it is good news. . . . I have serious ethical problems with the evangelistic strategy of swinging them 'low and slow over the fires of hell' before breaking the good news to them" (Evangelism 48).

Manipulation assumes many shapes. Not all manipulation appears overt. Distorting the cost of commitment presents a more subtle form. Half-truths such as "Accept Christ and everything will be wonderful" hide the cost of discipleship (Engel 319). Manipulation of this kind, perhaps the most prevalent of all distortions, goes unnoticed. The subtlest of spiritual seductions involves the offer of cheap grace. The Lausanne Covenant challenges preachers toward integrity in persuasion. The summons of men and women to Christ calls for true repentance and presents the full claims of Christ upon their lives.

Lewis Drummond states the issue well: "Any form of evangelism that resorts to manipulation of people, regardless of the motive is unworthy of the gospel" (Leading Your Church 36). Clyde Fant defines manipulation as "persuasion that is deliberately not in the best interest of the individual involved but is deceptively intended for the advantage of the

persuader; or that attempts to get people to do something they would not do if they had the facts” (Preaching Today 117-8). Raymond Baily says it well: “Seduction [is] the way of the serpent, not the way of Christ” (557).

Billy Graham, addressing the issue of manipulation in A Biblical Standard for Evangelists, gives this admonishment:

We must be careful that coercion does not enter into persuasion. . . . Gifted personalities have the ability to excite emotions and manipulate people. Others can use dubious means, such as threats, scare tactics, and psychological pressure to make “converts,” or become so anxious for numbers that the invitation is broadened to include any person or problem. . . . I am convinced that a high-pressure invitation cannot be the call of God the Holy Spirit. By such methods we can be guilty of giving people a false assurance of salvation. (61)

The preacher's role demands proclaiming the truth, calling for a response, and leaving the result to God. The preacher's job is not that of the Holy Spirit's. Packer notes that “[w]hile we must always remember that it is our responsibility to proclaim salvation, we must never forget that it is God who saves” (27).

Authoritative Speech

Students of the psychology of persuasion have long noted the association between persuasion and the authority of the persuader. Perry notes that “to be persuasive, the evangelistic delivery must be authoritative, enthusiastic and earnest” (Evangelistic 132). The gospels record the authority inherent in the message of Jesus: “And they were astonished at his doctrine for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). Unfortunately many today preach as scribes and not as ones having authority. An “uncertain sound” whimpers from the direction of the pulpit.

If one extreme reflects a lack of authority, authoritarianism is the other. Evangelistic speech, rightly understood, is authoritative but not authoritarian. Psychologist Harry Guntrip

gives an insightful glimpse into the warped psyche of the authoritarian preacher who verbally bludgeons his hearers to compel their assent. His or her intolerant championship of orthodoxy is more a “justified outlet for the urge to dominate” than a genuine desire to bring God's love and mercy to the flock (69). Outward intolerance and blunderbuss bravado reflects sheltered weakness more than an indication of genuine unwavering faith. Such preachers are dangerous in the pulpit. They represent a dysfunctional element within the family of God. If the popularity of TV preacher John Hagee is any indication, there still remains a segment of the population hungry to devour the bitter word of authoritarianism. While some are drawn to such preachers—the insecure and negatively minded—many more are turned away from the faith because of them. “There will always be people who submit to such treatment,” Guntrip warns, “and their surrender makes the method appear to be successful” (69). Authority in the biblical sense and authoritarianism are not the same.

The true authority of the messenger resides in a number of areas. The messenger's trustworthiness and credibility determine authority. The importance of holiness of life and character cannot be over stressed. Integrity makes the message credible. Aristotle spoke of the persuasive power of the “*ethos*” of the speaker. The speaker's *ethos* has to do with his credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise. Aristotle declared that the speaker's ethical appeal is the most potent force in persuading (qtd. in Lewis, Persuasive 15). “The life of the speaker,” writes Augustine, “has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence” (Bk. 4 27.59 164). Phillips Brooks concurs: “When God wants to make a sermon, he first makes a preacher” (qtd. in Wiersbe “Preaching is Not” 223).

Authority and authenticity are linked. Transparent sincerity and vulnerability must extend to the pulpit. Chapell makes a connection between the impact of the message and the transparent quality of the messenger's character:

True character cannot be hidden, although it can be temporarily masked. Character oozes out of us in our messages. Just as people reveal themselves to us in conversation by their words and mannerisms, we constantly reveal ourselves to others in our preaching. Over time our word choices, topics, examples, and tone unveil our hearts regardless of how well we think we have cordoned off deeper truths from public display. The inside is always on view. (Christ Centered 28)

Preacher and message cannot be separated. The age-old prayer, “Hide our pastor behind the cross so that we may see not him but Jesus only,” expresses a worthy sentiment, yet there is no place to hide! The largest pulpit cannot cover the nakedness of his or her soul. “The man affects his message,” says Robinson. “He may be mouthing a scriptural idea yet remain as impersonal as a telephone recording, as superficial as a radio commercial, or as manipulative as a ‘con’ man. The audience does not hear a sermon, they hear a man” (24). Authority and authenticity go hand in hand.

Another factor concerns the persuader's perceived expertise. Does the speaker know what he or she is talking about? Neuhaus speaks of this: “Genuine authority comes from truth that we have made our own” (Freedom 197). This credibility factor motivates Finney to recommend evangelist speak extemporaneously. James Engel, after more scientific research, arrives at the same conclusion:

Somehow the message spoken directly without copious notes seems to be authentic. In an age of scriptwriters, natural suspicion arises toward the speaker who is bound by a pre-written script. Fair or not, listeners question whether a speaker really believes his own words if he has to write them down first. (qtd. in Griffin 144)

Calvin Miller also argues for extemporaneous preaching. He calls this “teleprompting the text,” suggesting a good ad-lib style of delivery which calls for “tight preparation and

loose delivery” (Marketplace 96). Miller argues for a less formal and more friendly approach in which the preacher shoots from the hip with relational force (47-8). Miller recommends the use of an outline rather than full manuscript in the pulpit allowing valuable eye contact and freedom in delivery. “Extemporaneity welds audience and communicator together” (49). Buttrick also speaks of the “authority of extemporaneity” (239).

The authority of the speaker comes not only from the messenger’s ethos and expertise but also from the credibility of the message. Jesus spoke with authority because his message came from above. God’s Word, not the preacher, is the source of ultimate authority. While the authority of the messenger remains a factor, the authority of the message counts supreme. We speak not of ourselves. Romans 10:17 lays down the eternal principle: “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” First Peter 1:23 also points to this truth: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God.” For this reason Graham saturates the message with Scripture. Graham’s sermons often include as many as forty-five direct Scripture quotes. In speaking to preachers on the subject of communicating with authority, Graham advises: “When you quote God’s Word, He will use it” (“The Evangelist” 100).

The Bible is self-authenticating. Like a lion, as someone has said, the Word needs no defense, it simply needs to be let loose. Scripture heard has a ring of truth about it. The fact that the biblical texts are found in a black book with gold edges does not impress the secular mind. When the Word of God authenticates itself by touching a person’s life at the point of need, it then reaches even the most secular individual. Authenticity, once speculative, becomes unmistakable. Speaking of the self-authenticating quality of the gospel, Kinlaw in “How to Preach with Authority” notes, “The Gospel is not an alien word if we think of it as a

communication from the Creator to His creatures. After all, if the name preached is the One from whom we all came, should there not be an inherent compatibility between us” (255)? Romans 1:20 puts it plainly: “For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities . . . his eternal power and divine nature . . . have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” Kinlaw states that “[t]he Gospel in itself is power and the preaching of it is an act of power” (“How to Preach” 254). Agreeing, MacArthur says, “[I]t is not our anecdotes, applications, how-to's, jokes, catchy titles, clever outlines, or other contrivances . . . but the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation” (qtd. in Kinlaw “How to Preach” 254).

An additional factor must be considered, the mysterious element of the Spirit. The ancients named it “unction.” Preaching at its best is “anointed proclamation”. Preaching involves much more than “truth through personality,” it is God-anointed speech. Thomas Oden sees preaching as part of Christ's ministry in and through us. “Anointed speech lives out of the Anointed One” (139). For Oden preaching means more than just the delivery of a speech. Preaching represents a religious act that, when anointed by God, becomes a corporate religious experience. Oden gives a powerful description of preaching:

We know good preaching when we hear it. It touches us viscerally. It is a profound, subtle mode of communication that somehow makes the transcendence of Yahweh appear palpably imminent. It mixes courage and comfort, candor and sympathy, strength and vulnerability, in the kind of delicate blend achieved by an excellent cook. Most worshipers know that there have been rare and beautiful times when they have been privileged to hear such a word. When it happens, it is a remarkable event. It is a treasure in earthen vessels. (138)

Paul also speaks of the power of anointed proclamation when he recounts his first preaching in Corinth:

I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom. . . . I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with

wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Corinthians 2:3-5, NIV)

Illustrative Speech

Evangelistic speech is illustrative speech. Historically, evangelistic sermons rate high in the content level of illustrative material when compared to the average pastoral message. D. L. Moody set the pattern for those who would follow. His sermons largely comprise a collection of anecdotes and stories loosely focussed around a Scripture theme. The sermons of Billy Sunday place such a high emphasis on illustration that little room remains for Scripture. Sunday scores remarkably low in Scripture content by today's standards of evangelical preaching.

Billy Graham, following in the steps of Moody and Sunday, relies heavily on illustrative content to bear up the sermon. As an experiment, in a previous study I chose a Billy Graham sermon at random and analyzed it according to illustrative content. A culling out of all the illustrations revealed that illustrative material comprised approximately one-third of the total sermon length. Exactly 1029 words or twenty-eight percent of the sermon was in the direct form of illustration. When compared to the common pastoral sermon, this represents a remarkably large proportion devoted to illustrative content.

The advantages of story and illustration for evangelistic communication are numerous. Story engages the unconverted mind and soul. The target audience of the evangelistic message differs significantly from the pastoral homily. The evangel aims squarely at the unconvinced and unconverted. Unbelievers have little reason to listen. Their level of Scripture knowledge is significantly less than the enculturated churchgoer. While outwardly passive, the unbeliever remains potentially hostile to the message of faith. At best many

respond with indifference to the “news” being shared. At worst, they respond with antagonism and skepticism toward the truth claims of the preacher. For these reasons, the evangelist shapes the message toward a different mindset and level of spirituality than the typical believers' message.

Stories move from the known to the unknown. Stories capture the imagination and hold the interest of a potentially hostile audience. Stories invite us to enter into the life experiences of others and of God. Stories allow a holistic communication, they touch the emotions and connect with the soul. Stories make the abstract concrete. Story, more than any other genre, makes abstract theological propositions understandable. Story relates the invisible to the visible. Stories make plain the obscure. Story helps us to grasp murky mysteries of faith. Merleau-Ponty in The Phenomenology of Perception makes the point: “Meaningful thought flourishes when tied to reality” (235). Jesus employed the same method for similar reasons. James Engel, in his work Contemporary Christian Communications, points out that Jesus moves persons from known and familiar to the unknown through use of metaphor and parable (60). Jesus never speaks without an illustration (i.e. parable), and the result is that the common people hear him gladly. Evangelistic speech is directed not at the company of the committed but the common soul.

Picture and story characterize effective evangelistic communication. Griffin in The Mind Changers notes, “I’ve discovered that a message requires vivid illustrations and personal examples in order to be persuasive” (142). Illustrative speech is visual speech. Albert Palmer observed, “People do picture thinking” (qtd. in Demaray 139). Horne in Dynamic Preaching quotes an ageless Arab proverb: “He is the best speaker who can turn

ears into eyes” (50). Griffin states it plainly. “We don’t think in abstractions, we think in pictures. . . . Pictures in the mind move people. . . . Pictorial words have power” (140).

Stories capture our imagination and hold our interest. Wayne McDill, in The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching, notes the incredible power of story in communication:

It is a miracle. At least it seems miraculous to the preacher. He is preaching along, struggling through the apathy like wading in two feet of muddy water. He can see it in the faces of the audience. They are not with him. What he is saying is just not of interest to them. Then the miracle occurs. They suddenly look his way. They become very still. Some lean a little to the side to see around the person in the next pew. An older man cups his hand to his ear. Children who have been drawing look up in anticipation.

What has happened? Has the preacher suddenly become a great communicator? In a sense he has. All he has done is begin telling a story or vividly describing a scene. And for no other reason than that, the communication connection is suddenly complete. The attention of the audience is riveted on him as they strain to hear his every word. The preacher loves it. The congregation loves it. Suddenly real interest has been sparked. A sense of exhilaration comes with the connection. The message takes on a life of its own. Sadly, too many congregations rarely experience these marvelous moments of connection. (222)

Children the world over love stories. “Dad, tell me a story! . . . Now tell me another! Please.” In the soul of every adult the charm remains. The allurements of a well-told story never fully disappears. Max Lucado, master of story telling, says it all: People “love a story; they love to be captured”(112).

For good reason we are captivated by stories. Stories involve human experience, always. People love to hear about people. We find others fascinating. Galli and Larson in suggest that preachers learn from the techniques of journalists to add impact to sermons. Journalists know the public's fascination with human-interest stories. “Many magazines exist solely because of this fact. We are inspired by other's accomplishments. We are curious about their secrets. We are attracted by their virtues and repelled by their flaws. For good or ill, we are never neutral about people” (82). Newspaper editors strive to put faces on stories,

or to wrap an issue around a specific person. “Our minds can follow people,” says Jensen, “much better than they follow ideas” (Thinking 26). For this reason Craddock urges us to “turn ideas into people” (Preaching 69).

Stories invite us to enter into the life experiences of others and into the life experience of God. Through a simple illustration, says Chapell, “the preacher invites the listener into the experience. The live-body details flesh out the illustration in such a way that the listener can vicariously enter the narrative world of the illustration. . . . [The preacher says in effect] ‘I’ll take you there. Live through this experience with me so that you will understand fully what this means’” (Christ Centered 164). Thus, an illustration becomes a snapshot from life. “It captures a mood, a moment, or a memory in a narrative frame and displays that slice of life for the mind to see and the heart to know” (Christ Centered 178). Through this snapshot we vicariously enter into the experiences of others. Donald Demaray depicts the inner working of story upon the soul:

The subconscious fills and grows with events, actual happenings, pictures from our past—the very nature of remembered experience. Thus we identify an insightfully chosen image with an experience tucked away in the subterranean caverns of the subliminal mind. The snapshot becomes deep calling unto deep. (140)

Stories and illustrations allow for a more holistic communication, one which opens the doorways into the imagination through the five senses.

Illustrative speech offers another advantage: stories touch our emotions and connect with our soul. A story works at many levels at the same time. A story does its work at the level of conscious and unconscious mind, through imagination as well as the emotions. To understand the abstract love of God is one thing, but when the preacher relates it to the story of a famous rock star being reunited with his father, suddenly something of that love is felt and identified with. “If we were to graph the emotional intensity of a sermon,” says Chapell,

“we would see that the peaks tend to rise around illustrations, especially if an application is made with the illustration” (Christ Centered 191). Thus through story connection is made with the total person. For persuasive speech, this is of special importance. By use of story, narration, and illustration, preaching reaches the heart as well as the head. Griffin notes that both appeals are necessary for a successful message:

Emotions move us—logic tells us which direction to go. Feelings show us our need—rational thoughts suggest solutions to meet that need. Emotions are drive inducing, they turn us on. A truly persuasive message will speak to both feelings and intellect. (143)

Characterized by Simplicity

The teaching of Jesus was profoundly simple and simply profound. “Simplicity” does not necessarily imply simplistic. Nor does “simple” mean shallow. The mature preacher respects complexity. Sage wisdom declares that for every complex problem there is a simple answer—that is wrong! The gospel is true but not trite. Simplicity means the message is made clear. Some preachers have the ability to make the simple complicated. The evangelist faces the singular task of making the complicated, simple. Evangelistic preaching speaks to the uninitiated. Barna reminds us that until we have made the gospel understood we have not truly communicated. “We have only made noise” (Barna Evangelism 43).

When asked what attracts them to Billy Graham’s preaching, people commonly respond that “the message is so simple.” By that they mean it is clear and understandable. What Hemmingway did for the novel, Graham has done for the sermon: he has shaped it in short sentences and strong verbs. Stating his own philosophy on preaching, Graham quotes the words of James Stewart of Edinburgh: “You never preach the Gospel unless you preach it with simplicity. . . . If you shoot over the heads of your hearers, you don’t prove anything except you have a poor aim” (“The Evangelist” 100). Graham goes on to add, “People want

simplicity. I am sure that was one of the secrets of the ministry of our Lord. The Bible says, “The common people heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37, KJV). Why? For one central reason. They understood Him. He spoke their language” (“The Evangelist” 100).

Giants of preaching throughout the ages have intuitively known the secret of profundity through simplicity. Calvin says, “I have always studied to be simple” (qtd. in Stott I Believe 128). Augustine advocates conscious neglect of eloquence and cultivated language in preference of simple and direct speech. Quoting Cicero (Orat 23.77ff) he says that his preaching involves “a kind of studied negligence” (Bk. 4, 10.24 133-34). The brilliance of John Wesley shone in his ability to translate the message of the cathedral for the man in the coal mine. “Profundity,” Wiersbe reminds us, “is not born of complexity; it is born of simplicity” (45). Great preaching is clear preaching.

Evangelistic preaching demands simplicity. The message is entry level Christianity, “Christianity 101,” aimed at the pre-Christian. Without dumbing down the gospel, the preacher seeks to translate it to the level of spiritual understanding of those who have not yet experienced God's “grace amazing.” The preacher of the *evangel* respects the journey of the potential seeker. The seeker's level of understanding, not the preacher's, becomes the starting point of the preaching conversation. The evangelist as “spiritual obstetrician” has the unique gift of assisting in the “birthing of souls.”

If focus remains a critical factor in effective communication, the singular importance of focus to this special “word to the pre-born soul” cannot be overstated. Here much evangelistic preaching falls flat. Many sermons, as Craddock observes, attempt to “promote God and all worthy causes” (Preaching 155). The message aims at everything and hits nothing. The sermon lacks one fundamental quality—unity. Stephen Leacock's description

of a man who got on his horse and rode off in all directions is an apt picture of the pathetic preacher who “took a text and went everywhere preaching the gospel” (Demaray 103). For this reason teachers of preaching advocate a central focussed theme around which the sermon is built. Haddon Robinson calls it the “Big Idea.” For Craddock it is the “Governing Idea.” “The Sermon Logo” is the name given it by Miller. James Cox dubs it the “Central Idea,” which he suggests should be simple, lean, literal, and striking (89). The words of John Henry Jowett are almost cliché yet worth repeating: “[N]o sermon is ready for preaching, nor ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal. . . . I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged clear and lucid as a cloudless moon” (133). Jowett's words are legendary for good reason: Jowett is right.

Simplicity in preaching the *evangel* applies not only to the clarity of the message and its centrality of purpose but also to the very choice of words which clothe the message. The good news is neither news nor good until articulated in language people comprehend. Halford Luccock makes this complaint: “Seminary students learn Greek and Latin, and forget English” (qtd. in Cox 55). The language of *churchspeak* or *christianese*, warns Barna, alienates, rather than enlightens (*Evangelism* 42). Marketplace preaching, says Miller, speaks “shopping mall English” (*Marketplace* 16). The concept is not new. Charles Spurgeon is quoted as saying “it [is] not likely that the people in the marketplace [will] learn the language of the academy, so the people in the academy must learn the language of the marketplace (Schmidt 265).

Kingsmore, in “Message Preparation and Delivery,” suggests the communicator prefer present tense and active voice with simple short sentences (132). Chapell agrees: “Clarity

increases as sentence length decreases. Communication improves as words simplify. This is not because people are dumber than they used to be. We all simply understand more when others address us plainly” (Christ Centered 325). Consider the genius of one-syllable words. Winston Churchill exemplifies the power of basic Anglo-Saxon. William Sangster in Power in Preaching notes that the task is taking truths—some of, which are deep and complex—and explaining them in terms that are simple, dignified, and clear (61). Thus, “good preaching, like good writing,” Wiersbe reminds us, “is clear, crisp, uncluttered, and easy to understand” (81-82). He quips, “Good preachers own wastebaskets and use them” (40). For the preacher as well as the writer, Mark Twain's dictum remains true: “[T]he difference between any word and the right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug” (Wiersbe 35).

Characterized by Relevancy

Listener relevance characterizes effective communication. James Engel speaks to this issue: “The goal here is not to make the gospel relevant but to communicate the relevance of the gospel” (276). Michael Green in “Methods and Strategy in Evangelism of the Early Church,” reminds us to “let the world set the agenda” (164). Green points out that Jesus began at the point of felt need and moved from there to bring spiritual light to the underlying dimensions of people’s problems. In Preaching to Convince, Joseph Parker says: “Preach to the suffering and you will never lack a congregation. There is a broken heart in every pew” (qtd. in Berkley 41). John Claypool in The Preaching Event compares vital preaching to paratrooper school: “No one who is learning how to survive ‘the Jump’ needs extra coaching on its importance. In sessions where parachuting is covered, the most mundane lecturer on the subject will have rapt attention” (87-88). Whenever the preacher touches the nerve of felt need, he or she gains a hearing.

James Engel, in his studies of the communication process, speaks of the “principle of audience sovereignty”:

[T]he message must be adapted to audience members without sacrifice of biblical fidelity if it is to have relevance. . . . Audience members are sovereign at any given point in time in that they will see and hear what they want to see and hear. Their attention is captured and held only when the message is seen to be relevant for their life at that point. . . . Adapting the message does not mean changing the message. (31)

Effective evangelism seeks awareness of cutting edge trends and cultural issues that confront people today. Preaching giant John A. Huffman Jr., in “Preaching with Prophetic Edge,” offers wisdom: “The reality is that I am a translator. That means immersing myself in what they read, do, and think, yet trying to bring to it a prophetic edge” (65). George Barna, in “Trends That Affect Evangelism Today,” gives this challenge:

Effective evangelism these days requires more than preaching the Word with boldness and truth. You must also contextualize your ministry in ways which reflect an understanding of, and sensitivity to, the backgrounds, values, experiences, felt needs, thinking styles, potential objections, and spiritual soft spots of the target audience. (201)

Karl Barth was asked how he prepared his messages. He said it was with “the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other” (Stott I Believe 149). Barth was not the first. Spurgeon answered the same question in the title of one of his sermons—“The Bible and the Newspaper” (Miller Marketplace 133). Long before Barth or Spurgeon, John Chrysostom, the silver tongued orator, was praised as “a man of the Word and a man of the world” (Stott I Believe 147). Likewise John P. Newport reminds us that the Scriptures themselves are a combination of “this worldliness” and “otherworldliness” (95).

Bill Hybels, from the perspective of his “seeker friendly” ministry, speaks of the need for relevance in preaching:

I've found that the unchurched person thinks most Christians and especially pastors, are woefully out of touch with reality. They don't have a clue as to what's going on in the world, he thinks. . . . That's why I select 60 to 70 percent of my illustrations from current events. I read Time, Newsweek, US News & World Report, Forbes, and usually Business Week [I] watch at least two TV news programs, and listen to an all-news radio station when I'm in the car. Why? Because when I can use a contemporary illustration, I build credibility. The unchurched person says, "He's in the same world I'm in." (Mastering 36)

John Wesley White, evangelist and research analyst for Billy Graham, uses a similar approach as Hybels. In "How to be Relevant and Biblical in Preaching" he shares his daily habit of systematically reviewing scores of local and world newspapers and magazines for relevant illustrations. In assisting Graham in the development of his sermon White seeks "a balance of biblical exposition and current-event-oriented illustrations and testimonies" (463). The fruit of such time-consuming labor now lies at the fingertips of the average preacher thanks to the magic of the Internet. News articles, magazine articles, and a host of illustrative material on every subject under the stars is available at the speed of light through the information highway.

William E. Hull, in writing on the subject of "The Contemporary World and the Preaching Task," begins with an admittedly awkward question: "Why is 'great preaching' so often dull?" He goes on to explain that after his exhaustive study of Fant and Pinson's thirteen-volume anthology, 20 Centuries of Great Preaching, to his disappointment he seldom found material that he thought would be interesting and powerful if used today. Hull found this observation puzzling since these volumes supposedly contained some of the best sermons of the most exceptional preachers who ever lived. His conclusion is significant: "[T]he sermons lack sparkle and punch today precisely because they were written for another generation." Then quoting Fant and Pinson he observes, "Great preaching is relevant preaching" (571).

Characterized by Urgency

Persuasiveness requires a sincere note of urgency. Preaching is not casual speech. The subject pertains to matters of life and death. James H. Jauncey, a professional psychologist speaks of the importance of urgency as a persuasive factor: “To be persuasive is to express enthusiastically a belief which we hold ourselves strongly” (qtd. in Streett 157).

Unfortunately, much preaching lacks this quality. “The bland leading the bland,” James L. Johnson calls it (qtd. in Engel 256). Sangster lamented that “some preaching fails in power because it fails in passion” (89). Sam Kamaleson admonishes that “if the preacher does not earnestly feel his message he cannot expect anyone else to be moved” (136). “Faith makes one believable . . . passion makes one persuasive” (Craddock Preaching 24). Lewis in Persuasive Preaching speaks also of the ‘earnestness factor’: “Earnestness is the one factor common to all great speakers. . . . Dare to be intense” (21).

As far back as Aristotle, students of rhetoric have recognized the importance of passion. Aristotle called it “pathos.” Passion persuades. Who among us can erase from our minds the image of Martin Luther King, Jr. as he stands on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial saying, “I have a dream!” We remember not only the words but also the fervor in his voice spilling over from the passion of his spirit. Preachers who identify with their congregations communicate passion about what they preach, passion for people, passion for the gospel, and passion for life.

Augustine speaks of the place of urgency in persuasion: “He therefore will be eloquent who can speak of small things in a subdued manner, of moderate things in a temperate manner, and of grand things in a grand matter” (Bk. 4 17.34 143). “If the gospel is news of liberation . . .” says Buttrick, “then it is inevitably urgent. A casual style will contradict the

essential character of the gospel” (77). In an age when subdued speech is popular, Buttrick argues that there remains something to be said for a tone of urgency:

[C]asual chatter is scarcely appropriate if, indeed, we stand in the presence of the holiness of God. No wonder the prophets were urgent. No wonder apostles strained with emotion. If the gospel is life-and-death good news, then our personal lust for naturalness may be a dreadful error. (78)

Throughout history, great speakers, even diabolical ones such as Hitler, have known the intrinsic power of passion: “Hitler was a passionate speaker who moved Germany. His formula was (1) Have something to say. (2) Say it simply. (3) Make it burn. He moved a nation with his fiery earnestness despite his diabolical designs” (Lewis, Persuasion 21). “Passion is the answer,” Hitler asserted. “Only a storm of burning passion can turn people's destinies, but only he who harbors passion in himself can arouse passion” (qtd. in Lewis, Persuasion 21). By contrast, John Wesley knew the positive power of godly zeal when he advised his lay preachers, “Get on fire and people will come to watch you burn.” On a similar note, Spurgeon said, “A burning heart will soon find itself a flaming tongue.”

Neuhaus calls us back to this missing element of passion. He cites Tertullian of whom it was said that he preached with restrained ardor. Neuhaus points out that the Latin meaning of ardor is “to burn.” Thus, he suggests that we preach like a fire under control:

Fires rage, and fires simmer, and fires dance; there are fires of wrath and fires of the passion called love. Not for nothing were Isaiah's lips touched with a coal of fire. I have heard great preachers who, like great actors, have an awesome public presence. They are the kind of people of whom it is said that they walk into a room, and without their having said a word, the room is theirs. They fill the pulpit. And I have heard great preachers who, although they may be six feet tall, one has to look twice to make sure they are there. But once the sermon is begun, it is evident that the fire is there. Whether he speaks in tones stentorian or is barely audible, whether he is accompanied by grand gestures or with a crouch of intense concentration, it is soon evident that here is a preacher. Here is no smooth therapist, no peddler of religious palmsmanship, no friendly pusher of spiritual highs, no aspiring social critic, no seven o'clock news commentator on portentous events. No, here is a

preacher who has been visited by the seraphim with a burning coal from the altar. (172-3)

However, passion will be tempered according to the age in which we live. We live in an age when sobbing evangelists and “glib Jesus-shouters,” as Buttrick labels them, are despised and distrusted (257). Any hint of manufactured emotion is disregarded as “hoke.” Verbal histrionics or pulpit gymnastics are not appropriate today. Transparent sincerity is. “Restrained ardor” as Tertullian puts it, truth deeply held, genuine earnestness, never goes out of style. Faith resonates in who one is, in what one says, and how one says it. The audience senses something of the preacher’s heart and soul. They hear the unmistakable note of sincerity and conviction as the burning issues of life are addressed. Urgency persuades.

II. The Challenge of Today

Thus far, the literature review has focussed primarily on the traditional understanding of the nature of evangelistic preaching. Our study now turn to changes in contemporary culture which challenge evangelistic communication for the future.

An apocryphal version of the King James Bible reportedly records that Adam once said to his wife, “Eve, I think we are living in a time of transition!” The cliché bears humor because we recognize the truth that change or transition occurs in every era of human history (Adams 2). The latter part of this century has proved abruptly transformational. “The late twentieth century seems to be a turning point,” says Loscalzo. “We live ‘between the ages’. All of a sudden our well-worn ways and means of doing things seem to be up for grabs” (Preaching: 9). Michael Adams, a Canadian secular sociologist, speaks of “luminial moments” in history. He points to the Italian Renaissance in the fifteenth century, America in 1776, France in 1789, and Russia in 1917 as examples of history at the crossroads.

Luminal moments, Adams suggests, are times when old structures are dismantled as the new is in the process of being created with little regard for the recent past. Such moments in history are “times of great creativity, and also of great personal stress” (42). Adams concludes that Western culture experienced such a luminal moment in the social revolution in the 1960s. “Rebellious ideas, spawned in the conformist 1950s, inspired and informed a counter-cultural revolution in that tumultuous decade that was shaped by the vanguard of the postwar Baby Boomers” (43). Adams sees the turbulent decade of the 1960s as a watershed in the history of the Western world. In that decade, people began to question many, if not all, of the basic assumptions that shaped the way they viewed themselves and the world around them. “This mass re-evaluation of life’s basic rulebook,” according to Adams, “set in motion a sometimes unsettling, and always exciting, revolution in social values” (2).

Unfortunately, many within the church have lost touch with our changing world. Alan Roxburgh understands the challenge facing the church as it approaches the third millennium. In his thoughtful book, Reaching a New Generation, Roxburgh declares, “North American churches have lost touch with the incredible changes that have been transforming our culture over the past 25 years. Consequently we are ill-prepared to speak the gospel into the world taking shape around us” (8). Such is the challenge that faces the church as a whole and the mission of evangelism in particular.

King David, in choosing the men of Issachar as his counselors, positioned them as people “who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chron. 12:32 NIV). The research of George Barna contributes to understanding current trends as they affect the evangelistic mission of the church: (cf. Evangelism That Works; “Trends That Affect Evangelism Today”; Virtual America). In particular Barna gives insight into generational

issues affecting our times: (cf.: Baby Busters: The Disillusioned Generation; Boomers, Busters, and Preaching;” Generation Next). Nida's book Customs and Cultures, published in 1954, represents an older classic worth reading today. The encyclopedic scope of Nida’s work illuminates the subject of cross-cultural communications. Nida brings together the fields of anthropology and Christian missions. Summarizing his thesis he states, “Good missionaries have always been ‘good anthropologists’” (xi). Nida says, “There is no fundamental conflict between the science of anthropology and Christian missions. . . . The accumulated experience of the science of anthropology can make important contributions to Christian missions” (22). The link between missiology and anthropology includes evangelism. The findings of Nida apply equally to reaching our own culture as they do to cross-cultural missions. The need to “understand the times” challenges us as never before.

A Post-Christian Era

Christendom is dead. The church no longer holds sway as society's major influence in morals, values, and beliefs. The thesis of Mike Regele's Death of the Church concerns this point: Ours is no longer a Christian society (203). The true extent of the Christianity’s past hold on culture remains a matter for debate. Nevertheless, any influence the church once claimed is now diminishing. Secular humanism exerts itself as the dominant value system in both the U.S. and Canada. This is not news. Surprising, however, is the extent of secularism's domination even within the church. A growing body of evidence suggests that concerning life-style little difference exists between those who espouse Christianity in North America and those who do not (Bibby Fragmented Gods). Christendom’s death implies significant implications for evangelistic communications in a now post-Christian era.

A Generation with No Christian Memory

Perhaps the most notable mega-shift within our lifetime concerns the fact that the evangelistic task in North American is now directed toward multitudes with no Christian memory. “Evangelistic preaching must begin with the premise that some hearers have absolutely no background for the faith and must be addressed from that presupposition” (Loscalzo Evangelistic 20). Even as late as a generation ago we could assume that even the most pagan of our hearers would have some knowledge of God, the Bible, Jesus and his death and resurrection. But this assumption is no longer valid. Barna's studies reveal that one third (31%) of those living in the US have no idea what the term “the gospel” refers to (Evangelism 36). An abysmal lack of knowledge of even the most basic themes of the Christian faith characterizes a majority segment of society.

George Hunter, in How to Reach Secular People, suggests this means the starting point must change. Before speaking about Jesus we must first speak about God. The starting point for many will be that God is creator and as such life then has significance and purpose. Before speaking about forgiveness we must begin with the fact of sin. Hunter gives ten characteristics of today's audience: 1) ignorant about basic Christianity; 2) seeking life before death; 3) conscious of doubt more than guilt; 4) negative image of the church; 5) multiple alienations; 6) untrusting; 7) low self-esteem; 8) experience forces in history as “out of control”; 9) experiences forces in personality as “out of control”; and 10) cannot find “the Door” (7).

The changing face of culture demands a response in the transformation of evangelistic communication. The present paradigm shift in evangelism, as mentioned in Chapter One, is similar to that witnessed in the book of Acts. When Peter speaks to the crowds in Jerusalem

(Acts 2) he quotes from the Old Testament to his hearers' recognition and agreement.

However, when Paul later speaks at Athens (Acts 17) he cannot quote Scripture for they would not recognize it. Instead of utilizing quotations of the Old Testament Paul now relies more upon local writers and the contemporary culture as a vehicle of communicating Christ to his hearers.

No Longer Motivated by Guilt

Another interesting change in our contemporary world concerns the fact that many are no longer motivated by guilt. The title of psychiatrist Karl Menninger's book asks a poignant question: *What Ever Happened to Sin?* Generation X, according to marketing consultant Michael Sack, has almost no concept of evil. Sack suggests that the "Political Correctness" movement requires that people consider all ideas equally. In doing so, any sense of right and wrong is lost. Sack suggests that those under twenty-five have refined this process to an art ("Brain Scan").

Today's society has a cultural aversion to guilt. This guilt-aversion has several implications for the way people view Christianity. Firstly, people today experience less religious guilt than generations before. Secondly, what measure of guilt remains is viewed as something to be negated. Guilt itself and not the reason for guilt becomes viewed as something to be avoided. The third consequence of our guiltless society is most significant. Remaining guilt feelings are often blamed on Christianity. Boyd notes, "It is rare for secular psychotherapists to speak of religion without the modifier 'guilt-inducing'" (50). A case in point are the words of Albert Ellis in Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology. In response to A. Bergin's Psychotherapy and Religious Values, Ellis charges: "Religiosity . . . is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance." Ellis goes

on to say, “the elegant therapeutic solution to emotional problems is to be quite unreligious. . . . The less religious they are, the more emotionally healthy they will be” (639). Rather than viewing Christ's forgiveness as the answer for guilt, people today see Christianity as the cause of it. Boyd gives an intriguing reason for this cultural aversion to guilt. He suggests the concept of “sin” has been discredited because “sin itself has become the preferred way of life” (51).

Society's newfound guilt aversion profoundly affects the formation of evangelistic strategy. Motivation via guilt no longer presents an effective means of persuading secular people to Christ. Alfred Krass, in “Bulldozer Strategies? Preach to Convince, Not to Condemn,” adds a similar sentiment when he says, “We're going to get nowhere fast by laying guilt trips on middle-class North American[s]” (62). Secular people seem more concerned with doubt than with guilt.

No Longer Motivated by Fear of Death

The fear of death no longer motivates secular people. They fear more the problems of life. In the past, much evangelistic preaching played upon the fear of death and judgment. Most people today think of neither. They are absorbed in the complexities of their daily problems. This means that people focus on life rather than death. People's former obsession with the “sweet by and by” has given way to issues of the here and now. “Sky pie,” according to Miller, “is out” (Marketplace 53). The idea of deferring gratification to the next life in preference for a life of self-sacrifice holds little appeal in a consumer-driven society. People want meaningful life now. Adams voices the prevailing attitude: “I want to cram as much experience as I can into the cosmic second I am allotted in this life” (37). The idea of salvation from eternal wrath simply does not press a hot button for most today. Discussions

about what is likely to happen after we die seem morbid, distant, and unrealistic to many (Barna Evangelism 41).

Life rather than death preoccupies people's minds. In the past evangelists preached that without Christ a person is unhappy. The idea of Christ alone as the source of personal fulfillment and satisfaction exemplified the message preached. But an interesting phenomenon of our age emerges with the realization that many secular people seem both happy and satisfied. A recent survey reported on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Television Network noted that rich people are indeed happier than the poor, albeit only slightly. The matter is complicated by the perplexing fact that many Christians appear supremely miserable.

A Postmodern Age

Postmodernism glooms large on the darkening horizon of today's changing world. David L. Goetz, in his article "The Riddle of Our Postmodern Culture," gives insight into this phenomenon from the perspective of Christian communications. Modernism, which began in the 1700s and allegedly ended in the 1950s, was rationalistic, scientific, and optimistic. Modernism as a cultural outlook puts faith in progress, and the pursuit of objective knowledge through science. The power of reason, modernism assumed, would someday resolve all the world's dilemmas.

Postmodernism eludes easy definition. "It is a throw-away word," that according to Goetz, "means everything and nothing" (52). J. I. Packer, theologian at Canada's Regent College, says, "Postmodernism is a word that has never secured a dictionary definition. Different people use it in different ways" (qtd. in Goetz 52). In many respects postmodernism is the antithesis of modernism. Postmodernism is defined more by what it is

not than by what it is. “The only agreed-upon element,” says Packer, “is that postmodernism is a negation of modernism.” Packer says, “The heart of postmodernism is parasitic; it has no life of its own, [it has a life] only by a denial of what other people believe” (qtd. in Goetz 52).

Pessimism denotes the distinguishing characteristic of the postmodern age. Modernity believed that science would someday save the world. Postmodernism has no such saving faith in science or in the progress of humankind. By contrast, it fears the end of the world in apocalyptic gloom.

The Absence of Absolutes

“Here, apart from the sun compass and the odometer mileage and the book, he was alone, his own invention” (qtd. in Adams 42). Michael Ondaatje’s words from The English Patient symbolize postmodern man. An absence of absolutes and a rejection of truth characterize postmodernity. As Walker Percy observes in The Thanatos Syndrome, this is no longer the age of enlightenment but “the age of not knowing what to do” (75). Friedrich Nietzsche the forefather of postmodernism was a German philosopher who lived in the second half of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche teaches that all truth, even scientific knowledge, is biased and socially constructed. All “truths” are relative and are culturally dependent. For Nietzsche ultimate truth remains inaccessible to human beings. Everything is a matter of perspectives. In fact, Nietzsche claims that reality itself does not exist; there is no “true world.”

Developments in science at the beginning of the twentieth century mark a massive shift toward postmodernism. Einstein's theory of relativity overthrew the Enlightenment-spawned physics of Isaac Newton. The scientific implications of relativity are as follows:

There is no such thing as an objective point of view in matters of physics: all viewpoints are relative in space and time. Under some conditions, subjective experience supersedes objective measurements. Space and time are relative, not absolute. (K. Ford 113-114; L. Ford Power)

Einstein's theory upsets all previous assumptions of the nature of the universe and reality itself. Science's concept of relativity spills over to other disciplines. French philosopher Jacques Derrida is the father of “deconstructionism.” Deconstructionism, introduced in the 1970's, describes a theory about language and literature which revolves around the concept that words have no objective content. Derrida's goal was to empty words of their meaning. Words become meaningless and truth becomes a sort of Play-Doh to mold and shape any way you want. To interpret the meaning of a text, according to Derrida, is to impose meaning on it. “To say 'This is what it means' is to misread it” (K. Ford 120-121).

The effects of such philosophies are wide spread even if public knowledge of their origins is not. According to Barna, “Four out of every five Americans under the age of 30 contend that there is no such thing as absolute moral truth” (Evangelism 108). The prevailing attitude becomes “live and let live”—“what's true for you may not necessarily be true for me”—“everything is relative.” The popularity of syncretism reflects this growing attitude: M. Scott Peck's blending of Christianity and Zen is definitely in. Goetz explains: “It's fashionable to add, for example, a dash of Zen Buddhism and a dash of Native American religion to one's nominal Christian or Jewish beliefs. People tend to downplay theological differences—‘Who can really know the truth anyway?’ they say” (Goetz 52).

The loss of truth has serious implications for evangelism. The person who attempts to persuade another draws suspicion. As Newbigin makes clear, any “confident statement of ultimate belief, any claim to announce the truth about God and his purpose for the world, is

liable to be dismissed as ignorant, arrogant, dogmatic” (Gospel 10). Christian truth claims are viewed by the world, according to Newbigin, not only as intolerable but dangerous:

To maintain, in this new situation, the old missionary attitude is not merely inexcusable but positively dangerous. An aggressive claim on the part of one of the world's religions to have the truth for all can be only regarded as treason against the human race. This view is so widely shared that it has become in effect the contemporary orthodoxy. (Gospel 155-156)

Thus in a pluralistic society the Christian persuader represent religious bigotry and intolerance. In an age where everything is considered relative, evangelism becomes the ultimate heresy. As a result, Madonna's hit, becomes a theme song for today—“Papa don't Preach.”

A Renewed Openness to Spirituality

Sigmund Freud predicted that modern men and women would abandon religion in favor of rationality, “leaving heaven to the angels and the sparrows” (qtd. in Bibby and Posterski Emerging 115). Freud was wrong. “The rumors of the death of Christianity,” to misquote Mark Twain, “have been greatly exaggerated!” Rationality has not slain human intrigue with the supernatural. Indeed, there are signs of renewed interest even in the miraculous. “Postmodernism,” observes Goetz, “has stuck a needle in the ballooned arrogance of the Enlightenment. Science and technology, we're learning, are not God” (52). Secularity, the church's old enemy, is itself in trouble. The death of modernism results in renewed openness toward spirituality and the soul. Postmodernism presents an unexpected opportunity for the church. Confusion, the absence of absolutes, the popularity of Chaos theory and more combine to loosen the grip of rationalism on the Western mind.

In an age of rationalism, objective verifiable fact is the only reality. If you cannot see it through a telescope or view it under a microscope it does not exist. Postmoderns, however,

have not rejected reason altogether so much as they recognize the possibility of reality beyond reason. Postmoderns are rediscovering a reality beyond the senses. The spiritual side of humankind has been awakened.

Evidence of renewed interest in things spiritual can be seen in the proliferation of books on the subject of soul. While all too often New Age thinking and other syncretisms are filling the spiritual void, nevertheless the soul is Christian domain. The Bible rightly understood is the ultimate “Handbook of the Soul.” Boyd, in Reclaiming the Soul, makes this case:

I am convinced that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift. The age of science—one that ignores religious sensibilities—is drawing to a close. The age of the Spirit is dawning. Within the age of the Spirit it will be essential to emphasize the soul, understand the Bible as the greatest psychiatry textbook ever written. (111)

Unfortunately, neglect of spirituality in favor of legalism and doctrinal matters has sometimes dogged the church in evangelical circles. The “Spiritual Direction” movement continues to make a positive contribution. Christian writers such as Henri Nouwen, Brendon Manning, Richard Foster, and Alan Jones put us in touch with the mystery of God. Nevertheless, a fully developed evangelical Spirituality is yet needed to embrace a world starving for spiritual reality.

Is postmodernism a window of opportunity? Some think so. A number of Christian writers have sounded the charge to awaken Christians to the opportunity presented. Duke University's William Willimon is one of them:

The good news is we are entering a period in which the old, modern worldview is losing its grip. People are wandering and exploring. We ought to be there to say to them, “The world too flat for you? Okay, we can help you with that. Your life an impenetrable mystery to you? We love to talk about that.” (qtd. in Goetz 52)

Barna describes that the Baby Buster generation, those born since 1965, as a spiritually intense generation. Kevin Ford agrees. In Jesus for a New Generation, he sees postmodernism as a door of opportunity:

The postmodern mindset represents an abandonment of the rationalist belief system. The postmodern framework allows for the existence of realities that science cannot measure—the supernatural, the transrational, the spiritual, the eternal, the ineffable, the numinous. . . . The collapse of the modern worldview has given the Christian worldview a beachhead in the postmodern mind. (123)

Postmodernism presents the Christianity with both a challenge and an unprecedented opportunity.

A Post-Literate World

In Media: The Second God, Tony Schwarz, a student of McLuhan, defines the meaning of “post-literate age”: “We have become a post-literate society. Electronic media rather than the printed word are now our major means of non face-to-face communication” (11).

According to communication theorist Walter Ong, the human race has experienced only three communications eras. The first Ong calls the “oral or oral-aural” era. The second is the “literate period.” Ong refers to this as the era of “script” which reaches critical breakthroughs with the invention of the alphabet and later with the printing press. The third communications era Ong designates as the “electronic” age (17). Each of these transitions marks major shifts in both communications and the way people perceive reality. Thus, according to Ong, there have only been two major shifts in communication in the history of mankind. Today we stand at the beginning of the second major shifting of eras. Jensen highlights the significance of this unique moment in history:

We are living on the boundary between the print era and the electronic era. We must understand, therefore, that we are living through revolutionary times. A shift in communication media has occurred only once before in human history. This is a

revolution. It is a revolution that calls upon us to seriously rethink most of what we do. (Thinking 8)

The consequences of such a cataclysmic change for the church are enormous. Illich and Sanders, in The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind, give insight into the discovery of the first communications era. Milman Parry, during the first third of this century, according to Illich and Sanders was the first to discover something of the dynamics of the oral period. Parry detects that the poetry of Homer is shaped by orality and not by literary canons. He conclude that oral tellers of tales “rhapsodize,” their practice is to stitch songs and stories together like one might stitch together a quilt (15-19).

The invention of the alphabet and later its popularization to the common man through print changed everything. If the oral-aural culture massaged the ear, the culture of writing massaged the eye. Linear script produced linear thought. The Western mindset, according Illich, Sanders, and others, is a result of the “alphabetization of the popular mind.” Human consciousness, according to Ong, was restructured by the linear massage of print. Humanity moved from ear to eye, from a world of hearing dominance to a world of sight dominance (91). Marshall McLuhan, in Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man, speaks also of the reshaping of human consciousness through the medium of print: “The interiorization of the technology of the phonetic alphabet translates man from the magical world of the ear to the neutral visual world” (27). This reshaping of the mind, some suggest, involved the evolution of a culture dominated by right-brain thought to a world dominated by left-brain thinking.

Jensen, in Thinking in Story, argues that the invention of the printing press radically altered the shape of the sermon. The Gutenberg printing press lead to Gutenberg hermeneutics which created Gutenberg homiletics, the linearization of the sermon. The

linear message of print created a linear approach to preaching. Story succumbs to lecture as the dominant pattern of thought. The sermon as story, or quilt of stories, is replaced by the sermon as a series of ideas.

In the electronic era, the third phase of human communications, television dominates. Television as an auditory-visual experience exists as a holistic medium of communications compared to the left-brain dominance of print. As a result, stream-of-consciousness thinking replaces linear logical progression.

Oral-aural communication massaged the ear. Writing and print communication massaged the eye. Electronic communication and particularly television, stimulates and massages many of our senses simultaneously. We live in an age of the polymorphic massaging of our senses. The effect of this polymorphic massage results in a more complete participation of our sensate selves in the new media. Participation, physical/sensate participation, reflects one of the hallmarks of the new age (Jensen Thinking 47).

Jensen views the electronic era as a return to orality. The ear is put back to work with radio and television. Communication theorists see similarities between the post-literate and pre-literate worlds (58). Thus, Jensen suggests a kind of “back to the future” approach in which preachers of the electronic era rediscover something their ancient ancestors knew well—story. The way to communicate in a post-literate world, according to Jensen's thesis, is in learning to “think in story” (58).

A Reduced Attention Span

Television shapes the way we think, drastically reducing people's attention span. Preachers address an audience with TV remotes in their heads. “They vote in the first thirty seconds whether to tune in or turn off the channel” (Galli and Larson 9). Numerous studies

attest to the media's erosion of our attention span. MTV, according to Barna's Generation Next, has the greatest influence of any television programming to reshape teenagers' attention spans (53). Generation X raised in an environment of advanced technology, in the form of fax machines, cellular phones, VCRs, and personal computers is the vanguard of multimedia. Gen-Xers are accustomed to a historically unprecedented barrage of media images and ideas. Young people who spend 80 percent of their non-working, non-sleeping hours in front of a TV screen find the pace of the average worship service wearisome. They are not bored with Jesus. They are bored with the intolerably slow pace of church.

Computers develop speed addiction, says McLuhanite Derrick de Kerckhove. He suggests that, from the moment children take to computers they, “develop a kind of speed addiction, demanding that their favorite programs and games be immediately available” (qtd. in Adams 124). While children are normally impatient, Kerckhove's description seems to describe a new cultural posture.

Quentin Schultze points to one of the most damaging effects of media saturation, the loss of our ability to engage in reflective thought. Reflective ability, silence, meditation are all disappearing from people's lives and this effects the church significantly. People want fast-moving liturgy and they want a pastor with flair, otherwise they become bored. This is especially true of younger people, the first generation raised on TV (“Television” 158).

Today's preaching must compete for the attention of the hearer's mind. In his book, The Empowered Communicator, Calvin Miller notes the awesomeness of the preacher's task in this media-saturated age: “Holding an audience without a rope is the all-consuming art of every preacher in this current age of communication” (1). Miller also notes that “[t]he first 180 seconds are the most critical moments of our whole communiqué” (19). Bill Hybels

recognizes the difficulty in maintaining audience attention in a media driven, consumer oriented society: “Unchurched people today are the ultimate consumer. We may not like it, but for every sermon we preach, they're asking, ‘Am I interested in that subject or not?’ If they aren't, it doesn't matter how effective our delivery is; their minds will check out” (27).

The multi-billion dollar cinema industry is instructive to the science of Christian communications, suggests Lewis in “Preaching With and Without Notes”:

The duration of human attention varies from 3 to 24 seconds, according to tests. . . . Attention must be captured, held, and recaptured many times during a sermon. Perhaps we need to take a lesson from the cinema. Most movies aim for an emotional climax at least every five minutes or they lose audience attention and quickly fade at the box office. . . . (417)

Schaller agrees. Preaching needs to learn from good theater, he advises in 21 Bridges to the 21st Century. Schaller cites syndicated religion writer George Plagenz: “Theater is something done with an audience in view. It must therefore be stimulating to the ear, the eye and the mind of the members of the audience.” Good theater, Schaller surmises, includes “passion, humor, feeling, and a message that speaks to the human condition”(87).

A Visual Age

Groothuis, in The Soul in Cyber Space, reflects: “Our souls reflect our worlds and our worlds reflect our souls” (23). Ours is a sensate age. We are the *cybergeneration*. We live in an age gluttonized on image. The post-literate age may also be described as an age of “visual literacy,” according to Lewis (Inductive 169). “Television and stereo,” observes Chapell, “have become the sensory wallpaper of many an American's daily existence” (Chapell Christ Centered 170). Neil Postman, in Amusing Ourselves to Death, concludes that “our culture trains us to reason and react experientially” (79-80). As well as affecting our attention span, television modifies the nature of our thinking. We think in pictures.

For this reasons contemporary preachers must see themselves as artists who paint with words. The term “Picture Preaching” attempts to describe the reshaping of the sermon for today. The “Video Sermon” depict Calvin Miller’s concept of preaching in an image-driven age. The video sermon is one that casts images on the wide screen of our imagination. It turns ears to eyes (Marketplace 38).

A Relational Age

Another shift in our culture involves the importance of relationship. “Ours is a relational day and age,” says Miller. “The predominant psychology of our day is relational. Television abounds with talk shows. Radio offers a totally dialogical format of call-in shows” (Marketplace 72). In a world of loneliness and isolation the aspect of relationship has never been so important. This is especially true for younger generations. Xers are driven by “longing for belonging” (K. Ford 79).

Emphasis on relationship has profound implications for evangelistic preaching. It means that “befriending God” becomes an important theme for ministry (Barna Evangelism 56). Salvation as personal relationship with God becomes the major theme of the Christian communicator. Marcus Borg, reflecting on his own spiritual journey in Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time, summarizes the reality of God for people who seek him today: “God [is] no longer a concept or an article of belief, but . . . an element of experience” (15). Philip Yancey expresses a similar appreciation for the relational aspect of faith in The Jesus I Never Knew. Yancey concludes that Jesus

brought God near. To Jews who knew a distant, ineffable God, Jesus brought the message that God cares for the grass of the field, feeds the sparrows, numbers the hairs on a person's head. To the Jews who dared not pronounce the Name (of God), Jesus brought the shocking intimacy of the Aramaic word 'Abba'—a familiar term of family affection equivalent to Daddy. (266)

Warmth, friendliness, and a perceived sense of trust characterize a preaching style with a relational tone. F. Dean Lueking, in The Art of Connecting People with God, reminds us that while pulpit authority comes from the biblical message, the messenger stands in relationship to the people (58). Lyle E. Schaller says, “[t]he most obvious implication of this trend is that the churches seeking to reach and serve the generations born since 1942 will be more effective if they build their ministry around the concepts and values reflected in such words as grace, relationships, hope, love forgiveness, identity, acceptance, compassion, choices, caring, and service” (34).

Insights from Right-brain/ Left-brain Research

From its humble beginnings in 1836 under French physician Marc Dax to the present day, research in the area of right-brain/ left-brain studies contribute to our understanding of communications theory and practice. In the early 1940s understanding of cerebral hemispheric function took a quantum leap forward when William Van Wagenen, a neurosurgeon from Rochester, New York, performed the first split-brain operations on humans suffering from severe epilepsy. In split-brain surgery—known as *commissurotomy*—some of the fibers that connect the two cerebral hemispheres are cut. For the first time in history, such operations provided opportunity to study the various cerebral hemispheres independently. The notion that one could study the role of specific regions became known as the *doctrine of cerebral localization* (Springer and Deutsch 8).

Roger Sperry, after pioneering work with split-brain patients, offered evidence that an independent stream of consciousness resides in each of the separate hemispheres (“Eccles Brain”). For his contribution Sperry won the 1981 Nobel Prize in Physiology of Medicine.

While mystery continues to cloud our understanding of the brain, some general observations can be made from the research of Sperry and others. The left hemisphere of the brain, for example, tends to be logical, mathematical, linear, sequential, intellectual, and analytic. The right hemisphere tends to be more holistic, artistic, symbolic, intuitive and creative (Babin 55). Springer and Deutsch's mammoth work, Left-Brain, Right Brain, from a scientific and physiological perspective helps our understanding. Split-brain research confirms that, in most persons, control of speech is localized to the left hemisphere (Springer and Deutsch 42). Further speculation has led to the idea that the left hemisphere is skilled at sequential processing in general and therefore, is the more analytic of the two hemispheres (Springer and Deutsch 51). The right hemisphere appears to be nonverbal, visuospatial, simultaneous, analogical, *gestalt*, synthetic, and intuitive (Springer and Deutsch 272).

Psychologist Robert Ornstein, in The Psychology of Consciousness, saw a correspondence between Western and Eastern consciousness. He noted that the emphasis on language and logical linear thinking in Western societies has ensured that the left hemisphere is well exercised. He went on to argue that the functions of the right hemisphere are neglected in the West and that such functions are more developed in the cultures, mysticism, and religions of the East. In short, Ornstein identified the left hemisphere with the thought of the technological, rational West and the right hemisphere with the thought of the intuitive, mystical East. According to Ornstein, brain research shows that these distinctions do not simply reflect culture or philosophy. The old belief in distinct Eastern and Western forms of consciousness, he argued, now has a physiological basis in the differences between the two hemispheres.

Evidence shows that women tend to be more right-brain oriented than are men. To what extent this is the result of cultural influence and how much is biological/physiological in origin is not yet known. Some speculate that the legendary intuition of women may arise out of a more holistic perception and assimilation process as opposed to a more one-sided reasoning. Again, the findings are not conclusive. The popular book, Men are From Mars & Women are From Venus, and other such drugstore-philosophy tend to overstate the case and oversimplify the supposed differences between male and female consciousness.

The significance of such research impacts the field of education. Joseph Bogen argues that current emphasis on the acquisition of verbal skills and the development of analytic thought processes neglects the development of important nonverbal abilities. As a result, he claims, “we are starving” one-half of the brain and ignoring its potential contribution to the whole person (24-32).

Concerning Christian communications, the discoveries of hemispheric research also have great significance. Referring back to Ong's theory of stages in human communications, the pendulum appears to be swinging back in the direction of a more right-brained communication style. The orality era was one of right-brain communication dominance. The script age was a highly linear, logical, left-brain dominant communication style. With the invasion of TV into our collective consciousness we are returning to an era of holistic right-brain communication and thought process. I. Sonnier, in Methods and Techniques of Holistic Education and Hemispherisity as a Key to Understanding Individual Differences, views television as a right-brained input system. Computers, video games, and other media also tend toward right-brain perception. Such media forms enable people to absorb large

amounts of complex information and to process that data in a nonlinear fashion. Media shapes consciousness. We not only program computers, they program us!

Research, though not yet conclusive, suggests that there may be generational differences in perception which reflect the communications styles that shape us. For example, educational researchers have long suggested that Baby Boomers and preceding generations grew up in a society that trained people to use linear logic in making decisions. Thus, most people over thirty approach decision making by moving from point A to point B to point C until the conclusion is reached (Evangelism 109). Today's teens may reach the same conclusion as people who use linear processing, but the means to that end are very different. Generally speaking, younger generations tend toward a more right-brain orientation than older and more left-brain generations.

Serious research suggests the lines of division between right and left hemispheric functions are not as clearly defined as popular thinking would suggest. Many functions remain a mystery while others seem to overlap between both right and left-brain activities. Springer and Deutsch draw this conclusion: “Our educational system may miss training or developing half of the brain, but it probably does so by missing out on the talents of both hemispheres” (283). For the purpose of this study, the actual location of brain functions is a mute point—right or left side is not the issue; logical versus intuitive is. An effective model of communication attempts to speak holistically to the total person; intellect, intuitions, emotions and rationality.

What does this mean for contemporary evangelistic preaching? Ralph Lewis maybe the most significant seminal thinker in this area of study. Lewis attempts to link the findings of brain research with the field of Christian communications and evangelistic speech in

particular. His works including, Inductive Preaching, Learning to Preach Like Jesus, Persuasive Preaching Today, and “The Triple Brain Test of a Sermon,” have contributed much to a growing body of literature. Citing Sperry for his brain research, Lewis notes that too much preaching aims at the left brain to the neglect of the right brain. While the left brain handles the functions of logic, analysis, and reason, the right brain relates more to the emotions, the visual, and the abstract. Lewis argues that persuasive preaching must become more right-brain focused (“Preaching With and Without Notes” 417). He notes that the “traditional propositional form or points of our sermons may generate little emotion or passion either in the preacher or congregation. Our electronic “galaxy” today demands more involvement, more participation and more real excitement from its turned-on preachers” (419).

Lewis makes an intriguing connection between the Hebrew and Greek styles of communication within the Bible and today's findings regarding hemispheric research. Lewis sees the Hebrew style of communication as a vivid holistic approach, rich in imagery, symbol, and metaphor. Hebrew thought, according to Lewis, represents classic right-brain communication style. In the Greek style of communication, Lewis finds a more left-brain approach. Linear, logical, and sequential thinking dominate the Greek thought pattern. While the Aramaic words of Jesus are recorded in Greek in the New Testament, nevertheless, Jesus’ thought process and manner of teaching exemplifies classic Hebraic style. Jesus teaches in Hebraic forms and structures and thought patterns.

Comparison of the imagery rich parables of Jesus to the logical, linear epistles of Paul reveals the contrast between communication styles. Lewis, in Learning to Preach Like Jesus, contends that for centuries preachers have been preaching in Greek thought patterns like Paul

and not in Hebrew like Jesus. The revolution in communications of today demands response from the pulpit. Lewis challenges contemporary preachers to learn to preach in “Hebrew” as Jesus did. He argues for preaching to emulate Jesus in his right-brain holistic approach of communication.

Canada – A Distinct Society

“Canada is a country where nothing ever seems to happen. A country always dressed in its Sunday go-to-meeting clothes. A country you wouldn’t ask to dance a second waltz. Clean. Christian. Dull” (qtd. in Adams 58). If Carol Shields' description of Canada’s national character was once accurate it is no longer. Today “Canada is no longer a nation-state,” says Richard Gwyn, “but a postmodern something” (qtd. in Adams 78). The context of this study is Canada. If much of the preceding discussion contributes to our general understanding of evangelistic preaching, specific mention needs to be made of the unique Canadian context lest this study be incomplete and inaccurate.

Sex in the Snow by Michael Adams does not describe what the title suggests. Rather it represents a serious demographic study of the changing character of Canadians. Adams offers a “psychological landscape” of the nation. His research dramatizes a truth little appreciated beyond the nation's borders, that Canada has “a distinctly Canadian world-view” (18). Canadians look like Americans. They dress like Americans, howbeit in more conservative colors. They even sound like Americans, with the slight distinction that they raise the tone at the end of sentences, transforming assertions into hypotheses so as not to give offence, often adding “eh” (a verbalized question mark) to emphasize politeness. Though Canadians may appear as American clones, beneath the skin of culture any family resemblance ends. Canadians are uniquely Canadian. “In fact, despite tribal differences,”

says Adams, “French and English Canadians have far more in common with each other in terms of values than either group has with the Americans. . . . And in spite of our growing intimacy with American commerce and culture, Canada remains a distinct society on the northern half of the North American continent” (195).

Canada is exceptionally cosmopolitan and secular in thought, a trait more closely linked with Britain and Europe than with her more conservative cousins to the south. Adams calls Canada a “multicultural reality” hallmarked by “the waning of traditional institutions” (21). Toronto is rated as one of the most cosmopolitan and multicultural cities in the world. If postmodernism has infiltrated the U.S., its effects are more severely felt in Canada. Bilingual Canadians are perhaps the most postmodern in the Western Hemisphere. Their ability to communicate in different languages is an international “passport to post-modernity.”

Surprisingly, the techno-revolution has influenced Canada more strongly than the U.S: “In Canada, ‘sex, *drugs* and rock’n roll’ has given way to ‘sex, *tech* and rock’n roll.’ . . . [T]he Internet [is] providing Canadians with an exciting new sense of social connectedness” (126). A Times Mirror survey in 1994 found that among the countries of North America and Europe, Canada has the highest level of home personal computer use. “Canadians,” according to the report, “are . . . among the most wired people in the world” (qtd. in Adams 129). Canada's lead in the techno-revolution of postmodernity can be attributed to several factors: Economy is one. Despite legendary taxes and a notoriously low dollar, Canadians, according to the United Nations report of 1997, rate as having the highest quality of life in the world (Adams 20-21). There is another reason Canadians are “plugged in and online”—geography. “If some countries have too much history,” quipped Prime Minister Mackenzie King, “Canada has too much geography.” Long before the term “information highway” was

ever coined, the infrastructure that held together a sparsely populated Canada was its sophisticated network of communications systems.

“Family values” is another area where Canadians and Americans differ. The Christian right-wing political movement of the States is virtually non-existent in Canada. Little exists in the way of a “moral minority” let alone a “Moral Majority.” Social liberalism predominates as the accepted norm. Family values in Canada have evolved from “Leave it to Beaver” to television sitcom “Ellen,” starring in an openly lesbian role. Though Americans blush over the scandalous suspicions of philandering in the oval office, former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's fathering a child out of wedlock at seventy years of age hardly rates the raising of a Canadian eyebrow.

Bibby's Fragmented Gods documents the decline of religion in Canada. Canadians have witnessed the “privatization of religion.” If Canadians were once more religious than Americans, they are now less so by far. The church in Canada is losing ground with the exception of some evangelical denominations. Biblical illiteracy, according to Canadian Sociologist Don Posterski, remains high: “Churched and unchurched people are religiously illiterate” (Future Faith 137). When it comes to religion, the forty-ninth parallel is “the demystification zone” of North America.

The privatization of religion in Canada is hallmarked by the increasing value placed upon tolerance as the guiding virtue. “Tolerance above all else,” is the unspoken motto of many. Yet tolerance soon becomes intolerance in response to Christians that might dare to point to an exclusive salvation in Jesus. Canadian evangelicalism, a small minority voice in Canada, does not hold the public esteem of its American counterparts.

Canadians' disdain for traditional religion does not mean they are closed to the subject of spirituality. As a nation of Postmoderns Canadians exhibit a growing openness to things spiritual of one form or another, especially among younger generations. In The Emerging Generations: An Inside Look at Canada's Teenagers, Bibby and Posterski document this growing phenomenon. Their "Project Canada" research reveals that approximately four out of ten Canadian teens think that they have experienced God's presence (116). More Canadian young people today believe in heaven than did their counterparts in 1965. More Canadian teens (80 percent) believe in life after death than Canadian adults (60 percent). While Canadian teens are growing in openness to things spiritual, they are closed to traditional church (Bibby and Posterski 117). The spiritual climate in Canada holds consequences for evangelism. If the U.S. finds itself moving towards a postmodern secular society, Canada has almost certainly arrived.

III. Synthesis: A Model for the Future

From insights gained come life application. This section attempts to bring synthesis to the preceding discussion and discern appropriate action as we seek to develop a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching. For preaching to become more effective for today's world a number of changes need to take place.

More Inductive – Less Deductive

To date evangelistic preaching has been almost exclusively propositional and deductive. For effectiveness in the current milieu, the sermon must move toward being more inductive and less deductive. Deductive reasoning works well if the audience is in general agreement with the presenter. If this was once true, it can no longer be assumed. Lewis agrees, saying that "deductive reasoning is appropriate if the listeners are in agreement with the speaker

and if listeners accept the authority of the Bible, the Church and the preacher” (Persuasive 63).

Nathan, the prophet, can be our instructor. Nathan’s famous confrontation with David concerning the king’s adultery (2 Sam. 12:1-15) displays classic induction at its best. By choosing this obtuse method the prophet traps the king with his own words. Without realizing it, the king pronounces himself guilty. Nathan simply has to voice the verdict—“You are the man!” The knife of self-judgement stabs David’s heart. Induction approaches the hearer obliquely, therein lies its power. “We don’t see what is coming in the story,” says Jensen. “When we do, it is too late. We are hooked by the story” (Thinking 62). Induction follows the advice of Emily Dickenson’s poem, “Tell all the truth but tell it *slant*.” Dean Kemper also speaks of the disarming quality of induction. It “short circuit[s] emotional reaction” (87). Induction enables the delivery of a potentially confrontational message while avoiding dogmatic confrontation. Loscalzo also argues for inductive evangelism:

Most evangelists structure evangelistic sermons following the deductive model. The preacher states a proposition at the beginning of the sermon and sets out to prove its veracity and to apply its truth. . . . In some ways the inductive approach may actually be the better approach for evangelistic sermons because it inherently overcomes the problem of negative listener bias. (64-5)

Another advantage of inductive evangelism is its ability to lead people into discovery of truth. The preacher guides his or her hearers on a journey of discovery within the hearers’ minds, leading them to arrive at a destination seemingly their own (Robinson 125). In practical terms, while the essential content of the message will not change, the structure and style of presentation must. Instead of starting with a “Big Idea”, to use Haddon Robinson’s term, followed by several propositional statements supported by argumentation, illustration, application and exhortation, the process is reversed. The preacher leads the hearer toward

several minor conclusions, which build toward one large conclusion revealed at the end of the sermon.

More Narration – Less Didactic Instruction

Contemporary evangelistic preaching will offer more narration and less didactic instruction. The term “narrative evangelism” expresses the concept. This resolve comes from an awareness that our culture thinks in terms of story, narration, and picture. We live in a story soaked age, an age of narrative preeminence. In “Where Preaching is Headed,” Rowell quotes Miller: “Typical congregations nourished on years of television dramas and popular video releases have been groomed to relate to the narrative sermon”(Rowell 95). Even television commercials are now told in the form of story. In the sixties a commercial might present a man in a white lab coat saying something like “86 percent of doctors prefer brand X.” Today lab coats are out. Stories are in. Everything from Hallmark cards to hemorrhoid cream is promoted through story. A popular series of coffee commercials has even become a mini soap-opera. Story is the medium of day. “Ours is par excellence the age of illustration, an age when people are habituated to picture thinking” (MacPherson 39).

Jesus taught inductively through stories. Lewis points out the difference between Jesus’ inductive preaching style directed to unbelievers, and his deductive teaching style directed toward his disciples:

When Jesus PREACHES he always begins with life—a story, a need, a question. His basic authority is life itself and not as the scribes who always begin by leaning on scriptural authority with their own interpretation. He leads to faith, to Scripture, to God. His preaching doesn’t demand faith in a text in His opening sentence. . . . When Jesus TEACHES His disciples he begins with Scripture. (166)

“A story ,” says Chapell, “has the ability to guide hearers along an narrative trail that leads to scriptural conclusions” (155).

Narrative form, suggests Greidanus, enables “the hearers to be involved more holistically, not merely logically but also intuitively, not only intellectually but also emotionally” (151). This allows the sermon to be “life-size in the sense of touching all the keys on the board rather than only intellectual or emotional or volitional” (Craddock As One Without 137). Women preachers may be more attuned to this holistic method of preaching than men. Methodist pastor Marianne Chalstrom, who studied homiletics with Fred Craddock, once remarked, “Story is how women communicate at every level. So you men can quit pretending you've invented something new” (qtd. in Rowell 95).

Kevin Ford suggests a number of benefits to narrative evangelism as a means to reaching contemporary hearers. Narrative evangelism is biblically authentic. The Bible itself is the story. The theological dynamic of narrative evangelism places God at the center. Narrative communication proves culturally appropriate and relationally effective. It speaks to the human heart. No one can resist a good story. A good story communicates truth with more impact and clarity than any other communication medium (221).

More Here and Now – Less There and Then

Warren Wiersbe says, “Nobody goes to church to find out what happened to the Jebusites” (Elements 66). We experience life in the present tense and come to a sermon longing to hear what God has to say to us today. Contemporary evangelism seeks to develop an audience-centered preaching style. It focuses more on “the here and now” (the contemporary world), than on “the then and there” (the biblical world). Haddon Robinson states the case well: “Life-changing preaching does not talk to the people about the Bible. Instead, it talks to the people about themselves—their questions, hurts, fears, and struggles—

from the Bible. When we approach the sermon with that philosophy, flint strikes steel” (Mastering 65).

More Conversational – Less Confrontational

President George Bush spoke of a “kinder and gentler world.” Likewise, the present cultural climate requires a kinder and gentler evangelism. To some degree we have witnessed this transformation in the preaching of Billy Graham whose style has mellowed over the years. Graham no longer shouts. He no longer paces like a lion in a cage. He talks in a more natural tone of voice. His preaching reflects a more conversational tone. He no longer points his long index finger saying “You!” but more often uses the inclusive “we” as in “We must repent.” Yet even in his elder years and in a more relaxed tone suitable to our times, the fervor of his earnestness and urgency is still felt.

Seeking to develop a model of contemporary evangelistic speech requires preaching in a style more conversational and less confrontational in tone. Secular people resist confrontational appeals. Posterski, in Reinventing Evangelism, notes “Confrontational styles of witnessing were never popular, but today they are considered offensive” (65). A relational age demands a more relaxed style. Communication takes on a relational tone, a two-way dialogue through questions and answers. Woodrow Kroll, in Prescription for Preaching, calls this “heightened conversation” and points to John Wesley as an originator of the concept (85).

The Model Defined – Content/ Form/ Style

This investigation seeks to develop a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching. Reflecting on the research covered in the review of literature, a proposed shape for this model emerges with three components: *content*, *format*, and *style*.

Regarding *content*, the proclamation attempts to reflect the essence of New Testament *kerygma*, contextualized for today. Chapter two, from a theological prospective, put forward the essentials of a *kerygma* for today: 1) *Who Jesus is*—God’s self-disclosure in his eternal Son; 2) *Why Jesus came*—to bring us into a living relationship with God; 3) *What Jesus did*—he died and came to life again as God’s saving act in history to make possible both our forgiveness and eternal life; 5) *Our response*—commitment to God expressed in repentance and obedient faith. In summary, the gospel is the story of God’s redemptive act in Christ, necessitating our response.

Chapter two examined the *kerygma* from a purely theological point of view. The review of literature of the present chapter attempts to bring the preaching of the *kerygma* into its present contemporary context. The following summarizes the significance of the *kerygma* from the perspective of today’s culture:

1. A God who cares.
2. A living Christ able to help in the problems of life and victorious over death.
3. A call to surrender to Christ as Lord (including repentance and faith).

This modified message has a different starting point than the New Testament *kerygma* which begins with Jesus. Evangelism in “Athens” (Acts 17) and in the new Athens paradigm of today requires a start further back. The message begins with a God who cares. The implications of the biblical message are stated simply and from the beginning point of the post-modern hearer. No attempt to reduce the *kerygma* is made, but only to apply it. The Christ who performed miracles, who suffered on the cross and conquered the grave is the same Christ who brings victory to out-of-control lives.

Regarding the *form* of the message, the literature recommends variety among structural formats, lest form becomes formula preaching. Freedom and creativity in sermon design are

the order of the day. Often the form of the text and what the text does lends itself to the form of the sermon suggesting what it too must do to its hearers. Preaching is no longer bound by one-size-fits-all homiletical straightjackets. Contemporary preaching is set free. Yet while affirming freedom of structure and design, three elements remain constant. In general terms, the message will be characterized by the following: *induction, narration, and movement*.

The contemporary model relies on inductive rather than deductive learning.

Traditionally evangelistic sermons are propositional and deductive. They need not be. The inductive method is more effective when dealing with audiences either hostile or indifferent to the message. The inductive approach seeks to lead people to discover truth rather than thrusting it upon them. Whether the sermon takes a strictly narrative approach or not, in general it will exhibit a narrative quality through the use of illustration and visual imagery. Lastly, due to the fast-pace influence of television upon our thinking, the sermon will characterize movement and flow.

Regarding *style*, the sermon model will be: *visual, relational, conversational, contemporary, extemporaneous, authentic, emotive, and persuasive*. Contemporary evangelistic preaching seeks to win a hearing. The evangelist is a translator. The desire to translate the timeless message of Christ into the language of the times consumes the evangelist. The message must be heard, understood, and embraced. The New Testament declares “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17 NIV). The ultimate goal is faith. Nevertheless, before faith can be embraced, it must be understood. Before it can be understood, it must be heard. The evangelist seeks a hearing.

Having proposed a model for contemporary evangelistic preaching as described above in terms of *content*, *form*, and *style*, the following chapter formulates a research design to implement the model and evaluate it. With this challenge in view, the words of Abraham Lincoln are as appropriate in our time of culture war as they were in his day of national crisis: “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present. We must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves” (Leedy 27).

CHAPTER 4

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In my opening story, Jeff, upon returning from the army enters his familiar surroundings to discover that his friends Ron and Karen have moved. Likewise, the review of literature confirms that North American culture has moved also. To return to our guiding metaphor, the world outside our door is no longer Jerusalem—it is Athens. The terrain becomes unfamiliar ground.

A great challenge faces evangelism in such an environment. A new kind of seeker, one with little or no Christian memory, who lives by different rules, who thinks in different concepts, who perceives truth by different means, whose life and soul is shaped by a world radically different from any other generation in history, has emerged. Bringing change to the model while holding firm to the message presents our challenge. To reevaluate, redefine, and reinvent the form of preaching we call “evangelistic” defines our task

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is “to develop, implement, and evaluate a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching in a local church context.” Through the process of theological reflection (Chapter 2) and review of literature (Chapter 3) a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching is developed in partial fulfillment of this purpose. The shape of this design model is described in general terms of content, form, and style in Chapter 3, *Synthesis*. Matters of implementation and evaluation concern our attention in this chapter.

My hypothesis was that evangelistic preaching in the contemporary context increases in effectiveness as it becomes more inductive, narrative, visual, right-brain oriented, relational,

and relevant while remaining true to the historic biblical *kerygma*. The conducting of a preaching experiment was proposed to test both the model and the hypothesis.

Research Questions

A series of eight sermons patterned after the design model was created and delivered by the researcher. The preaching was evaluated by a wide spectrum of congregational participants made up of self-selected volunteers. The experiment centered on the identification of how various groups (according to gender, age, Christian experience, and church experience) responded to the model. The response of those raised in a “Jerusalem” paradigm (i.e. those with a longer church history) was compared with those living in “Athens” (i.e. those with no or little Christian memory) and conclusions drawn.

The following questions give focus and direction to this research in light of the stated purpose:

Research Question #1: How do subjects evaluate each of the sermon characteristics of attention, induction, narration, emotion, persuasion, authenticity, and relational tone?

Research Question #2: Do subjects differ in their response according to gender, age, years of Christian experience, or years of church experience?

Research Question #3: Which sermons were more persuasive and why?

Research Question #4: What elements of the preaching contribute to persuasiveness?

In answer to Research Question #1, the response score for each of the eight characteristics of preaching is tabulated, and then plotted graphically in order to assess their relationship to each other and toward the overall effectiveness of the sermon. A series of computer generated Charts and Tables are created to show the composite score of each of the preaching characteristics for the total preaching series and also for the eight individual sermons that comprise it.

In answer to Research Question #2, matters of gender, age, years of Christian experience and years of church experience were factored into the equation and displayed graphically for comparison, both on a composite level and on the level of individual sermons.

The answer to Research Question #3 and #4 are sought through assessment of the “Composite Score” (Chart B.1) which graphically displays the comparative assessment of individual sermons. Of particular importance is the category of *persuasion* used as a measure of the effectiveness of the sermon as a whole. The question of “why” some sermons appear more persuasive than others enters the domain of subjectivity. However, tentative answers are sought from two divergent sources. A comparison of the element of *persuasion* to that of the other seven preaching characteristics is insightful. A comparison of the category of *persuasion* and the actual sermon transcripts (cf. Appendix D) offers further light on the matter.

Population and Sample

Careful consideration on the part of the Congregational Reflection Group along with the researcher sought the best means of collecting the most data while remaining sensitive to those to whom the evangelistic outreach was directed. Several options were explored. The possibility of giving the SRQ instrument to the total congregation immediately following the message, either before or after the benediction, received consideration. While this method would insure a large ratio of listener response, the option was rejected for several reasons. The time factor inhibited this approach. The SRQ takes from four to six minutes to complete. The morning worship at Spruce Grove Alliance consists of two consecutive services beginning at 9:30 AM and 11:00 AM. Change-over time between services is short, especially when the service is prolonged by a response to the evangelistic invitation.

Psychological factors entered the picture. Considering the celebrative nature of the event it was deemed important to end each service on an high note closing worship with a song of rejoicing. The administration of a five-minute test instrument at such a moment was thought inappropriate. Further, the CRG expressed concern over administering the instrument immediately following the evangelistic message and appeal with the fear that doing so would hold the potential of being spiritually insensitive to the very people the effort is intended to reach.

Another approach held possibility. Approximately half (200-250) of the worship congregation attends “Care Group” meetings on a weekly basis. These groups ranging in age from high-school students to senior citizens. Administering the SRQ instrument in this setting was deemed more appropriate and non-offensive. Trained lay pastor/Care Group leaders would administer the test in a controlled environment. For these reasons, the weekly Care Group sessions were decided upon as the venue for administering the SRQ test instrument.

A week by week breakdown of church attendance, Care Group attendance, and number of SRQs completed follows:

<u>Sermon Title</u>	<u>Worship Attendance</u>	<u>Care Group Attendance</u>	<u>SRQs Completed</u>
Break Through, Break Free	466	210	86
A Cry in the Dark	520	223	94
The Eye of the Hurricane	570	202	74
All Stressed Up	556	190	60
When the Wine Runs Out	507	215	63
Nobody Like Jesus	544	180	59
Water of Life	572	165	43
Reborn from Above	545	196	35
Total	4280	1581	514

The SRQ volunteer response represents 33 percent of those given opportunity to complete the instrument through weekly attendance at Care Group. Compared to the total population (i.e. the number attending Sunday worship over the eight-week period) a response rate of 12 percent was achieved. In total, 514 SRQs were completed by self-selected volunteers over the eight weeks of the preaching experiment.

Instrumentation

While the literature review suggested various types of test models, no pre-existing instrument was found that would satisfactorily test the hypothesis. The creation of a researcher-designed instrument was deemed necessary to evaluate the distinct elements of the researcher designed preaching model.

In formulating such an instrument the first task was to identify between three to ten distinctive elements of the model (cf. Chapter 3, Synthesis) which are measurable by a test instrument. Acknowledgement is given to the fact that some elements of preaching are not measurable in the usual sense, most noteworthy being the power of the Holy Spirit and the unique personality and charisma of individual speakers. Having said this, the possibility of measurability holds potential for a number of the preaching elements when distilled from the working model. Eight characteristics of the model are deemed significant. These eight elements are recorded below with their category designation listed to the right:

In order to communicate the Gospel effectively we need to:

Hear the Gospel	— <i>Attention</i>
Discover the Gospel	— <i>Induction</i>
See the Gospel	— <i>Narration</i>
Feel the Gospel	— <i>Emotion</i>
Do the Gospel	— <i>Persuasion</i>

In addition, contemporary communication also demands that:

The messenger be perceived as authentic	— <i>Authenticity</i>
The message be perceived as relevant	— <i>Relevancy</i>
The messenger speak in a relational tone	— <i>Relational</i>

These eight elements—attention, induction, narration, emotion, persuasion, authenticity, relevancy and the need for a relational message—show congruence with the description of the design model in Chapter 3. They also reflect congruence with the hypothesis that evangelistic preaching needs to be inductive, narrative, visual, right-brain oriented, relational, and relevant in order to be persuasive in communicating the biblical *kerygma*.

The eight categories form the basis for the design of a thirty-two question Sermon Response Questionnaire (SRQ) with four questions per category. Each question is formulated as an objective statement followed by four response squares designated as strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The four response squares are laid out in horizontal fashion to the right of each statement in a Likert-type scale. The respondent simply checks one square per question indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement.

Of the four statements per category, two state the question positively and two negatively. For instance, under the category of “attention” a positive statement reads, “The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention.” A similar statement cast negatively reads, “I was bored.”

Chart A.1 below lists the eight categories followed by the four statements in each category. The actual SRQ document, displayed in the appendix, gives no indication of category. Likewise, in the finalized SRQ the list of statements appears in random order concealing any relationship between them. For present convenience and design purposes,

symbols indicate questions cast in a positive and negative format. Positive statements are indicated by the symbol (+). Negative statements are symbolized (-). These symbols are omitted from the finalized SRQ.

Figure A.1

Attention

- (+) The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention.
- (+) The speaker's use of visual imagery helped me follow the sermon.
- (-) I was bored.
- (-) My mind wandered constantly.

Induction

- (+) The speaker "guided" me through the Bible passage.
- (+) The speaker helped me "discover" some new truth.
- (-) The speaker told me what to believe without letting me think for myself.
- (-) I felt the preacher was pushing his views down my throat.

Narration

- (+) In retelling the biblical story the speaker "made the Bible come alive."
- (+) The true-life stories helped me "visualize" the truth expressed in the Bible.
- (-) The stories seemed to make no point.
- (-) The sermon would have been helped by removing the modern day stories.

Emotion

- (+) I was deeply moved by something the speaker said.
- (+) I was moved to a state of reflection.
- (-) The sermon left me cold.
- (-) The message was dry and lacked "heart."

Persuasion

- (+) I feel my faith is strengthened.
- (+) I felt challenged to change some aspect of my life.
- (-) The message made no difference to my life.
- (-) When it was over I said "so what!"

Authenticity

- (+) The speaker seemed to believe what he was saying.
- (+) The speaker knew what he was talking about.
- (-) He was more interested in the message than in me.
- (-) He seemed insincere.

Relevancy

- (+) He spoke to the needs of my life.
- (+) The sermon related to the world I live in.
- (-) The sermon did not connect with my life.
- (-) The sermon used language that non-Church people would not understand.

Relational

- (+) The preacher seemed warm and friendly toward me.
- (+) I felt like he was speaking to me.
- (-) I felt the preacher as hostile and cold toward me.
- (-) The speaker was uptight and ill at ease.

Respondents rate each statement on the four-point Likert scale. Positively worded statements (+) are scored as follows:

“The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention.”

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	3	2	1

Negatively worded statements (-) are reverse scored relative to the positively worded items as follows:

“I was bored.”

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4

The sum of the two item types (positive and negative) provides an overall score for each of the eight categories. In this way a “Strongly Agree” response to “The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention” receives a score of four. This same respondent receives a score of four when he or she “Strongly Disagrees” with “I was bored.” Thus, a “Strongly Agree” response to a negatively worded item in the “Attention” category (such as “I was bored—Strongly Agree) denies giving the speaker attention, while a “Strongly Disagree” response to a positively worded item (such as “The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention”) confirms the denial. A “Strongly Disagree” response to a negatively worded item in the same “Attention” category (such as “I was bored”—Strongly Disagree) implies that the speaker gained the hearer’s attention. A “Strongly Agree” response to a positively worded

item in this same category (such as “The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention”—Strongly Agree) confirms the hearer’s attention was indeed given to the speaker.

The scoring yields a range of four to sixteen for each of the eight categories. The midpoint score, referred to as the point of neutrality, is ten. Thus, a score of 9.9 or less (i.e. $9.9 > 4$) indicates a decreasing level of response experience regarding the specific category. A score of ten or more (i.e. $10 < 16$) in any category indicates an increasing level of response.

Observation of the relationship between categories inquires into the possibility of interdependency among any or all the preaching elements. The inclusion of a composite score provides a possible means of evaluating the over-all effectiveness of the communication. A high composite score, for instance, reflects the overall effectiveness of the communication. Likewise, a low composite score reflect the message’s failure to communicate.

The composite score of all eight categories yields a possible range of 32 - 128. The midpoint score is eighty. This means that a composite score of seventy-nine or less (i.e. $79 > 32$) indicates decreasing response regarding the effectiveness of the communication. A score of eighty or more (i.e. $80 < 128$) indicates increasing response regarding the effectiveness of the message as a whole.

Comparing composite scores to the *generation* variable allows insight into the sermon model’s degree of appeal to various ages. A similar compilation of composite scores when broken down by gender indicates variation between male and female response patterns. Similarly the possibility of a relationship between the way people perceive a sermon and their history of church attendance and Christian experience (i.e. people of *Jerusalem* versus

Athens) is explored. The instrument is designed to reflect the degree to which those with little or no Christian memory are receptive to a message style designed with their needs in mind. The investigation design intends to yield light upon these and other questions.

Pretest and Refinement

At a Care Group Leaders session on September 13, 1997, twenty-seven volunteers participated in the pretest SRQ evaluation study (see Appendix C.1.1). Respondents were also asked to give feedback regarding the clarity of questions. Accordingly, adjustments to the wording of the SRQ were made as needed (cf. Appendix C.1.1 and C.1.2) Several of the questions were softened in order to solicit a less ultimate response. Others were clarified to remove vagueness.

Table C.2 and Chart C.2 in the Appendix display the response scores of the Pilot study as broken down by gender. The response according to age groups is displayed in Table C.3 and Chart C.3. Table C.4 and Chart C.4 indicates the response according to Christian experience (i.e. years as a believer). Likewise, response according to church experience (i.e. years as an attender of Spruce Grove Alliance) appears in Table C.5 and Chart C.5 of the Appendix.

Data Collection

The preaching of a series of eight experimental sermons occurred on consecutive Sundays from Oct. 19 – Dec. 7, 1997. Under the title “Invitation to Life!” a two-month outreach campaign engendered participation among a wide number of church attenders. Effort at every level of church ministry sought to involve the total church in the success of the endeavor. Training and encouragement in friendship evangelism preceded the campaign. Special advertising coincided with the services. Guests received gifts in appreciation for

their coming, including a copy of the video cassette, "Jesus," produced by *The Genesis Project*.

Uniformity was also desired in test implementation. Lay pastor/Care Group leaders were instructed in how to administer the SRQ instrument. Lay pastors administered the test in a controlled atmosphere. At the beginning of each Care Group session a letter from the pastor was read to the group instructing respondents in the process (cf. Appendix for a copy of the researcher's letter of instruction). Pencils and pens were provided. Lay pastors were instructed to give oversight insuring that volunteers not consult with others during the completion of the SRQ. Lay pastors collected the completed SRQs for return to the church office by sealed envelope.

Variables

Variables include the composite assessment of the sermon series, assessment of individual sermons, and sub-level assessment of the eight sermon characteristics. These eight characteristics are the aspects of 1) Attention; 2) Induction; 3) Narration; 4) Emotion; 5) Persuasion; 6) Authenticity; 7) Relevancy; and 8) the need of a Relational style of communication. These sub-level variables are congruent with the design model of Chapter 3. Findings are further analyzed in light of age, gender, years of Christian experience and years of church experience.

Data Analysis

Following the sermon series, the accumulated data was analyzed by computer to indicate patterns and trends of significance. *Microsoft Access 97* was used to compile and analyze data base information. Through the assistance of a professional computer analyst a special program was created after the pattern of the SRQ design which automatically tabulated

response scores as they were entered into the program. The computer screen was made to approximate the SRQ in appearance so that information could easily be transferred to the computer. Following tabulation and analysis of the data base material, the results were transferred to *Microsoft Excel 97* for graphic display in charts and tables (cf. Chapter 5).

The investigation is marked by two stages. In the first stage the composite results of the entire sermon series are examined. The second phase of investigation takes a more detailed look at the response to individual sermons.

Phase One of the investigation looks at the composite scores of the entire sermon series. This phase of investigation presents a higher potential of reliability compared with the second phase of investigation since Phase One tabulations are based on the total response population of 514 SRQs. Phase Two represents an analysis of response to individual sermons. Reduced statistical reliability of Phase Two investigations results from the reduction of population in response to individual sermons in contrast to the series as a whole (Phase One). Conclusions drawn from Phase Two are thus more tentative and less verifiable. Nevertheless, the investigation includes this phase in order to complete the picture given in Phase One and to give insight into the response to individual sermons by various groups. While all sermons are based on the design model, each has a unique character reflected in the response scores. While Phase Two is statistically less reliable than Phase One, in practical terms the second phase proves valuable in examining various elements of the design model. Specifically the Phase Two investigations point to clues in answer to the question, "What worked in which sermons and why?" Phase Two allows for direct correlation between sermon characteristics and individual sermons preached. Response scores concerning

specific elements such as “narrative,” etc., can than be correlated with illustrations or story format used in a particular sermon.

The investigation deserves merit to the degree of accuracy attained in measuring things measurable. The nature of the subject under examination—namely preaching—inherently limits the value of the statistical aspect of this investigation. An element of subjectivity accompanies any research that deals with an activity such as preaching. The extent to which preaching is scrutable to statistical analysis remains a subject open to philosophical debate. “Preaching,” it is often said, “is both an art and a science.” Science we can put under the microscope, but how does one measure art? The mystery of preaching, not the least of which concerns the working of the Holy Spirit and the complexities of the human soul, eludes us as inscrutable beyond any definitive form of human assessment. Salvation remains a miracle and miracles, even more than butterflies in summer, are hard to capture in a bottle.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This Chapter purposes to report the findings of the investigation and allow the observations to speak for themselves. Conclusions as to the interpretive meaning of these observations remain for the final summary in Chapter 6.

The four research questions guide the study. Two sections divide the research. Phase One examines congregational response to the sermon series as a whole. Phase Two examines the response to individual sermons. Table and chart displays are inseparable from the observations and comments that follow, thus their inclusion in this Chapter rather than the Appendix. The exception to this being the Pilot Project Analysis found in the Appendix designated as Tables C.2-C.5 and Charts C.2-C.5.

I. Phase One: A Response to the Sermon Series

Research Question #1 ask: “How do subjects evaluate each of the sermon characteristics of attention, induction, narration, emotion, persuasion, authenticity, and relational tone?” Research Question #2 asks: “Do subjects differ in their response according to gender, age, years of Christian experience, or years of church experience?” Tables and Charts A.2 through A.5 display the response these questions in relation to the sermon series as a whole. Each chart gives a visual presentation of the information shown numerically in the table above it. The table’s left-hand column entitled “Count” represents the number of SRQs for each category. For example, Table A.5 indicates that 146 respondents categorize themselves as being Christians for five years or less. Respondents falling into the six to fifteen-year category number 217. Those with Christian experience of sixteen or more years number 145. The categories under analysis appear in the column second to the left. The corresponding

information is displayed in the key to the right of the chart in which a color code and/or line type is designated to each of the categories displayed on the chart. For example, Table A.2 shows response by gender. The key to the right of Chart A.2 indicates that a red dotted line plots female response. A continuous black line plots male response to the message series.

The eight columns to the right of the table indicate the eight elements of preaching congruent with the design model of Chapter 3. These variables are also displayed on the bottom line of the chart. Under these designations in the table the response score is recorded for each category in the eight columns to the right of the table. For example, Table A.2 under “Attention” indicates that males score 12.578 while females score 12.851 on their response to the four questions on the SRQ concerning their perception of how well the speaker was able to hold their attention. The ordinal scale to the left of the chart indicates the same information. Thus by plotting the score as indicated by the left hand ordinal scale in conjunction with the variables as indicated at the bottom of the chart a visual display is possible.

The possible range of score is between four and sixteen with a medium score of ten. A score of four indicates the lowest possible response while sixteen represents a perfect score. The midpoint of ten represents a neutral response to the particular category. For clarity and convenience, charts vary in the range displayed. For example, Chart A.2 displays a range of 10.5 to 14 while Chart A.5 displays a range of 11.5 to 13.5. This fact is important when interpreting the data. While some plottings in both Charts A.2 and A.5 appear at the lower half of the display, all plottings in both charts are above the midpoint mark of ten as indicated by the right hand ordinal scale. Likewise, while several plottings approach the top of the

Table A.2

Count	Gender	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
185	Male	12.578	12.092	12.314	11.881	13.054	11.849	12.405	11.681
202	Female	12.851	12.401	12.743	12.520	13.584	12.307	12.891	12.243

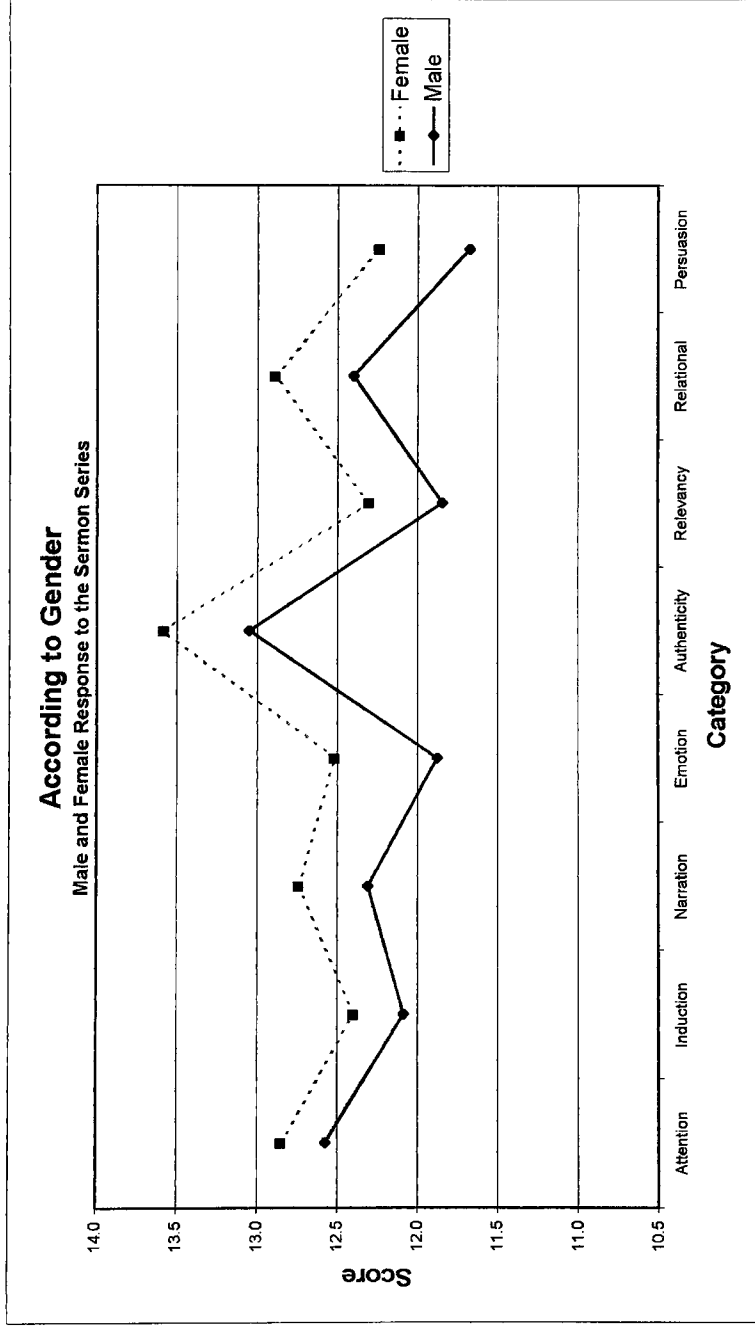


Chart A.2

Table A.3

Count	Age	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
55	Teen	12.382	11.691	12.709	11.655	12.982	11.236	12.218	10.418
40	20-29	13.350	12.650	13.300	12.250	14.175	12.325	13.225	12.350
75	30-39	12.827	12.453	12.880	12.453	13.667	12.307	12.933	12.227
236	40-54	12.873	12.462	12.674	12.398	13.326	12.318	12.589	12.182
118	55+	12.627	12.220	12.178	12.051	12.915	12.051	12.568	12.059

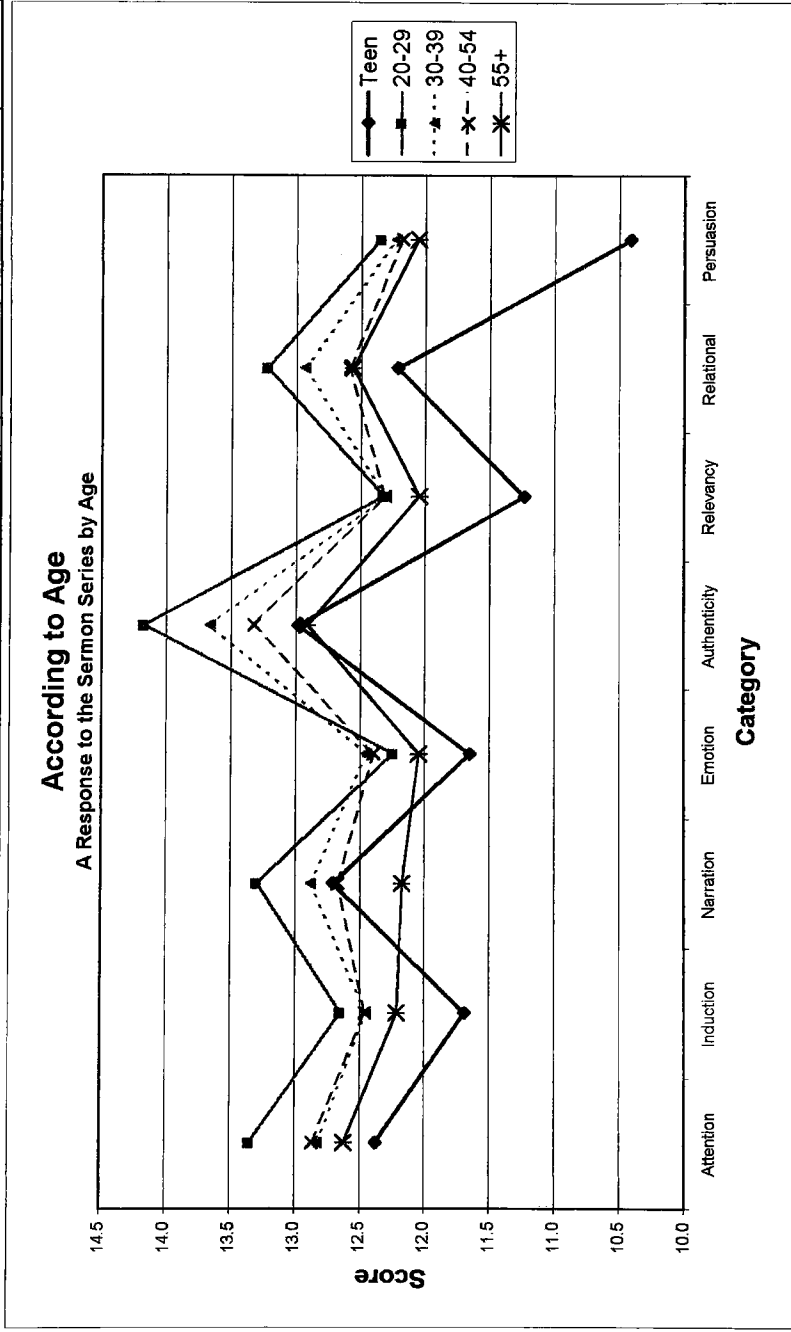


Chart A.3

chart they fall short of the ultimate score of sixteen which lies beyond the view of these graphs.

According to Gender – Table A.2 / Chart A.2

Table A.2 and Chart A.2 show the response to the total sermon series as broken down by gender. The range of response for both genders remains above the midpoint of ten, ranging from 11.6 and 13.6 indicating the overall response to the sermon series was more favorable than unfavorable in all eight categories. Females score higher, thus more favorably, in their response to all categories. The patterns for both sexes as shown in Chart A.2 are almost identical, one paralleling the other with females scoring approximately .5 points higher over all. Both males and females give the highest score to “Authenticity” and the lowest to “Persuasion.” The categories “Attention,” “Narration,” and “Relational” also score relatively high in the 12.5-13 range. The numbers displayed in the eight columns in the right side of the table section and plotted on the chart according to the ordinal scale represent the average score of all males and average score of all females for each category. These averages are based on the response rate of 185 SRQs identified as male and 202 SRQs identified as female. The total of SRQs identified as male and female equals 387. This figure falls short of the total number of 514 SRQs returned for the reason that 127 people failed to fill in the gender designation.

According To Age – Table A.3 / Chart A.3

Response to the sermon series according to age breakdown appears in Table A.3 and Chart A.3. The chart displays a range of ten (the midpoint score) to 14.5. Respondents are broken down into five age categories: Teens, twenty to twenty-nine years of age, thirty to thirty-nine years of age, forty to forty-five years of age, and those fifty-five and over.

Table A.4

Count	Christian	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
35	1-5 Yrs	12.688	11.625	12.438	11.750	12.771	11.375	11.625	11.063
173	6-20 Yrs	13.0462	12.7919	13.1618	12.6416	13.872832	12.37572	13.24855	12.294798
191	21-40 Yrs	12.5916	12.1885	12.5445	12.0942	13.209424	12.08901	12.5288	11.801047
112	41+ Yrs	12.7679	12.1518	12.1964	12.0804	12.919643	12.15179	12.44643	12.25

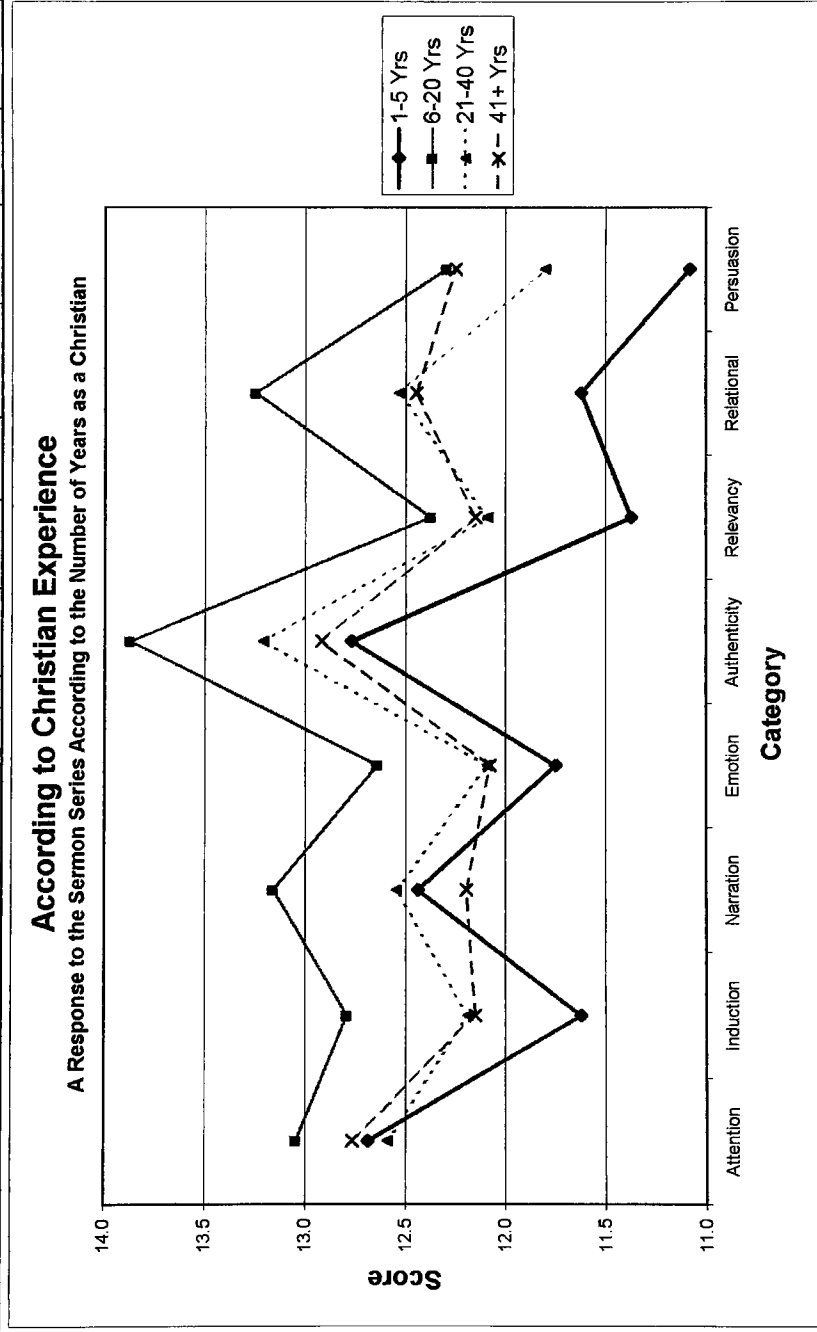


Chart A.4

The response pattern of all five age groups is similar and roughly parallel for all groups. “Authenticity” receives the highest score in all age groups. “Persuasion,” “Relevancy,” and “Emotion” generally rate lower than the other five categories.

Teens score the lowest, and thus are least favorable to the message series. Teen response for “Persuasion” (10.42) approaches neutrality, approximately 1.5-2 points lower than other age groups for this category. Teen response to “Relevance” rates the second lowest of all scores at 11.24.

Those in the twenty to twenty-nine year age group indicate the most favorable response to the preaching experiment. This group score highest in their overall response to the sermon series. While all ages experience the communicator as authentic, the response of the twenty to twenty-nine year age group scores highest at 14.18. Thirty to thirty-nine year olds are next in their favorableness toward the sermons, followed by forty to fifty-four years olds. Those fifty-five years of age or more follow indicating the least favorable response toward the sermons of any group twenty years of age or above. Thus, with the exception of teenagers, a possible pattern emerges: Younger respondents seem to indicate a more positive response toward the sermons than do older respondents. Further, the level of favorableness corresponds to the sequence of age groups from younger to older for all four age groupings above twenty years of age. Teenagers represent an exception to this sequence.

According to Christian Experience – Table A.4 / Chart A.4

Table and Chart A.4 displays Christian experience broken down into four categories: Those who have been believers for five years or less, six to twenty years, twenty-one to forty years, and those of forty-one or more years. The chart displays a range of eleven to fourteen

out of a possible range of four to sixteen. All groups display a pattern roughly parallel to each other.

Those with the least amount of Christian experience (five years or less) respond least favorably to the sermon series. “Persuasion,” for those of five years or less Christian experience scores the lowest at just over eleven. “Relevancy” also rates low for this age group at 11.36. While the response of those five years or less scores lower than other groups, an observation may be appropriate. The “count” category in Table A.4 indicates this to be the smallest group by far. Only thirty-five responses make up this category compared to the figures of 173, 191, and 112 for the other three age groups. Generally, the smaller the group the less accurate the response indication.

Those of six to twenty years Christian experience yield the highest scoring pattern. In “Authenticity,” this group scores more than a point higher than those of five years or less Christian experience. Those with twenty-one to forty years Christian experience indicate less favorability toward the sermon series than those with six to twenty years experience. Those of forty-one or more years of Christian experience score slightly lower than those of the twenty to forty year level of Christian experience. The scoring of the two groups shows little significant difference. With this in mind a possible pattern emerges: With the exception of those of five years or less Christian experience, those with more years of Christian experience show less favorability toward the sermon series than those with fewer years of Christian experience. Further, the level of favorableness corresponds to the sequence of groups from those with less Christian experience having a higher degree of favorableness toward the sermons than those of more Christian experience. Those of five years or less Christian experience remain an exception.

Table A.5

Count	Christian	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
146	1-5 Yrs	13.014	12.432	12.733	12.274	13.466	12.110	12.788	12.089
217	6-15 Yrs	12.811	12.346	12.829	12.544	13.465	12.300	12.793	12.069
145	16+ Yrs	12.5703	12.2207	12.3655	11.8069	12.986207	11.92414	12.37931	11.772414

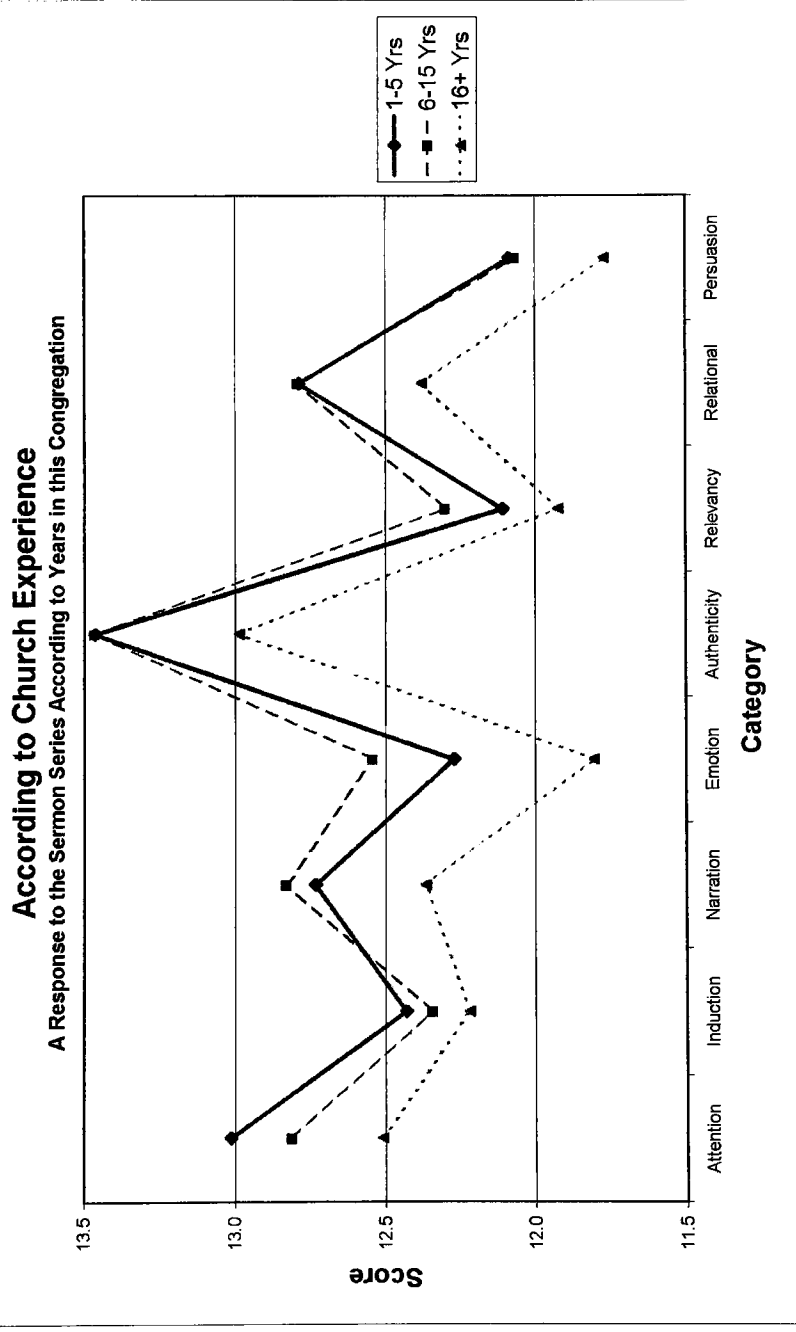


Chart A.5

“Authenticity” again receives the highest response score by all groups. All groups of various levels of Christian experience reveal roughly parallel patterns with the exception of “Persuasion” in the five year or less category.

According to Church Experience – Table A.5 / Chart A. 5

Table A.5 and Chart A.5 display the congregational response according to church experience broken down by three age groups: those with five years or less congregational experience, those with six to fifteen years congregational experience and those with sixteen years or more experience of this congregation.

The categories of five years or less and six to fifteen years congregational experience roughly coincide in their response. Three categories (“Authenticity,” “Relational,” and “Persuasion”) show identical scores for both groups. All three groups are roughly parallel in response pattern.

Phase Two: A Response to Individual Sermons

Phase Two represents a closer assessment focussed at the level of individual sermons in answer to the four guiding research questions. The results are displayed in Tables B.1 through B.16 and their accompanying Charts B.1 through B.16. The left column of each table labeled “count” indicates the number of SRQs returned for each sermon. The column second from the left names the sermon. For example, Table B.1 indicates the sermon, “A Cry in the Dark,” received a response of ninety-four SRQs. In Tables B.2 through B.16 the eight columns in the right-hand portion of the table indicate average response scores for each of the eight variables “Attention,” “Narration,” “Induction” etc. as they relate to the individual sermon title adjacent. Table B.1 marks an exception where only one column of figures appears to the right of the sermon title indicating the “Composite” score. The

composite score combines the average of all eight variables, “Attention,” “Narration,” “Induction,” etc.

Each chart presents the information shown numerically in the table above it. As with the previous section, the ordinal scale to the left of the chart indicates the average response score with a possible range of four to sixteen points with a midpoint score of ten. Sermon titles of the eight messages are displayed at the bottom of the chart. The range displayed, similar to the previous section, varies from chart to chart for visual convenience. With the exception of Chart B.1 which indicates the composite score only, a key to the right hand side of each chart displays the color code and/or line type designated for each of the eight variables of “Attention,” “Narration,” “Induction,” etc. Thus by plotting the response score of individual variables as indicated by the ordinal scale in conjunction with sermon titles, a display reveals how each sermon performed in regard to the eight variables. For example, Chart B.2 suggests that the sermon, “When the Wine Runs Out,” is perceived by the average of all respondents as being the least persuasive, while the sermon, “Nobody Like Jesus,” is perceived as the most persuasive. A more detailed analysis appears in Charts B.3 and B.4 by breaking the response down according to gender. Male participants, for example, respond positively to the message “Reborn from Above” in the area of “Attention” according to Chart B.4.

The results of Phase Two research are admittedly less reliable than those of Phase One which looks at the total response rate over eight sermons. For example, the Sermon, “A Cry in the Dark,” totaled only ninety-four responses from which to draw analysis as compared to 514 responses received for the series as a whole. As specificity increases, accuracy of response decreases. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Phase Two analysis brings suggestive

Table B.1

Count	Sermon	Composite
94	A Cry in the Dark	12.3178
60	All Stressed Up	12.5375
86	Break Through, Break Free	12.5785
59	Nobody Like Jesus	12.7521
34	Reborn from Above	12.3125
75	The Eye of the Hurricane	12.395
43	Water of Life	12.5756
63	When the Wine Runs Out	11.869

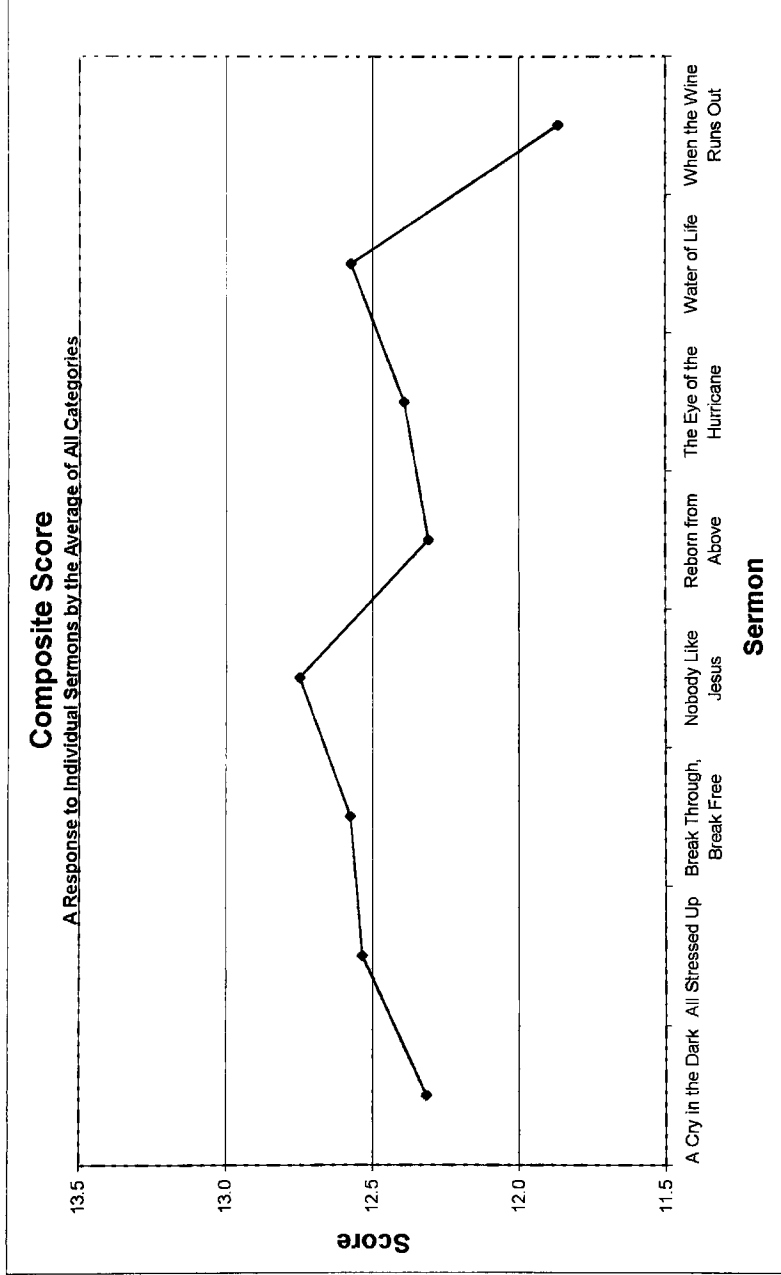


Chart B.1

Table B.2

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
86	Break Through, Break Free	12.814	12.465	12.698	12.395	13.500	11.895	12.651	12.209
94	A Cry in the Dark	12.372	12.468	12.638	11.862	13.255	11.798	12.394	11.755
75	The Eye of the Hurricane	12.880	12.107	12.747	11.960	13.227	12.013	12.520	11.707
60	All Stressed Up	12.883	12.133	12.350	12.450	13.067	12.667	12.767	11.983
63	When the Wine Runs Out	12.270	11.730	11.921	11.508	12.730	11.524	12.206	11.063
59	Nobody Like Jesus	13.153	12.559	12.729	12.492	13.525	12.492	12.864	12.203
43	Water of Life	12.953	12.488	12.767	12.302	13.349	11.837	12.721	12.186
34	Reborn from Above	12.559	11.912	12.706	12.294	12.824	11.882	12.353	11.971

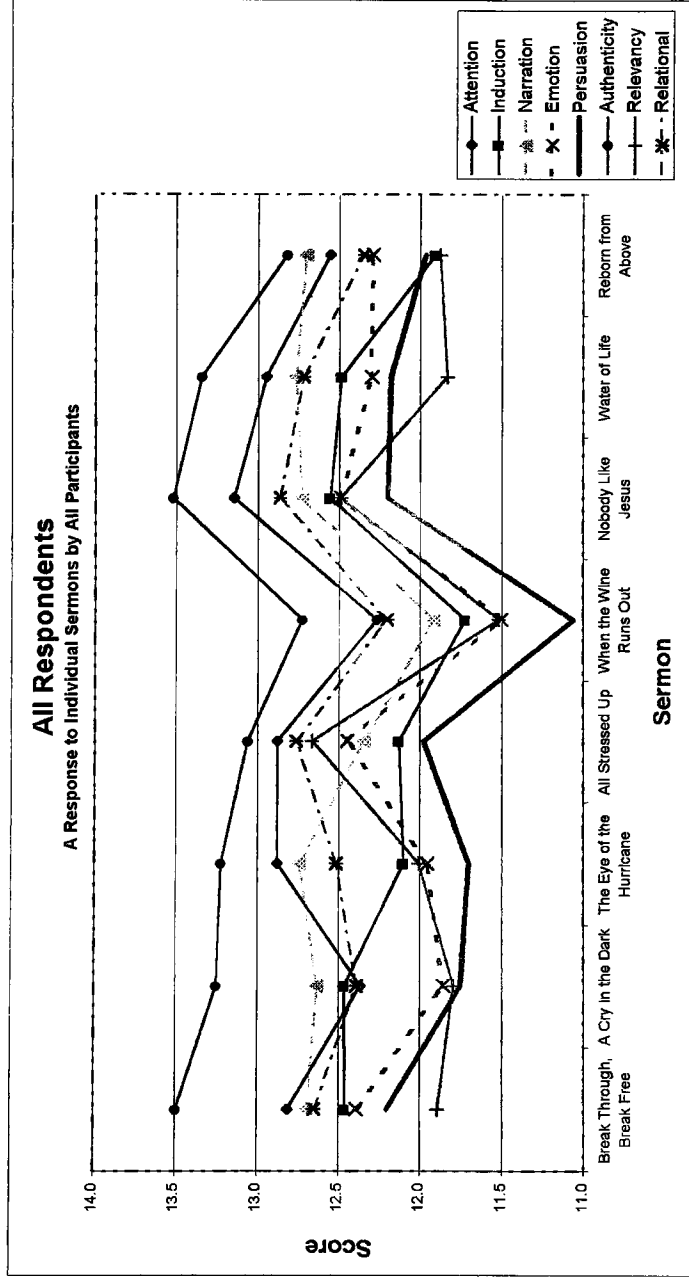


Chart B.2

difference between the most favorably received sermon and the least is approximately one point in a possible range of twelve.

The composite has another advantage. This score along with its counterpart, “All Respondents” (cf. Table B.2 and Chart B.2), gives the most reliable information at the level of Phase Two investigations of individual sermons since the response rate is higher in these two studies than in the others to follow. For example, the response rate as indicated by the count column in Table B.1 reveals that eighty-six people returned completed SRQs for “Break Through, Break Free.” When female response to the same sermon is singled out in Table B.3, the response level is reduced to thirty-seven. Interpretations based on Tables and Charts B.3 through B.16 are given less weight than that of the “Composite Score” and “All Respondents” of Tables B.1-2 and Charts B.1-2.

Two of the eight sermons in the composite score receive low response rates as recorded in the count section of Table B.1. “Reborn from Above” represents the result of only thirty-four SRQs. Likewise, “Water of Life” receives a response of only forty-three SRQs returned.

All Respondents – Table B.2 / Chart B.2

The table and chart labeled “All Respondents” represents a response to individual sermons by all participants. “All Respondents” and the previous investigation labeled “Composite Score” are virtually the same in all respects but one. The single line of the “Composite Score” is now broken down into eight separate lines representing the variables “Attention,” “Induction,” “Narration,” etc.

The benefit of this study is its ability to demonstrate the dynamic relationship between all eight variables and their possible interdependence on each other. Intriguingly,

Table B.3

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
37	Break Through, Break Free	13,182	12,378	12,811	12,541	13,973	12,135	12,649	12,135
34	A Cry in the Dark	12,147	12,412	12,676	11,647	13,353	11,324	12,794	11,824
26	The Eye of the Hurricane	13,269	12,115	13,077	12,654	13,538	12,500	12,923	12,115
21	All Stressed Up	12,952	12,476	12,429	13,000	13,381	12,857	13,048	12,381
19	When the Wine Runs Out	12,105	11,526	11,526	11,789	12,211	11,579	12,053	10,947
23	Nobody Like Jesus	12,870	12,478	12,783	12,478	13,609	12,609	12,826	12,261
16	Water of Life	12,938	12,750	12,563	12,375	13,500	11,813	13,000	12,563
8	Reborn from Above	11,500	12,250	12,000	13,000	13,250	12,500	12,625	12,250

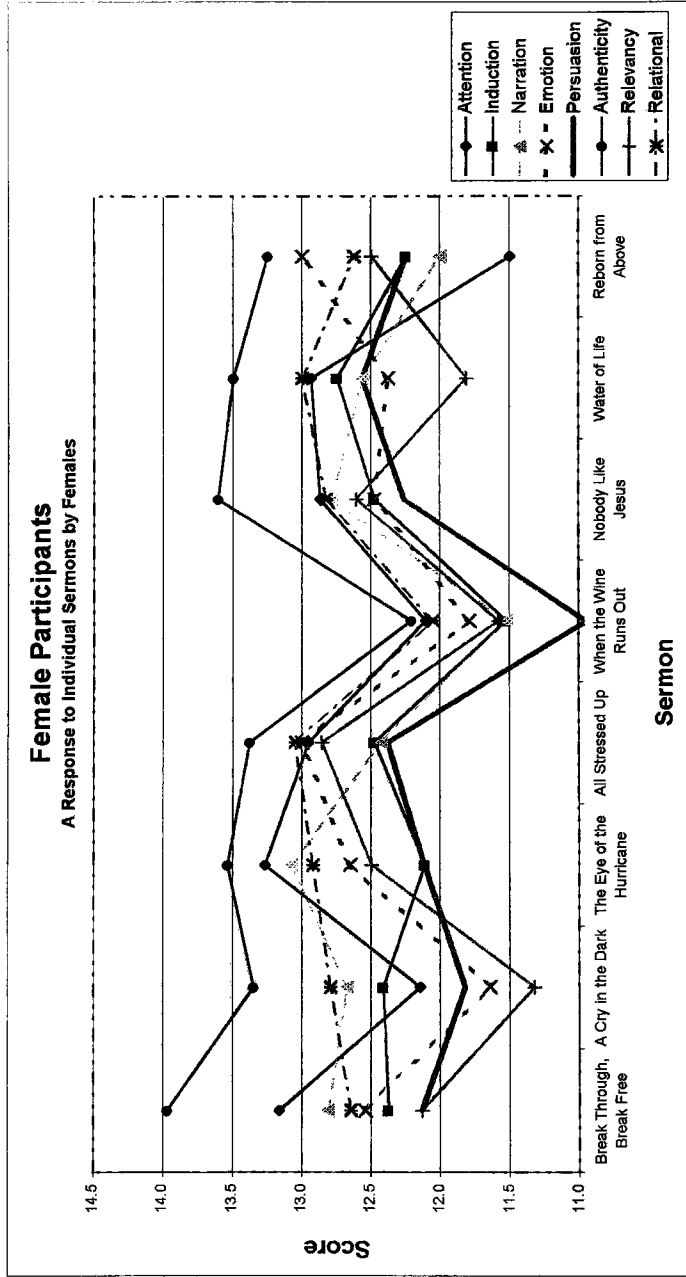


Chart B.3

Table B.4

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
34	Break Through, Break Free	12,588	12,471	12,412	12,206	13,176	11,559	12,382	12,088
31	A Cry in the Dark	12,387	12,387	12,419	11,742	13,161	11,968	11,968	11,516
31	The Eye of the Hurricane	12,613	12,065	12,323	11,484	12,935	11,645	12,161	11,484
23	All Stressed Up	12,609	11,348	12,087	11,870	12,652	12,000	12,652	11,391
24	When the Wine Runs Out	12,250	11,708	11,958	11,375	13,167	11,708	12,750	11,375
15	Nobody Like Jesus	13,087	12,600	12,267	12,267	13,200	12,400	12,800	12,400
14	Water of Life	12,643	12,000	12,500	12,214	12,929	11,786	12,643	11,857
10	Reborn from Above	12,900	11,800	12,700	12,400	13,200	12,400	12,600	12,000

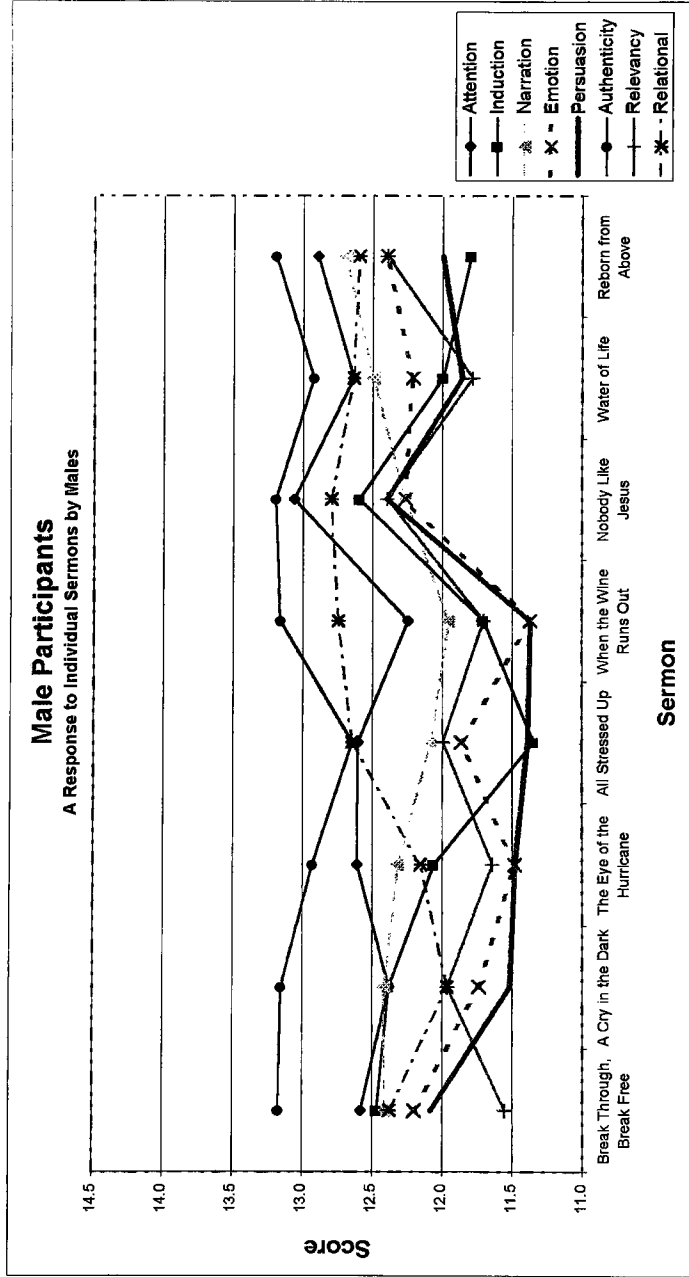


Chart B.4

“Persuasion” is located at the lowest end of the spectrum. “Authenticity” tops the scale. “Persuasion” and “Authenticity” roughly parallel each other in pattern with a spread of approximately 1.5 to 2 points. “Attention” also remains high, with “Relevancy” and “Induction” in the middle section yet remaining at the lower end of the spectrum. The eight categories are relatively parallel in pattern and thus show possible correlation.

Female Participants – Table B.3 / Chart B.3

The table and chart labeled “Female Participants” represents a response by females only. The pattern remains consistent in that the eight lines roughly parallel each other with “Persuasion” at the low end of the spectrum and “Authenticity” at the top. When compared to the following chart regarding male participants, females rated the speaker as generally more authentic than did their male counterparts.

The message, “When the Wine Runs Out,” was not received as favorably as others by females and scores low in all categories especially “Persuasion.” “Persuasion” in “When the Wine Runs Out” receives a low score of 10.9, barely above neutrality. When compared to the highest score (13.97) of “Authenticity” for “Break Through, Break Free,” this gives a spread of approximately three points in a possible range of twelve.

Male Participation – Table B.4 / Chart B.4

Table B.4 and Chart B.4 represent a response to individual sermons by males only. The correlation to this graph and the one previous (“Female Participants”) is interesting. Males and females are divided in their perception of “When the Wine Runs Out”. While the sermon takes a “nose dive” for females of the congregation in all categories (cf. Chart B.3) males remain neutral in their perception. Regarding “Persuasion,” males rate “When the Wine Runs Out” at approximately the same level as three other sermons. The same sermon

Table B.5

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
8	Break Through, Break Free	12.750	11.125	13.250	12.375	14.375	10.875	12.625	11.125
11	A Cry in the Dark	11.182	11.818	12.364	10.818	12.273	11.091	11.545	9.636
8	The Eye of the Hurricane	12.375	11.875	12.875	11.000	13.750	11.500	13.000	9.000
6	All Stressed Up	13.333	11.167	11.667	12.500	13.333	10.833	12.167	11.167
6	When the Wine Runs Out	11.333	10.500	11.333	10.667	12.500	10.500	12.833	10.333

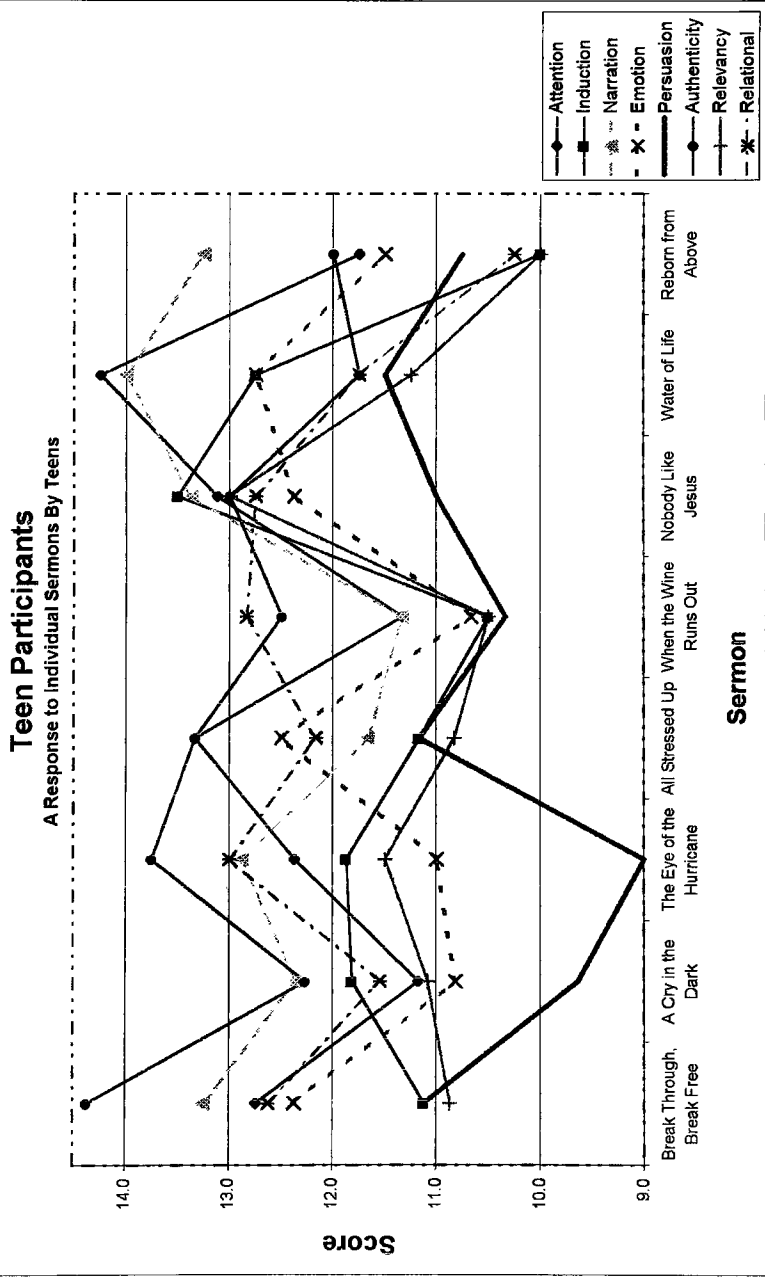


Chart B.5

seems to provoke a more negative response among females. More fascinating is the fact that males and females differ in their response to “Authenticity” about “When the Wine Runs Out.” Females rate “Authenticity” in this sermon as lowest among the eight, at 1.76 points lower than “Break Through, Break Free.” “Authenticity” for both sermons rates approximately the same for men. Males rate “When the Wine Runs Out” among the highest scoring sermons regarding perceived “Authenticity” of the speaker. The low composite score of “When the Wine Runs Out” (cf. Chart B.1) does not reflect an average of all participants as much as it reflects low response among females.

Tables B.5 – B.16/ Charts B.5 – B.16

The level of reliability diminishes from Tables and Charts B.5 through B.16. Reliability diminishes as the response rate of SRQs per category decreases, as indicated in the count column of the table. For example, “Teen Participants” Table B.5 indicates the number of responses per sermon range from four to eleven SRQs returned from this age group. Conclusions and interpretations from the data from this point on are of necessity more tentative. The inclusion of Tables and Charts B.5 through B.16 in this Chapter reveal possible insight into the response of various groups to individual sermons.

The table and chart designated “Teen Participants” represent response by teens to individual sermons. The graphed results as depicted in Chart B.5 are erratic and wide spread. The various lines show little correlation in pattern. A range of 4.25 points exists between the highest score of “Authenticity” in “Break Through, Break Free,” and the lowest score of “Persuasion” in “The Eye of the Hurricane.” “Persuasion” in this sermon dips a full point below the midpoint of ten. The trend of “Authenticity” at the high end of the scale and

Table B.6

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
7	Break Through, Break Free	13,000	13,000	13,571	11,714	14,429	11,714	13,286	12,857
7	A Cry in the Dark	12,857	13,143	12,714	12,714	14,571	11,714	13,286	12,571
5	The Eye of the Hurricane	14,400	12,200	13,200	11,800	14,000	12,600	12,600	12,000
6	All Stressed Up	13,333	13,000	13,167	13,667	14,000	14,333	13,500	12,667
4	When the Wine Runs Out	11,000	8,750	11,500	9,000	12,250	9,750	11,500	8,750

Ages 20-29

A Response to Individual Sermons by Those Age 20-29 Years

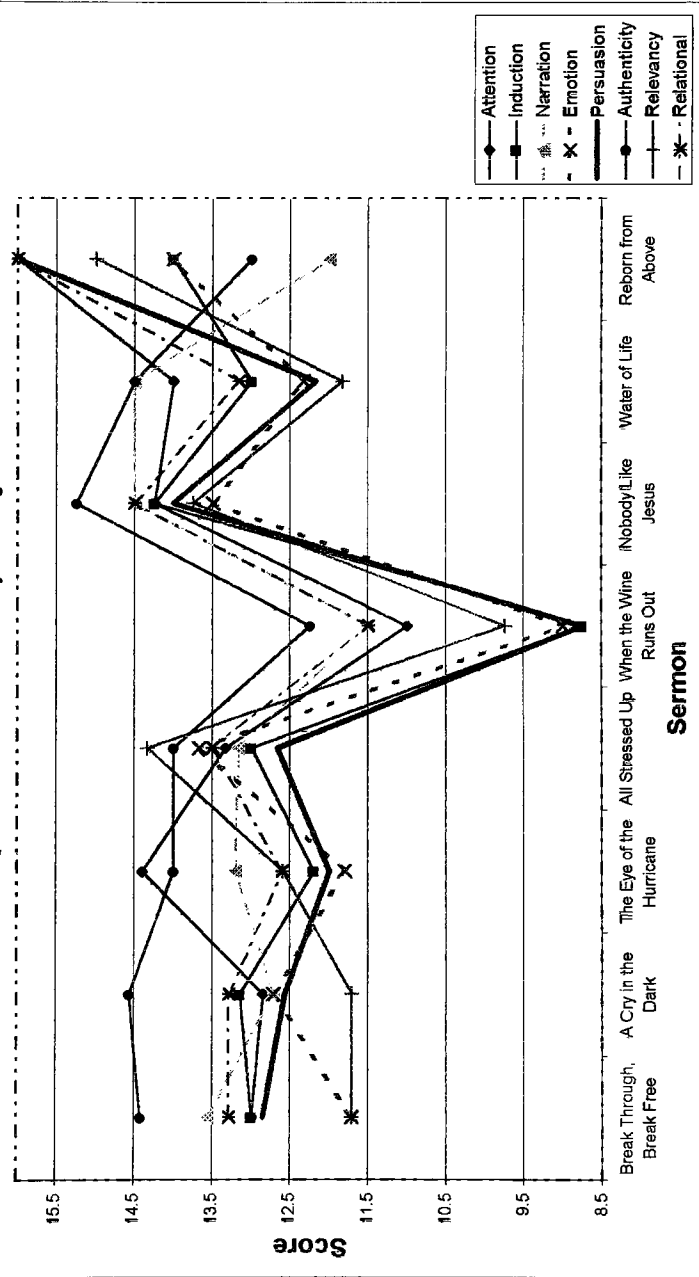


Chart B.6

Table B.7

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
13	Break Through, Break Free	13.846	13.154	13.303	13.385	13.923	12.769	13.000	13.077
15	A Cry in the Dark	12.067	12.067	13.000	11.800	13.800	11.533	12.533	11.333
13	The Eye of the Hurricane	12.923	12.462	13.000	12.077	13.692	12.231	12.846	11.923
7	All Stressed Up	12.286	12.429	12.000	11.857	12.857	12.571	12.714	12.000
6	When the Wine Runs Out	12.833	12.000	12.833	12.000	13.333	12.333	13.500	12.000
5	Nobody Like Jesus	11.800	11.200	11.400	11.000	12.200	11.000	11.200	10.800
5	Water of Life	13.800	13.400	13.000	13.200	14.200	12.200	13.200	12.800
3	Reborn from Above	10.333	11.333	11.667	12.000	12.000	11.333	11.667	11.667

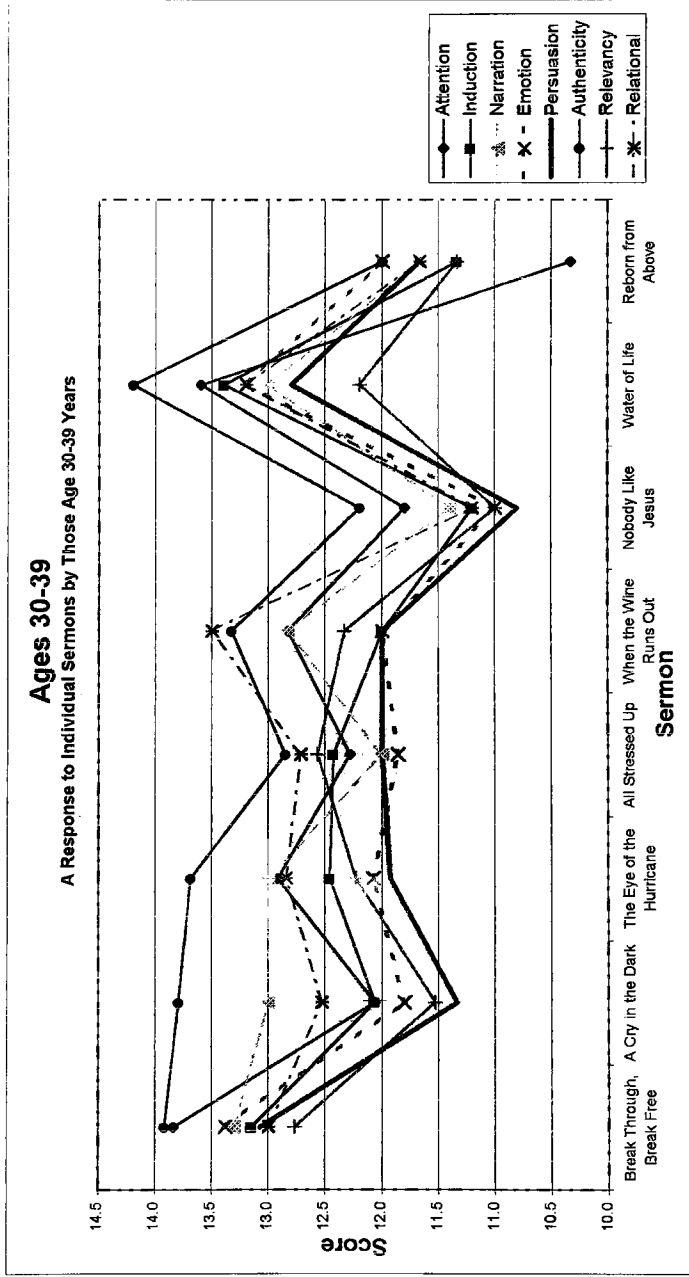


Chart B.7

Table B.8

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
36	Break Through, Break Free	12.778	12.750	12.694	12.444	13.556	12.306	12.500	12.333
31	A Cry in the Dark	13.097	13.355	12.935	12.452	13.484	12.323	12.613	12.645
33	The Eye of the Hurricane	12.697	11.939	12.818	12.091	13.091	12.030	12.333	11.939
30	All Stressed Up	12.867	12.000	12.367	12.233	13.067	12.633	12.700	11.833
34	When the Wine Runs Out	12.294	11.853	11.882	11.471	12.647	11.559	11.912	11.147
28	Nobody Like Jesus	13.286	12.464	12.929	12.957	13.714	12.571	13.000	12.393
17	Water of Life	12.706	12.412	12.235	12.353	13.000	12.059	12.706	12.118
14	Reborn from Above	12.766	12.643	13.071	12.643	13.214	12.429	12.571	12.643

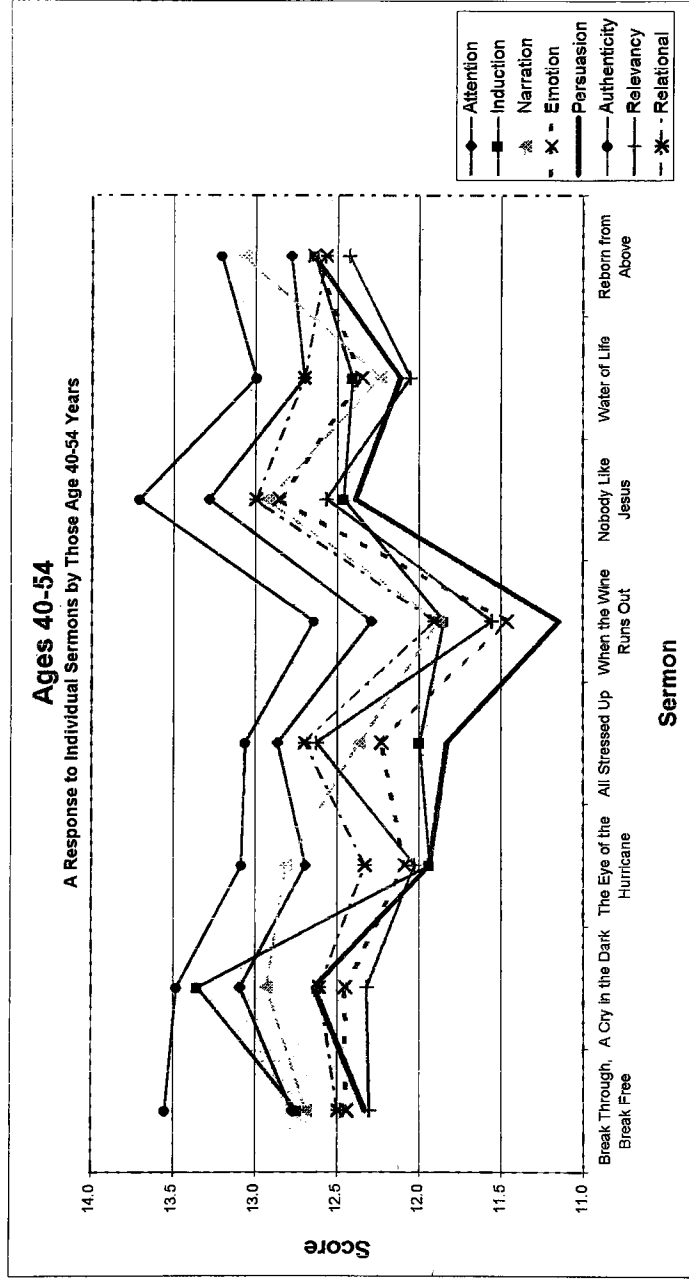


Chart B.8

“Persuasion” at the lower end remains generally true for this age group. Other than this, significant patterns are difficult to discern.

Table B.6 and Chart B.6 represent a response to individual sermons by those aged twenty to twenty-nine. A similarity of response pattern among the eight variables is more easily determinable for this age group as compared to the previous response among teens. Lines within the chart run parallel. “When the Wine Runs Out” scores low in most categories when compared to the response to other sermons by this same group.

Table and Chart B.7 represent a response to individual sermons by those thirty to thirty-nine years of age. Lines run roughly parallel showing high correlation between the eight construct variables. The continuing pattern of “Authenticity” at the top end of the spectrum and “Persuasion” at the bottom remains true for this study also. While the lines show parallel correlation within this chart, the overall pattern is significantly different for this age group’s response. Most notable is the fact that “Nobody like Jesus” which rated highest on the composite score rates among the lowest by respondents of this age group. “The Water of Life” scored highest for this group.

Table B.8 and Chart B.8 are a response to individual sermons by those age forty to fifty-four years of age. This study shows a higher SRQ response count when compared to the two previous age groups. The general response pattern occurs with “Authenticity” remaining at the top for all sermons and “Persuasion” generally at the base of the chart. In line with the composite score this age group scores “Nobody Like Jesus” higher than other sermons and scores lowest on “When the Wine Runs Out.” “Break Through, Break Free” was also received in a positive light by this age group.

Table B.9

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
20	Break Through, Break Free	12.45	11.95	11.95	12.2	12.45	11.35	12.55	12.15
27	A Cry in the Dark	11.9259	11.7778	12.1852	11.4074	12.7407407	11.66667	12.11111	11.518519
15	The Eye of the Hurricane	13.2667	12.5333	12.2667	12.2667	12.9333333	12.06667	12.6	12.266667
11	All Stressed Up	12.8182	12.3636	12.4545	12.7273	12.5454545	12.90909	12.90909	12.454545
11	When the Wine Runs Out	12.6354	13.1818	12.0909	12.5455	12.8181818	12.27273	12.72727	12
11	Nobody Like Jesus	13.1818	12.1818	11.8182	11.9091	13.3636364	12.09091	12.72727	12.454545
8	Water of Life	12.625	12.375	12.125	11.875	13.875	11.5	12.875	12.625
9	Reborn from Above	13.1111	11.7778	12.5556	12.3333	12.7777778	13	12.88889	11.77778

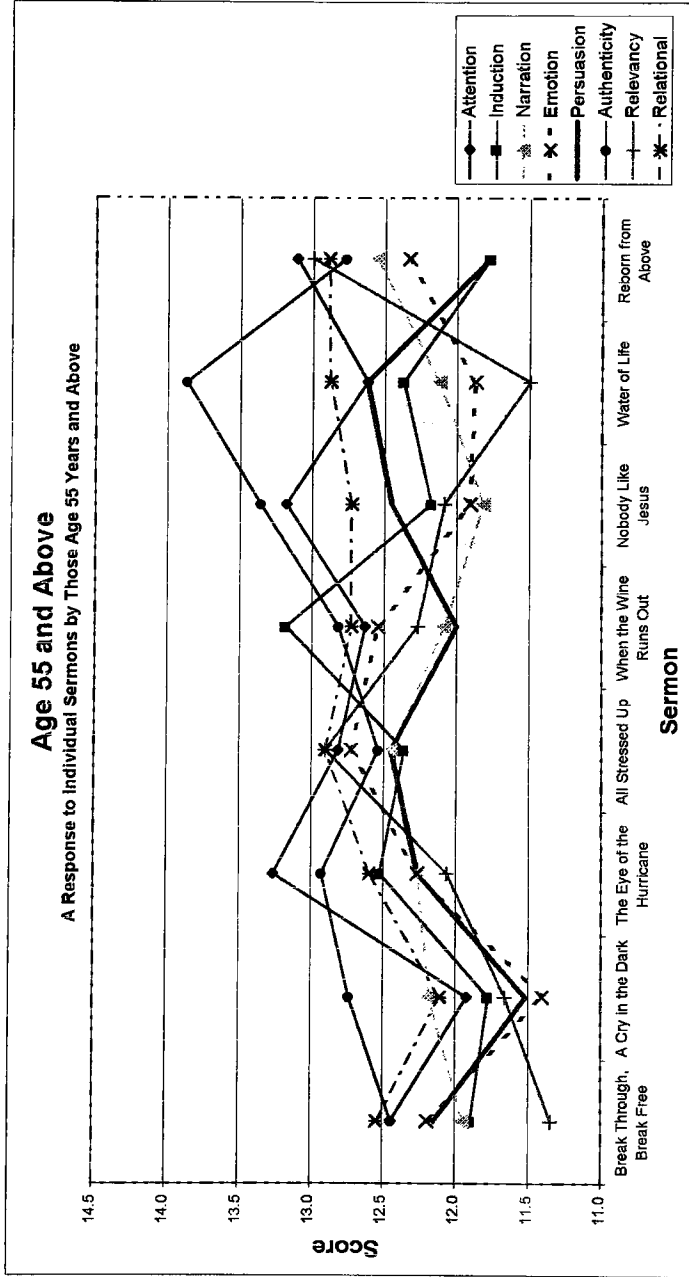


Chart B.9

Table B.10

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
8	Break Through, Break Free	12.625	11	12.625	11.875	13.25	11	11.75	11
9	A Cry in the Dark	12	12.4444	11.3333	11.3333	12.4444444	10.77778	10.44444	10.555556
5	The Eye of the Hurricane	12.4	11.2	13	9.4	12.2	11.4	11.2	9.4
7	All Stressed Up	13.4286	12.2857	12.5714	13.1429	14	13	12.14286	12.285714
5	When the Wine Runs Out	12	9.8	11.6	10.6	12	10.6	12.4	10.6
6	Nobody Like Jesus	12.6667	12.6667	13.1667	12.5	13.3333333	12.33333	12.16667	12.333333
5	Water of Life	14.8	12.6	13.8	12.8	12.6	11.8	12.8	11.4
3	Reborn from Above	11.3333	9.33333	11.6667	12	11	9	10	10.666667

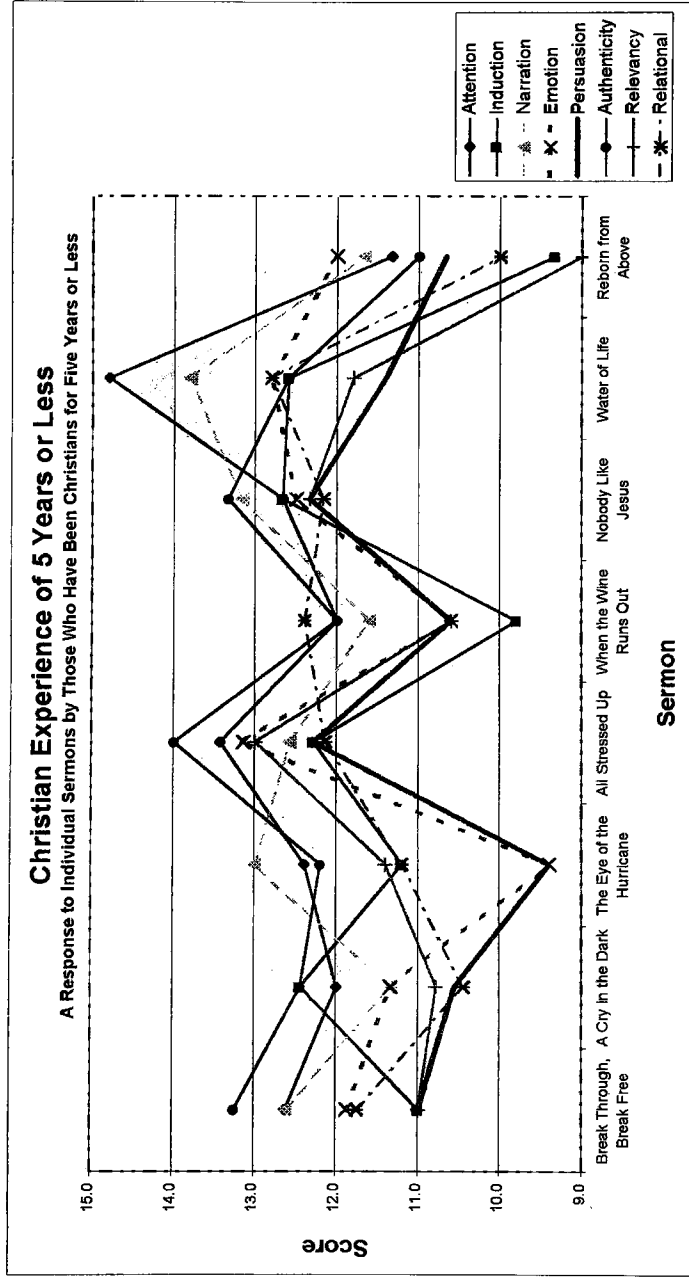


Chart B.10

Table B.11

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
31	Break Through, Break Free	13.774	13.355	13.710	13.452	14.516	12.581	13.581	13.226
26	A Cry in the Dark	12.192	13.115	13.231	11.923	13.731	11.769	13.346	12.038
21	The Eye of the Hurricane	13.286	12.667	13.143	12.714	14.190	12.286	13.333	11.857
26	All Stressed Up	13.000	12.346	12.500	12.308	13.308	12.846	13.000	12.000
18	When the Wine Runs Out	12.278	11.444	12.333	11.778	12.944	11.556	12.722	11.000
20	Nobody Like Jesus	13.400	13.000	13.300	13.000	13.850	12.550	13.250	12.400
13	Water of Life	13.615	13.308	13.769	12.769	14.462	12.462	13.231	12.462
7	Reborn from Above	12.000	12.143	13.000	11.857	12.857	11.714	12.000	12.000

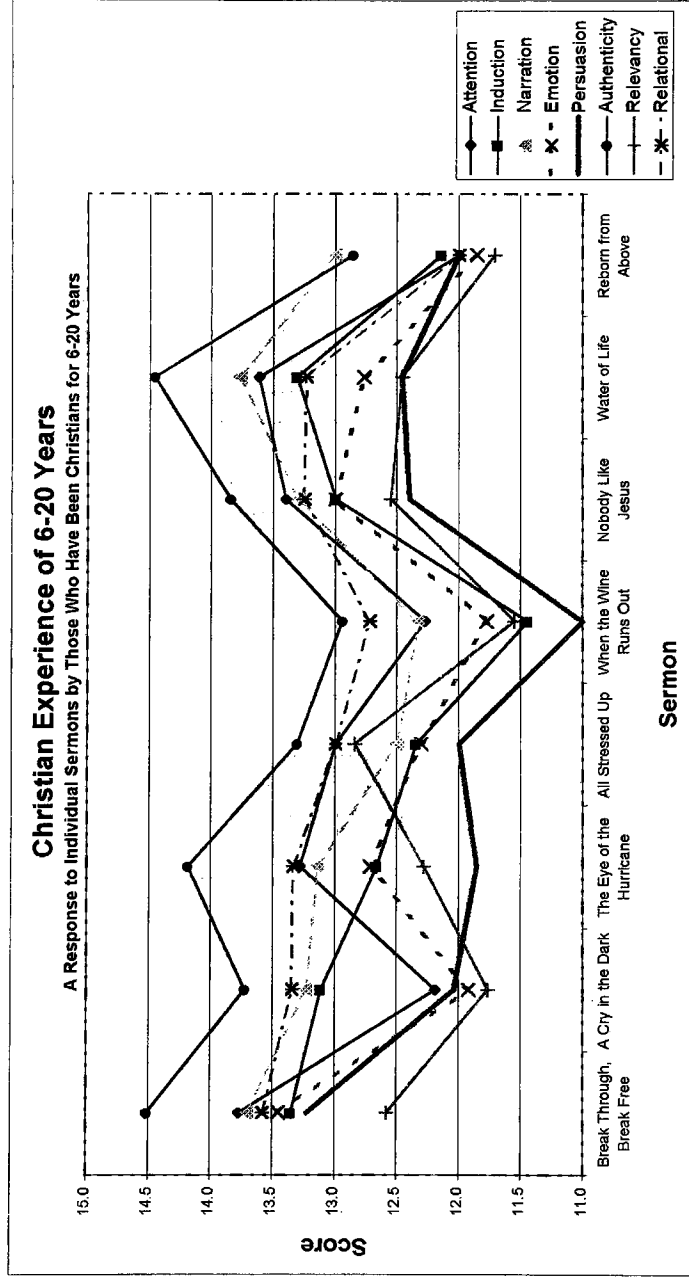


Chart B.11

Table B.12

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
27	Break Through, Break Free	12.370	12.556	12.593	12.074	13.444	12.185	12.481	12.037
38	A Cry in the Dark	12.263	12.237	12.553	11.921	13.211	11.868	12.395	11.579
30	The Eye of the Hurricane	12.767	11.867	12.700	11.667	13.167	11.967	12.333	11.633
14	All Stressed Up	12.429	11.071	11.929	12.000	12.214	11.643	12.143	11.000
26	When the Wine Runs Out	12.038	12.038	11.769	11.269	12.654	11.538	11.962	10.962
15	Nobody Like Jesus	13.000	12.200	12.867	12.333	13.600	12.133	12.800	12.067
15	Water of Life	12.067	11.933	12.200	11.933	12.400	11.200	12.533	11.800
12	Reborn from Above	13.417	12.917	13.000	13.167	13.500	13.333	13.500	12.917

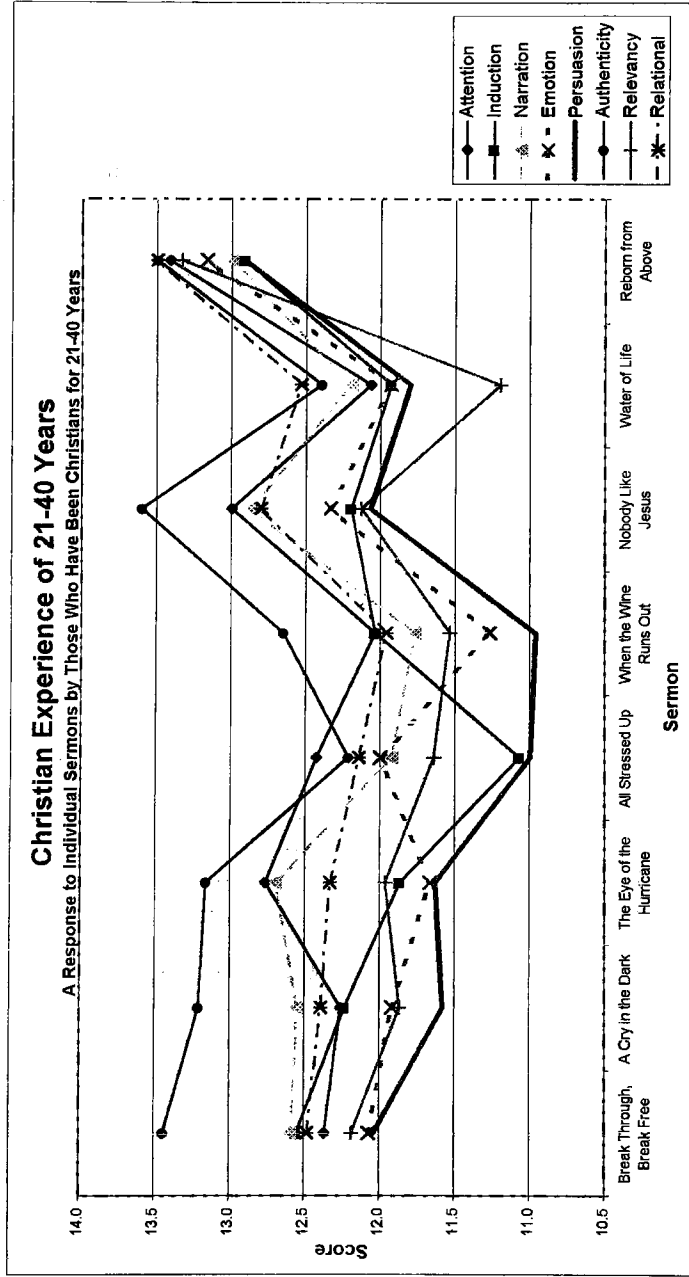


Chart B.12

Table and Chart B.9 indicate the response of those fifty-five and above to individual sermons. Reliability is reduced by the low response rate of SRQs. Patterns and correlation between the independent variables of “Attention,” “Induction,” “Narration” etc. are difficult to establish. “Water of Life” has the most diverse scoring pattern with “Relevancy” dipping to a low of 11.5 and “Authenticity” topping the chart at 13.87.

Table and Chart B.10 represent response to individual sermons by those who have been Christians for five years or less. Correlation between variables is observed as the lines remain generally parallel. “Relevancy” scores notably low at nine (a point below neutrality) for “Reborn from Above.” “Attention” receives an exceptionally high score of 14.8 for “The Water of Life.” A low SRQ response count for this study tends to nullify reliability.

Chart B.11 represents response to individual sermons by those who have been Christians for six to twenty years. While patterns show a tendency toward parallelism the spread of variation between “Attention” at the top end of the chart and “Persuasion” at the lower end is noted. These two aspects have a spread of approximately two points on the ordinal scale roughly parallel throughout.

Table and Chart B.12 represent response to individual sermons by those who have been Christians for twenty-one to forty years. Parallelism occurs with a spread of approximately 1.5 points on the ordinal scale. “Reborn from Above” scores highest among this age group along with “Nobody Like Jesus.” “All Stressed Up” and “When the Wine Runs Out” receive scores at the lower end of the spectrum. The pattern of “Authenticity” being the at the top of the spectrum and “Persuasion” at the bottom holds true for this investigation as with most others.

Table B.13

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
19	Break Through, Break Free	12,316	11,579	11,368	11,684	12,158	11,053	11,895	11,789
20	A Cry in the Dark	12,950	12,100	12,650	11,850	13,250	12,150	12,250	12,250
18	The Eye of the Hurricane	12,944	12,333	12,389	12,389	12,778	12,111	12,444	12,222
13	All Stressed Up	12,846	12,769	12,385	12,846	13,000	13,231	13,308	12,846
10	When the Wine Runs Out	12,400	12,300	11,400	11,500	12,400	11,600	12,100	12,000
14	Nobody Like Jesus	13,429	12,429	12,286	12,143	13,500	12,786	12,929	12,429
7	Water of Life	13,000	12,143	12,286	12,571	13,714	12,000	12,429	13,000
9	Reborn from Above	12,000	11,444	12,778	11,889	12,667	12,333	12,222	11,556

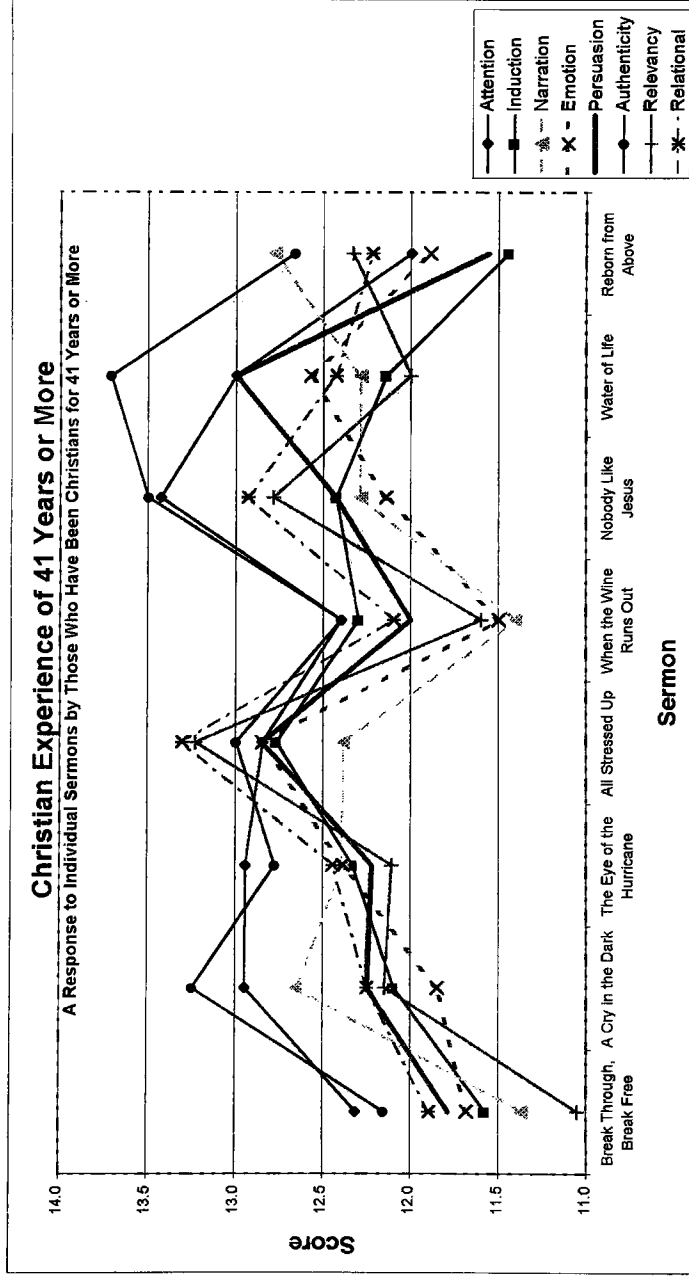


Chart B.13

Table B.14

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
25	Break Through, Break Free	13,360	12,240	13,000	12,800	13,560	11,880	12,640	12,040
31	A Cry in the Dark	11,935	12,548	12,258	11,452	13,097	11,419	12,226	11,645
20	The Eye of the Hurricane	13,350	12,550	13,150	11,750	13,600	12,350	12,850	11,950
23	All Stressed Up	13,609	12,478	12,957	13,000	13,870	13,261	13,435	12,739
16	When the Wine Runs Out	12,313	11,375	11,563	11,750	13,000	11,375	12,688	11,625
12	Nobody Like Jesus	12,250	12,417	12,250	11,667	12,667	11,750	12,167	11,333
12	Water of Life	14,583	13,667	13,583	13,167	14,333	12,500	13,500	12,833
6	Reborn from Above	13,500	12,167	13,667	13,833	13,667	12,833	13,667	13,333

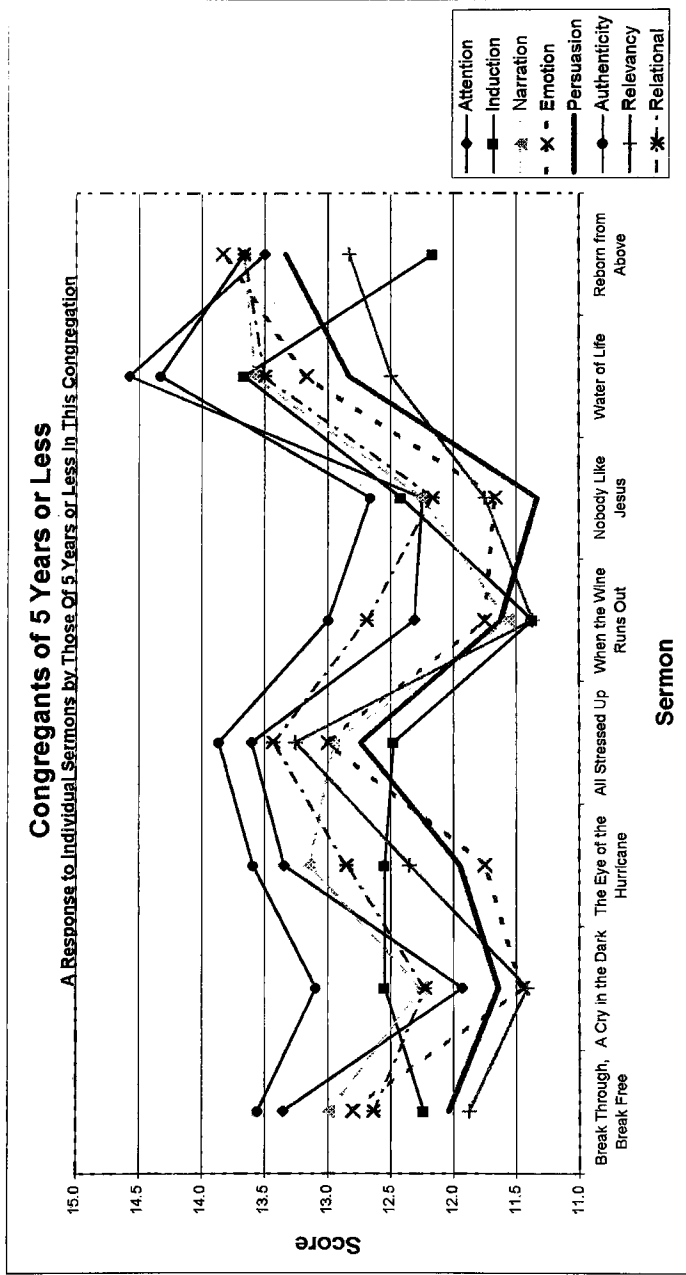


Chart B.14

Table B.15

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
38	Break Through, Break Free	12,921	12,500	12,868	12,526	13,684	12,263	12,789	12,500
31	A Cry in the Dark	12,516	12,548	12,742	12,323	13,387	12,000	12,548	11,903
30	The Eye of the Hurricane	12,867	12,133	12,800	12,433	13,500	11,967	12,733	11,533
25	All Stressed Up	12,320	11,520	12,040	12,000	12,600	11,960	12,360	11,000
26	When the Wine Runs Out	12,500	12,231	12,731	12,231	13,192	12,385	12,769	11,654

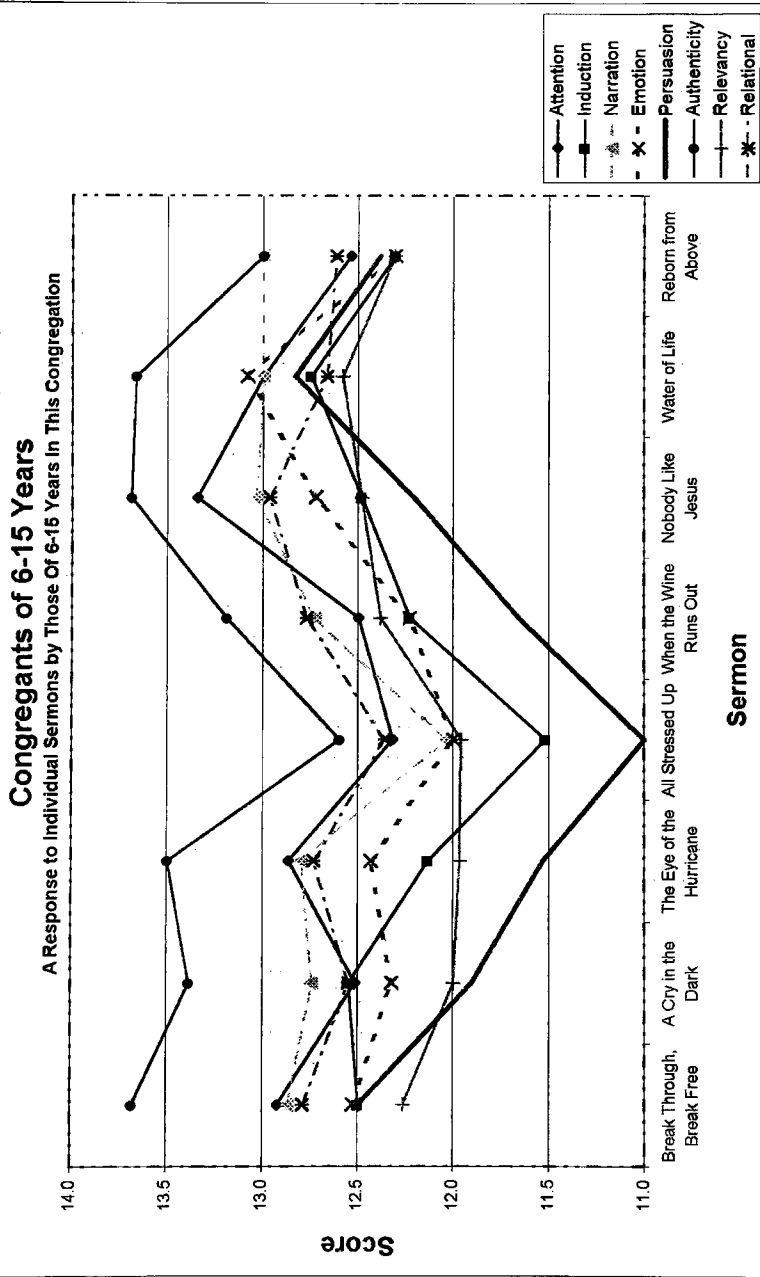


Chart B.15

Table B.16

Count	Sermon	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
20	Break Through, Break Free	12,200	12,500	12,000	11,900	13,100	11,400	12,600	12,150
30	A Cry in the Dark	12,600	12,433	12,933	11,900	13,233	11,867	12,533	11,767
24	The Eye of the Hurricane	12,667	11,875	12,417	11,625	12,792	11,917	12,125	11,667
10	All Stressed Up	12,500	12,900	11,900	12,400	12,300	12,900	12,000	12,400
16	When the Wine Runs Out	11,875	11,313	11,438	10,063	11,688	10,375	11,125	10,000
14	Nobody Like Jesus	13,643	12,929	12,786	12,500	13,929	12,929	13,286	12,929
12	Water of Life	11,167	11,000	12,000	11,083	12,333	10,583	11,917	10,833
8	Reborn from Above	12,375	12,000	12,500	12,375	12,875	12,625	12,125	11,375

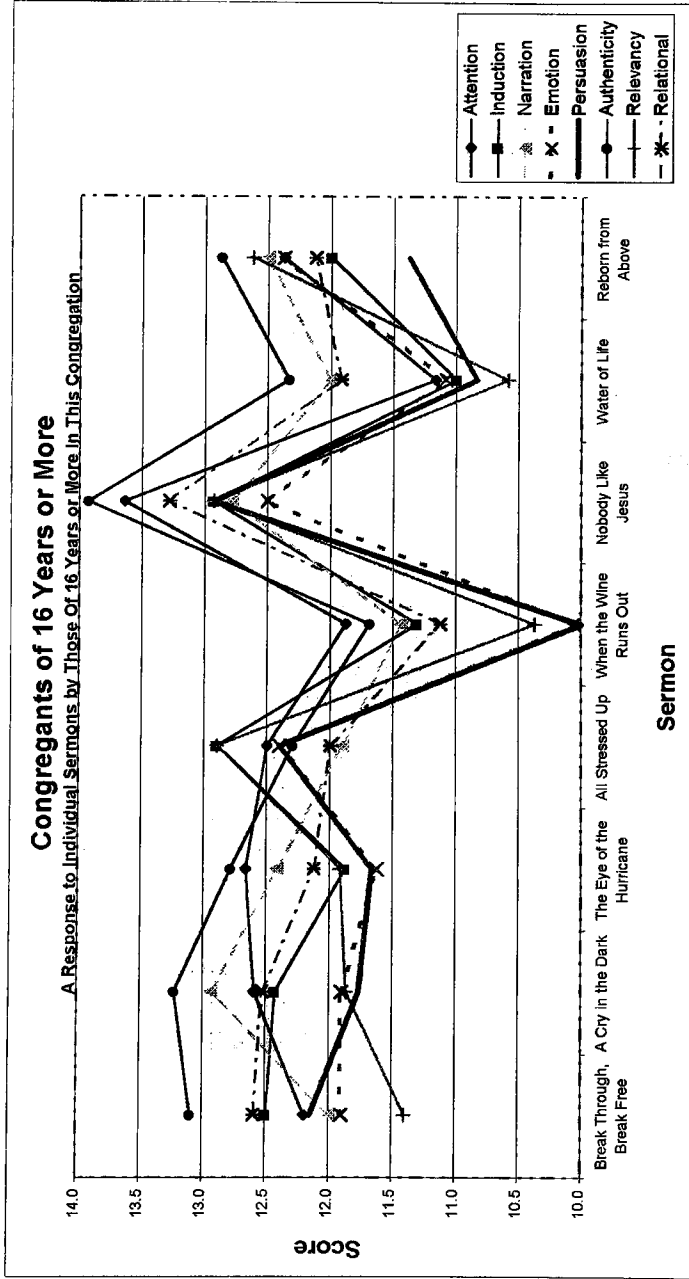


Chart B.16

Chart B.13 represents response to individual sermons by those who have been Christians for forty-one years or more. “Break Through, Break Free” scores lowest among the eight. “Persuasiveness,” usually low, scores a comparatively high level of response (13) for “The Water of Life.” “Authenticity” also receives its highest score for “The Water of Life.”

Table and Chart B.14 represent response to individual sermons by those of five years or less congregational experience within Spruce Grove Alliance. A high level of parallelism is noted in the response pattern as a whole. “Authenticity” tops the chart with “Persuasion” toward the bottom roughly parallel and approximately 1.5 points below. “Nobody Like Jesus,” which scores highest on the “Composite Score” (cf. Table and Chart B.1), receives the lowest rating from to this group. “The Water of Life” scores at the top for the group with the least congregational experience.

Table and Chart B.15 represent response to individual sermons by those of six to fifteen years of congregational experience within Spruce Grove Alliance. A high degree of parallelism is observed between the eight variables of “Attention,” “Induction,” “Narration,” etc. A low score in “Persuasion” for “All Stressed Up” is noted with a parallel downturn in almost all other variables for the same sermon.

Table and Chart B.16 represent response to individual sermons by those of sixteen years or more congregational experience within Spruce Grove Alliance. The pattern of “Persuasion” at the low end of the spectrum and “Authenticity” at the top continues. The eight lines representing the variables remain roughly parallel throughout. The unique pattern of this chart is marked by two extremes. The variation between response toward “Nobody Like Jesus” and “When the Wine Runs Out” extends approximately two points on the ordinal scale. While “Nobody Like Jesus” receives a higher score than others, “When the Wine

Runs Out” scores the lowest by far among the eight sermons with those with congregational experience of sixteen years or more.

From observation through the process of reflection comes interpretation. The final chapter addresses this subject.

CHAPTER 6

Summary

Interpretations and Conclusions

Observation leads to interpretation. The investigative research discussed in Chapter 5 yields a harvest of information from which inferences are suggested and conclusions drawn.

The major findings discussed are summarized as follows:

1. “Authenticity” scores the highest of all eight variables.
2. “Persuasiveness” scores the lowest of all eight variables.
3. Assessment of the eight sermon characteristics demonstrates a high level of parallelism possibly indicating a degree of interdependence.
4. Females respond more favorably to the design model than males.
5. Younger age groups tend to respond more favorably to the design model of preaching than older groups, with the exception of teens.
6. Those with less Christian experience tend to respond more favorably to the design model than those with more Christian experience, with the exception of those with five years or less Christian experience.
7. Those with more years of congregational experience tend to respond less favorably to the design model than those of less Christian experience, with the exception of those with five years or less Christian experience.
8. Response of teens and those of five years or less Christian/church experience show less correspondence to other groups and score lower in favorableness to the sermon series.

Teen response patterns in general appear erratic.

Male and Female Response

The research yields an unexpected result, thus absent in the original hypothesis. Specifically, females express more favorableness to the sermon series as a whole than do males in relation to all eight sermon characteristics. Chart A.2 demonstrates a high level of parallelism between males and females in their patterns of response with the exception that males score approximately one half point lower overall.

Reasons for differences in male and female response are speculative at best. The review of literature regarding “Insights from Right-Brain/ Left-Brain Research” suggests a growing body of evidence indicating that women are generally more right-brain oriented than men in their mode of thought consciousness. Various studies estimate that 85-93% of women are right-brain dominant. The reason for this, whether physiological or cultural in origin, remains elusive. The hypothesis, as stated in Chapter 1, includes the aspect of right-brain consciousness: “[E]vangelistic preaching in our contemporary context will become increasingly effective as it moves in the direction of being . . . right-brain oriented.” The underlying intention of this hypothesis primarily concerned younger generations, both male and female, for whom research indicates a more right-brain orientation than older generations. The tendency of women in general toward right-brain consciousness, and not younger generations only, was a factor overlooked by the researcher.

Response by Age and Years of Christian/Church Experience

The hypothesis assumes that younger generations, whose consciousness is shaped more by media than older generations will respond more favorably to a communication style that moves toward being inductive, narrative, visual, right-brain oriented, relational, and relevant. Observations five through seven, mentioned above, suggest the possibility of an intriguing pattern. In general, those older and with more Christian and church experience tend to be

less favorable toward the design model of preaching than those who are younger with less Christian and church experience. The exception to this are teenagers and those of five years or less Christian and church experience. A comparison of these categories reveals that they represent largely the same group of people (86 percent correlation), most of which are teens. The reason for this particular group's divergent scoring pattern remains unclear. The unsettled nature of adolescence may suggest an answer.

When the latter group (mostly teens) is eliminated from the equation, a clearer and more consistent pattern emerges. Those older with more Christian/church experience are less responsive, albeit only slightly, to the design model than those younger and with less Christian/church experience.

The degree of favorableness toward the design model seemingly correlates to the sequence of age groups and those with varied years of Christian/church experience. When teens are eliminated from Chart A.3 the four remaining age groups responded in the following order (from most favorable to least favorable): 1) ages twenty to twenty-nine; 2) ages thirty to thirty-nine; 3) ages forty to forty-five; and 4) ages fifty-five and above. Similarly, in looking at Chart A.4, when those of five years or less Christian experience (mostly teens) are eliminated from the chart, the same pattern emerges (from most favorable to least favorable): 1) those with six to twenty years of Christian experience; 2) those with twenty-one to forty years; and 3) those with forty-one or more years. Chart A.5 repeats the pattern. This pattern, consistent in Charts A.2-A.5, may support the hypothesis of Chapter 1. Apparently, those born and raised in "Athens" (with the noted exception of teens) tend to respond more favorably toward the design model than those of the "Jerusalem" paradigm.

One senior citizen put it this way, “Son, we like it better when you preach the Bible.” A review of sermon transcripts shows that Bible content was not lacking but may have been in a form that was not recognizable as biblical to some raised in a Jerusalem paradigm. Instead of verse-by-verse exegetical teaching, the biblical story was retold and applied in a more narrative fashion. Extensive quotations and paraphrases from the text saturated the message but usually without reference to chapter and verse.

Persuasiveness

As noted earlier, “Authenticity” scores highest of all eight variables. Likewise, “Persuasiveness” scores lowest of all eight variables with equal consistency. That “Persuasiveness” remains at the low end of the scale in virtually all charts is both a surprise and a puzzle. As a determining factor, the aspect of persuasion strongly influenced the formation of the design model of the sermon in terms of content, form, and style. What happened? Several possible explanations suggest themselves:

1. Did the Sermons Fail to Persuade? The most obvious explanation may be that “Persuasiveness” ranked lowest simply because the messages failed to persuade. If this is the case then the design model comes into question, for it fails to perform as intended. Yet observable response in terms of human behavior tends toward negating the conclusion of failure regarding “persuasiveness.” While only two public invitations were given during the eight-week series, nevertheless among the many who came forward on these two occasions, eight seekers indicated first-time commitments to Christ. Further to this, twelve others expressed by commitment card their experience of faith during this time period through church ministries other than the Sunday morning worship event. All of this tends to suggest an explanation other than the failure of the sermons to persuade.

2. Does Persuasion Reflect the Cumulative Effect of all Other Categories Combined? A

second possibility suggests that “Persuasion” differs in quality from the other seven variables. Rather than representing a contributing factor toward effectiveness of the sermon, perhaps “Persuasion” reflects the cumulative effect of all other seven categories combined. If the other seven aspects of preaching result in a level of “Persuasion” then perhaps finding “Persuasion” at the lower end of the spectrum would be expected. For example, if “Authenticity” contributes toward “Persuasiveness,” then one could hardly expect that a message be more persuasive than the deemed trustworthiness of the messenger.

Understanding “Persuasion” as a result of the other seven aspects of preaching does not imply a mistake in placing it within our investigation. Nor should it be removed from future use of the investigative instrument. Rather, a positive correlation appears between the seven contributing aspects and the resulting persuasion. Each of the factors, “Attention,” “Induction,” “Narration,” etc., to varying degrees may combine to form the overall persuasiveness of the communication. This conclusion, though tentative, tends toward validation of the design model. The parallelism displayed may suggest that a balance of the various components combine in forming an effective evangelistic communication.

Was the Majority Already Persuaded? Another possible explanation suggests that the majority was already persuaded in what the preacher was asking the audience to do. The messages were evangelistic in nature. Each sermon clearly called for a commitment of repentance and faith. The fact that the majority of the congregation has already made such a commitment may be reflected in the level of “Persuasiveness” recorded.

Generalizability

Certain aspects of the project commend themselves toward generalizability. The stated purpose of this study was to develop, implement, and evaluate a model of contemporary evangelistic preaching in a local church context. To some degree this goal has been achieved.

The sermon design model perhaps represent the most valuable contribution of this investigation. The exercise of theological reflection and review of literature inspired the creation of a sermon design model defined in terms of content, form, and style. Regarding *content*, the model seeks translation of the biblical *kerygma* in terms meaningful for today. In one sentence, the gospel represents the story of God's redemptive act in Christ, necessitating a response. Essential to this message are three aspects of the story: A God who cares; A living Christ able to help in the problems of life and victorious over death; A call to surrender to Christ as Lord (including repentance and faith).

Regarding *form*, the structure is set free from formula preaching. A creativity of form characterized more by plot, narration, and movement than by static structural design replaces the old clothes of one-size-fits-all homiletics.

Regarding *style*, the sermon model is characterized by being visual, relational, conversational, contemporary, extemporaneous, authentic, emotive, and persuasive. The proposed model moves preaching toward being more inductive and less deductive in presentation. A more narrational and less instructional posture is assumed. The prospective of "here and now" is chosen over the past tense of "there and then". In tone, the message takes on a more conversational and less confrontational attitude.

The sermon design model was implemented over a two-month period in which eight evangelistic sermons were delivered. In conjunction with the design model a special researcher-designed evaluation process was created. Completed evaluation forms numbered 514. The forms were then tabulated and the results displayed graphically revealing suggested patterns of correlation among various components of the preaching model. Aspects of the evaluative process tend to support the hypothesis that evangelistic preaching in the contemporary context increases in effective as it moves toward being more inductive, narrative, visual, right-brain oriented, relational, and relevant, while remaining true to the historic biblical *kerygma*. The model was received favorably with average scores well above the point of neutrality. A number of people reported discovering faith in Christ.

The test design of this study (SRQ) also demonstrates itself as a valuable tool for future sermon evaluation. The SRQ exhibits a visible relationship between key components of the sermon and their individual contribution to the sermon's overall effectiveness. The comprehensive thirty-two-question test instrument enables the translation of otherwise nebulous aspects into quantifiable terms graphically displayed. A glass prism takes the pure white light of sunshine and works its magic by splashing color in a spectrum of rainbow diversity. Frequencies of light previously undetectable to the human eye are now visible. To a much cruder degree, the evaluative component of this project attempts the same. The research evaluation model of this project attempts to refract the miracle and mystery of "prophecy" (the proclaiming of God's Word) into a spectrum of discernible qualities. The accompanying computer program specifically designed for tabulating the SRQ scores of this project results in a user-friendly tool in aid of sermon evaluation.

To the degree that the instrument measures things measurable, the instrument holds the potential of generalizability. The researcher-designed Sermon Response Questionnaire enables the measuring of various aspects of preaching showing their correlation to each other. SRQ results reveal possible relationships between various aspects to the overall effectiveness of the communication. While the Sermon Response Questionnaire is designed with evangelistic speech in view, the instrument holds potential for generalizability in the area of pastoral preaching.

The process of theological reflection and review of literature revealed a gap in the present body of knowledge. While much has been written on the subject of narrative preaching in general, present literature has little to say concerning the connection between narrative form and that unique genre of evangelistic preaching. A fully developed theology and practice of Narrative Evangelism is needed. If this research contributes even in a small way to this body of literature, then the study is well served.

Limitations

Leedy reminds us of one of the tenets of the scientific method: "If it exists, it can be measured"(15). When it comes to love, art, and preaching the clarity of such a statement becomes blurred. The book of Acts holds a caution against overzealous attempts at measuring the miracle of preaching by audience response. In Acts 2, Peter preaches a sermon. God is with him. He is filled with the Holy Spirit. The response is overwhelming: Three thousand people find faith. In the seventh chapter Stephen preaches essentially the same sermon. He too is filled with the Holy Spirit. God is with him so much that his face glows. Again the response is overwhelming: The congregation kills the preacher! Audience response to a message depends upon the audience as much as the message.

A number of factors limit the study. The population of a single church limits the scope of the investigation. The time factor of a two-month period further limits the experiment. The preacher's ability to translate the design model into sermons accurately reflecting that model presents a further unquantifiable limitation. A review of the transcripts of sermons preached revealed that while a conscious attempt was made in sermon preparation to avoid all *christianese* and *churchese*, nevertheless in the extemporaneous delivery of these messages the preacher occasionally lapsed back into his native tongue. In preaching to "Athens," occasionally the preacher betrayed a "Jerusalem" accent.

The venue chosen to administer the SRQ severely limits the scope of the study. The sample was limited to the Care Group population of our church with an average of 198 weekly attendance. The response was limited further by the number of volunteers who complied with the SRQ request. Most critically, the composition of this group failed to accurately reflect the nature and make up of the total church population. While the Care Group population represents ages ranging from teenagers to senior citizens, and includes a small number of those with little or no Christian experience, nevertheless the people who attend Care Group tend to be more spiritually mature than the average visitor, new church attender or seeker.

The option of giving the test indiscriminately to the whole church body during or immediately following the evangelistic sermon presented problems that were felt sufficient to warrant another venue. The appropriateness of giving a test of this nature at such a moment was deemed spiritually insensitive. In retrospect, another option other than the one chosen might have proven more helpful. Future experiments of this nature might consider the possibility of indiscriminate distribution of the SRQ immediately following the service with

the expectation that they would take the instrument home for response at a later more appropriate moment. The provision of a postage-paid self-address envelope might encourage a higher rate of response. Another possibility might be to mail a copy of the SRQ specifically to all visitors and newcomers to the church. While the population size would be drastically reduced, the benefit of reaching more of the target audience (i.e. those of Athens) might outweigh other factors. In retrospect, the choice of venue for the administration of the SRQ severely limited the test results as it failed to reach the majority of the target audience, especially those of least previous exposure to Christian faith. This aspect of test administration represents the greatest flaw of the project investigation.

A further limitation might have been the extended duration of the experiment. After two months of weekly surveys, response rates dwindled in the last three weeks especially as people grew wearisome of the process. Future experiments along this nature might be better served by conducting the experiment over an eight-month period (one Sunday per month) rather than an eight-week campaign. One evangelistic sermon per month might sustain higher levels of interest and allow for a more balanced ministry to the whole congregation.

The Journey from Jerusalem to Athens

The journey from Jerusalem to Athens and beyond is a long road. Danger exists that the messenger, arriving at the intended destination, has somehow lost the message en route. Biblical integrity and sensitivity to culture define the goal. “The history of the church is replete with syncretisms. Syncretism almost always begins by trying to make Christianity more palatable to diverse cultural groups” (Miller Marketplace 44). Marketplace preaching easily degenerates into consumer-driven preaching. Quentin Schultze, in “Television and the Pulpit,” warns of the seductive power of culture to shape the message. He tells of a little

known fact concerning the beginnings of the ill-fated *700 Club* TV ministry. According to Schultze the program was organized around the specific theme of healing for a reason—their own market research showed that is what the people wanted (165).

Newbiggin makes a good point when he cites the convenience of a god of our own liking: “The unknown God is a convenient object of belief, since its character is a matter for me to decide. It cannot challenge me or pose radical questions to me. . . . It is likely to be just the enlarged image of my own ego thrown up against the sky” (21-22). Steward Briscoe said a widespread misconception holds that God is nothing more than a “great felt need meeter in the sky” (qtd. in Engel 317). The danger of contaminating the Gospel cannot be ignored.

The gospel demands that we meet the challenge with biblical integrity and sensitivity to culture. The souls of men and women, boys and girls demand one’s best effort. The world has changed beneath our feet and before our eyes. Methods of communicating the timeless message must change accordingly. The task of renewing the packaging of the gospel without altering the content challenges us. Calvin Miller states, “Preaching of tomorrow will understand that it must change its ways or lose the day! The church is about to turn an important millennial corner” (28).

Jeff, in our opening story, returns to his familiar surroundings only to discover that he has the wrong address. His friends have moved. Jeff’s story is open-ended. The end of the story is untold. Will he find his friends, or will he stumble through the streets lost? We are not told. To discover that one’s friends have moved is one thing; finding out where they live, getting a map, and going there is quite another. The story of evangelistic communication in our contemporary world, is also an open-ended story. The end remains unwritten. It is one thing for the church to wake up to the fact that the world has relocated; it is another thing to

discover the new address, find a map to get there, and make the journey. This project attempts to find the address and discover the map. Communicators of the gospel must make the journey. If the church hopes to reconnect with its friends—those lost and in need of Christ—the journey must begin.

Pretest Version
Sample Sermon Response Questionnaire
 (Reduced in Scale)

Sermon Response Questionnaire

Message: "More Than A Candle In The Wind" Date: Sunday September 7, 1997

Please read each of the following statements and check the square that best indicates your experience of the Sunday Morning Message. Thank you.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The stories seemed to make no point	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The speaker helped me "discover" some new truth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The speaker knew what he was talking about.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I was deeply moved by something the speaker said.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I felt the speaker was pushing his views down my throat.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. He was more interested in the message than in me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I was bored.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The sermon related to the world I live in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The speaker was uptight and ill at ease.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The true-life stories helped me "visualize" the truth expressed in the Bible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I felt challenged to change some aspect of my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. My mind wandered constantly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. The message made no difference to my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. He seemed insincere.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. The speaker "guided" me through the Bible passage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Removing the modern day stories would have helped the sermon.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. I was moved to a state of reflection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. At times I felt the speaker was hostile and cold toward me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. I feel my faith is strengthened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. He spoke to the needs of my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. The speaker told me what to believe without letting me think for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. The sermon left me cold.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. I felt like he was speaking to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. When it was over I said "so what!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. In retelling the biblical story the speaker "made the Bible come alive."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. The sermon used language that non-Church people would not understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. The sermon did not connect with my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. The speaker seemed to believe what he was saying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. The message was dry and lacked "heart".	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. The speaker seemed warm and friendly toward me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. The speaker's use of visual imagery helped me follow the sermon.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Male Female Age: Teen 20-29 30-39 40-54 55+

Number of years as a Christian _____ Number of years in this congregation _____

Final Version
Sample Sermon Response Questionnaire
 (Reduced in Scale)

Sermon Response Questionnaire

Message: "The Eye of The Hurricane" Date: Sunday November 2, 1997

Please read each of the following statements and check the square that best indicates your experience of the Sunday Morning Message. Thank you.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. The speaker was able to capture and hold my attention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I found it difficult to figure out the point of the stories.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The speaker helped me "discover" some new truth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The speaker knew what he was talking about.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I was deeply moved by something the speaker said.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I felt the speaker was pushing his views down my throat.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. He was more interested in the message than in me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I was bored.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The sermon related to the world I live in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The speaker appeared to be uptight and ill at ease.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The true-life stories helped me "visualize" the truth expressed in the Bible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I felt challenged to change some aspect of my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. My mind wandered constantly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. The message made no difference to my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. He seemed insincere.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. The speaker "guided" me through the Bible passage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Removing the modern day stories may have helped the sermon.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. I was moved to a state of reflection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. At times I felt the speaker was hostile and cold toward me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. I feel my faith is strengthened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. He spoke to the needs of my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. The speaker told me what to believe without letting me think for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. The sermon left me cold.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. I felt like he was speaking to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. When it was over I said "so what!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. In retelling the biblical story the speaker "made the Bible come alive."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. The sermon used language that non-Church people may not understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. The sermon did not connect with my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. The speaker seemed to believe what he was saying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. The message was dry and lacked "heart".	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. The speaker seemed warm and friendly toward me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. The speaker's use of visual imagery helped me follow the sermon.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Male Female Age: Teen 20-29 30-39 40-54 55+

Number of years as a Christian _____ Number of years in this congregation _____

MEMO TO: All Care Group Leaders
FROM: Pastor Henry Trickey



October 24, 1997

I need your help! I am presently finishing up my Doctor of Ministry degree with Asbury Theological Seminary of Wilmore Kentucky. My dissertation is on the subject of "A Contemporary Model of Evangelistic Preaching". As a part of the dissertation "project" I am required to preach a series of sermons which are to be evaluated by a large number of the church population. Feeling it to be inappropriate to conduct such an experiment during the Worship Service I hope you will not mind having your group fill in the enclosed form for the next seven weeks. This will not only help me in completing my Doctoral Degree but more important it will help me to assess the congregation's needs by age and church experience, as well as giving me valuable feedback in my preaching ministry.

In addition to the instructions on the "Sermon Response Questionnaire" please note that the following is requested.

1. Each question must be filled out, including the bottom section for the form to be valid for computer analysis.
2. The response should be done quickly without labored thought or consultation with others. (An Honest gut reaction response is what we are looking for.)
3. Please encourage everyone in your group who attended the Morning Service to fill this out. (Approximately 200 – 250 forms are needed weekly to make our computer statistics valid)
4. Lastly, could you please return the completed forms in the envelope to the Welcome Center and pick up the next week's set from your church mailbox.

If you have any questions please contact Marv Poettcker or myself. Thank you for your cooperation!

Table C.2

Count	Gender	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
3	Male	12.667	12.667	12.667	12.667	13.333	11.667	11.333	10.000
18	Female	14.111	13.333	14.333	14.111	15.167	14.333	14.333	14.333

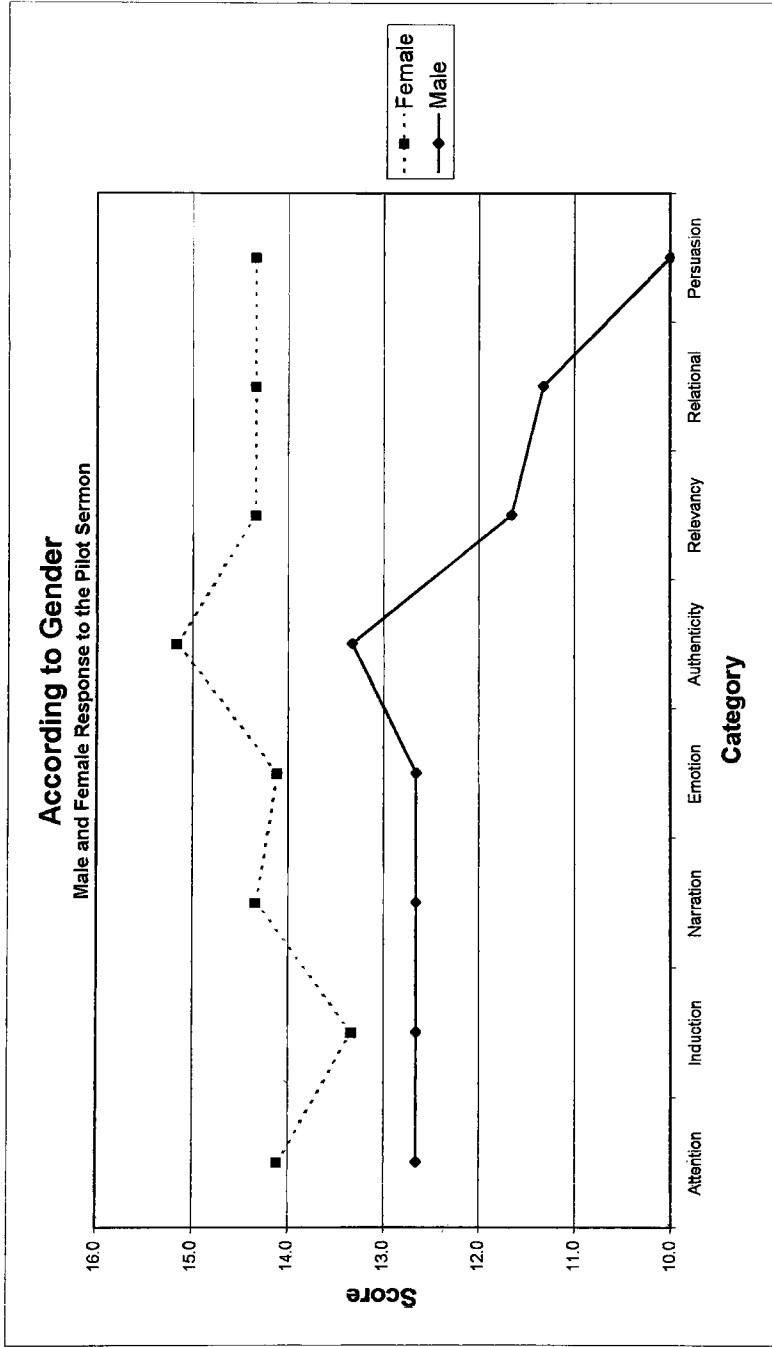


Chart C.2

Table C.3

Count	Age	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
8	30-39	14.000	13.000	13.875	14.250	15.125	14.125	14.875	14.125
13	40-54	14.000	13.365	14.000	14.538	15.000	14.000	13.923	13.923
6	55+	12.667	13.000	12.500	11.833	14.167	13.333	12.500	12.000

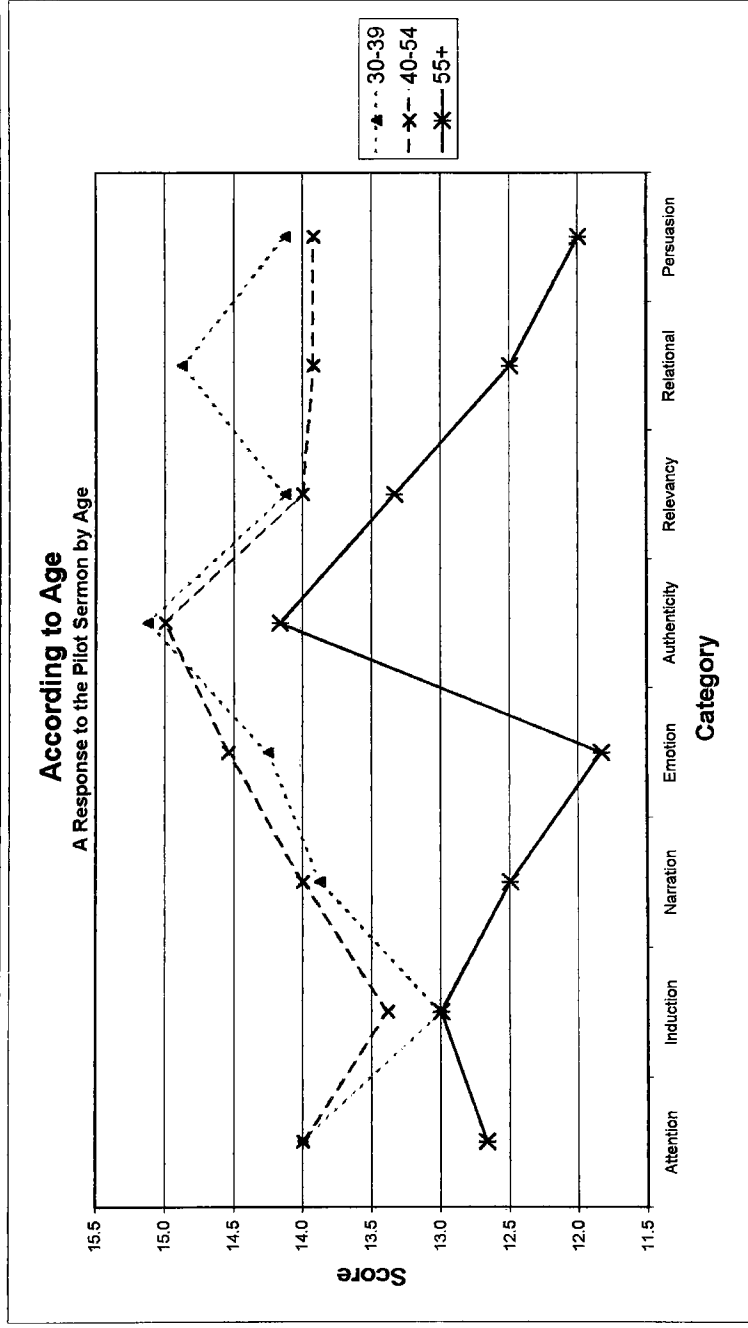


Chart C.3

Table C.4

Count	Christian	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
11	6-20 Yrs	13.2727	13.3636	13.5455	13.8182	14.636364	13.63636	14.18182	13.727273
14	21-40 Yrs	14.1429	13.0714	13.7857	14.1429	15.071429	14.07143	13.71429	13.428571
2	41+ Yrs	13	13	13	12	14.5	14	13.5	13.5

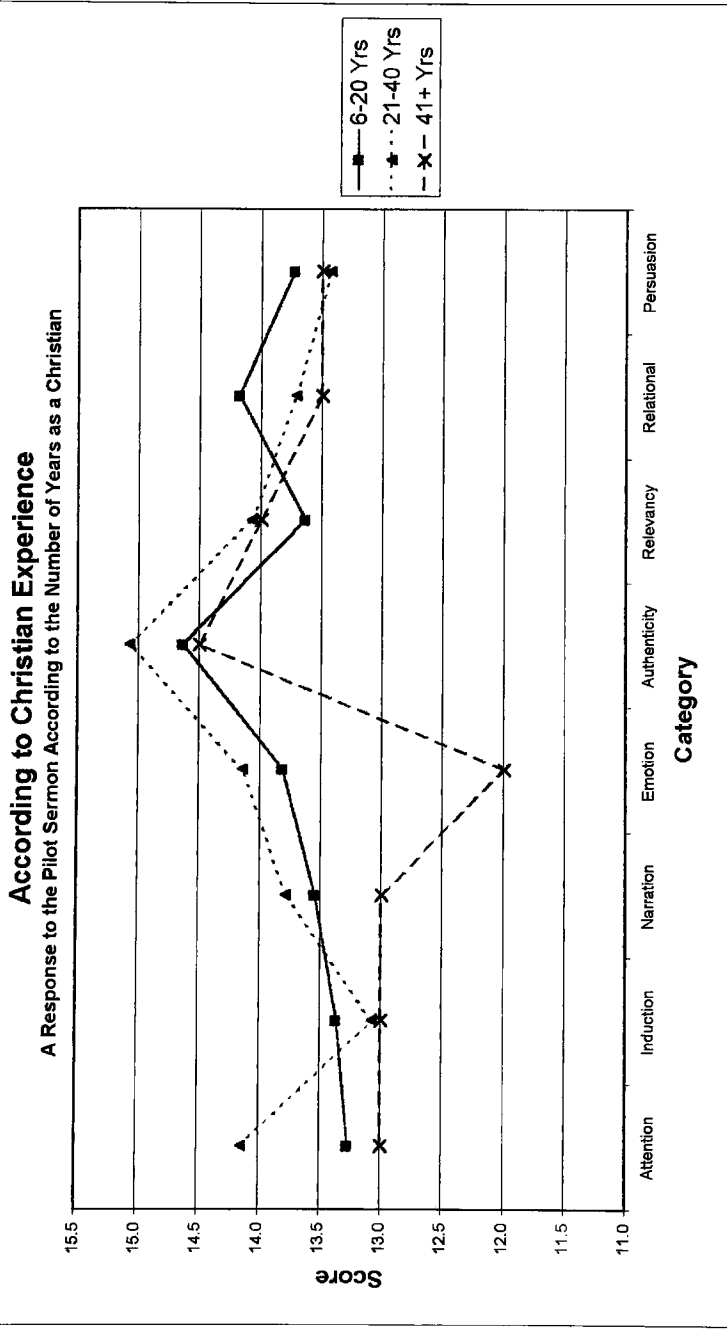


Chart C.4

Table C.5

Count	Christian	Attention	Induction	Narration	Emotion	Authenticity	Relevancy	Relational	Persuasion
13	6-15 Yrs	13.5385	13.0769	13.9231	14.3846	14.923077	13.69231	14.30769	14
11	16+ Yrs	13.5455	13.1818	12.9091	13.2727	14.636364	14.09091	13.81818	13.181818

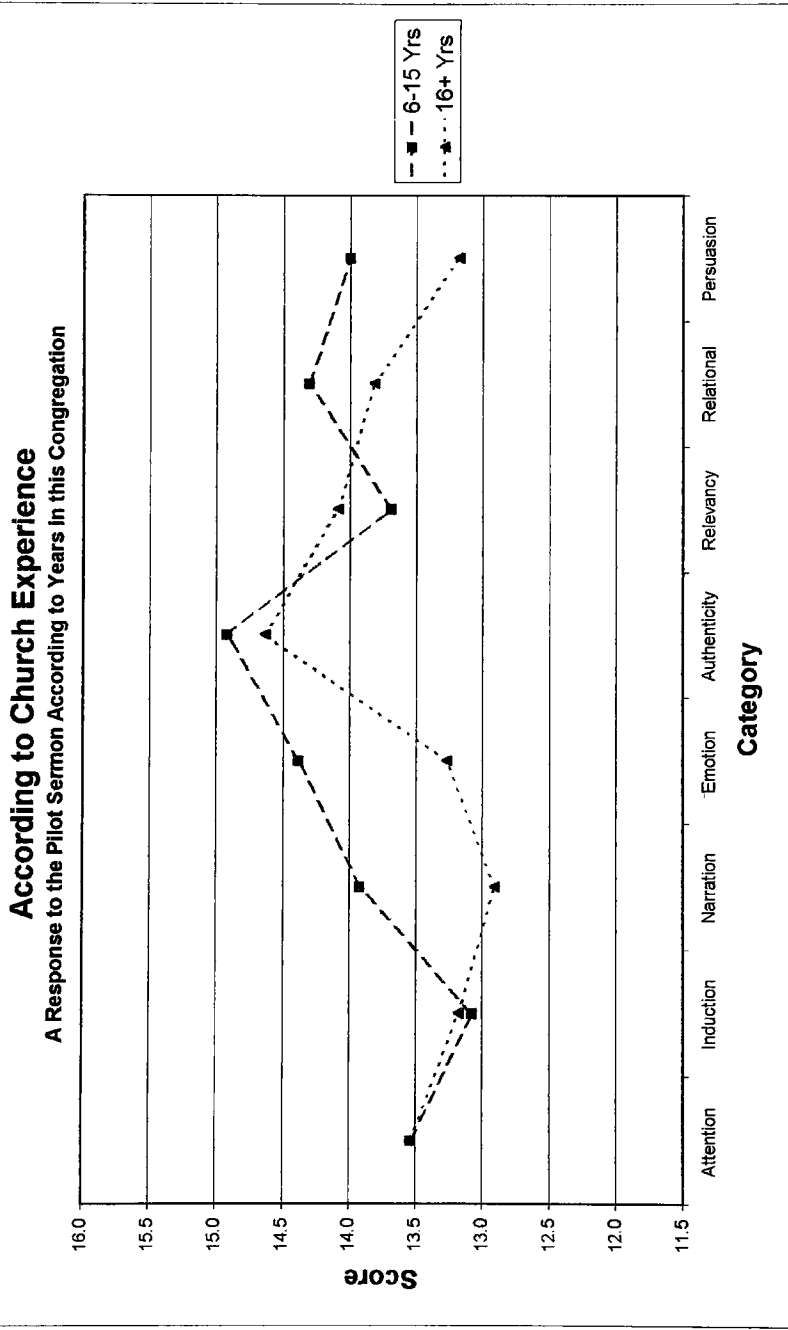


Chart C.5

“BREAK THROUGH – BREAK FREE”

October 19, 1997

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded on our radio broadcast, “Journey of the Soul.” As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. Sermon delivery for this sermon was extemporaneous, without the use of notes or pulpit.

The headlines today: “Prisoners escape!” Most of us heard the news this morning. Last night at approximately 7:00 PM, five prisoners escaped from the Cape Breton Correctional Center at Sydney Nova Scotia. Five prisoners escaped from the confines of prison to freedom, or at least a freedom of sorts.

The good news from today’s Scripture is also a story of a prisoner escaped. It is the story of a man who *broke through and broke free*. He was indeed a prisoner, although a prisoner of a different kind, a prisoner of the worst kind. He was confined, not to a cell, but to the prison of his own body. He was a quadriplegic, completely paralyzed, a prisoner of his own body, unable to move. Out of necessity, he had to rely on others for everything: food, bathing, and even help with sanitation. Of all the prisons in the world there’s perhaps none worse than that of being a prisoner of your own body.

Then he heard the news: “Jesus is here.” So with the help of able-bodied friends he sets out to see Christ. But he his stopped. There is a problem. Between himself and Jesus, there are barriers: a wall of stone and a wall of people.

Any handicapped person can identify with this story. Any handicapped person in a wheel chair who has ever had to enter a building by means of a freight elevator and then go through the kitchen or utility room before being able to join the normal people who come to the front door identifies with this man’s plight. Any disabled person who’s ever been

embarrassed by having his wheel chair carried up the steps of a church will fully identify with this man. An insurmountable barrier lies between him and Jesus Christ, a barrier that seems both impossible and impassible for this prisoner of paralysis.

Sometimes barriers keep us at a distance from God. There are all kinds of things, which might keep us from Christ: our pride, our ignorance, and the hardness of our heart.

But in this case, notice what or rather who the barrier is, God's people! God's people, who are gathered at the feet of Jesus, shoulder to shoulder with their backs to the world refusing to open the way for someone who needs Jesus. Have you ever thought about the church being a barrier, keeping people from Jesus?

Mahatma Gandhi once said "I like your Christ but I don't like your Christians." He gave as his reason, "They are so unlike your Christ." It is unfortunate that many of the people out there have been so hurt and hindered by us that they can't make it through the door to Jesus. If that's ever happened to you then remember this: If you are sick, you don't throw out the medicine because the pharmacist was rude. Keep your eye on Christ. Come to Him.

And so we read that this man and his friends were so determined, so persistent to come to Jesus that they did something that most of us would never of dreamt of, let alone dared to do. They had a faith that refused to be stopped, a faith that laughs at impossibilities. They had mountain-moving faith, imaginative faith, audacious faith. See them now on the rooftop literally breaking through to Jesus. They are breaking a hole in the roof and bringing their friend to Christ.

If you read the dusty books that sometime preachers read, the kind that tell you all about life in the middle east way back then, the experts will probably tell you some like this:

they will tell you that there was probably an outside staircase on the house. They'll tell you that in eastern homes there was a flat roof that was regularly used as a place of rest and quiet; that there were beams laid across about three feet apart. The experts will tell you that between the beams there was a filling of brushwood, clay, and earth, over which there was often a healthy crop of grass. They will tell you that the ceiling was only about five to six feet high. It was the easiest thing in the world to clear out one of those spaces between the beams and lower their friend.

But what the experts forget to say is this: this was a highly unorthodox unusual way of making an entrance! It would be highly unusual now for someone to break a whole in your ceiling to drop in for tea—"Hello. Just popping in. . . ." (laughter from congregation) It would be unusual now, and highly unusual then. That's the point of the story! It was completely unorthodox. "B. & E" is what the police call it, a break and enter in broad daylight!

Imagine now the scene. Picture yourself inside the house sitting at the feet of Jesus. You are listening to him preach. You hear a sound you can't place. And then a tiny beam of sunlight begins to stream in through a cloud of dust cascading from a pinprick of a hole in the ceiling. Now large chips of clay and earth and grass begin to fall on your head as you scramble to move aside. While the crowd is astonished, and the landlord upset, Jesus is amused. He rather enjoys the interruption. Dust flies, bits of straw and clay fall on the guests. Noise and chaos interrupt the sermon and Jesus the preacher is amused. He enjoys the spectacle of a handicapped man lowered through the floor by four pairs of willing hands, guided by four sets of mischievous eyes. Jesus is amused, and so are we. He got through to Jesus in the most audacious way, and that's a pleasing sight.

This is the man who literally broke through to Jesus. He was determined to get through and he did. The Bible calls that faith. It says, “When Jesus saw their faith,” not just the faith of the four, but the faith of all five. The whole adventure was an exercise of faith. This is faith with arms and legs, faith that acts, faith that makes the first step in coming to Jesus, faith that says, “I won’t give up! I’m not going to be blocked. I’ve failed before but I’m going to try again. Nothing is going to turn me away.” This is faith that says, “The most important thing in the world is that I get to Jesus’ feet no matter what.”

When someone makes a great discovery in the world of science or medicine we say that this person has made a *breakthrough*. When someone goes through a time of great emotional crisis and they experience recovery we say they’ve experienced a *breakthrough*. This man literally broke through to Christ. Handicapped by his disability, hampered by the crowd, hindered by physical barriers, nevertheless this man was not going to be stopped.

It is my prayer that someone listening to me today might experience a spiritual breakthrough. Perhaps you’re here today in body, but in soul you are far from God. There is a wall between you and Christ. The Bible says in Isaiah 59:12 “that your sins have separated you from God.” Perhaps you are hindered by pride or some secret sin or some hurt that has happened, perhaps even by the church, or some sin that you can’t seem to let go of or it won’t let go of you? Perhaps a habit or attitude of heart. Maybe you are a good living person but you’ve simply trusted in yourself for salvation and not Christ the Savior? Today is the day. Be hindered no longer. You’re not going to let anyone or anything stand in your way. You are going to break through to Christ and you are going to come to Christ today by faith no matter what anybody else thinks. You’re not going to let the crowd hold you back.

And so our physically challenged friend breaks through to Christ and in breaking through he makes an amazing discovery: he also breaks free! What does Jesus say? He says, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” He is set him free from his sin.

But wait a minute, who said anything about sin? Even though the handicapped man hadn’t said a word everyone knew why he came. It was obvious. He came to be healed, not forgiven. But, Jesus looks beyond his outward need to see the inner need, and he gives him not what he wants, but what he needs. Just like God! Jesus does the unexpected and startles the crowd by making the announcement, “Your sins are forgiven!”

He sees through the problem to the deeper cause of the disaster. A famous psychologist, wrote a famous book entitled, “Whatever Happened to Sin?” He said that if he could convince the patients in his psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the door the next day. We have many felt needs. It might be our marriage, or it might be our employment, or it might be our health, or it might be our future, or our relationships, but the deepest need you have in your life is spiritual not physical. Bertram Russell said, “It is in our hearts that the evil lies and it’s from our hearts that it must be plucked out.”

The modern world has erased the word sin. We talk about self but not the soul. We talk about neurosis not sin. We talk about life as biological drives not spiritual realities. We have spirituality without God. And yet there’s something in our heart that tells us there’s more. As Flannery O’Connor writes, “Mystery is a great embarrassment to the modern mind.” Ernest Becker concurs, “Modern’s try to replace vital awe and wonder with ‘how to do it’ manuals.” That’s where the self-help movement steps in and says, “I’m Ok— You’re OK. Be satisfied with who you are. Love yourself. Believe in yourself. Actualize

your potential. Quit listening to all those negative tapes and by the way it helps if you make a lot of money.” So says the self-help gospel. But what has it produced? As someone has said, “A generation of self-centered, fully-realized, daring-to-confront people, who have read all the books and know how to be their own best friend, who own a lot of real estate and yet wonder why they can’t make a lasting relationship . . . and wonder why the old patterns seem as iron clad as ever.” Lifting ourselves up by our own bootstraps doesn’t work.

The problem is at a deeper level than the superficial cure can touch. C. S. Lewis said, “We are in revolt. It’s not just a self improvement we need—we’re rebels who must lay down our arms.” The Bible is blunt in its diagnosis. It says we have all sinned and that the wages of sin is death—spiritual death. If I live separated from God and die separated from God, I’ll be eternally separated from God. Sin is a cancer. Cancer cells don’t lie dormant. If anyone let’s the cancer go the results will be deadly. Only if the disease is cut out or blasted out will it stop growing. If you were told that your child had cancer and needed to be operated on would your response be “Whatever you do don’t use the knife, just wait a little while. It’ll all go away?” Ludicrous! You would rush your child to the hospital and plead with the surgeon to spare nothing to save her life. So it is with sin. It needs spiritual surgery for a spiritual cure. Sin blinds us. It warps our judgement. It binds us. It enslaves us and death is the ultimate result of sin – death physical and death spiritual.

And so, this man was paralyzed physically. He was not able to walk or use his limbs. He was completely helpless; imprisoned within his own body. There is another kind of paralysis: spiritual paralysis, the paralysis of sin. Mark records this incident for the reason that this sick man is a symbol of the whole human race helpless and hopeless before Christ. We are paralyzed by the sins our life. We are not able to walk as we should walk. We’re not

able to live as we should live. We're not able to do the things we should. We're not able to be the kinds of persons we ought to be. We are bound and fettered by chains of habits, which enslave us. Scripture declares that before meeting Jesus, we're "dead in trespasses and sins."

An announcement on a bulletin board in a church in Ohio said, "This is a segregated church." On the next line it said, "For sinners only." Underneath it said, "Everybody welcome!" (laughter)

And the Scriptures tell us that we have all sinned. Every so often we read in the papers about a tragic story of yet another baby born with fetal alcohol syndrome, a baby born addicted. Listen, whether you know it or not, you were born addicted. Addicted to sin. We are sinners by birth and later sinners by choice, even the best of us. "All have sinned," the Scriptures say. Sin is debilitating. It's crippling. It's paralyzing. Some of you are paralyzed by your past, "stuck" by something that happened in the past, something you might have done or that was done to you. Moreover, you're bound by chains of guilt that you can't let go of or they won't let go of you.

And so, Jesus recognizing the real problem, not his physical ailment but his spiritual one, speaks life to his soul: "Son, You're forgiven."

But wait a minute! What does it mean to be forgiven? Good news! The word forgiven literally means to be loosed; to be set free; to be unshackled, to be released. That's what happened. He was set free! He broke through and he broke free. Scripture says that whom "the Son makes free is free indeed." Jesus said, "The truth will set you free." Paul bewails in Romans 7:24, "Oh wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death." And then he rejoices "Thank God it has been done. Jesus Christ has set me free." We are prisoners of sin set free.

Talmage , speaking of our pardon said, “Release! Signed in tears, sealed in blood, written on heavenly parchment, recorded in eternal archives, the black ink of the indictment is written all over in the red ink of the cross: “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” He sets you free. Jesus said, “I have come to bind the broken hearted and to set the captives free.”

Billy Graham has said that in these days of guilt complexes perhaps the most glorious word in the English language is this: “forgiveness.” Our greatest need today is not physical or emotional or psychological, it’s spiritual. Your deepest need is the need to be forgiven, to have a right relationship with God. Bushnell has rightfully said, “Forgiveness is man’s deepest need and God’s highest achievement.”

And so Jesus says just six words, “Son, your sins are forgiven you,” and he is released. Set free. Jesus said it then and he says it now. There is somebody here today with dawning faith. And God is already touching your heart with grace, as your heart, like a rose to the morning sun is opening to him. He is saying to your soul at this very moment, “Son. . . . Daughter . . . your sins are forgiven!” You are released!

What a wonderful thing to be forgiven. God has a big eraser and he cleanses our sins, all of them. Like pushing the clear button on a calculator Christ can wipe clean the record of all our sins. What does God say to us in Jeremiah 31, verse 34. “I will forgive their iniquity and their sins I will remember no more.” The Bible says that “He is able to bury our sins in the sea of his forgetfulness,” and Corrie Ten Boom liked to add to that saying, “then God puts up a sign saying ‘No Fishing Allowed.’”

Forgiveness is absolutely free. It’s a gift. That’s the meaning of grace. A little boy came to the Washington Monument and noticed a guard standing by it. The little tyke looked

up at the guard and said, "I want to buy it." The guard stooped down and said, "How much money do you have?" The boy reached into his pocket and pulled out a quarter. The guard said, "That's not enough." The boy replied, "I thought you'd say that." So, he pulled out another nine cents. The guard looked down at the boy and said, "You need to understand three things. First, thirty-four cents is not enough. In fact, thirty-four million is not enough to buy the Washington Monument. Second, the Washington Monument is not for sale. And third, if you are an American Citizen, it already belongs to you."

We need to understand three things about God's forgiveness. First, you can't earn it. Second, it's not for sale. And third, if you are trusting in Christ you already have it. Your sins are forgiven.

A frustrated man said to his work mate, "Every time I have an argument with my wife she gets historical." His friend said, "You mean hysterical?" "No. Historical. Every time we have a fight she drags up the past." (laughter) God is not like that. He forgives and he forgets. So God says to you, "I set you free from the guilt of the past, from the grip of sin in your daily life. I set you free from the enslavement of self. I set you free from the regret of all those wasted years. I set you free from an empty hollow life and I set you free to serve and follow me and to walk in my steps. Son. . . . Daughter . . . your sins are now forgiven."

"All I ask of you is your compliance," says God. "All I ask is that you trust me to work a wonder in your life. I always do. You'll be astonished to find that you really are free and the chains are gone." So what does it mean to be forgiven? It means to be set free.

But, some in the crowd are angry with Jesus. If you could see the Pharisees and the curl on their lip, the scowl on their face, and if you could know what they were thinking and

see through their souls with X-ray vision like Jesus did, you would know that in their hearts they were cursing Christ and saying, “Blasphemy!” They were accusing Jesus of blasphemy because they knew the Bible. They knew Isaiah 43:25, that God only and only God has the power and authority to forgive sins. And so they said, “Blasphemy”—and they were right! Because no ordinary man can forgive sins. But, they were wrong because Jesus was no ordinary man. He is not just Son of Man and Son of God but God the Son.

Who is Jesus to forgive sins? He’s God that’s who. And this incident in the life of Jesus is one of the clearest demonstrations of Jesus’ claim to be one with the Father. He was able to forgive sins because he was God forgiving sin. He is the only one who can. Every religion in the world has a founder, but only one religion on the planet has a Savior: “Thou shalt call His name Jesus for he shall save His people from their sins.” Other religious leaders claimed to be seekers of the truth or prophets of the truth, but Jesus claimed to embody it. He said, “I am . . . the truth . . . the way, the truth, and the life. . . . If you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father.” Who then is Jesus to forgive sins? He’s God, and as God he has the authority to pardon you and forgive your sins.

And so to prove his case Jesus puts before the scribes, an unanswerable argument. To prove once and for all that he has power to forgive sins, he says, “Which is easier to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take up your bed and walk?’” By the way which is easier? The answer is neither, because both are impossible to man but possible with God. Nevertheless, one miracle is visible while the other is invisible. Any Charlatan can say, “I forgive your sins.” And so Jesus vindicates his words with a mighty work saying, “That you may know the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins . . . I say to you stand up, take up your bed and go your way.” Immediately he lifted up that old

tattered mat and marched out in the presence of them all. And so Jesus proved his power to forgive sin.

You have greater proof. Jesus proved his power to forgive this man's sin by raising him from his bed, but God proved Christ's power to us by raising his only Son from the dead. In the words of Romans 1:4, "Christ was proved to be the Son of God with power." How? By "the resurrection from the dead." Anyone could have said, "I'm the Son of God," but Jesus proved his words by rising from the dead.

Back to our story. And so Jesus speaks a word, and a paralyzed man parades out the door. He stood to his feet and walked away. This is the pardon that enables us to stand. His pardon enabled this man to stand physically. Your pardon will enable you to stand spiritually. To your soul he speaks, "Arise, stand up and walk." In Romans 6:4, God teaches us that we're "raised together with Christ" so that we can walk in newness of life." When your heart kneels before Christ in repentance the burden of sin is lifted, the bondage of sin is broken and you *stand* to your feet a new person—reborn from above. You walk in newness of life, walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

And so, he was a prisoner who escaped. He was a prisoner of his own body and of his own soul. Paralyzed physically, paralyzed by sin but Jesus set him free. He broke through and broke free and so can you. For those of you who have faith, for those of you who are willing to forsake your sin, the Word to this man's soul is a Word to you: "Son. . . . Daughter. . . you're forgiven!"

NOT ENOUGH DARKNESS

(A CRY IN THE DARK)

Sunday Oct. 26

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded on our radio broadcast, "Journey of the Soul." As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. Sermon delivery for this message was extemporaneous, without the use of notes.

Andy Patkinson—If you don't know the name he's one of the stars of Chicago Hope. You'll probably know his character because he's the slightly insane doctor who likes to relax by walking around his office in his boxer shorts. Recently this actor was on the Tony Awards. He was presenting the award to the best female actress and he came up to the stage wearing heavy dark glasses. He said, "I'm not wearing these because I'm trying to be a movie star, believe me my home is the theatre and the stage—that's my world. Then very movingly he told the story how just eleven days earlier he had experienced delicate eye surgery. The technical name is a corneal transplant, commonly known as an eye transplant. He thanked the family publicly, the parents of the little child whose eyes he had received and he said, "Until the day I die, I will be so thankful and so grateful and I will never forget the gift of sight. I am so happy and I feel so good."

The eye is a fascinating sensory organ isn't it? We depend so much on it, more than any other sense. Yet sight is something we generally take for granted until it's gone. A man by the name of Griffith had a surgical corneal transplant as well and when he could see again after many years of blindness he said: "It's just like being born again!" The Bible says that unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.

The story that I want to talk about today, the story of blind Bartimaeus told in Luke's Gospel chapter 18. It's not just a story about something that happened a long time ago on the dusty roadside of Jericho, it's the story about something that still happens. It happened yesterday at the great Coliseum at the Promise Keepers Rally as we saw hundreds of men come forward and claim Christ as their Savior and rededicate their lives. It happens all over the world every day. It's happening this day at this very moment some place. It might happen in the sanctuary later today. Whenever a man, or a woman, or a young person steps from the darkness of sin into the light of the Savior Jesus Christ, from unbelief to faith—that miracle happens again.

And the story of a man called Bartimaeus is both history and parable. It's history in that on a certain day at a certain place, a certain man experienced a real and true miracle and went from blindness to sight. It is also a parable in that it's a symbol of the whole human race, you and I standing before Jesus in our blindness and our darkness begging helpless before the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, and stepping from darkness into the light and following him in the way. The story of a man called Bartimaeus is the story of every single one of us in this room because every one of us right now is either in darkness spiritually or in light. If we are in darkness now and we remain in darkness there's a danger that we can be forever in darkness. Jesus talked about heaven but he also talked about a place, we don't know where it is—perhaps beyond the stars—he simply called it the outer darkness.

And so we discover Bartimaeus' story and ours in the pages of Luke's gospel chapter 18 starting in the thirty-fifth verse. If you have your Bibles and if you'll bear with me, I want to title this story: "Not Enough Darkness." "Not enough darkness," you say, "Wait a minute Henry. You've got that the wrong way around. There's too much darkness in the

world. There's too much darkness in our hearts. There's too much brokenness. There's too much immorality. There's too much unbelief and skepticism." But listen, I've taken the title from a tombstone and a graveyard in England and here's the full title: "There's not enough darkness in all the world to put out the light of a single candle." And that's true. It's eternally true. All the darkness can't quench the light of even just a flickering flame. But, it's also true of Jesus Christ because there is not enough darkness in your soul and mine, there's not enough darkness in all the world, there's not enough darkness in Canada to quench the light of Jesus Christ because he is the Light of the World that John says "shines into every heart and the darkness can't comprehend it." In other words all the darkness can't snuff out the light of Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? Not enough darkness.

And so our story begins with a man in the dark. His name is Bartimaeus. He lives in a world of darkness. It simply says that Jesus was approaching Jericho and a blind man sitting by the roadside was begging, like the 150 million people today who are blind, and by the way a third of those people could have sight today if they just had treatment in time and in the right way. That technology exists. But, like 150 million today, his world is a world of darkness. Totally without light. Think for a moment what it must have been like to be Bartimaeus, to have never seen the sun rise. You've never seen the face of your mother. You've never seen a rainbow. You've never seen the beauty of a little child. You've never seen the blue sky. All you have known is an endless night with no morning or no hope of it. He's a man who lives in darkness and he cries out begging—because that's all he can do. He doesn't want to beg but he has to beg. It's beg or die. And he cries out "Alms for the poor. Mercy, have mercy upon me." Think of how it must have felt to be Bartimaeus, buffeted by the crowd and spat upon, hit, kicked, and not even being able to see the hand that hits you.

He was blind physically, but there's another kind of blindness. The Bible speaks about spiritual blindness. You see, we have two sets of eyes. You can have twenty-twenty vision physically and yet be spiritually blind. You were born with your eyes closed. It's not until we come to Christ that the veil is lifted and we receive our spiritual sight. Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 4:3, "If our Gospel be hid it is hid from them that are lost in whom the god of this world," that is god with a small "g," the devil, "has blinded lest they believe." Again in 2 Corinthians 4:3, we read "their minds were blinded, having their understanding darkened because of the blindness of their heart." You see, Satan is so powerful he has the ability to supernaturally blind us and place a veil over our hearts and conceal from us the truth. It is not until we are spiritually reborn that the scales fall off and the light of God's love illuminates our soul.

Darkness is an archetypal figure in all countries, in all cultures throughout all history—a symbol of evil. Instinctively we know that darkness symbolizes a menacing evil, a mysterious unexplained evil, the malignancy of sin. As children we were probably afraid of the dark. Then as we grew up we began to become comfortable with the dark and even to love the dark. Why? Because we are children of the dark. "Men loved darkness," Jesus says, "rather than light because their deeds are evil."

Now there are different kinds of spiritual darkness. There's the darkness of ignorance, simply not knowing the gospel, never having heard. A Denver woman told her pastor about the time that she recently went into a very expensive jewelry shop for a necklace and a chain with a cross on it and this respectable business man experienced in the business trade asked, "Do you want a plain one or one with a little man on it?" And we are living in an age of darkness. People just don't know about the gospel like they used to. We have a

new generation that's not brought up with the Lord's Prayer in school and the gospels and who never went to Sunday School and who only know of Jesus as a curse word.

There is darkness of ignorance and there is moral darkness. Billy Graham says that "the most devastating effect of sin is that by it we are blinded to it." We have a sin darkened soul. As a pastor, and especially as a former Salvation Army officer, I've visited prisons many times and preached in prisons many times. In fact my wife and I, when we were dating, every Thursday I think it was, we went to the prison in Hamilton. We couldn't wait to go because the food was so much better than at the Bible College. (laughter from the congregation) And that's true—that's true! I am no stranger to prison cells and Ping-Pong tables and pool tables in prisons. But you know what? I've never prayed with or counseled with or spoken with a prisoner who wasn't innocent. They are all innocent . . . in their own eyes . . . because they had a reason to do it. All of them. And you know what? We're no better. We can condemn another person's sin but we are always blind to our own sin. I guess that's the way it works. We're blinded from the truth about ourselves. Dostoevsky said, "If God did not exist everything would be permitted and people are living as if God doesn't exist." Pope John Paul significantly observed in a talk recently that, "Today the very sense of sin has disappeared because the sense of God is vanishing."

There is moral darkness and the darkness of ignorance and then there's the darkness of unbelief." John Milton said, "Unbelief is blind." And someone else has said that "Faith is the eye of the soul." An anonymous writer has said, "Without faith we are like a stain glass window in the dark." Helen Keller who was blind and mute but graduated from University and became a lovely Christian woman who spoke all around the world lecturing people said, "I have walked with people who's eyes are full of light but see nothing. Their

soul's voyage through this enchanted world is a barren waste." And then according to Scripture it says, "They have eyes to see but they don't see, they have ears to hear but they don't hear." So many people are blind in unbelief.

Have you heard about the "Jesus Seminar" that is making so much publicity about theologians of various denominations. Liberal Theologians who are trying to decide how much of the Bible is true and how much isn't and their presupposition is that none of it is true and they vote on verses and come up with about 2 percent or something like that. What they've done is they have given Jesus a makeover. They have given God a makeover so that you can choose any one of a number of portraits of Jesus, which ever you choose. There is Jesus the psychic, Jesus the saint, Jesus the cynic, Jesus the Magician and so forth. He's seen by some as the peasant protestor. Jesus of our own understanding. That's a good one. Jesus of whatever you want. A stripped down Jesus who's just a man like any other man and no more. But all of these fall short of the Biblical Jesus, the true and historic Jesus, and the Jesus of manhood and majesty, the God-man of the gospel.

But our hearts are blind to Scripture. Some of you are struggling with the Scripture. You say, "I can't believe it. I want to believe it but I can't." I have news for you. The Bible says you can't believe the Scripture. That's right. Let me read it to you. 1 Corinthians 2:14, speaking of the person who's not yet received spiritual sight, it says "the natural man can not receive the things of the Spirit for they are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned." The Bible says you can't understand. Its not until you come to Christ and the veil is lifted that faith will come. Another place in 1 Corinthians 1:18 we read , "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to them that are saved it's the power of God."

The new age movement is making such subtle inroads into our society that people are new age in their philosophy and don't even know it. Churches have become tainted by new age philosophy without even knowing it. About thirty years ago theologians were saying, "God is dead." Because they pronounced the death of God, now some of the ancient gods of paganism have risen again in the hearts of unbelievers, filling the void and the vacancy that is there. We have dethroned the God of heaven, the true God, and we have reinstated ancient pagan deities who have their origin in the depths of the earth and the stars of heaven. The New Age movement has brought back the Roman pantheon of Mars, the God of War; Gia, Mother Earth; Apollo, the god of Light, inner light; the gods of commerce, materialism and theft; Dionysius, the god of intoxication; Pan, the god of the forest and the pasture; Moyra, of fate; Prometheus, the defiant one, the rebellious child; Venus, the goddess of sex and fertility and whenever we enthrone sex it becomes demonic. And then there is Futura, the goddess of chance; and the androgynous gods, the gods of gender blending and unisex culture that ignores the Scripture where God made man in His image—male and female.

The new age movement is very subtle but it leads to spiritual darkness. There are all kinds of spirituality and all kinds of books about the soul but not everything that speaks about the soul is really soulful. Best selling books are flooding the markets with books about the soul. There is even a comic TV sitcom called "Soul Man" about a single parent clergyman. But not everything that says it's spiritual really is. Much of today's spirituality so-called is old-fashioned occult, pantheism, spiritism, and witchcraft.

And so, modern man is intellectually enlightened, psychologically enlightened, socially enlightened, and yet we are spiritually blind. Why, because we love darkness rather

than light and our deeds are evil. The Bible says because mankind “knew God but didn’t glorify Him, neither were we thankful,” God gave our imaginations over and our “foolish hearts were darkened.” We have a sin darkened heart and we’re blind to our own condition. We’re blind to the truth of the gospel. We’re blind to the brevity of life and blind to the judgement of God. There’s an old Chinese proverb that says, “The soul enlightened is like heaven but the soul in darkness is like hell.” And many of us have darkness in our soul and even some Christians are tainted by darkness.

But listen, all that darkness is not enough. It’s not enough to snuff out the light of Jesus Christ because he is greater than all of that. And so this man called Bartimaeus lives in a world of darkness. But he doesn’t stay in darkness because we hear six words that will change his life forever. “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” Notice that this is in the present tense, he “is passing by.” Although you it doesn’t come through in most modern translations of the Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the original Greek are written almost completely in the present tense, as if it is happening right now before you—because it is! In the Greek they call it the historic present. Because you see, this is the living word and Jesus of Nazareth is passing by right now. He is here, risen from the dead and you can reach out and touch Him.

Now you know the story. I know the story we’ve read the last part of Luke’s gospel. We know it, but Bartimaeus doesn’t: this is the last time that Jesus will ever pass this way again. Jesus is seventeen miles from Jerusalem and He’s on the way to the cross. Bartimaeus doesn’t know it but it’s now or never. We never know if we will ever have another chance to respond to the Gospel. We are tempted to think when we are young, that our youth is an insurance policy against death, but it’s not. It’s not. How many young

people have we known in the last year, some have been known very well and loved by this congregation, who have died tragically and quickly? Jesus of Nazareth is passing by right now and I urge you to reach out in faith and touch Him. The eye of faith can see Him; the hand of faith can reach out and touch Him. As someone has said “the sparks of eternity fly thick about us only to be grasped by the hand of faith.” Right now Jesus is passing by. Shakespeare said, “There’s a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune omitted and all of life’s journey are in shallows and in miseries.” We have all known people who had the great chance of a lifetime but they let it pass and regretted it for the whole rest of their lives. Don’t ever regret Jesus Christ coming close to your heart.

Well, what’s Bartimaeus going to do? He hears that Jesus is passing by. No surprise. He is going to do what he always does, the only thing that he knows how to do—beg. He’s a beggar so he’s going to beg. Good for him! He’s going to beg. He cries out, “Mercy, have mercy. Help!” And good for him because the only way to Jesus is to come as a beggar. I have to come that way, you have to come that way, and all our pride, we have to throw down as trash and all the things that we clutch to and all the accomplishments and the good deeds that we cling to and think that we are so good because of—we just have to let go and come to Jesus as a beggar.

Did you know that the word prayer means to beg? When we pray, we beg, but it’s the kind of begging God longs to respond to. He says, “Come boldly. You’re my child and I want to answer your prayers.”

And so Bartimaeus begs and he says, “Have mercy, help! And the crowd hinders him. They say “No. Be quiet! He doesn’t have time for the likes of you. You’re just a beggar.” But what does he do? He keeps on begging. And he begs even louder. Hear an

explosion of noise burst from his mouth as he crawls through the crowd to Jesus who is almost out of hearing distance: “Jesus, have mercy! Help!” And miracle of miracles, Jesus stopped. And the miracle of the Gospel is that Jesus stops for us when we call out to Him.

It was a cry of faith. He said, “Son of David.” He recognized that Jesus was the Messiah. It was a cry for forgiveness: “Have mercy upon me,” like the man who said, “have mercy upon my soul.”

And it was a determined cry, because he wasn't going to be stopped. He didn't let the crowd hinder him. Some of you are hindered by the crowd. If you are in high school then this is the most decisive time in your whole life spiritually because the temptation to give in to the pull of the crowd is so hypnotic, so magnetic that you can't overcome it. Only with Christ's help can you overcome it. You need to be sold out and radical for Jesus Christ. That's the only way you'll get through. I've spent about half of my adult life in and out of university campuses and I know that a university campus can spell death to your faith unless you're strong in the Lord .

And we can be hindered by the crowd. You might be hindered thinking “Well, what would my husband think if I gave my heart to the Lord?” or “What would my Dad think if I give my heart to God?” or “What would my friends say?” Don't be hindered by the crowd. It's your soul—nobody else's. It's your life now and forever. It doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. You're coming to Jesus Christ because in your heart of hearts you want to. If you are even close to the kingdom the devil will throw up every roadblock imaginable. But cry out to God and come as a beggar. When you cry out, he'll stop.

God was arrested by his prayer. It says, “Jesus stood still.” Jesus heard his prayer and he will hear yours. Even when you cried in the dark and you thought you were all alone

the Scripture says, “He bottled your tears.” Above the sound of the thronging multitudes Jesus heard that one man’s voice. As on one other occasion he felt the touch of a woman who simply brushed the fringe of his garment. He knows! And today above the sound of traffic, above the hustle of humanity, above the static that fills the atmosphere and above the rush of stratospheric winds and higher above the roar of a trillion, trillion stars and suns, each set ablaze, an infernal of nuclear blasts—above all that he hears! He hears when a mute little child prays, just by thinking “help”! He hears. God the master mover behind the infinite revolving universe stops at the whisper of His name. The reason He stops is this: (Are you listening?) Because, you are important to God. Because you matter to God. In two words: God cares. He cares.

And so the crowd that hindered now makes way and he rushes through the crowd stumbling to Jesus Christ. And Jesus answers his prayer. Just like God! Christ, the Living Word who spoke at the creation of the Universe at the first nanosecond of history—“Let there be light,” thunders again through the Son of God Jesus and commands that light come to his blinded eyes. And immediately he received his sight .

And the very first thing he ever saw was the face of Jesus Christ. What an experience! Imagine looking into the face of Jesus. Peering into Jesus eyes. Someday you will you know that experience. It says, “We shall behold Him.” Not enough darkness in all the world to keep you from that. Not enough. We shall behold Him.

Hymn writer Fanny Crosby wrote more than 8000 hymns and she was blind and most of those hymns have to do with sight. Now, she wasn’t blind from birth but at six weeks of age she lost her sight. Yet she never felt bitter about it. In her old age a pastor friend wanting to comfort her said something like this: “Oh isn’t it such a pity that God has

showered so many gifts upon but didn't give you the gift of sight as well?" Fanny Crosby, (who wasn't the least bit afraid of rebuking her pastor) said, "No! In fact if I could have asked God at the very moment of my birth for one thing it would have been this, that I would be born blind." "Why?" he said. "Because then, the very first thing that would ever gladden my sight in heaven would be the face of Jesus Christ." Listen to the word of God: "God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shone in your heart through the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Imagine now that you are blind Bartimaeus. You're looking into the eyes of Jesus Christ. What do you see? Close your eyes for a moment and in your imagination pretend that you are looking at Jesus face. What do you see? What do you see? This is what you see: You see the face of God. And you see the face of a God who is not angry with you. He is not angry. You see the face of God who accepts you and loves you. But he is a Holy God who hates sin with a holy hatred but he loves you so much with a holy love that he is willing to die himself to take your sin away. That's what you see. This is what you see in one sentence: You see a God who smiles upon your life. That's what you see.

Well, this business of darkness and sight is symbolic of something and it is fairly simple. It's a picture of your soul and a picture of you coming to Jesus. The Bible calls it many things: conversion, salvation, justification, regeneration, spiritual birth, being born from above—many different ways to describe the same experience. When we come to Christ his Spirit comes into our heart and into our soul in such a way that one of the only ways to talk about it is in terms of giving sight to the blind. New life in your soul. Colossians 1:13 says, "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his Son."

And His cure was complete. Jesus says, “Your faith has made you whole.” The word “whole” means complete. You are not complete until you come to Christ. The word whole also means saved. Salvation. Your faith has saved you Bartimaeus. In other words he not only received his physical sight but he also his spiritual sight as well.

Well, they said it couldn't be done. They said it would never work, it would be a miracle if it did and then they did it. On September 17, 1941 the first time a cornea transplant had been successfully done. They didn't have anti rejection medication. They didn't have preservatives to store the donated eye tissue. It was now or never. There was no waiting. They didn't have all the techniques that they do today. Time was of the essence. But Sid Sclare tells the story of how he had been blind from the age of thirteen—totally blind. He describes how he was on the operating table under local anesthetic. He was awake the whole time. They took off his old cornea with one flick of the scalpel and he said it was like a velvet blackness until all of a sudden he saw this wonderful light and the face of the doctor over him and the mask of another doctor. There was a doctor with a turban and then they put on bandages and kept him immobile for six weeks. Finally they took off the bandages and instantly he could see everything: the furniture, the lights streaming through the window, his loved ones. Everything was a little bit red for the first couple of days but it was all there and it changed his life and it changed history. Now that same transplant doesn't take six weeks. It's an outpatient deal with 95 percent success rate, a miracle of modern science. Some of you have received it.

But listen, receiving your spiritual sight is also a miracle. What do we have to do? Well, God does His part. His part is the miracle of spiritual birth and spiritual awakening . Our part is faith. “Your faith,” Jesus says, “has made you whole.”

Well, it looks like it's the end of the story but it's not quite. We are almost finished. It looks like the end of the story but it's not. It's the beginning of a happy ending or better—a happy beginning. How does the story end? How does it read? “And he followed Jesus in the way.” That's a significant word—the way. People in New Testament days would recognize the double meaning. Long before Christians were ever called Christians, they were called the “people of the Way,” with a capital W. John the Baptist said, “I've come to prepare the Way.” Jesus said, “I am the Way.” Paul the apostle said that he “persecuted the people of the Way.” And later he says that “he expounded to them the Way.” And so when it says he “followed in the Way,” he didn't just leave the sidelines and follow down the path, it means he took up the life of a disciple and became a follower of Jesus Christ. It's just the beginning—a happy beginning and not the happy end.

Well, I want to conclude with this story. The story of Linda Burtish who literally gave herself away. Linda was an outstanding teacher who felt that if she had time she would like to devote her life to art and poetry. She was twenty-eight when she began to have headaches. An enormous brain tumor was found. There was only a 2 percent chance of a successful operation so she said, “No. I'll just give my life to art and poetry.” She painted furiously and wrote feverishly and every one of her poems except one was published and every one of her portraits was sold except one. And then, just before she died she wrote a living will and literally gave herself away donating her body to science to save the lives of others.

Her eyes went to a hospital in Maryland and a recipient was found in South Carolina, a young man the same age—twenty-eight years old. He literally went from darkness to sight, blindness to sight and he was so grateful that he thanked the eye bank. It was only the

second time after 30,000 eye donations that they had ever received a thank you note. He was so thankful that he asked them if he could find the parents of the donor because they must be wonderful people to raise up a girl who would give away her body so that others could live. She must have been a wonderful person to want to do that. And so he got it, found their address and surprised them one day by flying in to New York City to see them. He arrived unannounced and rang the doorbell. After the introductions they just embraced him and hugged him: The man who had their daughter's eyes. And she said, "If you are not doing anything why don't you stay here for the weekend." And he said, "OK." Later that day, he browsed around through the house. He saw Linda's room and he was interested. He said, "That's interesting" She's read Plato and he had read Plato in Braille. The next morning Mrs. Burtish said, "You know I think I've seen you somewhere before but I don't know where." And then she remembered and she ran up to the room and brought the last portrait that Linda had ever made. It was the picture of her "ideal man." And it was almost exactly like him. And then she got out the poem, the one that was left. It went with the picture and it said this:

Two hearts passing in the night,
Falling in love,
Never able to gain each other's sight.

That love story reminds me of another love story. The story of Jesus and the story of you. Because long before you ever saw Jesus, he saw you. Long before you were ever born he saw you in his heart and ordained that you should be born and he loved you. And just as Linda Burtish had to die in order for that young man to see, Jesus Christ had to die on a cross for you to gain your spiritual sight. He had to die in order to erase your sin and he had to die

in order to give you new life. God's miracle of spiritual renewal is made possible at the cross and made personable by faith. Let's bow our heads and our hearts.

THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE

November 2, 1997

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded on our radio broadcast, "Journey of the Soul." As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. While pulpit and semi-full notes were used for quotes from Scripture and several illustrations, most of this sermon was delivered in an extemporaneous style.

They came with devastation in their wake. First it was Bill and then it was Danny, and then later Pauline. Hurricane Bill churned up the waters of the North Atlantic west of Bermuda and then Danny left a wake of devastation and most recently we heard about Pauline that smashed the coast of Mexico near Acapulco, the worst hurricane to hit the shores of Mexico in twenty-five years. A wall of water thirty feet high hit the pristine beaches of Acapulco. One person who survived it in a hotel said that they heard the foundations of the hotel shake because of the rocks that were the size of cars battered against the foundations and a river of water. One hundred and eighteen people died and twice that many people were injured and some are lost and still haven't been found. A hurricane is a devastating force.

We used to live in the Bahamas and occasionally I've had a chance to go back there and preach. I always accept any invitations to speak in the Bahamas, especially in February, when "I feel the call." Spanish Wells is one of the 500 islands that make up the commonwealth of the Bahamas. Let me tell about the experience of a certain man and his wife who lived on Spanish Wells when Hurricane Andrew hit. It was hurricane Andrew, a few years ago that caused so much devastation in Florida and the East Coast of the United States. A man looked out at the bay in Spanish Wells and was startled by the fact that where there should be ocean there was no ocean. The bay was empty. The hurricane winds of Andrew had caused an unusual phenomenon: the wind had emptied the bay. Then the wind

turned. He saw coming toward him a wall of water perhaps thirty feet high. Just behind their house was about the highest point of land. He and his wife did something instinctively. It saved their lives. They lashed themselves to a huge post that was anchored deep in the ground. As the wall of water hit they held their breath and it washed up over the houses and over this high point. They held their breath and then the water subsided and they saw what was left of their home. Some of the walls were left standing but everything inside was washed away, all the furniture and everything they had—gone. They were saved because they lashed themselves to this post.

When I heard that story I thought of the storms of life that you and I encounter and the waves and the winds that seek to bash our home, and destroy our families; the tides that try to shatter our bodies and effect us even at the level of our soul. And then I thought about a post that's anchored deep in the ground called "Calvary," and that if we lash ourselves to the cross we'll be safe and saved for all time.

The message this morning is entitled "The Eye of the Hurricane." If I had a subtitle for this story that's found in Mark's Gospel chapter four, I'd call it "The Unsinkable Ship," because that's what it was.

Right now they are making a move that they expect will out sell any other at the box office: Titanic! Titanic was built in the years before World War 1 in Belfast Ireland. She was the greatest and largest and most modern ocean liner ever built. Her construction was unique in that she was made of a series of watertight compartments to insure impregnability against disaster. She was heralded far and wide as "The Unsinkable Ship"—the Titanic. But on her maiden voyage this unsinkable ship sank off the coast of Newfoundland after striking an iceberg.

But the story today is not about a huge ocean liner, but it's about a frail tiny bark, tossed in the waves and wind of a storm but unsinkable because Jesus Christ, the master of land, sea, and wind was asleep on a pillow in the stern of the vessel. And your life too is unsinkable with Jesus Christ at the helm, in control of your life and mine.

So we look at the story and what do we see? We see the story of a storm and men at a point of drowning when they call on Jesus for help. In fact, the New International Version uses the word swamped. Ever felt swamped? Well, Matthew's gospel tells us that sheets of waves were covering the ship and Mark says, they were swamped. In other words the ship was just about to go under and they cried to Jesus for help.

Well, has your life ever been like a storm? We asked the children earlier, when we were dismissing them, if they'd ever had a problem and they all smiled and said "No." Isn't that wonderful? I'd like to shake their hands after the service and get some counsel from them because I've had problems and so have you. We all have. If the little children haven't they will. It is a storm tossed world; storms of strife, and storms of problems, and the history of the world is the history of one crisis after another, one war after another. The latest war was called "Desert Storm," and for those of you who are veterans from the Second World War or from Korea, or if you've ever been under the hail of gunfire you know what it's like to be in that awful storm. My grandfather was in World War I at the Battle of Vimy Ridge and they say that the gunfire was so great that the men actually walked into the battle with their shoulders up as if they were bracing themselves against the wind. You could actually feel the wind as the shells going over top.

There are storms of wars and storms of strife, problems, family problems, financial problems, and health problems. We are afraid! This is a story about fear. Fear. We are

afraid of losing our health, we're afraid of losing our wealth, we are afraid of losing our family and sometimes we're just afraid of life. Afraid. It's a fearful world and storms around us.

Now this is no ordinary storm. Matthew uses the word "*seismos*." In other words, it's a storm of earthquake proportions. Sometimes it's as if the whole world moves beneath our feet and there is no solid ground to stand on. We have storms without and we also have storms within. Personal problems, emotional problems, pain within the heart and within the soul. It's always been a world of storms and it always will be until Jesus Christ comes back and puts an end to all storms.

Job speaking about the storms of life says in Job 27:20 "Terror"—that's the word he uses for it—"Terrors overtake him like a flood; a tempest steals him away in the night." In Job 30:14-16, we read, "They come as broad breakers; under the ruinous storm they roll along. Terrors are turned upon me; they pursue my honor as the wind, and my prosperity has passed like a cloud. Now my soul is poured out because of my plight." David knew about the storms of life saying: "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls; all your waves and billows have gone over me." The Psalmist says in another place: "They who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." And then he describes the storms of life saying: "For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man. And are at their wits' end." And then the Scripture says: "Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brings them out of their

distress. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. They are glad because they are quiet; so he guides them to their desired haven.”

Well, have you ever experienced the storms of life? Max Lucado tells the story of Chippy the parakeet: Chippy never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problem began when Chippy’s owner decided to clean Chippy’s cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She’d barely said “Hello” when “sssoop.” Chippy got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippy still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippy under the running water. Then realizing that Chippy was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do, she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

Poor Chippy never knew what hit him. A few days after the trauma, the reporter who’d initially written about the event contacted Chippy’s owner to see how the bird was recovering. “Well” she replied, Chippy doesn’t sing much anymore—he just sits and stares.”

It’s hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . that’s enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart. Can you relate to Chippy? Most of us can. One minute you are seated in familiar territory with a song on your lips, the pink slip comes. The rejection letter arrives. The doctor calls. The divorce papers are delivered. The check bounces. A policeman knocks on your door.

And so there are storms within and without and the disciples find themselves in the midst of a storm and they're swamped and they cry out to Jesus. Look at the Bible – what happens? Well, where is Jesus when they need Him? He's asleep and it seems like he doesn't even care. They find Him in the back of the boat asleep on a pillow. They are angry and they say, "Don't you even care that we're drowning?" You know, sometimes when you and I go through storms it seems like Jesus is asleep and it seems like God doesn't care. And you're not the only one because there is a whole host of authors in the Bible that have gone through that experience. Just let me quote a few of them:

Job lost everything in a day and then was stricken with a disease no known as Leprosy Elephantiasis. He lost his sons, lost his wealth, lost everything, his health. He wrote this, "I cried to you O God but you did not answer. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind and you toss me about as in a storm." David also knew this experience. He said, "O my God, I cry out to you but you don't answer me." In Psalm 77 he says, "Will God reject me forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" And then Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, knew that experience too because he said, "Even when I cry out for help he shuts out my prayer and he's barred my way with blocks of stone." In other words his prayers bounced off the ceiling because the heavens are brass and they just don't seem to be getting through. It seems like God is asleep and he doesn't even care. Well, maybe you've had that experience.

I'm going to change the names. I'm thinking of a couple, Bill, that's what I'll call him, was an entrepreneur, a man of vision and faith who built up a nice business, provided well for his children and his home, and then one day the stock market changed, dipped just

enough to put his business in ruin and everything he had was gone and his hopes for the future and all his savings lost. He was a Christian and it didn't make sense. He said, "God where were you when I needed you? Don't you even care?"

Or I'm thinking of a young lady, a young mother, I'll call her Susan. That's not her name. Her heart is broken because her teenager has run away. Her teenage girl 16 years of age, and she doesn't know where she is, or who she's with, or what she's doing. She brought her up in the church, but now her teenage daughter is gone. She says, "God, where are you when I need you? Don't you even care?"

Or, I think of another couple, I'll call them Tom and Barbara. Their marriage has gone bad and there's a divorce and he's left all alone. And they're Christians. A tragedy that sometimes even strikes a Christian home because his wife had an affair and she's gone, and he didn't even see it coming, and the children are gone too. And I imagine he must have said, "God where were you when I needed you? Don't you even care?"

Or a couple who stands over the grave of a child, a little one, who one moment was so filled with life and eyes of innocence, filled with love and promise and now a grave. And their hearts are breaking. "Where were you? Don't you even care?"

Mary felt that way at the funeral of her brother Lazarus, Jesus' best friend. Jesus delayed His coming by four days. He died in that interim. Jesus is about to raise him from the dead but she doesn't know that and she runs out and meets Jesus and says, "If you'd only been here he'd still be alive." "Where were you God when I needed you and don't you even care?"

Friends, the good news of the Gospel is that God is not dead. He is not asleep. He is here and he does care. So, they wake up Jesus and what does he do? He gives a shout of

rebuke. He sees the wind and the waves and he feels the blast upon His face and he takes command and the very same voice that spoke and the universe came into being thunders again through Jesus Christ and he says, "Peace! Be still." And it is calm. Just like God! There is no wind and there are no waves. The disciples are amazed and they say, "Who is this man who even the wind and the waves obey Him," and they might as well have said what the Psalmist said, "Who is a God, like unto our God," because this was a demonstration that Jesus Christ, the Son of God is also God the Son.

The Old Testament makes it clear that it is God who holds the winds in His fists. It is God who speaks so the storm is still and who calms the noise of the winds. It is God who treads upon the waves. They see Jesus as God and it's a revelation. And they say, "Who is this."

Well, Jesus speaks and there is calm. It's a miracle. There is nothing natural about it. It's a supernatural miracle. That's all there is too it. It's beyond explanation, but it happened. It still happens because Jesus Christ calms the storms in the hearts and lives of boys and girls and men and women and teenagers every day, who come and trust in Him. Jesus said "Peace I leave with you. My peace I leave unto you, not such as the world gives," not as psychology gives, not as medication gives, "my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled." Jesus still calms storms.

A hurricane is a powerful thing; it's a massive storm. Winds about 400 miles in diameter sometimes approach 200 miles per hour. It generates more power in ten seconds than all the United States uses in electrical power in a whole year. But, listen, Christ is more powerful. He's the Lord of the winds! The Scripture says in Psalm 93, "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea." Whatever

problem you have God is greater. No matter how big it is, God is bigger. He can calm the storms in your life.

Now a hurricane is a terrible and devastating thing, but do you remember what you learned in school? There is a calm spot in the center of every hurricane. And that calm spot is called the “eye.” In the very center of every hurricane there is a calm spot, a place where it’s still and quiet. The Eye of the Hurricane. This is what I’m saying to you today: Jesus Christ is the eye of the hurricane, and wherever Jesus is there is peace.

The word Shalom or peace in the Old Testament used 237 times is a rich word, a deep word. It means more than the absence of war, it means more than the absence of trouble. Indeed you can have peace in your heart even in a war, even during trouble. It means even more than emotional peace. There is a difference between feeling and faith. There are people who have had great turmoil, great mourning, and pain and yet have known the peace that’s in the soul.

Like a submarine. There might be a hurricane above, storm winds, gales, thunder, lightning. Like the problems in our life there might even be frothing waves heaving to and fro like our emotions, tossed and turmoil. But, deep down under the sea there is calm; peace. There is a peace that God gives that is even beyond the circumstances of life, even beyond the emotions, a deeper peace at the very depths of your being the center of your self called the soul. God can give peace, inner peace there.

That peace comes through Jesus Christ. He, “himself is our peace.” The Scripture says he is the “Prince of Peace.” And, it says, “The peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.” The only way to

know the peace of God is to have a “piece of God” in your heart, to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

He calms the storms and then sometimes he calms us in the midst of the storm.

Sometimes the problems don't go away, but he calms our soul in the midst of our storms.

That peace is made possible through the cross. He was crushed for our iniquities.

The Scripture says, ‘Punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.’ In Romans 5,

“Therefore since we are justified through faith we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ still calms storms.

Well, our story says the storm was still or calm. That word literally means “tranquil.”

In fact it means this: It talks about the “smile of the ocean.” That's what that word tranquil means in our text. When he made the sea calm it was as if the ocean smiled. Just imagine a bright blue day with a rainbow and the sun and water like glass. Still waters. It's as if all creation is smiling on you. When we have inner peace the smile of God shines in our life.

Robert Louis Stevenson delights in the story of a ship tossed in a storm. The sea was rough and the rocky coast perilous. Danger was real and dread expectancy active among the seamen. One frantic sailor who was laboring below the water line could contain himself no longer. He rushed to the control room, closed the door behind himself, and stood frozen with fright watching the captain wrestle with the controls of the huge ship. Skill of mind and strength of hand enabled the captain to guide the vessel through the threatening rocks into the open water. The captain turned slightly looked at the young man and smiled. The young sailor returned below deck and assured the crew that all danger was over. When they inquired how he knew, he answered, “I've seen the Captain's face . . . and he smiled at me.” God smiles upon your life. He gives inner peace like the calm after a great storm.

Well, we could end our story right there and most sermons on this text do. they end here and miss the point.

There are two rebukes in the story, not just one. And, in a way there are two miracles. At least one real and another implied. Not just one. Immediately after he rebukes the waves, he turns and rebukes the disciples and says, “Why are you afraid. Where is your faith?” He challenges them to turn from fear to faith.

Now fear is the natural thing, always. We always tend towards fear. Faith is unnatural—nothing natural about it, just like there was nothing natural about the calming of the sea. It was a miracle. But he calls us to make a complete reverse to go from a life of fear and turn 180 degrees around to a life of faith. We can only do that in response to God. God spoke and the sea was calmed. God speaks to our hearts, “Be still and know that I am God.” He gives us an inner calm and faith that we don’t have ourselves. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. It’s a response to God’s truth.

Perhaps God has already spoken to your soul even today: “I have not forsaken you. I am not asleep. I do care. I will be your peace.” Do you believe that?

God is speaking to your heart. He is turning you around. He is changing the whole direction of your life, even now as you respond to God’s word in faith. You’re going one direction in fear and changing course trusting Jesus Christ and saying, “I’m willing to follow you.”

That turn around, is called spiritual rebirth or conversion. It’s the miracle that happens when God comes into our life and turns us about.

There is a true story that’s recorded in the annals of the United States Navy and a man by the name of Frank Koch relates the incident: Two battleships assigned to the training

squadron had been at sea on maneuvers in heavy weather for several days. Visibility was poor with patchy fog, so the captain remained on the bridge keeping an eye on all activities. Shortly after dark, the lookout on the wing reported “Light bearing on the starboard bow.” “Is it steady or moving astern?” the Captain called out. The lookout replied, “Steady Captain,” which meant they were on a dangerous collision course with the other ship.

The captain then called to the signal man, “Signal that ship, ‘We are on a collision course, advise you change course twenty degrees.’” The response came back, “You change course twenty degrees.” The captain said, “Send: ‘I am a captain. Change course twenty degrees.’” “ I’m a seaman second class,” came the reply, “You had better change course twenty degrees.” By that time the captain was furious. He spat out “Send: ‘I’m a battleship. Change course twenty degrees.’” Back came the flashing light. “I’m a lighthouse . . .” needless to say, they changed course.

Well, we are headed the wrong way in life and God says, “change course. Turn about. Radically turn from a life of fear to a life of faith.” Faith is a miracle—always. Just like the calming of a sea. Like the calming of the sea, the miracle of faith happens when we respond to Jesus’ voice, and believe.

ALL STRESSED UP AND NO WHERE TO GO

Sunday November 9, 1997

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded on our radio broadcast, "Journey of the Soul." As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. This sermon was delivered extemporaneously without the use of notes.

Would you turn in the Scriptures to Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 11, starting in verse 28 to the end of the chapter:

Come to me all you that labor and are weary and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

This is the word of God, and we believe it.

Well, you've heard the saying, "All dressed up and no where to go." Now I don't know who first uttered that phrase. My imagination was going this weekend, and I wondered if it was perhaps a little boy dressed in his Sunday best at church, wiggling and squirming in a pew, on some Sunday morning, all dressed up and no where to go. Or maybe it was an Irish Wake, and the center of attention was all dressed up and no where to go. He wasn't the life of the party either! Or maybe it was a young man that was stood up on a date on a Saturday night. All dressed up and no where to go. I don't know how that saying came, but we've all heard it, haven't we?

Well today I just want to change two letters of that phrase and say that most of us today are all "Stressed Up and No Where To Go." All stressed up and no where to go, because we live in a world of anxiety and stress, and tension, and hypertension as never before.

I read a book earlier this week called "The Stress Factor." The opening chapter of that book, written by several Christian doctors, tells the story of one of the authors who went

to visit a friend in Dallas, Texas by the name of Bob. And the author hadn't seen Bob in a number of years. They started out in radio production years before. A small radio station in Texas, and then they graduated, the both of them to separate stations. Now the author found himself travelling up a giant elevator to the top of one of these huge Dallas skyscrapers, made of steel and glass, to the top floor of a major radio station. The door opened and there was plush carpet; he went to the secretary and said, "I'd like to speak to my friend Bob, I haven't seen him in a number of years." And the secretary went white, and then tears flooded her eyes, and she said, "You haven't heard? Bob's dead. Over a year now." And he gasped and said, "Well what happened? Was it a heart attack or was it a stroke?" And suddenly a panorama of pictures flooded his mind like slides flashing before his face: of coffee that they'd had a hundred times, and plans and dreams and the kids, and conversations about nonsense and politics and spirituality, and everything under the sun, and all the things that went wrong, and the happy times. And then she came back after a choking moment and said, "It was natural causes; it wasn't an accident; it wasn't a heart attack. The doctor said he just burned out."

And people all over our country are just "burning out." Fifty-three percent of Albertans will go through a divorce before their life is over. Seven out of ten people in the Mao Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, doctors say are there, not primarily for physical reasons, but psychological reasons. They're burning out. And that phrase, "burn out," that is so common in our society. We hear it often in phrases like "a flickering candle going out," or "an empty shell," or "gray ashes," or "a flame that once burned brightly, but then has gone out." People are burning out. We're all stressed up and no where to go.

Stress has become a major problem in our society as never before. A hundred years ago there was the extended family, grandparents, aunts and uncles, all living within a block. You knew all your neighbors and they knew you. You lived in one place your whole life. You went to one job all your life. Everybody went to school together, worked together, and stood at each other's graves as old friends. But community is completely gone, and we're a society of nomads, and separated, and many of the friends we had are left behind or gone different places. And so stress is so acute, it's become epidemic.

In the 1930s said the famous words, "The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself." Don't you wish that were true today? The cold war is over, but the threat of nuclear holocaust is not, because now they're predicting nuclear terrorism is the next thing, not the super powers, but the mad men who've got a hold of all these nuclear bombs. And even as I speak at this moment there are black U2 spy planes going over the Middle East and looking down upon the bomb factories of a madman by the name of Sadam Hussein. Stressed! We're all stressed up and no where to go.

Doctors are now seeing a relationship between disease and stress. We've all know the relationship between hypertension, blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, and stress, but now they're saying there is documentary evidence that cancer and stress are related. In fact, UCLA Professor Bruce Hensel has produced a famous document that says, in essence, that "all of us have cancer cells all the time, but when stress, and burdens and depression comes then we become more susceptible and our immune system which holds these cells in balance and check is just relaxed, and so brings danger." If he's right, then what a scary thought. All of us have cancer all the time, and our immunity system, when healthy holds it back, but in stress the immune system runs down.

There is a relationship between stress and the problems of life. And by the way, you need a little bit of stress just to keep you healthy. What would a baseball game be with no hits, no runs, and no errors?

Norman Vincent Peale's most famous story is the time he was walking down the street and he saw his friend George coming, and George was particularly down in the dumps. He wasn't ecstatic, he wasn't effervescent, and he wasn't enthusiastic, which is just a way of saying he was "dragging bottom." And he was coming along, and Norman Vincent Peale made the mistake of saying, "How are you?" Now that is a mistake with some people, because usually it's just "Hi, how are you doing?" But some people when you ask, "How are you?" They give an organ recital! "My heart is acting up and my liver and my kidneys," and so forth. And it proceeded to be a fifteen-minute discussion of all his ailments, and then Peale said, "Well, what's the matter?" His friend George said, "Well, all the problems, the problems, the problems. If I could just find a place with no problems I'd give five thousand dollars to your church." And as any preacher he took this offer very seriously. So he thought about it and came up with an answer: "Yes, I was at a place yesterday where there was about ten thousand people, and as far as I know not one of them had a problem." And George said, "That's great! Sounds like my kind of place. Can we go tomorrow?" And he said, "Yes, it's Woodland Cemetery, and there isn't one person there with a problem."

Well, if you have no problems, you're out of the game. The only person with no problems is dead! So we need to have a healthy amount of stress to make life interesting and pleasant and challenging, but when stress becomes too much, too long and in the wrong way it becomes "distress," and distress is what we feel when we're burdened. The Bible doesn't use the word "stress," but it uses the word, "burden."

It speaks about the burden of responsibility. Moses said, “Lord, why do you burden me with all these people?” And then Job said, “Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards.” And there’s problems that all of us have.

There’s the stress of normal life, and then today there’s an extra stress, it’s the stress and strain of working towards success. And success has become the goddess of this age.

Well, there’s the strain of ordinary life, the stress of searching after success. And also there’s another stress which some feel, and some don’t. It’s the stress of sin, the burden of sin. Many people don’t feel it today. They feel the financial burden, the family problems. It’s not that they don’t have that burden, but they’re unaware of it. If you took a corpse and put a fifty-pound weight on top of it, what would it feel? Nothing! Because it’s dead. And the Bible says we’re dead in trespasses and sin until Christ awakens us. And so many people don’t feel any guilt, or any shame about all the things that they are doing, because spiritually they’re dead. And yet that’s the biggest burden that we’ll ever bear. And Scripture says that sin is a burden, it’s a weight. The Bible says, “The wrath of God is upon the children of disobedience.” It says in Psalms, “that my guilt has overwhelmed me.” It’s a burden that crushes my soul.

It’s a burden that we can’t escape. One man was restless for forty years, because of a crime he committed. He embezzled money forty years ago, and at the age of eighty he finally gave himself up, and confessed to the police. And he said, “I’m so thankful, because now I can rest.” And then I read about somebody else who confessed to the income tax department anonymously. He sent them a letter saying, “I haven’t been able to sleep since 1970.” And inside were five, one hundred-dollar bills. At the bottom it said, “P. S., if I still can’t sleep, I’ll send the rest.” (Laughter)

On February 27, 1972, twenty miles south of Vancouver, there was a ship that sank, the Harrow Straits. It was pulling a great weight, a barge. And after the salvage crew had done their investigation they reported there was no damage to the hull at all. They came to the conclusion that the only thing that sank the Harrow Straits was that it was pulling a weight that was too heavy, and the stern was pulled under, and the ship sank.

Many of you feel as if you're being dragged under, because the weight that you're carrying is too heavy for you to bear. And so we're all "stressed up and no where to go." And we have the stress of sin, and the stress of sorrow, and the stress of sickness, and the stress of life itself, and the stress of trying to be a success. And there's no place to go.

But the Good News of the Gospel is that there is somewhere to go. Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and heavily laden, and I will give you rest . . . rest unto your souls. Take my yoke upon you, because my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Six hundred and forty-two times in the Bible, God invites you and says welcome, or come, "come unto me." "Come to me." It's wonderful, isn't it? We're "stress up," and we do have some place to go.

Jesus Christ is our burden bearer, and he lifts the burden that we can't bear ourselves. The only prerequisite is to come. You're weary, and exhausted, and heavily laden, and all stressed up, and no place else to go. Jesus says, "Come, come unto me."

And when we come to Jesus, what happens? Does he take our burden away? Not exactly! Look at the text again, and see that he doesn't take our burden away as much as he replaces it with a different burden. There's an exchange of burdens here, because he says, "all you that have a heavily laden burden, come take my yoke which is light." We exchange a heavy burden that we can't bear for a new yoke that is light and easy.

You see it's wrong to think that we come to Jesus and all our problems go away. Some TV and radio preachers preach a cheap gospel that says, "Come to Jesus and be happy." And you know what? It's not quite true. We are happy, but we still have problems, don't we? But listen, Christ is able to help us bear those burdens that we can't bear ourselves.

In fact, sometimes you come to Jesus, and you might actually have more problems than you had before, because it's not easy to live a holy life. And the non Christian can sin and do this and do that, and we're called to take the yoke of Jesus Christ, which means to submit to his authority, and there is a burden to following Jesus Christ. But it's a light one for several reasons. First of all, it's light because he takes away the burden of sin. When Jesus Christ carried his cross he was carrying your sin and mine, and it says in Isaiah 53, looking seven hundred years in advance, telling the story before it happened, "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all, and he was bruised; he was crushed by our iniquities." And Peter says, "He bore, in his own body on the tree, our sins." Jesus takes the yoke of your sins which is unbearable, and he lifts that and puts it upon himself on the cross.

You remember Pilgrim's Progress? That famous book that in the last century, next to the Bible, was the most read book in the whole world. It starts in the first chapter with a pilgrim. His name is Christian and he goes through the straight gate and he's weighed down by a heavy burden. He can't get rid of it. It's the burden of his sins, and there's nothing he can do. All the going to church, and all the good works, and all the charity, and all the love can't take away this awful burden that's crushing him. But then he finds his way up the mountain of Calvary and he looks up at the cross. The moment he sees Jesus the burden rolls

off his back and down the hill, and rolls, and rolls, and rolls until it's out of sight and gone forever.

And a Canadian Evangelist from Toronto, who I know of by the name John Moore, was reading that story and penned these words of a song, "Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary." And they are! It's light because the burden of sin is gone. Wouldn't it be nice to lay your head on your pillow knowing that everything sin you ever committed is wiped away? God can give you that clean conscience. He takes my sin away.

And then it's also light, because it's made to order. The word "easy" as in "take my yoke, it is easy," means "made to fit." Now Jesus was a carpenter, and Jesus made hundreds of yokes. The wooden yoke that is put on the oxen was tailor made. They put it on and they'd rough it out and then they'd bring back the oxen and make it perfect for that particular oxen so it wouldn't chafe. And there's a legend that says Jesus was the best yoke maker in all of Israel and people would come from all over the land to his shop. And the legend says that there was a sign over the shop, as there has always been signs over shops today and then, and the sign said this, "My Yoke is Easy." That means it's made to fit. And your yoke is made to fit.

You don't know the future. What problems you'll have to bear. And I don't know the future, but God does. And he tailor-made you so that you will be able to bear your burden with Christ's help.

It was Carol Schuller, the seventeen-year-old daughter of Bob Schuller, and the famous preacher from California, who suffered a tragic accident and lost her leg. Six months after getting out of hospital her first trip was a cruise with her parents. On this great cruise she was so glad to be out of the hospital, but she was embarrassed by this artificial leg, and

by seeing everybody else in their bathing suits and their attire, and here she had to limp around. On the last night of the cruise there was a special talent night, and everybody was invited. It was rather a secular affair, sort of a cocktail lounge kind of thing, and there was drinking but she decided she would go. She said, "Mom and Dad, I'm going to go because I'm going to enter the talent contest." And they had no idea what she was going to do. Everybody else got up and did their song and dance and their stories, and all the rest, and it came time for her. And the spotlight shone on her, and she was wearing a long dress. She was looking very beautiful, and she's a blonde and just a gorgeous young lady. And she got up and said, "I'm not sure what my talent is, but I want to take this opportunity to explain to you what I think I owe you, and that is an explanation. You see, six months ago I was in a motorcycle accident, and they cut off my leg below the knee, and then they gave me another operation, and they cut off my leg above the knee, and for six months I was on intravenous and antibiotics, and I had numerous blood transfusions to try and keep me alive. I don't know what my talent is, but I just wanted to take this opportunity to share with you and tell you that during that time my faith became very real. And everybody gasped and the cocktails stopped tinkling, and the waitresses stopped serving, and every eye was on this young, seventeen-year-old lady. And she said, "I came to know Jesus Christ in a very personal way." And she said, "The bottom line is this: it's not how you walk, but who you walk with, and who walks with you." And she said, "I'm not a singer, but I just want to sing a verses about my friend, Jesus. I want to sing it. And will you help me? And she saying these words:

And He walks with me and He talks with me,
 And He tells me I am his own,
 And the joy we share as we tarry there,
 None other has ever known.

Doctor Schuller, writing about his daughter that day, says there wasn't a dry eye, and there wasn't a life that wasn't touched by Jesus Christ.

Jesus' burden is light, because he takes away all my sin, and the burden he gives in exchange is tailor-made.

Jesus burden is light because it's a burden of love. Matthew Henry says, "It's lined with love." And in the Sunday school class they were talking about it and the little boy was asked by the teacher, "What's a yoke?" And the boy said, "It's when you put something around the neck of an animal." And the Sunday school teacher asked another question: "What is the yoke Jesus gives?" And a little girl said, "It's God putting his arms around my neck." It's a burden of love.

William Barclay, the Scottish Presbyterian, tells this little story about a little boy was crossing the street in Edinburgh, Scotland, that he had his lame little brother on his back. And the policeman, one of Edinburgh's finest said, "Isn't that little boy a heavy burden?" And the wee lad said (with Scottish accent), "*He's no a burden, he's me brother.*" And we're called to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters, and it's no burden, because it's a burden of love.

Why is Jesus' burden light? One more thing, the most important. Are you ready for this? It's light because Jesus himself bears it with us. It's a yoke make for two, not for one. We come to Jesus all burdened down, with a single yoke, and Jesus takes it off and gives us one made for two. And Jesus takes the heavier part, and he walks through life with us. See the picture? We still have burdens, but Jesus is there. Jesus is there. And what happens? He says, "I'll give you rest." That means refreshment. Deep down in your soul—soul-peace.

There's a legend that says when God made the sparrows they thought their wings were burdensome until they found out that's what would make them fly. And the burdens God gives you are the wings of your soul. And Jesus says, "My burden is light, my yoke is light, and I'll give you rest."

WHEN THE WINE RUNS OUT

November 16, 1997

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded on our radio broadcast, "Journey of the Soul." As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. The sermon was delivered the use of pulpit or notes. While a partial manuscript was prepared and studied, little attempt to memorize was made. The sermon was given in a loose extemporaneous fashion.

The first miracle that Moses ever performed was turning water into blood, as judgement. The first miracle that Jesus ever performed was turning water into wine. The Scripture says in John's Gospel chapter one that the law came through Moses and grace and truth through Jesus Christ.

And so here we have the story of Jesus turning the water into wine, his first miracle in which his glory was displayed. And we read that his disciples "believed." If were going to title this message I would call it, "When the Wine Runs Out." Where do you go when the "Wine of Life" runs out?

And so here we see Jesus at a party where wine is being served and we're shocked! If you're not shocked I am because I'm an evangelical, brought up in a denomination that if you danced, played cards, or drank liquor even moderately at Christmas there was something suspicious about you and you weren't as good as the rest of us. Well, I'm shocked that Jesus would be at a party where wine is served and probably if you're an evangelical you are shocked too!

Now John the Baptist, well he probably wouldn't have been invited to the party in the first place. He was a total abstainer. And he would have been uncomfortable, and maybe made other people uncomfortable. And I just rebel a little bit about the freedom that Jesus has as he's at a party where wine is being served and we're shocked! I must confess that I'm

a little bit uptight about this text. In fact I've never preached it in almost twenty years of preaching. I don't think I've consciously avoided it but just unconsciously because it's too shocking for me and I'm a little bit uptight. In fact, to suggest to you how much of a spiritual snob your pastor is, I'll tell you what I've done sometimes. Sometimes, when I've gone to a wedding that I've performed and I have been invited to the reception afterwards (usually if it's in the church it's no problem, but if its someplace else, usually one side or the other side of the family wants to have drinks being served) and at that time, after I've said the "Grace," and enjoyed the meal, my wife and I usually, kind-of, slip out. Because we want to "gracefully" leave although I'm not sure how full of grace it really is, but I don't want to tarnish my witness by being soiled, by being with those people who are taking a drink.

Jesus is at a party where drinks are being served, and we're shocked! At least I am because I grew up in that kind of a church where we signed the pledge. And so I'm shocked to see Jesus in such a crowd and drinks are being served and there's my Jesus. I feel a little bit like the preacher of a certain evangelical church who said, "Yes, I do know that Jesus turned water into wine but I must confess Jesus has always embarrassed me a little bit by doing it." (laughter from congregation) And if you're an evangelical, you can identify with that.

Well, I'm not preaching this text to glorify alcohol or preach for booze. Of course not! There really is something to be said for abstinence. In fact, we have to take this text in the context of our culture where the number one problem among young people is addiction to alcohol and over-indulgence in drugs. In fact it's the number one family problem in Canada. The number one problem in Edmonton and Spruce Grove, I'm sure, is addiction to drugs, and

alcohol. And so our church is forming a special ministry to help people. We're going to call it Christians Victorious, to help people with that problem.

There really is something to be said for total abstinence. In the Bible the Scriptures say a lot about alcohol and drink. In fact I once did a study, where I printed out through my computer, every single verse the Bible says about wine. The computer printout was about seven feet long. And I looked it up, read everything, I found three things: 1) the Bible always prohibits drunkenness. Christians can't be drunk. It's a sin. In fact if we become too addicted it can even jeopardize, or at least, warrant questioning a person's salvation. "They shall not inherit the Kingdom of God," the Scripture says. Drunkenness is always prohibited. 2) And then abstinence is encouraged as a voluntary vow in the Old Testament Book of Numbers. There was a Nazarite vow which a person could take for life as Samuel did and John the Baptizer did, or they could take it as a temporary vow as Saint Paul did in the Book of Acts when for a time he took upon this sacred vow of total abstinence from wine. So drunkenness—prohibited, abstinence—encouraged. 3) Then it was a little bit shocked to find, despite my background, that sometimes not everyone can bear the heavy burden of abstinence and so they're allowed as Christians to be *temperate*, that is in *moderation*. Not everybody can bear the burden and special calling to abstinence, although we encourage it. In one study denominations that prohibit any members from ever taking a drink actually have a higher rate of alcoholism than those who allow moderation. Do you hear what I'm trying to say? Drunkenness prohibited, abstinence encouraged, and moderation allowed.

And so, I'm offended just a little, and perhaps you are, that Jesus has the freedom to be at a party where drinks are being served, and I'm shocked! But you know what, we

should always be a little bit shocked by Jesus and the Gospel and “Grace Amazing” because the time that we’re not shocked by the Gospel is the time that we’ve stopped hearing it. And many people read the Gospel, but don’t hear it. They look at Jesus but they only see themselves reflected in a mirror. They’ve made Jesus into their own image rather than allowing themselves to be transformed into God’s image. And one thing that always shocks us is grace amazing. The Pharisee in us all, the judge and jury in us all, always leans to rules and regulations and judgement. And that’s why I’m shocked at Jesus.

But if we’re shocked at Jesus, we’re even more shocked to discover that the party itself is a picture of the kingdom of heaven. Throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, the wedding banquet is a symbol of heaven itself. Many times from the Old Testament, such as the Song of Solomon, it says, “He invites to his banqueting table, his banner over me is love.” That’s the wedding banquet. And in the New Testament, Jesus says, “Blessed are they who are invited to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.” And in Revelation, heaven is pictured as Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. And so the first thing that happens in heaven is we’re going to be invited to a banquet.

Have you ever felt the joy of a wedding banquet as you’ve seen the bride adorned in all her glory? She’s more beautiful than on any day of her whole life. And the husband actually looks handsome. (laughter) Perhaps he has never worn a tie before in his whole life and never will again but there he is in all his glory. And you feel the warmth and you remember your own wedding vows and it’s a beautiful thing. And God says that’s a foretaste of heaven.

Jesus ministry begins with the turning of water into wine and it ends at the last supper where he says “I will not drink this wine again until I drink it with you in the kingdom of God.” When we get to heaven, we’re going to have a communion celebration such as never before.

People in the Middle Ages had a quest. The quest for the Holy Grail. They wanted to find the actual chalice, the cup that Jesus drank from at the last supper. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to hold that in your hand and put to your lips the very chalice that Jesus drank from. Well in heaven we’re going to have a communion celebration, a banquet where Jesus himself with nail pierced hand will extend to you and I the cup of celebration. And that’s going to be a great occasion.

Every time there is a Passover in Jewish celebration they say, “Next time, in Jerusalem.” And every time we celebrate the Lord’s table, and partake of the Lord’s body and the symbol of the cup we say, “Next time, in Heaven,” because it’s the foretaste of the banquet with Jesus Christ. And so it’s fitting that Jesus Christ should begin his ministry at a marriage supper. And we’re a bit shocked, but there it is!

We should never put Jesus in a box. The moment we think we’ve got Jesus in a box, we haven’t got Jesus, because God is bigger than our theology. And the gospel is one of grace. And that’s what is so shocking about this whole story.

You remember W. C. Fields, that actor from the thirties, who was an inebriate and a sinner? They caught him doing something that was very uncharacteristic. A friend caught him reading the Bible. And they said, “Why are you reading the New Testament?” And he put his finger aside his large nose, his bulbous nose as he used to do when he was about to say something funny, and he said, “I’m just trying to find a loophole.” (laughter) Well I

suspect that the loophole that W. C. Fields was trying to find is called “grace.” And the Bible is filled with “Grace Amazing.” That God would reject the self-righteous and welcome sinners to his table and his banquet is a shock to me and it’s a shock to you! But “ Grace Amazing” always is.

Jesus is at a banquet where wine is being served, and we’re shocked, and even more shocking is the fact that the banquet itself is a picture of heaven to come. It’s a picture of the joy and celebration of heaven itself.

And then something happens and the party goes sour. We read that there was no more wine and the correct translation says “they were out of wine,” or “the wine ran out.” Now you have to understand in Jewish celebration in those days, the party was one that lasted a whole week. Have you ever seen *Fiddler on The Roof*? Have you ever seen the moment at sunset and they’re singing “Sunrise, Sunset?” I won’t sing it for you but it’s running through your mind right now. And there’s a parade because they move from her house to his house and the whole town joins in following with torchlight—that’s the kind of joyous celebration here in this picture in John the second chapter.

In Jesus’ day they had a lovely custom. In the ceremony the bride and groom are both crowned with leaves of Laurels. They were crowned King and Queen for a day. In fact, in Jesus day, their reception last a whole week.

If you haven’t been to a Jewish wedding it’s almost like an Italian wedding. Have you ever been to an Italian wedding? Spare no expense, mortgage the house, get the biggest white dress you can and then a party afterwards that would be shocking to most evangelicals, and certainly to me, and probably you. That’s the kind of event that Jesus was at and it was a great social faux pas for the host to run out of wine. In fact, in Jesus day it

was a liable offence. The guests could sue them. That's true. And so Jesus' mother whispers to Jesus, "The wine has run out."

Now did she whisper it or did she say it loud enough that others would hear?

Because, you see, it was a poor party and they didn't have enough, or maybe Jesus and his twelve unexpected guests kind of made things run out. I'm not too sure but I think she may have said it a little bit loudly, as if to say, "Good-bye Son, and take your friends with you."

It's kind of like the uncles that I had who grew up in the thirties during the depression. When they had company over in the dirty thirties and everyone was poor the mother would say to the boys, "Now," (and there was seven boys), "Sons, when the meat is being passed just say, "No thank-you, I'm not hungry," and then there will be enough for our guests. When the meat was passed and the guests had enough then she would say at the end of the meal, "and those that didn't eat their meat don't get any dessert." (Laughter) Well, one suspects that's a little bit of what is going on when Jesus' mother says, "the wine has run out—time to go." How would you feel if your son brought twelve extra guests unexpected for dinner today? There's no room at the table. There's no room for an extra table.

Now, what do we do when the wine of life runs out? I'm speaking symbolically here. What do you do? Where will you go when the wine runs out? And friends, the wine always runs out in life. The wine of pleasure always runs out. I mentioned that one of the major problems of young people is addiction to alcohol and drugs. And pleasure . . . we live as if there's no tomorrow but we always pay for it.

I'm thinking of a young girl, I'll call her Jill, who indulged too much in the parties of life, and the wild life. She rebelled against her parents and against her religion and she found herself pregnant and she found herself alone because her boyfriend who promised to be with

her always—left. And she had to finish high school. Now she's on welfare. What do you do when the wine of life runs out?

Or I'm thinking of a business man, who I'll call Bill, who's an entrepreneur, who when he was in grade twelve wrote a list of all the things he wanted to achieve but now he's forty-two and he realizes he's not going to make it to the top. He'll never be the president. And while he hoped to own a million he realizes that he owes about half of that. What do you do when the wine of life runs out? And by the way, mid-life crisis is that crisis that men come to often when they realize that they're half way through and they're not going to get to where they achieved. The wine of life is run out. Paul Goodman, says that seventy-five percent of men hate their jobs and about ten percent are working on an assembly line and they wish they were someplace else.

And then there is another kind of person. They go through life desperately disappointed. What do you when the wine runs out of life?

Or I'm thinking of a couple. . . . By the way, it was beautiful last Sunday night to have a couple stand here for marriage and they'd been married a number of years but every five years they come together to renew their wedding vows. And you know, I think that's even more precious than the first time because the first time we don't know what we're getting in to! But he was saying to her, in effect, "I love you so much and if I had to do it all over again I would. And they put the rings on again, and it was touching.

But what about those families who were married in bliss and great promise and hope but something's gone sour? And while I believe that all marriages have hope if both are willing to give themselves to Jesus Christ and to each other, what about those families where

one is committed, and the other isn't? Ho-hum husbands and worn out wives. What do you do when the wine of life runs out?

Or I'm thinking about a man who has achieved everything in life. He's fifty and he's got to the top. He's the president. And he's got everything but he doesn't have Jesus Christ. And he's got all the things on his wish list but now he says, "Now that I have everything I want, I don't know what I really, really want." He's got everything but he's got nothing because he doesn't have Jesus. What do you do when the wine of life runs out?

Or what do you do when you're seventy years of age and you've been in church all your life and you want to believe and you think you believe but you're facing death and you don't know if you can really believe that stuff anymore. And you wonder if Jesus really is true and if there really is a heaven. You've got religion, but you don't really have the real thing and the assurance of salvation. What do you do when the wine of life runs out?

Or what about a person who's tired of church and they've been hurt by church. You know church can hurt people. I love this church and I love my denomination but you know what? Whatever church you go to, even this one, eventually you'll get hurt. In fact, eventually I will disappoint you, not intentionally, but I disappoint myself all the time and I'm sure I disappoint God. And so, no matter what church you go to, you'll be disappointed sometime. In fact, much of what we call church growth is really church hop. People jumping like frogs from one church to another until they're hurt and they move again. If all you've got is religion and you don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ then the wine's going to run out.

In fact, the context of this story is religion. Empty religion! It says that there were six pots for water—empty! Stone jars. And there's a parenthesis. The Scripture says that

they were the stone jars used in purification. They symbolized the Jewish religion—it's emptiness. And six is the number of incompleteness. Seven is the number of God and completeness. But six stands for man. Empty jars of religion symbolizing emptiness of religion without rebirth and transformation in Jesus Christ. You might be here today and the church has hurt you, and all you've got is religion. The wine is going to run out if it hasn't already.

Well, where do we go when the wine of life runs out? Mary, Jesus' mother knew exactly where to go. She went to Jesus Christ and she told the servants, "What ever he says, you do it"! And later the disciples would know where to go too. When everyone else was leaving him, Jesus said, "Are you going to leave too?" And they replied saying, "Where else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Where do you go when the wine of life runs out? You go to Jesus Christ! Because he is the one who turns water into wine. He is the one who turns the flavorless, tasteless, colorlessness of the water of earth into the wine of heaven. Jesus is the one who takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Who takes the water of life and turns it into the sparkling, effervescent, life-giving wine of heaven.

The story of Jesus turning the water into wine is a true story. It's a special moment that happened in a certain place on a certain day and the hand of certain man—Jesus. And if you haven't already guessed, this story about a miracle isn't just about what happened then but what still happens. The turning of water into wine is the turning of lives transformed by Jesus Christ into something new and refreshing, filled with joy.

In the Old Testament, wine was the symbol of joy and was poured out at the altar as a sacrifice to God. And the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and goodness, and faith. The

Scripture speaks of wine as symbolic of the Holy Spirit himself. In Ephesians we read, “be not drunk with wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Be filled with the Spirit. Where do we go when the wine of life runs out? You go to Jesus Christ, because he’s the one who turns water into wine.

It was a miracle but it was a secret miracle because if you look at the text the people in the crowd, the bride, and the groom, even the toastmaster didn’t know it was a miracle. Only a few saw it. The servants saw it and the disciples from the back room saw it but it was a secret miracle. So it is with the miracle of spiritual life from above. The transformation takes place in secret behind the closed doors of the heart, in the sanctuary of the soul—there God makes a change and makes a difference. But it has evidence in changed lives.

There is a story about a burly construction worker who was up on top of the girder and it was lunch time and he opened up his lunch box and instead of pulling out a bottle of beer as he usually did today he brought out a Bible. Because, you see, he’d been to a church service like this today, and something happened and he was changed, he’d found Christ. And his work mates started making fun of him, “Do you believe all that Jesus stuff? Do you really believe the all those miracles? Do you believe that Jesus turned the water into wine?” He was a brand new convert so he didn’t know what to say but he answered well: “I don’t know if Jesus turned water into wine. I wasn’t there. All I know that he turned beer into furniture in my house.”

There’s going to be a difference when that inner transformation takes place. It’s a secret miracle but it’s a miracle nevertheless. In fact, it’s a great miracle. We read what the Scriptures say that the toastmaster said, “What’s this? Usually a person gives the good wine at first and then when the people are a little bit tipsy and can’t taste it anymore they bring out

the cheap stuff.” That’s what the Scripture says, my translation, but that’s what it’s saying. But then he said, “You have saved the best wine until last.” It’s not just a secret miracle, but it’s a great miracle.

Jesus Christ is the best wine. The wine that the world gives is good and then turns bad and then worse but what Jesus Christ offers is the very best. It’s the best wine because Jesus is the one who brings eternal joy and eternal life.

It’s the best wine not only because of its quality but also its quantity. Six jars . . . and some scholars estimate between fifteen and twenty gallons of the best wine. You know the life that Jesus offers is abundant. He says, “I’ve come to bring life and life more abundantly . . . I’m the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” John said, “In Him is life.” And the Scripture, in the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah, says we’re to “draw deeply and drink of the wells of salvation.” Some people just sip at salvation but they never drink deeply.

Are you intoxicated with the Holy Spirit? On the day of Pentecost, they were so filled with the Holy Spirit that people thought that they were drunk.” And they were! They were drunk on the Spirit of God. They were “under the influence” of Christ. Are you enthusiastic for Christ? The word enthusiasm means *en*—“filled with,” and *theos*—“God.” To be enthusiastic is to be filled with God. Do you know what a fanatic is? It’s somebody who’s just a little bit more dedicated than you are. I want to be a fanatic for God. I want to be a fan of Jesus.

And we’re to be filled just like those pots, it says, to the very brim. Then the water turns into wine. Are you filled with God?

Well, how do you measure a church and how do you tell if its people are filled with the Holy Spirit or not? Well, people have tried to measure churches in different ways.

Sometimes people measure a church by a yardstick; how big the building is. But you can't measure that because God blesses small churches and big churches and every kind of church although we're called out to reach the lost. Some people try to measure it by a calculator; how many people are there. Some people try to measure a church by this thing here: I'm holding in my hand a decimeter. It measures loudness of sound. In other words, some people think that the louder we sing the more spiritual we are. Can you imagine anything so ridiculous as to measure a church by this contraption? Some people try to measure a church by a metronome. If we sing fast, it's good; if we sing slow, we're dead. Well, I have been a travelling evangelist and I've preached in the Bahamas, I've preached in Barbados, I've preached in Newfoundland, Labrador, I've preached all over Canada. I've preached in the United States. I've seen all kinds of worship services. And my philosophy is, "I can worship anywhere; when in Rome do as the Romans." I've been in revival meetings that have gone from six in the evening to twelve-thirty at night, where if you didn't dance in the aisles you weren't considered to be really filled with the Spirit. I've been in meetings where there's been silence and it's been like the "Holiness of the Shekina Glory." I've been in some services where there's been such a hoopla we thought we were filled with God's Spirit but you know, afterwards I wondered if it was any different than the kind of shouting that goes on at this afternoon's football game. You can't measure a church by a yardstick or by a decimeter or a metronome or a calculator. The only way to measure a church is by a thermometer. By how much love is evident. And God blesses all kinds of churches. He blesses fast and slow, and quiet and loud, and big and small. But you can tell where God's filling is when God's presence is in people's lives.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with Jesus and to become like him, to become Christ-like. That's what it means to be filled.

Well, Jesus went to a party and we're shocked. And the party is a symbol of God and we're even more shocked. The wine runs out and we know where to go. It's Jesus Christ because he's the one who turns the water into wine. It's a secret miracle, but it's a great miracle.

The last thing I want to say is this: It's a miracle that still happens! It says this was "the beginning of miracles." The first miracle that Jesus ever performed but not the end, just the beginning. And every time somebody commits their life to Jesus Christ that miracle happens again. It happened last week when somebody gave their heart and faith to Jesus Christ. It can happen today.

Notice in the Scripture that it says, "the servants saw," and they knew what had happened, "but the disciples believed." Some people know but they don't believe. We can see and we can know but there's the eyesight of faith that only happens if we yield our hearts to Christ. It happens if we allow the Holy Spirit to grant us the gift of faith. Some of the servants just saw and they knew but they didn't know what to make of it. Others saw the Glory of God and it says, "They believed." The Gospel of John was written it says, "that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and having him, have eternal life." Will you believe in him and be changed from within?

I conclude with a story that Sidlow Baxter used to tell—A Scottish preacher, who wrote, "Explore The Book." Sidlow Baxter used to love to tell the story of the Vicar of the Anglican Church, who's curiosity was aroused when he would look out and see, everyday for a number of days, a certain stranger come into his church at exactly twelve-thirty. And this

man was a workman, an older man. He'd obviously known the calluses of life. He was coming in on his work break, perhaps from a construction job or something. You could tell he wasn't a regular church person by his unfamiliarity with the circumstances but he just came to the altar every day at twelve-thirty. At the altar rail where communion was served and he would simply grab hold of the altar and look at the communion table and the picture of Jesus. He didn't have the theology to do a correct sinner's prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Come into my heart. Be my Sav. . . ." But he had the faith of the thief on the cross who prayed a two-word sinner's prayer, "Remember me." This man too in his own way prayed a three-word sinner's prayer. Each day he'd come and grab the communion rail and say, "Jesus, it's Jim," and bow his head in repentance and faith.

And day after day he'd come and the Vicar would look into the sanctuary and hear him pray, "Jesus, it's Jim." And then later that week there was an accident at work and Jim was placed in the hospital and he was dying. And he was placed in a men's ward where there were a number of men, hardy, strong, callused men who would curse and swear and embarrass the Catholic sisters and the nurses almost to tears sometimes. They'd be afraid to go in because of all the things that would be said. You know the kind of men I'm talking about. But when Jim came there the whole ward was somehow transformed. In fact, there was laughter and joy so much that it was even bearable for the nurses to come in and the sisters. And one day, one of the Sisters was so curious. She said to one of the men, "What's brought the change in the ward? I just can't fathom it"? He said, "Oh, it's that man in the fifth bed." She went down and talked to the man in the fifth bed, Jim. And she said, "What's happened here? You're so full of joy that it's just infected the whole room."

He said, “Well, I’ll try to explain but I don’t think you’ll be able to understand. But everyday at twelve-thirty, there’s a man that comes to the end of my bed and he’s wearing white robes and he has a beard and I see him grab hold of the end of bed, the white iron rail and I hear him say three words, “Jim, it’s Jesus.”

You can come to God today. Just say your name. “Jesus, it’s Henry.” “Jesus, it’s Mary.” “Jesus, it’s Bob.” And you don’t have to have the right words but God will hear your heart. And the transformation of water into wine will happen into your soul.

NOBODY LIKE JESUS

Sunday, November 23, 1997

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded on our radio broadcast, "Journey of the Soul." As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. This particular sermon was memorized and delivered almost verbatim, without the use of pulpit or notes.

God is politically correct, but Jesus is not. What I mean is this: the term "God: loosely defined, vaguely defined, as the creator is generic enough that theists of all descriptions and kinds can agree to that whether they're Christian, or Muslim, or Jew, or even New Ager. Almost all can agree the word "God" is OK. But as soon as you drop the word "Jesus" people get offended. Have you noticed that? Why is it that in every language around the globe, even in countries that don't believe that Jesus exists, such as communist countries, the name Jesus or Christ is used as a swear word, and curse?

What is it about Jesus that's different than all the rest? Why is it that we can talk casually in conversation about philosophers such as Aristotle, or Socrates, or Plato, or modern philosophers, and nobody is offended? We're all tolerant. Or we can talk about religious leaders such as Mohammed, and Confucius, and Buddha, or so forth, and nobody is offended? Everyone is tolerant. But as soon as we mention that Jesus is Lord, suddenly we're the one's that are intolerant. And others become intolerant of us. We mention the name Jesus and it's like dropping a bomb and people are offended. And if we complain about the swearing at work, or the swearing at school, we're looked at as if there's something wrong with us?

What is it about Jesus that makes him stand out from every other person? One historian has tried to calculate the population of the earth throughout all history, taking the

population of today and extrapolating it back in time. He estimates that the total population of the earth through all time is about sixty billion souls. From the beginning of time until now there have been about sixty billion live and die upon this earth. What I'm saying today is this: Jesus is not just one among the sixty billion, he's the one in sixty billion! There's nobody like Jesus. He's different from all the rest.

Other religious leaders claimed to be teachers, moral examples, leaders, founders of religion, but Jesus Christ is different, because he claimed to be God. And everything Jesus did and said hangs on the credibility of that claim. It's a true or false answer; there's no in between. Jesus either is who he says he is, or as C. S. Lewis says, "he's a lunatic, a liar, or something worse."

What is it about Jesus that's different? Jesus is more than just a man, more than just a teacher, more than just an example, more than just a great figure of history. Jesus is more than a man among men, or a godly man, he's the God-man. He's God among men. Jesus is the one in sixty billion. There's nobody like Jesus.

Now let's look to the story found in Acts chapter two, just three verses, verses twenty-two, twenty-three, and twenty-four, and hear Peter preaching the first sermon ever preached after the resurrection of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit, he tells the life story of Jesus in broad and sweeping terms. In three sentences he sums up everything about Jesus that John took twenty-one chapters to describe; Matthew, twenty-eight chapters to describe; Mark, fourteen chapters to describe, and Luke, twenty-four chapters to describe. He sums up the whole life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in three sentences. In essence, we have the drama of Jesus in three acts, three sentences, and only about ninety words, according to some translations. Listen now as I read:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him, in your midst, as you yourselves know—Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that death should be held my it. (NKJV)

And there we have it. In three sentences, three acts, the drama of Jesus' life. And if I were to cast a title over verse twenty-two, the first Act of Jesus' life would be this: "Nobody Ever Lived Like Jesus." Nobody! Nobody ever lived like Jesus. Wherever Jesus went a wake of miracles followed in his path. People once blind, now seeing; once lame, now leaping; once deaf, now hearing; once dumb, now singing; once dead, now living. Wherever Jesus goes he leaves a wake of miracles.

Nobody ever did the kinds of things Jesus did. The miracles of Jesus are an avalanche that follows him wherever he goes. In the Old Testament we have miracles, and great miracles, but they're scattered over many centuries, and over a large geographic era. Some have said that Jesus, perhaps, performed more miracles in one week than all the Old Testament miracles combined. We have thirty-six miracles that are individually described in the New Testament. The Bible says, "that all the books of the world couldn't contain the stories about Jesus." Beyond those thirty-six individually miracles, we have a host of miracles mentioned that could be described as mass miracles, such as when he went out at sunset one night in Capernaum . . . Mark's Gospel, chapter 1 tells the story . . . "and the whole city was gathered at his door, the sick, the diseased, the demon possessed, and he healed them." And according to Matthew's account he "healed them all."

Then there were the crowds that gathered around him, one day on a hillside and he fed the multitudes without bread. Five thousand is the number, but that's only the men—

possibly five thousand women, maybe five thousand children, at least, perhaps more. Fifteen or twenty thousand people fed from a few loaves and fishes! And yet baskets of leftovers.

Or another day . . . there's a storm, and wind, and waves, and lightening, and Jesus speaks, and it's calm. Three times it is recorded that Jesus raised the dead, one of whom, Lazareth who was in the grave for four days.

The amazing thing is this avalanche of miracles cascading around him is so great in magnitude that even the enemies of Jesus Christ cannot argue against it. The enemies of Jesus in the Bible, and the enemies outside of the Bible, that is extra biblical material dating from the time or around the time of Christ, nowhere indicates that they ever refuted the reality of Christ's miracles.

There is a famous Sanhedrin document dating from around the time of Christ that purports the reason for the execution of Jesus. It says this: "this Yeshua (that is Jesus) has committed sorcery and lead Israel astray." Those are the words of the enemies of Christ. That ancient document calling Jesus a sorcerer is thought by some to be a backhanded compliment to the miracles of Jesus Christ. Even the enemies of Christ did not deny the miracles, and neither should we. You see the question is not, "Did Jesus perform miracles"? He did. The question is, "How"? Was it by psychic power, or by Satanic power, or by the finger of God? Only faith can determine that.

In the Gospel of St. John, every time a miracle occurs, John uses a unique word—the word "sign." Because that's what a miracle is. It's a sign, and a sign is a post, a marker pointing to something else for those who are looking in the right direction. It takes faith. Signs in themselves are not proof, but they point in the direction of something greater—Jesus himself. Nobody ever lived like Jesus Christ.

The idea has often been expressed: Jesus never wrote a book, and yet he is the source of more literature and the inspiration of more literature than any other human being in the entire world. His biography, the New Testament, has been reproduced in one thousand, five-hundred languages, perhaps more since I looked up that figure, and it's the most published book in the entire world. The Bible is the best seller every year.

Jesus never owned a piece of property. He had to borrow a donkey. He had to borrow a cross. He had to borrow a grave. He even had to borrow a coin to use as an illustration one day. He never owned any property, and yet all around the world there are buildings dedicated to him. He never raised an army, and yet millions have died for his cause. This century alone an average of three hundred and thirty thousand people are martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ, every year in this century.

Jesus taught in just one country and yet today there's a missionary organization that claims they have flights to more countries on a regular basis than any commercial airline in the world. Jesus taught to only a few thousand people in his lifetime, and yet there are radio companies that are strictly devoted to ministries, and television ministries strictly devoted to the proclamation of the gospel around the world. There are satellites in space that are devoted to God and used for the worldwide proclamation of Jesus Christ.

His followers numbered just a handful, a dozen or so at first, and then perhaps a few thousand, and after his death only a hundred and twenty could be found on the day of Pentecost, until after the Holy Spirit came, and more followed, and more and more and more. But today, are you ready for this? There are one billion six-hundred and twenty-million people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. That is over one third of the population of

planet earth. The largest religion that the world has ever known is that of the followers of Jesus Christ. Nobody has ever lived like Jesus.

Someone has said, his life could be neither fraud nor fiction, because it would take a greater than Jesus to invent Jesus. Nobody ever lived like Jesus. And you know what? The proof of the reality of Christ doesn't exist just in the pages of this book. It is not found only in the testimonies of millions of changed lives. The truth is not found in all the edifices of buildings, temples, and churches dedicated to Christ, pointing to heaven all around the globe; the real evidence for Jesus Christ is right here (pointing to the heart). It's self-evident. The truth of Christ is soul-evident. Because whenever we hear the gospel there's something in the soul that resonates. There is something in your heart. It rings true.

It was the blind teacher, and noted Christian, Helen Keller who said "the most beautiful and perfect things in life can neither be touched nor seen, but must be felt within the heart." Whenever we look at Jesus, there's something in our hearts that's drawn to him. Do you know why? It's because God created you in the image of God. The Bible in the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Stamped upon your soul is the image of Jesus. The imprint of Christ, like a signet ring, is stamped upon you, and you're not complete until you're reunited with Jesus Christ.

I was shopping for a suit in the United States. I remember looking into a certain mirror and I thought what I was trying on looked good. In fact, I thought it looked too good. In fact, I thought, "I looked better than real." And I was! . . . because it was a concave mirror that made me look a little taller and a little thinner. I bet they sell a lot of suits (laughter from the congregation)!

You know, today everybody's challenged in some way or another. People are mentally challenged. The poor are no longer poor, they are financially challenged, that's all of us. The bald are no longer bald, they are follically challenged. And I happened to be challenged in two ways, at least: I'm horizontally challenged, and vertically challenged, which does not mean that I'm too fat but it means I'm not tall enough for my God given-weight (laughter)! And so I was looking in this mirror and I was perfect. I didn't buy the suit but I walked by the mirror a six times (laughter)!

Listen, when you look at Jesus Christ you're looking at the you! . . . the You, you were meant to be, before the fall. You're looking at the life you should have lived without the poison of sin. When you look at Jesus, you're looking at the person you long most to be like because the image of Jesus is stamped upon your soul.

Jesus performed miracles and some think that a miracle is something that goes against the law of nature, a suspension of the law of nature. Nonsense! It was the restoration of nature because death is unnatural, and disease is unnatural, and devastation is unnatural. It's something caused by the fall and when Jesus came it wasn't unnatural for him to perform miracles. It was the only natural thing God could do in an unnatural world. It was the restoration of Eden, and it was a foretaste of heaven to come, and that's what happened when Jesus performed miracles. Nobody ever lived like Jesus.

Second Act of the play, verse twenty-three has this title over it: "Nobody Ever Died Like Jesus." Look at verse twenty-three of chapter two of the book of Acts: "Him being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God." God planned it. God knew about in advance and yet humankind is involved. Look at the next part, "and you have taken by lawless hands, and have crucified, and put him to death."

Nobody ever died like Jesus. There is more about Jesus' death told in advance, in the prophecies of the Old Testament, then there are in the records of history looking back at the Pharaoh's death in Egypt. All of history, and all of the archeology and all of the Egyptology, and all we know about the death of the Pharaohs, and yet there's more about Jesus told in advance by the prophets of old. Some of it is told seven hundred years in advance, such as Isaiah chapter fifty-three, telling ever detail of the Lamb of God who'd come, and suffer, and die, and rise again. The story of Jesus is told in advance, because it was in the foreknowledge of God, and foreordained of God, and yet it was by human will, by our sin.

We can imagine a little of the physical agony that Jesus must have endured on the cross: the nails piercing his hands and his feet; the lash that shreds his back; the crown of thorns; the humiliation of the nakedness; the hanging in agony. They tell me that most people who die by crucifixion die by asphyxiation because it's so painful to breathe being stretched on a cross.

We can imagine something of that pain but we can't begin to imagine the spiritual agony as Jesus, the Son of God. And God the Son entered into the collective unconsciousness of the entire human race, past, present and future, and he took upon himself the guilt of every sin, every hideous crime that has ever been committed—every rape, every child molestation, every murder, every sinful thought that we have ever had, every lie that we have ever told, every sin was laid upon Christ.

And Jesus died twice! You see there's two deaths in the Bible. There's the physical death, and then there's something called the second death. Hell is described as the second death. And Jesus tasted the second death on our behalf. He entered into the outer darkness.

The day Jesus died there was darkness for three hours—midnight at midday! The cross stands beneath the shadow of the last judgement. He paid for my sin—your sin.

When I was a boy growing up in London Ontario there was a terrible ice storm. I was only about five or six years old and I remember it like yesterday. The electricity was out for about a week. We had to warm up bricks in a neighbor's oven and put them in our bed at night to keep warm. I remember seeing the military tanks and tractor vehicles roaming the streets because they were the only thing that could move. I'll never forget watching CBC channel ten News, when it was all over. When they were plowing the 401 highway they found a car partially buried in snow bank. They thought it was abandoned but it wasn't. In the back seat of the car they found a couple, a man and woman in huddled embrace. And when they pried apart the frozen figures they heard a muffled cry. It was a baby. Protected, sheltered beneath this couple, there was a little baby—alive. Mom and Dad literally laid down their life for the one they loved more than life (long pause). That's like Jesus. He loved you more than his own life. He laid down his life so that you can live forever if you trust in him.

Say it with me, those that know it: "God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." And the tragedy of tragedies is that there might be somebody here today who is listening to my voice and yet you don't even hear it. Nobody ever died like Jesus.

The last thing I want to say to you is the best news of all because nobody lived like Jesus, and nobody died like Jesus. . . . You can almost feel what I'm going to say coming on, can't you? You can almost say it with me. Nobody, but nobody ever rose from the dead like Jesus.

He died for your sins. Yes. But he rose from the dead and he's alive. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not fantasy, fiction, but fact. He was seen by many witnesses, by the twelve, by the women, by over five hundred brethren in one place at one time. Dr. Sanday has said that "no hallucination of the senses, no mere apparition has ever yet moved the world." The resurrection of Jesus Christ is different than a resuscitation, or any other resurrection that preceded it. The resurrection of Lazareth was the raising to life of a corpse who went back in the grave a few years later but the raising of Jesus was to a whole new level of existence. Jesus rose never to die again. He ascended into heaven and he lives on. Even the very nature of the mysterious resurrection body of Jesus is beyond our comprehending. It was physical; yes. He said, "you can touch my body, feel it, a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones." And yet it passed through walls in a room with closed doors, locked doors. He appeared again and again for forty days and afterwards as well.

In the book of the Acts, when Paul saw him on the Damascus Road, he appeared as light and in the book of the Revelation chapter one, he appears to John on the isle of Patmos as a glowing light. You see Jesus didn't just resuscitate from the dead. He is resurrected. Christ's resurrection is a foretaste of the glory to come. And the Scriptures say this, "because Jesus lives, you can live too."

I conducted a funeral yesterday. It's always sad. I stood here before people and tried to say words of comfort. Then we went our cemetery, the cemetery of the church. I saw names familiar, some unfamiliar. Some Russian names, some I might not even be able to pronounce; German names; names of various backgrounds, but some very familiar: names like Sutter, Schultze, Jespersen, others. And though it was my first time there yesterday, at

that cemetery, I thought of all the sadness that there must have been, and the other occasions, families gathered, saying “good-bye—farewell.”

And then I remembered something that happened in nineteen eighty-two. There was a famous gravestone built. The largest gravestone perhaps in the history of the world. A huge wall. A black granite wall built in Washington, D. C.—the Vietnam Memorial. On that wall is written the name of every soldier, man and women who perished in that tragic war. Fifty-eight thousand one hundred fifty-six names are on that wall. It’s a continual pilgrimage. I’ve seen it. A continuous pilgrimage of people who’ve come to mourn, and read the names of their loved one, and there weep. It has become America’s wailing wall. I remembered also that in nineteen eighty-two there were three soldiers who went there not to weep. Their names were Robert Begeun, Williard Craig, and Darrel Launche, and they went there, yes to weep for their friends and mates who had fallen in the war, but they went there to see their own names. Their names were put there by mistake. They were thought to be missing in action but they weren’t lost. They were presumed dead, but they weren’t dead. They went to stand by their own grave and just laugh and rejoice in being alive.

I thought also of Mark Twain, whose obituary was mistakenly put in the paper before he died, and you remember his comment? He wrote back to the newspaper and said these words, “Rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated” (laughter). Friends, in my mind I want to stand beside the gravestone that hasn’t been built for me. In your mind you can stand beside the gravestone that someday may have your name on it. And in your mind I want you to speak to that stone and say this: “Rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated.” Friends, if you’re alive in Jesus Christ, you’re alive forever. Do you believe that?

Someday Jesus Christ is going to bring a new heaven and a new earth. And if you're a Christian you'll never be lowered in a grave. Your body will but you won't. If you're a Christian you'll never die. Your body will, but you won't because the moment we die our spirit goes to God and we live forever with Jesus Christ.

Nobody ever lived like Jesus; nobody ever died like Jesus; and nobody was ever raised from the dead like Jesus. It reminds me of a certain funeral in the Bahamas when the black preacher got carried away and jumped over the communion rail, and he pounded the coffin, and said, pointing to the lady who was in the coffin: "She die good . . . She live good . . . She gonna be raise good!" And because he died a death as nobody else and because he's risen from the dead as nobody else, we are going to live forever with him. Do you believe that?

The response to Peter's sermon was staggering. The story tells us they were "pierced in their hearts." They were convicted and then they believed, and three thousand came forward publicly to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You see, it's an inward decision, a public declaration, and a new spiritual dimension.

“WATER OF LIFE.”
or
COME TO LIFE

November 30, 1997

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded for our radio broadcast, “Journey of the Soul.” As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. With the exception of the final illustration, the following message was delivered without notes in an extemporaneous fashion.

It was a Cinderella story of classic proportions. The story of the “Woman by the Well” is a Cinderella story. It is almost the archetype because she comes to Jesus out of the ashes and the burned up cinders of a failed life. She comes to a well and meets the Prince of Peace and she’s forgiven, and her life is changed forever. It is a Cinderella story, a classic.

The story of Princess Diana was a Cinderella story of sorts. Her story begins with a fairy tale wedding, the storybook wedding, the “Princess Bride,” and all the ingredients for a happily-ever-after ending. And the whole world rejoiced. But then the story went astray. It wasn’t supposed to end in divorce. It wasn’t suppose to end in tragic death and if the we were shocked at her premature death we were even more shocked by the unprecedented outpouring of grief from all over the world. I suppose there hasn’t been such attention to the death of one person and to their funeral since the days of Rameses the Second, Pharaoh of Egypt. Worldwide attention outpoured. Why? Well, some people speculate theories of mass psychology, and so forth. I think it’s a little bit of this: we not only mourn for a person but we mourned for an ideal. We mourn for the death of a dream. When Diana died the fairy tale of happily-ever-after died too. Put bluntly, Cinderella died, and it wasn’t supposed to happen. It wasn’t supposed to happen this way.

I read this week an article that said this: “Princess Diana had everything except one thing, happiness. She wasn’t happy.” She told a friend that all the people around her, all the photographers, the Papparazzi flashing cameras at her all the time made her feel like she was being raped. She wanted to be the queen of people’s hearts, and she was, but her own heart was very sad. Well, a Cinderella story gone astray.

The story in our Scripture for today, John chapter four is a Cinderella story but with a happy ending. It’s the story of a woman who comes to a well. The picture of her standing before Jesus is symbolic of all the world standing before Christ searching for happiness.

What everybody wants is happiness but why do so few people have it? This search for happiness is translated in one word: thirst. Thirst—soul thirst. God has given you and me a thirsty soul. St. Augustine said we will “never rest until we rest in him.” Tolstoy said we have a “God shaped vacuum” in our heart. Pascal said we have a “God shaped void,” a blank in our heart that only God can fill.

When you think about it, this soul thirst is a kind of evidences that God exists. This desire that you have for happiness, meaning, purpose fulfillment, God, eternity, and immortality is the best evidence in the world that there is a God. You see, you can look to the stars in heaven, you can see all he’s created, the mountains, and you can say, “Yes, that’s evidence that God exists.” Or you can look to the Bible because it tells of God. But I think the greatest evidence is right here in the human heart (pointing to the heart. You were born with a hunger for food. God wouldn’t have given you a hunger if there weren’t food to satisfy it. You wouldn’t have thirst if there weren’t water to quench it. You wouldn’t be born to love and be loved if the possibility wasn’t there to be fulfilled and in the same way you wouldn’t thirst for God if there weren’t a God to quench that thirst.

You remember the great philosopher that said, “Because I think, I am.” Listen, because you thirst for God, there’s a God that can quench that thirst. Some of you have been searching all of your life for evidence of God. The greatest evidence that there is a God is right here, in your own heart . . . because you are thirsty for Him.

And thirst is an instinct that drives us all. You can live for about 50 days without food but for only seven days without water. “Forecast drought,” that’s what they are saying this year because of El Nino, which means “the little one.” Some people are calling it the big one. It is anticipated to cause the biggest drought of all the century even bigger than the 1982 El Nino which cost the lives of twenty-two million people and billions of dollars around the world. So, even now in North Korea there is a drought. In various places they are expecting droughts and fires: in South America and Australia because of the effects of El Nino. There is a spiritual drought in Alberta and in Canada and in Spruce Grove and in Edmonton as people are thirsty for God.

Why is it that we all want happiness but so many people never find it? Perhaps the answer lies in where we are looking. Jesus pointed to the well, symbolizing all the pleasures and things of this world and he said, “Drink of this water and you will thirst again.” And be guaranteed it’s always true.

People try to quench the thirst through entertainment. Neil Postman wrote a book rightly called “Entertaining Ourselves to Death.” And when have we had so much entertainment before? Not even the Roman Empire with the Coliseum and all the Gladiators and all the spectacles had so much entertainment then as we do today. We have a new happening called “cocooning”—the cocooning effect. If you don’t know what cocooning is it’s sitting on the couch with a pizza and a video. What happens when you have seen all the

videos and you've read all the books and you've flipped through a thousand channels and there is nothing on any of them and our soul is still thirsty?

Like John Candy, one of Canada's great comediennes. So many of the comediennes around the world originate from Canada. I don't think it's a coincidence because we are rated as number one amongst the world for being happy. We are the happiest people in the world and yet there is so much sadness. The title of John Candy's biography written after his death says it all: "Laughing On The Outside." He made millions laugh and he couldn't make himself happy. He said his ultimate goal was to have a house with a laugh machine so he could push a button and there would be applause. He had a hunger and thirst to be loved by others and to be laughed at by others. Yet, he lived life in the fast lane and he had the fear of death over him all the time because when he was five years of age his own dad died of a heart attack at thirty-five because of his obesity and overeating. He himself died at age forty-three with so much life un-lived. They say of Candy in his biography that on the outside he was always happy but on the inside he was so sad.

Like the man who came to see psychologist James Hamilton in Manchester England. He was complaining of deep depression. He said "Nothing makes me happy, nothing can amuse me Doctor if you can't help me I'm going to commit suicide." The doctor listened to his story, and this was the prescription that the doctor gave him: "You know what you need to do? You need to get out on the town and have a good laugh. Laughter will cure you. In fact, there is a circus in town and the funniest man in the world is here. He's a clown by the name of Grimaldo the Clown. Go see him, he'll cure you." The man looked up with tears in his eyes and he said, "Don't kid me doctor . . . I am Grimaldo." We can entertain

ourselves to death and it's like a well that eventually runs dry. "Drink of this water and you'll thirst again."

Or we can look to money. And the hope of the hopeless in Canada today is to win the lottery ticket at the cash register at some corner variety store with a bag of chips in your hand. If we could just win the million-dollar lottery then we'd be happy. But there are more suicides amongst millionaires than any other group. Rockefeller was once asked, "How much money does it take to satisfy you?" He said, "Always just a little bit more." We always need just a little bit more. And there is nothing wrong with being financially responsible for your children and their children, but it's not the end in life, is it? "Drink of this water and you will thirst again?" says Jesus.

Or it could be the good things in life. And in our church and in most churches today we promote family and relationships and children and marriages. So we should. But even the best of marriages, even the best of homes isn't quite enough. Because there is something missing, there's a cosmic loneliness, there is emptiness in your soul that only God can fill.

And then some people look to alcohol because they are so despairing of life that they want to escape from it. And when they become addicted then the cure is worse than the cold because the addiction is worse than what they were trying to escape from. You only need to look at an alcoholic to know that this is not the answer to life. "Drink of this water," Jesus says, "and you will thirst again."

I read of a statistic about a year and a half ago. You know what Mark Twain says about lies. There are three kinds: "white lies, black lies and statistics." So I'm not sure if it's true. But, the statistic said that there are 120 kinds of Canadian beer. Canadians are one of the leaders in beer drinkers in the world and the article said that if all of the beer that is

consumed in one year—if all of those bottles were broken open at once and poured into the Niagara river—there would be enough beer to keep the Niagara Horseshoe Falls flowing at full flow for ten minutes. I heard that one preacher quoted that statistic and then he said, “And now we all going to sing, “Shall We Gather At The River” (laughter) . . . lead by a full choir” (laughter). Seriously, “Drink of this water,” Jesus said, “and you will thirst again.”

Some people are driven even beyond addiction of alcohol to drugs. Now they have designer drugs such as crack, which was introduced about fifteen years ago. Crack is a form of distilled cocaine. Designer drugs like Phenteline, which I understand is about 100 times more powerful than cocaine, so much so that one experience with this drug is life addicting. In other words a five minute high on Phenteline and you are addicted for life. You spend the rest of your life trying to recreate that initial high and you can never do it. When we were living in the Bahamas there were some who had 1000 dollar a day habits.

Then, there are other ways we try to satisfy the thirsting of our soul. We could mention the sex revolution or we could mention fame and popularity. Judy Garland said “If I’m such a legend then how come I’m so unhappy?” Richard Chamberlain who is the Shakespearean actor and the star of so many movies such as, “Thornbirds,” and “Showgum” was asked his prescription of happiness. He said, “I’m like the old song, I’m ‘laughing on the outside and crying on the inside.’” We could mention Elvis Presley and we could go on and on and on, but we all know it’s true. “Drink of the things of this life, drink of this water and you will thirst again.”

And so we ask “Why is it that happiness is what everybody wants and yet so few have?” It’s stamped upon the constitution of the United States: “The pursuit of happiness.” I

think that constitution is just an echo of the constitution of every soul that has ever lived because we long for happiness. It's stamped upon our soul. We are driven by it. And yet why is it that we can't satisfy it? Like the rock group that sang, "I can't get no satisfaction." Why do the Rolling Stones sing that? Because all the things of this world can't satisfy. The Scripture says, "He (that is God) satisfies the hungry soul and fills the hungry soul with bread."

The reason we can't satisfy our thirst is because we're looking in the wrong place. Jesus said, "Drink of this water you will thirst again," but then he pointed to himself and said, "drink of the water that I shall give you and you shall never thirst because the water that I shall give you shall be a fountain of water springing up from within you into everlasting life."

JESUS CHRIST IS THIS LIVING WATER! . . . this effervescent, life giving, refreshing, recreative power that changes a soul from the inside out. Do you believe that? Jesus Christ is this living water that Ezekiel talked about when he saw a vision of water flowing from the throne, flowing from the altar. Jeremiah said it all when he said "You have forsaken the fountain of living water, and you have hewn out cisterns," that is empty cisterns, "that hold nothing."

The world's looking in the wrong place. We need to look to Jesus. "Drink of the water I shall give you, and you shall never thirst." In the book of Revelation we read, "He that is thirsty, come unto me." Isaiah, chapter 55: "Ho, everyone who is thirsty, come unto me." And God says, "I will pour water on dry and thirsty land." God wants to outpour a Niagara of blessings on the desert of your soul and make there a garden. And that's what he can do when Jesus comes into your heart. Jesus is this living water that changes from within.

John's Gospel chapter seven tells of a great celebration in Jerusalem. It's the last day, the great day of the festival of festivals they call the Feast of Tabernacle. Here is the picture: the celebration begins at the pool of Siloam with a great procession. All the people would be gathered, hundreds of thousands. They were lead by a great choir, and the High Priest would go ahead and they'd march down to the pool of Siloam. With a golden vase, a golden picture in his hand, the Priest would dip the pitcher into the cool clean water of the pool of Siloam, symbolizing life—life from God. Then the Priest would hold up the pitcher. He would hold it high . . . and then . . . the Priest would lead the procession and they'd march through the city. They would enter the temple and then at the climactic moment they'd sing together antiphonally these words: "Blessed is he who draws from the wells of salvation." At that moment the Priest would pour out the water at the base of the great altar as a sacrifice to God. It was then that Jesus stood forth in the crowd and "he cried with a loud cry, saying 'If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink for out of his heart will flow rivers of living water!'"

We began by saying it was a Cinderella story. And it is. A certain woman comes to Jesus out of the ashes and the cinders of a burned out life. She comes looking for water but instead she finds Jesus. And she leaves a changed person with new life and forgiveness and eternal life.

Well the story could end there but it doesn't. The chapter of the story we call "The Woman by the Well," closes here in John chapter four but the story that starts at a well leads to a cross. The pathway from the well leads straight to a cross. And we say "I don't understand?" The story doesn't end where we think it does. The Gospel always has a twist to it. There's always a surprise. There's always a turn-about, and here it is: the very person

who stood at the well and offered to quench the world's thirst ended up being the thirstiest person in the whole world. And on the cross he cried out, "I thirst!"

In John's gospel, when the woman met him by the well, the story tells us the time of day. It says, ". . . and it was the sixth hour"—noon. A small detail perhaps. Perhaps not. Why does it tell us that? Well, perhaps because it wasn't the usual hour for a woman to go to a well. She was coming alone because she was an outcast. Why does it tell us the time—noon? Because it was the hottest time of the day and the picture of the sun beating down by an Eastern well would accentuate the theme of thirst? Perhaps. But there may be another reason. Perhaps it is because phrase "the sixth hour," linked with the word "thirst" echoes later in the gospel story itself. It was at the sixth hour, the very same moment of the day, that Jesus cried out on the cross "I thirst."

Let me put it to you that Jesus had to thirst so that we would never thirst again. Why did Jesus thirst on the cross? Well, we have a hint of it in Luke's gospel of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus goes to heaven. The rich man goes to hell. In tortured flames he says, "Father Abraham, won't you send Lazarus to dip his finger in water that a drop might fall on my tongue?" In hell he cried out and he was thirsty. Hell is a thirsty place where we thirst for God and are never quenched. Let me say to you that the cross was licked by flames, and Jesus entered into the desert and the darkness of separation from God so that we might enter in to heaven. He had to thirst so that you'd never thirst again.

That's a hard concept to understand so let me give you a picture so that you can see it. I want to share a story from the writings of Max Lucado, who says it better than I can. The story is simply entitled, "Cinderella." He tells of receiving a call from a friend named Kenny. Kenny told him about something that happened at Disney World, where he and his

wife and children had traveled for their holidays. Kenny tells of how he and his family were inside Cinderella's castle. It was packed with kids and parents and suddenly all the children rushed to one side. Had it been a boat, the castle would have tipped over. Cinderella had entered. Cinderella the princess pristine. She was the perfect princess in type casting, a gorgeous young girl with each hair in place, flawless skin and a beaming smile, and she stood waist deep in children, a garden of children, each wanting to touch her and be touched by her. For some reason Kenny turned and looked toward the other side of the castle and it was vacant except for a boy maybe seven or eight years of age. His age was hard to determine because of the disfigurement of his body. Dwarfed in height and face deformed he stood watching quietly and wistfully, holding the hand of an older brother.

Do you know what he wanted? He wanted to be with the other children. He longed to be in the middle of the kids reaching for Cinderella, calling her name. But can't you just feel his fear, feel yet another rejection, the fear of being taunted again, mocked again? Don't you wish Cinderella would go to him? Guess what? She did! She noticed the little boy and turned towards him, walking in his direction, politely, but firmly inching through the crowd of children, she finally broke free. She walked quickly across the floor, knelt at eye level with a stunned little boy and placed a kiss on his face.

Reflecting on little miracle that happened one day in the land of Disney, Max Lucado says this: "It reminded me of another [story], the names are different, but the story, the same. Rather than a princess of Disney, it's the Prince of Peace. Rather than a boy in a castle, it's you and I. In both cases a gift was given. In both cases love was shared. In both cases the lovely one performed a gesture beyond words but Jesus did more than Cinderella. Oh, so much more! Cinderella gave only a kiss. When she stood to leave she took her beauty with

her. The boy was still deformed. What if Cinderella had done what Jesus did? What if she assumed his state? What if she had somehow given him her beauty and taken on his disfigurement? That's what Jesus did. The Bible says he took "our suffering on himself," and felt our pain for us. "He was wounded for the wrongs we did—crushed for the evil we did. The punishment which made us well was given to him and we are healed because of his wounds." Make no mistake, Jesus gave more than a kiss, he gave us his beauty. He paid more than a visit, he paid for our mistakes. He took more than a minute, he took away our sin. And in order that we would never thirst again he had to thirst an unquenchable thirst.

Well, what's our response? How will you respond to the offer of Jesus? The woman by the well said this, "Sir, give me this water that I might never thirst again." And that ought to be our response today too. Come with your heart. Come with your soul. Come with your all the brokenness of your life. Come with your sin and God will forgive you.

REBORN FROM ABOVE

John 3:1-18

Sunday December 7, 1997

Sermon Transcript: The following sermon represents a transcription of the Sunday morning message as recorded on our radio broadcast, “Journey of the Soul.” As such it reflects oral speech and not written communication style. For this message, a semi-full manuscript was brought into the pulpit. Parts of the sermon were read for accuracy of factual information and parts were delivered extemporaneously.

High-school student Sean McCallum knew he’d die without a heart transplant. When Sean McCallum asked God to give him a change of heart, God took him up on it—literally.

So these days, Sean, 18 marches not to the beat of a different drummer, but to the palpitations of a new pump. And he is pumped. “Life sure looks nice when you’ve had a heart transplant. Especially” says Sean, “when you consider the alternative.”

Sean looked hard into the cold face of the “alternative” back in the fall of 1991 when he lay in a Chicago hospital bed hooked up to all kinds of machines including one which served as a wiretap to his heart. Sometimes Sean would glance at the monitor just to see the wavy line blipping across the screen reassurance that his ticker was, indeed, still ticking. But Sean, who was 14 at the time knew that at any moment, that reassuring wavy line could go flat—deathly flat.

A rare virus had attacked Sean’s heart, and if the words were too technical for Sean to comprehend, these were not: “Sean, you’ve got six months to a year” the doctors said, “If you don’t get a new heart within that time, you’ll die.”

“OK,” said Sean, “So I need a heart transplant. Let’s do it.”

Then came the waiting. They don’t just keep human hearts in a refrigerator down the hall. And you can’t call up the Home Shopping Network and order one, either. New hearts are hard to come by. If you need one, you’ve got to wait for one. You’ve got to wait for a donor.

A donor. For Sean to live, someone else had to die; most likely a sudden and violent death, an automobile accident, maybe, or perhaps a shooting. And it had to be someone

young, someone who hadn't planned on dying for a long time but some who while very much alive had signed an organ donor card just in case. And for that life-giving decision, Sean is forever grateful.

Sean's new life got its start one night a few minutes after midnight on November 26, 1991. He and his favorite nurse were laughing at David Letterman's Top Ten List when another nurse came into the room to change the bags on his IV in the middle of the night. "What's going on?" Sean said, "Am I sick?" The nurses started giggling. One of them said, "He just doesn't get it does he?"

"Well?" Sean asked, "What did I miss? Tell me!" And then came the magic words: "It's time." Just a few hours earlier and just a few miles away, someone between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five had been declared brain dead as a result of a massive head injury. That anonymous someone had just what Sean had been waiting for: a perfect heart.

It took a moment for Sean to catch on. And then, as Sean puts it, "I just freaked." In his own words he said, "I'm like, here it is, the day I've been waiting for. It was like a party. It was so rad. I was so excited. And then I started shaking like you wouldn't believe. I was so nervous I'm surprised I didn't get a heart attack." "So I called up everybody I knew: 'Hi, I'm getting a heart today. Yeah!'"

The operation lasted four hours and just within weeks he was home, on Dec. 21, just in time for Christmas. Sean is one happy boy. Not only does he have a new heart physically but also spiritually. You see Sean has given his life to Jesus Christ. Not surprising this is Sean's favorite verse: Ps. 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Sean says, "Its like God made this verse just for me. It reminds me of the new heart I have, not only physically, but also spiritually."

Someone here today might be like Sean. Today is a day you will remember for all eternity. This is the day you receive a new heart, a new life in Christ. Today's the day. And like Sean, in order for you to live someone else had to die. That someone is Jesus. He died that we might have spiritual life and life eternal.

In our story that we read earlier in John chapter 3, we meet a man. His name is Nicodemus. He came to Jesus. He came to talk about Religion and instead Jesus talked to him about Rebirth. He wanted to talk about church and Jesus said, "Be changed."

Nicodemus is a Representative of a Religion of Law. That says the way to heaven is by rules and regulations and rituals. Jesus said, No. It is by rebirth. He simple said, "Be changed."

The story of Nicodemus as found in John chapter 3 is a story of new life for a dead man. The Bible declares that all of us are "dead men walking" and "dead women walking," dead in trespasses and sins until we become alive to God through spiritual rebirth. And God says to all of us, "Be changed. Come alive."

When the Chinese dictator Mao Zedong died in 1976, his physician, Dr. Li Zhisui, was given an impossible task. The Politburo demanded, "The chairman's body is to be permanently preserved." The staff objected. The doctor objected. He had seen the dry and shrunken remains of Lenin and Stalin. He knew a body with no life was doomed to rot.

But he had his commands. Twenty-two liters of formaldehyde were pumped into the body. The result was horrifying. Mao's face swelled up like a ball, and his neck was as thick as his head. His ears stuck out at right angles and the chemical oozed from his pores. A team of embalmers worked for five hours with towels and cotton balls to force the liquids down into his body. Finally the face looked normal, but the chest was so swollen that his jacket had to be slit in the back and his body covered with the Red Communist Party flag.

That sufficed for the funeral but the powers above wanted the body permanently preserved to lie in state at Tianamen Square. For a year Dr. Zhisui supervised a team working in an underground hospital as they tried to preserve the remains. Because of the futility of the task a government official ordered that an identical wax dummy be made. Both the body and the replica were taken to the mausoleum in Tianamen Square. Tens of thousands came to file past a crystal casket and pay their respects to the man who'd ruled China for twenty-seven years. But even the doctor didn't know if they were seeing Mao or a waxwork dummy.

And we laugh and say how foolish but that is the way of all humanity. It is the quest of the workaholic, the desire of the alcoholic, the pleasureaholic, not to pump formaldehyde into a dead corpse but to pump life into a soul. And we are just foolish enough to keep ourselves trying a bit longer. Sometimes even we don't know if people are seeing the real self or a wax figure.

Max Lucado has said,

A dead flower has no life
 A dead body has no life.
 A dead soul has no life.

Look with me now at the Scriptures. John 3:1

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

And so in one sentence Jesus sweeps away all that Nicodemus stood for, and demands that he be re-made by the power of God.

What does it mean to be born again? The New Testament word is the word "*anōthen*" which means to be born from above. It means to be born anew. It has a double meaning. It means to be born a second time indicating the nature of the new birth. But it also means to be "born from above" indicating the source of the new birth. It means to be "born from God, reborn from above." It is a radical rebirth. To be so changed inwardly from the Spirit of God that the only way to talk about it is in terms of new life from above. To be reborn means to be changed.

Martin Luther was a Nicodemus of another age. He spent his life trying to please God by good works, by religion, by rules, by regulations, and penance. But in his search for God he found himself even more distant from the Father. Until he ceased from trusting himself and commenced trusting in God's grace and experienced a spiritual rebirth. Almost in passing he wrote these now famous words in his journal: "Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through gates that had been flung open."

And so Nicodemus had come to speak to Jesus about religion and instead Jesus spoke to him about spiritual rebirth. He said "Be reborn from above. Be changed!"

Nicodemus was baffled and so are we:

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

He misunderstood. It could be that he truly misunderstood by taking Jesus' words too literally or it could be that he chose to misunderstand because he couldn't believe it. "How

can a man be born when he is old . . . how can a man like me be changed?" And the answer is, it is impossible, humanly. And yet that is exactly what Jesus says is not only possible but absolutely necessary. "Do not be amazed," says Jesus, "that I say to you . . . you must be reborn from above."

The most impossible task in the world is this business of change, to change ourselves. Someone has said, "I am all that the years have made me." And so we too ask, "How can a man be born when he is old? How can a person like me be changed?"

So a thought, and you reap an act.
Sow an act, and you reap a habit.
So a habit and you reap a character.
So a character, and you reap a destiny.

And so we say to ourselves, "This is what I have made of my life and nothing can change it now." But grace amazing, the good news of the gospel is this: with God change is possible. With God change happens. Change happens because grace happens. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation."

Nicodemus is baffled and so are we today. Its unfortunate that the term "born again" has been so used, abused, misused and misunderstood and bandied about that it has become a term of confusion. The term today is used to label everything from right wing politically conservative ultra-fundamentalists on one hand to new age reincarnationists on the other. On one hand we read statistics about the number of born again Baptists and on the other we read in the newspapers about an active Montreal Stripper who claims to be born again. She claims a form of spirituality divorced from morality. It's no wonder that people are confused. And so Nicodemus was baffled and so are we.

And so Jesus clarifies what he means by spiritual rebirth. t is a spiritual birth. It's a mysterious birth. It is Spiritual in nature:

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

What does it mean to be born of water? Jesus is probably referring to the baptism of John the Baptist, a baptism of repentance. Water stands for cleansing. It stands for purification. Baptism is a symbol of washing away of our sins. It is a symbol and no more. It is an outward symbol of an inward reality, a symbol points beyond to something else. Even John the Baptizer knew that. He said, "I indeed have baptized with water but one is coming, the latches of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." The context of those words make it clear that John was speaking of both repentance and rebirth. And so Jesus says you must be born of water and of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that is emphasized in the text. To be born of the spirit means to be regenerated, renewed, and remade by the power of God. He says, "You must be born of the Spirit." It's a spiritual birth.

It is a mysterious birth as well. Jesus compares it to the mystery of the wind:

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

Lost in the translation is a play on words because both in the Old Testament and in the New the word for *spirit* and *wind* or *breath* is the same word. Spirit is the intimate breath of God. God who breathed upon Adam and he became a living soul breathes upon us and we are reborn from above.

And so Jesus compares rebirth to the unpredictable nature of the wind to illustrate the spontaneity of God's divine action in renewing man's spiritual nature. Rebirth is experienced differently by different people. For some it is like a hurricane, for others it is like a gentle breeze. God breaks in and who can guess how. So God's Spirit comes upon different people in different ways.

For some, it the change is like night and day, black and white. It's dramatic. For others it is not so dramatic but just as real. It is like the gentle opening of a rose to the warmth the summer sun.

The conversion of the disciples is a case in point. One of the great mysteries of the New Testament is the question, "When and where the disciples born again?" Was it that first moment when Jesus came by the Sea of Galilee and said "Follow me," and immediately they left their nets and followed him, even though they did not yet know who Jesus was? Or was

it later, two and a half years later when they first discovered he was the Messiah, at Caesarea when Peter confessed on their behalf: “Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God?” And Jesus said, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father.” Was that the moment of their conversion? Possibly. Or was it Easter Sunday when they knew him fully as the resurrected one? And after upbraiding them for their unbelief, we read, “. . . they saw the Lord and believed.” Was that the moment they were converted? Or was it later on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit filled them and they were so altered in their character and personhood that they were like new people? The point is we don’t know when and the Bible doesn’t tell us where they were converted. We only know they were.

Perhaps the most dramatic conversion, the archetype of the classic conversion experience, is that of Saint Paul who was blinded by a light on the way to Damascus. But if we look closely at that story we find even this story is not as clear to “where and when” as we might think. Was Paul spiritual reborn on the Damascus Road, or was it three days later when Ananias came laid hands on him and his sight was restored? We don’t know. Even in the most black and white case, it is never as white and black as we might presume. There is a mystery about the new birth that defies our theology. And why not? Because God himself is mysterious and bigger than any of the boxes we make to confine him.

Someone has said that man is always attempting to “systematize the working of the Spirit, to cut man-made channels for the living water that leaps and laughs and sparkles,” But whenever we make such an attempt the living water overflows its banks and cannot be contained.

And so Nicodemus is baffled and Jesus clarifies a little what he means by rebirth saying that it is both spiritual in nature and utterly mysterious. Like the wind itself.

And how does Nicodemus respond? If he was baffled before, he is completely bewildered now. He says, “How can this be?” And if he is bewildered we can hardly blame him. It takes spiritual eyes to see spiritual truth. If he is bewildered we can hardly blame him because so are we. We are bewildered too: We confuse feeling with faith. We confuse formula for grace.

I heard about a man who came to the altar of church following the evangelistic invitation. And when he got there he didn't know what to do in order to find faith. Some well-meaning brother said, "Hold on. Just hold on." Then someone else came along side and said, "Just let go. Let go brother." And then someone else gave advice: "Get down brother. Get down." Another one came along side and said, "Stand up and shout!" Years later, reflected upon the moment of his spiritual rebirth, he said to a friend, "You know between holding on and letting go and getting down and standing up its amazing found faith at" (laughter).

Spiritual rebirth is not some simple formula. You can walk a dozen aisles and be no more saved than the pew that your sitting in. And there are no magic words. No magic words, no incantation, no mantra that if you just say this it will be OK. I often lead people in a prayer of faith to help them begin their journey with God. I preface it with these words: "Saying the prayer will not save but meaning it will."

And so Nicodemus is baffled and bewildered but not yet reborn. But if it is a mystery how spiritual rebirth comes uniquely to the individual soul, it is no mystery how God makes rebirth possible for the whole world.

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And here is the paradox Grace: Life comes through death. It is only the death of God's Son that makes spiritual life and eternal life possible. Through death—life. Life comes through death. Life, spiritual life, eternal life comes through death. Jesus' death brings our new life. It is a paradox. The paradox of grace, grace amazing.

But here is the rub: If grace is amazing it is also dangerous. For whenever grace is offered ungrace becomes a possibility. It is dangerous grace. With the possibility of eternal life also comes the possibility of eternal death. One word stands out in the text: It is the word

“perish.” “Whoever believes might not perish.” And so the alternatives are set. They are life and death. To perish means to be banished to the outer darkness. And Hell by definition is eternal separation from God. If we live in ungrace and die in ungrace we will remain forever in a state of ungrace. The choice is up to us. Listen to the dangerous side of grace in the concluding words of Jesus:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

God's wish is that all might find eternal life but he does not force his will upon you. “He is not willing that any should perish but that all might come unto repentance.” While God wants you to be saved, you have to will it. “Whosoever will let him come unto me.” And grace is dangerous, because his love is so great that he gives us a gift called free choice, the ability to say “No.” And so grace is amazing but it is dangerous too, the Dangerous grace of God.

And unbelief is not always unbelief. When we turn away from Christ it is not so much that we can't believe but that we don't want to. “Men loved darkness because their deeds were evil.” As someone has said: “A great proportion of honest doubt is not honest at all. It does not arise in intellectual perplexity but in moral perversity and in a refusal to see what we do not want to see.” And so rather than come out into the glaring sunlight we shrink back to the friendly darkness where we feel at home. As someone has said, “Many exaggerate their doubts to excuse themselves from action.”

Aldous Huxley in his book “Ends and Means” put it this way:

I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption Those who detect no meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that the world should be meaningless. . . We objected to morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.

And so we try to laugh God out of court through our unbelief but in the end we cast judgement on ourselves.

And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Baffled, bewildered, or believing and reborn from above? What about you? Correy Ten Boom once said "If Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not in me, then I would still be lost." Is Christ born in you?

The story of Bill Wilson makes it clear that God is not asleep and God is still in the business of changing people. Bill Wilson was an atheist and a chronic alcoholic in the days before Alcoholics Anonymous. He worked as a lawyer on Wall Street until he got fired because of his alcohol binges and blackouts. Eventually he was crippled by alcohol, unable to work because his brain was pickled. There were whole years he couldn't clearly remember because of alcoholic amnesia. His wife, Lois, supported him. She worked and they lived in the home of her parents. He felt humiliated, ashamed of himself. He felt, correctly, that he had failed at life.

Another alcoholic, Ebby Thacher, a drunk more notorious and outrageous than Bill, was going to come over for a visit. Bill was delighted, and set out two glasses on the table along with a bottle of his best whiskey. When Ebby showed up he stunned Bill by saying that he didn't want a drink. He was now sober. Bill asked how this had happened. Ebby said that he had been defeated by alcohol. He had joined a Christian group called the Oxford Group in the Episcopal church and this enabled him to give up drinking. Bill was indignant that his friend refused to drink with him and he was offended by religion but he was also intrigued.

Bill thought that his fate was either death or brain damage from alcohol. He had a few drinks the next Sunday and wandered into Calvary Episcopal Church on Fourth Avenue in Manhattan, where he listened skeptically to the Oxford Group. At first he was totally resistant and continued drinking. But on his next visit to Towns Hospital for drying out, he became aware of how desperate he felt because of his inability to stop drinking.

Bill was alone in his hospital room. He cried out in despair, like a crippled animal, asking if there was a God. And then what happened can only be described as a religious experience. He became aware of light filling the room and felt a sense of ecstasy. He said

later that it was like standing on a mountaintop and feeling a strong, clear wind blow against him and around him and through him. Bill felt as if he had stepped into another world of consciousness. He had a sense of God's presence. He had a sense of being complete, satisfied, and embraced. He became filled with a peace unlike anything he had ever known before.

After this experience, Bill became terrified that he might be losing his mind. His physician, Dr. Silkworth, reassured him that this had been a valuable experience, representing some sort of psychological upheaval. Dr. Silkworth told him to trust the experience, even though Silkworth himself was an atheist.

Bill Wilson never had another drink and he went on to found Alcoholics Anonymous.

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