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ABSTRACT

If one considers the sermon as the main discipline a congregation participates in for their spiritual formation, what sermon structures lend themselves to helping a congregation mature spiritually? In this dissertation, I explored how the inductive sermon's structure positively or negatively affects the spiritual discipline of a United Methodist congregation.

Looking specifically at people born between 1956 and 1980, I surveyed thirty-five people over a period of four months. During those four months, the subjects listened to eight inductive sermons. I examined how these sermons influenced the spiritual formation of these people. The subjects participated in a pre-test and post-test as well as a test after each sermon.

Using the survey, I explored three specific areas of spiritual formation: (1) time spent in God's presence, how one spends this time, and one's attitude toward this time; (2) one's overall attitude toward the sermon; and (3) the perception of one's spirituality via the spirituality wheel.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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STRUCTURE ON THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF
A UNITED METHODIST CONGREGATION**

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated in loving memory of Dr. Ralph Lewis.

CHAPTER 1

Understanding the Problem

I hesitated to ask the question as I looked at the twenty people gathered in a small circle around me. I knew the answer, the same answer I received every week.

Optimistically I surged ahead, “How did your homework assignment go? What did you learn from the experience?” Forty eyes clouded over.

I glanced at the sign by the door: *Celebration of Discipline*. I shook my head. The topic seemed like a good idea for an adult Sunday school class. I had designed interactive lesson plans around Richard Foster's book. My plan called for the class to explore each of the spiritual disciplines and to take home a spiritual exercise to do each week. As we gathered the next Sunday, the class would discuss how they experienced the particular spiritual discipline we studied.

I came the second week, eagerly waiting to hear the class' responses. Nothing. No one had fulfilled their assignment. Some made an effort, but most did not even try. Week after week brought the same results. In the third class I put aside the book and voiced my concerns. What went wrong? Why did they not participate in the exercises?

As we talked, the truth unfolded. Clearly, the class members had not responded because they had no common frame of reference. They joined the class not because they had a burning desire to grow in the spiritual disciplines; they came out of curiosity. They did not ask, “How can I invigorate my prayer life?” or “How do I fast?” They asked, “What is prayer?” “Why in the world would I want to do without food?”

The class proved a good cross section of our congregation. In their late thirties and early forties, most of them did not grow up in the church. They lived and worked steeped in a culture that did not necessarily believe in absolute truth. As such they did not hold the Scriptures as prime authority for their lives. They saw the Bible as a good book, perhaps even a holy book, but one constantly measured by their experience and what their culture taught them to believe. Praying, fasting, or spending time in solitude just because the Bible said we should, not only held no attraction for this group, but created a good deal of resistance. Absolute Biblical truth seemed an archaic belief to a group of people who instinctively fought against anything authoritarian. They saw time as their most important commodity and before they gave any of their time away, they wanted to know how they personally would benefit.

Making the material more relevant to the class proved relatively easy. We began searching for common ground and took each topic only as far as they wanted to go. Over the next few weeks my mind kept returning to the first Sunday's conversation. What about the rest of the congregation? This class, though wary, at least showed some signs of curiosity about their spirituality. How did the rest of the church fare in spiritual formation? Did they have a primary source for spiritual direction?

Only in the sermon did this congregation find consistent, week in and week out spiritual direction. For this church the sermon became the common spiritual discipline by which they drew near to the divine center of God's presence.

Yet while the church treated the sermon as a primary source of spiritual formation, did we as pastors do the same? Did we treat preaching as one more task to accomplish, as

advice, or a plan of action; or did we see the sermon as an event where the congregation came in contact with the presence of God? Surely we perceived times when we did, yet often those moments came more as a serendipitous movement of the Holy Spirit than by our design. We could claim those sermons when we spoke specifically of spiritual formation, or growing more mature in our faith, but what about the other sermons?

As I continued to ponder this, and began to read in the areas of preaching and spiritual formation, I began to ask, Do the constructs of spiritual formation and preaching parallel and complement one another? Do certain preaching structures exist that, regardless of the biblical text, lend themselves more naturally to helping the congregation grow in their spiritual formation? If so, using these constructs in preaching should help the congregation grow in their spiritual formation.

Most of the literature spoke of the iconographic nature of spiritual formation, meaning the practice of a discipline acts as an icon, or window, into the reality of God's presence (Mulholland 62). The emphasis in such a nature moves from doing to being. Therefore, participation in the spiritual discipline becomes just as important as the discipline itself. For example, participation in the act of fasting becomes as important to our spiritual development as the outcome of the fast. The act of praying becomes as important as the answer to the prayer.

This parallels what preaching authorities such as Fred Craddock, Ralph Lewis, and Calvin Miller wrote about the inductive preaching method. Preaching inductively calls for the sermon to move from specifics to the abstract. Characterized by movement, narrative forms, allegory and questions, the inductive method emphasizes being over doing (Lewis

43). Such a construct, because it supposes resistance or hostility in the audience, strives for the audience to participate in the sermon. By using this approach the preacher hopes the congregation will take ownership of the premise or point of the sermon and be more likely to take action.

The Context

The context of this study takes place at Stonybrook United Methodist Church. Established in 1962, it still enjoys many of the charter members as active participants in the life of the church. Stonybrook serves the community of Gahanna, Ohio, a fast-growing, upper middle-class suburb of Columbus. A predominately liberal clergy served the church until the appointment of the senior pastor and myself five years ago.

Over the past four years the congregation has grown from a worship attendance of 350 to 560. The membership has grown from 800 to 1000. The staff consists of the senior pastor, associate pastor, Christian education/youth director and the executive secretary. I serve as associate pastor and preach once a month plus "extra" services (i.e. Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, or during the senior pastor's vacation time).

Demographically the congregation consists of middle- and upper middle-class, predominately white, white-collar professionals. Almost all adults hold a bachelors degree, many having masters or earned doctorates. The congregation has an almost fifty/fifty male to female ratio. The median age is forty-five but we have also observed a growing population of adults under thirty-five. How does a pastor help such a congregation, made up of predominantly first generation Christians who live in a postmodern culture, grow through the preaching of the word?

The Problem

Social commentator George Barna states the current generation of young adults (18-35) may be one of the most unchurched generations the church has faced since the first century, yet its constituents remain curious about spirituality (*Invisible Generation* 151). This generation does not oppose the idea of God as much as they do the idea of organized religion. Over the past few years, church growth experts chronicled both the need to minister to this same population, and the frustrations such a ministry bears (Hunter *How to Reach Secular People*). Their research warns “doing church” the same old way will not get the job done.

Churches who have responded to this generation with “seeker sensitive” services and commitments to small group ministry have proven effective (Hunter *Church for the Unchurched*; Barna *User Friendly Churches*). However, the lasting effectiveness of the non-denominational mega-church cannot be fully evaluated until they survive into a second or third generation of pastoral leadership. Yet, one must admire the pastoral care that goes into such a ministry and the desire to be a church that reaches the lost. Ironically, the mega-churches continue to find ways to reach this generation, not by going forward, but by going backward to the early church. Facing the same problems as the first century Christians -- spiritual ambiguity, lack of trust in authority, and disbelief in absolute truth -- the postmodern church finds itself following the early church’s path of evangelism and nurture. George Hunter notes this phenomenon as the rebirth of the apostolic congregation.

If the early church chronicles for us the path to nurture and evangelism, it may also give us insight on how the preached word may affect the spiritual formation of a congregation. Let us focus on two sermons of Paul found in Acts 13:16-43 and Acts 17:22-31. In comparing these two sermons, we find a similar message: Jesus is the Messiah and came to save us from slavery. The structures of these two sermons, however, differ. The first sermon, deductive in nature, moves from a generally shared hypothesis; namely, the anticipation of the Messiah, to his argument, Jesus is this Messiah (Acts 13:23). The second sermon, found in chapter seventeen, has an inductive structure. It moves from specifics, the unknown god, to who this god is, the God of Israel who has come to earth and risen from the dead (Acts 17:31). So inductive is this sermon Paul does not even name this Savior, simply that he is.

What causes Paul to preach in so dissimilar a manner? The audience. In the Acts 13 passage, Paul speaks to the Jews residing in Pisidian Antioch. He assumes his audience's agreement with him. The audience maintains an expectation of a Messiah. Paul asserts it is Jesus. He relies on their understanding not only of the Messiah but of truth and authority of the law. To this authority Paul turns again and again in this passage (13:16-26).

In the seventeenth chapter Paul faces an entirely different group of listeners, consisting of gentiles and philosophers, mostly Epicureans and Stoics. These two groups lived at opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. The Epicureans believed in pleasure. Their motto was "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." The Stoics, on the

other hand, tried to rid themselves of pleasure. They treasured self-control. These two groups met regularly to argue their beliefs in the midst of numerous idols.

Into this mix comes Paul. How will he address this group? How will he get them to listen to the truth of the Gospel? He preaches to them inductively. His sermon, although biblical at every point, has no scripture references. These people held little interest in the Hebrew scriptures. He does not even refute their mythology, although he implies it in verses 29-30. To do so would draw him into side arguments. Paul wants to keep them focused on one point: God has come to save us, he is alive and Lord of all. Paul starts with what they can understand, the altar to the "Unknown God," an altar they had seen or passed by most of their lives. "Let me tell you about this God" (vs. 23).

Theological Foundations of the Study

To create, God speaks (Genesis 1). Throughout the Scriptures, God uses narrative to change lives. Where God chooses not to speak directly, he sends others.

The tradition of the Hebrew prophets called them to be people of a message rather than seers of the future. Biblical Hebrew refers to the prophets as the *nabi* or "called out ones." This meant they were called out to deliver a message from God.

An examination of the words of the prophets illustrates the varied ways in which they shared the word of the Lord. Allegory, poem, and story come to light. Sometimes God made the prophet's life his message (Hosea). Why use so many different methods? Because the prophets had shared a common goal; sharing the message in a way the people would understand.

The Great Commission of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) makes all Christians the *nabi*, called out to go into all the world and make disciples. Jesus intends his disciples to go and tell others the Good News. This sentiment also surfaces at the end of the Gospel of Mark, “But go, tell his disciples” (Mark 16:7).

The construct of “go and tell” reminds us of the vital importance of Christian witness. Christianity, in its essence, is a religion of the word of God. How best to share our faith becomes of utmost importance.

From the examination of the two passages from Acts, clearly Paul's main concern was spreading the Gospel in the manner most effective to his listeners. In addressing the gentiles Paul relies on an inductive structure.

As Hunter and Barna pointed out, today's postmodern generation resembles the world in which the early Church ministered. Certainly in its infancy, no one thought of Christianity as a part of the power base for society.

Today we observe an increasing number of people who have lived their whole lives beyond the influence of Christian churches. They have little, or no church memory, background, or vocabulary (Hunter *Church for the Unchurched* 20). Yet we should not assume “secular” equals “irreligious”. Far from it. Attempting to fill the God-shaped vacuum, many secular people today are “spiritual seekers” (Hunter *Church for the Unchurched* 20). Like the gathering at the Aeropagus, the spiritual seeker would rather sit, debate and discuss, picking and choosing from several different religions what best fits them, or what best leaves their worldview undisturbed. If we wish to reach this

generation by preaching “apostolically” we should examine the role inductive preaching plays in the congregation's spiritual formation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to evaluate how the inductive sermon affects the spiritual formation of a United Methodist congregation.

Research Questions

- What is the level of spiritual maturity of the congregation as measured by the Congregational Survey, which consists of the (1) Spirituality Wheel spirituality selector test, (2) spending time in God's presence survey, and (3) sermon response survey?
- What kinds of changes, as measured by the Congregational Survey, occur in the spiritual formation of the congregation after listening to the inductive sermon?
- What kinds of changes, as measured by the Congregational Survey, occur in the spiritual formation of the congregation after listening to the deductive sermon?
- What relationship does the preached word have to the observed changes in the spiritual formation of a congregation?

Definitions

The following terms are used frequently in this study.

- **Inductive Sermon:** Induction is the reasoning process by which specific instances of experience lead to the forming of general concepts. The inductive sermon, characterized by starting with particular elements -- narrative, dialogue, analogy,

questions, parables, concrete experience -- leads to conclusions. Inductive preaching is classified not so much by the ingredients, but the use of those ingredients (Lewis *Inductive Preaching* 43).

- **Deductive Sermon:** Deduction is the reasoning process which moves from a general concept or basic premise to the specific instances. A deductive sermon is characterized as a sermon which starts with a declaration of intent and proceeds to prove the validity of what the preacher has already declared as true (Lewis 43).
- **Spiritual Formation:** For the purpose of this study, spiritual formation is defined as the process by which a Christian moves toward the divine center of God's presence giving him/herself over to the movement of his will. It is the process by which Christians relinquish the hold on their old lives and grow in understanding God's presence and divine will until they reflect Christ in all venues of their lives. Those in the Wesleyan tradition characterize spiritual formation as the activity of the Holy Spirit as one moves from prevenient and justifying grace through the process of sanctification.
- **Iconographic:** Iconographic actions or disciplines act as an icon providing access into God's presence; sometimes defined as a window into the reality of God (Merton).
- **Speculative:** The speculative spirituality type is based in linear thought. It is often defined as a mind-oriented spirituality typified in doctrine, intercessory prayer.
- **Kataphatic:** The kataphatic spirituality type is based in the revealing of God. We see the kataphatic in devotional reading or Bible study.

- **Affective:** This is the heartfelt or feeling-oriented spirituality type. Those disciplines which touch us emotionally become important to the affective spirituality type. Someone grounded in affective spirituality may feel connected to God through silent prayer, visualization of Scripture, or music.
- **Apophatic:** The apophatic spirituality type, rooted in the mystery of God, comes into play in the disciplines of silence, meditation, or contemplative prayer.

Methodology

For this project, I determined if an inductive structure of preaching had a measurable effect on the spiritual formation of the congregation. Over a period of four months, I preached eight inductive sermons. I selectively determined and surveyed a sample of the worshipping congregation. In order to insure anonymity each subject received a numbered code. Using a time series design, subjects participated in a pre-test measurement. I subsequently gave them another survey after the fourth, sixth, and eighth sermons. In this same time period, I surveyed the participants three times after listening to a deductive sermon. I determined if any measurable difference exists between the two structures concerning how they affect the congregation's spiritual formation. While the purpose of the study was not to prove which structure is better, by surveying the congregation as they listen to both inductive and deductive sermons, I determined if spiritual growth resulted from a particular sermon structure or some other variable such as time of the year or a crisis in the life of the church.

The Congregational Survey combines four individual scales, the spiritual well-being scale, the sermon response scale, the spirituality wheel, and the spending time in God's

presence scale (see Appendix A). The spirituality wheel used in various studies validated its usefulness (Ware). I designed the other scales, the sermon response sheet and the spending time in God's presence scales, specifically for this study.

Sample

In order to gather reliable data I limited the study to those people in the congregation who exhibited consistency in their worship habits. For the purpose of this study, those persons who attended worship at Stonybrook UMC three out of every four Sundays fell into an acceptable range of consistency. By researching the attendance records of last year, 300 persons (adults and children) fit into this category. Out of this 300, 170 fell into the 18 to 42 age range appropriate for this study. I used a selected sample of thirty-five to participate in the study. This sample provided a good cross-section of the church, exhibiting various degrees of participation in the life of the church and different stages of the spiritual journey.

Independent and Dependent Variables

Eight inductive sermons preached from November 1997 through February of 1998 served as the independent variable of this research. The dependent variable, spiritual growth experienced by the sample, resulted from the eight sermons preached. The intervening variables are the personal crises of individuals or in the church which may affect spiritual formation. Intervening variables such as seasons of the church year, Christmas or a sermon preached after a revival may also influence a person's spiritual well-being. The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is described below.

Instrumentation

The measurement of one's spiritual formation proves difficult. More difficult still, the measurement of the factors leading to this spiritual formation. So many factors, both individual and corporate, may play a part in aiding or impeding one's spiritual growth (i.e. the nuisance or intervening variables).

In order to minimize the effect of the nuisance variables on the research, I began with a reliable survey, Ware's spirituality wheel. In addition to this, I designed a Congregational Survey, comprised of the sermon response sheet and the spending time in God's presence survey specifically for this study.

The spirituality wheel measures one's experience of corporate worship and compares it to one's own personal style of spirituality. The spirituality wheel reveals how one's personal style of spirituality matches the congregational style or experiences of spirituality. For the purpose of this research, the survey measures what changes, if any, the inductive sermon structure had on one's spirituality experiences.

I designed the second section, the sermon response sheet, specifically for this research. The instrument consists of twenty questions on a four-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It explores people's impressions of how a particular sermon affected them spiritually.

I designed the last section of the survey to measure how the participant spends time with God. I used this scale to examine participation in the spiritual disciplines and how those surveyed felt about the disciplines. Most of the questions concern prayer, meditation, and Scripture/devotional reading. For the purpose of this project, I gave

particular attention to how participating in the inductive preaching structure affected the congregation's feelings about the spiritual disciplines as well as how it affected their participation in those disciplines.

Delimitations and Generalizability of the Study

As multifaceted as a diamond, one's spiritual growth comes through a compilation of factors. This study does not lift up the sermon as the only, or even the most important, factor in spiritual formation. The research does suggest, however, that the sermon, with its structure, plays an integral part in the spiritual formation of a congregation.

This study may have implications for other denominations and congregations made up of populations which differ from the research population I studied.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 anchors the study in the current related research and literature. Chapter 3 shows the design of the study. The findings of the study are reported in Chapter 4 with Chapter 5 containing the summary of the findings and their implications.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Precedents in the Literature

The question of how the preached word affects the spiritual formation of a congregation goes beyond the study of modern communication theory. Its roots lie in the concerns of ancient rhetoricians as they examined how they might change the opinion or lifestyles of their listeners. They sought to delight, teach and persuade (Cicero 21.69). Eliciting a change in the listener became the ultimate goal of any speech.

Like Cicero, Augustine saw the swaying of opinion as victories won, the absence of which negated delighting and teaching a congregation (Augustine 137). One may suppose this came from his Christian faith. Augustine saw persuasion not in terms of finite opinions but of eternal consequences.

This understanding caused the first rhetoricians to study the most effective methods of persuading an audience. The research of Cicero and Quintillion led early public speakers to the five canons of public speaking:

1. *Invention*, the discovery of the ideas and arguments that form the content of a speech
2. *Arrangement*, the organization of the parts of a speech
3. *Style*, the use of language in composing the speech
4. *Delivery*, the manner in which the speech is projected to the audience
5. *Memory*, the means by which the speaker keeps the ideas of the speech in the mind during delivery. (Minnick 3)

Formed over 2,000 years ago, the principles remain true today. They all apply to effective public speaking and therefore remain a part of causing change in the audience.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, writers on rhetoric, while paying homage to the classical canon, turned their attention to psychology. As the connection between

learning theories and persuasion became more apparent, rhetoricians began to explore the role *attention* played in the changing of another's opinions (Winans 194; Monroe et al.).

Attention does not concern us here as much as the process of how one goes about holding that attention. Shooting a gun in the middle of a speech will surely garner the audience's attention, but may hamper the end results. Audience members may remember the type of gun and its chrome but not a single word said.

Improper attention creates a negative effect on persuasion, pushing listeners away from the path the speaker wishes them to travel. According to Monroe and Winans, proper attention keeps the subject in focus. Attention should arouse the listeners, drawing them into the discussion. Proper attention makes listeners aware of conflict, arouses desire to end the conflict and draws them toward solution.

Attention, characterized as either proper and motivating or improper and debilitating should be used as a tool to convey a message, nothing more. To assume if one can hold attention one can motivate an audience is a mistake.

In an ever-changing world we have yet to comprehend the effect mass communication will have on us as a society. This is true in the world of personal communication as well. From telephones to satellites to the internet we see concern move from attention in communication to the need to transfer meaning.

In 1949, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver published *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* in which they hypothesized that communication begins with a source which formulates a message consisting of signs to be transmitted. A transmitter converts the message into a set of signals sent over a channel to a receiver which then converts the

signals into a message. Shannon and Weaver defined any distortion in the channel of communication as noise (Ward 120). The reception of the proper meaning they measured in feedback, having the receiver relate how he or she has understood the message. If the original meaning of the message was found in the feedback, one achieved a successful communiqué.

In theory, if the transmitter does away with distortion, or noise, the meaning of the message is clear. While this may work well in the field of electronic communication, it sets up some dangerous propositions for interpersonal communication.

First, it presumes a passive listener. Speakers send the message. Audiences receive the message. Listening is only a response (Campbell 268). This linear model of communication makes the speaker the sole creator of meaning. In reality, however, human beings bring their own histories, dreams, and agendas to the communication table.

Secondly, this model assumes that with a message transmitted to the receiver and proper feedback established, the receiver will act on the information. Even in an ideal situation this does not always bear out, much less in the sometime hostile environment in which preaching finds itself.

Mere transmission of meaning through the vehicle of attention won't significantly affect the spiritual formation of a congregation. An overview of the history of preaching makes this clear. For this discussion we narrow our focus to preaching's history from the time of Christ.

The early examples of preaching we have from the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles illustrate a style rich in the traditions of rhetoric. Paul's sermons at the Areopagus

(Acts 17:16-32) and in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 follow the usual pattern of introduction (*exordium*), narration (*narratio*), argument (*confirmatio*) and conclusion (*conclusio*). These examples show an early concern not just for a transmission of meaning, which parallels for Augustine the idea of teaching, but an actual change in the hearer (i.e. victory). From the first century on, preachers understood their task as not just sharing but the proclamation of a life changing word (*Kerygma*).

This need to proclaim the word in a way that affects people lies at the root of Origen's use of analogy. "While Origen's typology may seem arbitrary to us. . . his immediate legacy was to make Christian thought acceptable and even attractive to the Greek mind" (Wilson 38).

Origen attempted to bridge the gap between the Greek mind and the Gospel message. He desired not greater understanding alone, but to effect a change in the heart of the Greek listener. While I cannot agree with Origen's almost constant application of analogy to the Scriptures, he must be commended for his understanding of his audience as active listeners. Origen understood that in order for the word to have impact it must be presented in a manner that touches the audience. Yet while Origen's ideas continued for generations, we find little evidence of his preaching truly influencing the spiritual formation of his congregations.

John Chrysostom illustrated that one does not have to sacrifice the message of the Scriptures in order to achieve attention. He turned the tide of the analogizing preacher, moving back to a more literal interpretation of the Scripture. Consequently, through Chrysostom's preaching we see the Antioch congregation's spirit strengthened, enhanced,

and changed: "He may have saved the city single handedly. In doing so Chrysostom illustrates that one does not give up relevancy in speaking for the Biblical text" (Payne 13-15).

Chrysostom married Origen's concern for reaching the people in a way they could understand with the need to stay true to the biblical text. He understood we do not find true relevancy unless we speak from the text itself.

While schools of preaching continued during the following centuries to debate the role and interpretation of Scripture, they largely ignored the issues of style and persuasion. Yet effective preachers continued to help their congregations mature spiritually. Martin Luther, John Calvin, Hugh Latimer, and John Wesley fall into this category, as does Jonathan Edwards. Most often they appealed to the common person with a message nurtured in their personal experience and brought to fruition in their study of the word (Wilson 128).

Some preachers stumbled onto certain styles that seemed to affect the spiritual condition of the audience. In the eighteenth century George Whitefield worked at a style of preaching that changed lives. This came not from any school of preaching but from his infatuation with the English theater:

From the stage Whitefield inherited a dramatic presence that he would later take into the pulpit. . . . More than any of his peers or predecessors, Whitefield turned his back on the academy to concentrate on perfecting what we today would call "body language." Passion would be the key to his preaching of traditional spiritual truths. (Stout 9)

While much of Dwight Moody's success lay in his organizational skill (and, of course, to his commitment to Christ), a perusal of his sermons illustrates he, like

Whitefield before him, was in touch with the thoughts and lives of his listeners. Moody used phrases and experiences familiar to his audience: a father and son conversation, daily chores, the giving of money. He engaged the imagination of his congregation by the use of words like *suppose*. He gave the congregation just enough of a picture to entice them. He touched their nineteenth century world with the biblical text (35).

This need to hold the listeners' attention, to motivate them through the relevancy of the scriptural text, became the foundation for much of the work of Fred Craddock and Ralph Lewis in the 1970's and 1980's. They faced a world with a decreasing Christian frame of reference, a world which no longer respected the office of the pulpit. Rather than continuing on with business as usual or throwing up their hands in despair, Craddock and Lewis began to look for stylistic approaches to soften the hearts of the congregation.

Craddock made the case for the ultimate importance of the message but advised pastors not to ignore the vehicle. The style of the message proves not only vital in getting the message across but in effecting change. Craddock saw inductive movement as the most positive way to effect change:

The inductive process is fundamental to the American way of life. There are now at least two generations who have been educated in this way from kindergarten through college. . . . It cannot be overemphasized that the immediate and concrete experiences of the people are significant ingredients in the formation and movement of the sermon and not simply the point at which final applications and exhortations are joined. (58-59)

This approach re-established a common frame of reference, allowing the listener to process information through the common experiences of the congregation. Craddock hoped to move away from the "three-point sermon and wrap it up with a poem" style

which so typified preaching in the local church. He saw preaching as movement, one that caught the attention of the listener and swept the audience along yearning for conclusion, a conclusion both preacher and congregation reached together. By this point not only had the listeners paid attention due to the fact they could associate with the sermon, and identified needs in their own lives, but by the conclusion they had already reached and taken ownership of the solution to their conflict (Craddock 58; Robinson 185).

Lewis reminds us this inductive approach, rather than a fad, was not only one of the primary ways biblical preachers spoke to their listeners but also the preferred method of Jesus himself:

Evidently Jesus' favorite form of narratives, parables are by definition inductive. They are stories that reveal a message in and through a scenario. Listeners discover a point and its implications for themselves as the preacher relates the parable. . . . So we see how Jesus instructed his listeners by repeatedly going from the concrete to the abstract, from the facts to the principles, from the data to the dictum. That's inductive. (*Learning To Preach Like Jesus* 27)

In recent years Calvin Miller and Thomas Boomershine picked up this attention to preaching style and communication methods in their discussions of the image-driven sermon (Miller 87; Boomershine 19). Boomershine describes us, by nature and experience, as a narrative people. We each have a story. When our stories connect to God's story, revelation occurs (21). Change cannot take place without revelation.

The message of Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit remain the source of their revelation. But, as illustrated by scholars of communication and preaching, merely sharing the message will not suffice. We must consider how best to convey the message and utilize the principles of motivation. A true change in a person's spiritual formation

must become a consistent part of the person's inward, as well as outward, actions. It must become a learned behavior. The modern preacher looks to the field of psychology in order to discover how we learn and change behavior patterns.

Psychology Issues in Motivation and Learning

In order to understand the patterns of motivation and changed behavior, we begin with how we learn, the basis of understanding behavior (Hilgard 191). How do we define learning? Hilgard defines it as a “relatively permanent change in behavior that occurs as a result of prior experience” (191). Therefore, if we see no permanence in the “changed” behavior we cannot measure it as a learned event. This holds especially true in the realm of preaching where the subject matter holds such eternal import.

But how do we learn? As many answers have been given to this question as there are psychologists. Let us review three beginning with the relative simplicity of classical conditioning.

Pavlov's famous experiment with a dog and a bell provides us with an example of classical conditioning, the formation of a new association between a conditioned stimulus and a response with an unconditioned stimulus that elicits the response (Hilgard 193). A dog naturally salivates at the sight of meat. Psychologists refer to this reaction as the unconditioned response (UR). By Pavlov's ringing of a bell when he brought a meal, the dog learned to associate the food with the bell. Soon the dog salivated at the sound of the bell even in the absence of the food. Pavlov labeled this the conditioned response (CR).

One of the difficulties with Pavlov's theory lies in its simplicity. People are not dogs

and what motivates one person or what might generate a response in a person may not do the same in another.

Also, this theory does not fit our requirement of a permanent change. In time the dog learned to disassociate his response from the CR. Yet Pavlov's experiments do point us in the right direction. They demonstrate the possibility of eliciting a desired change in behavior from a subject.

B. F. Skinner presented a slightly more complicated theory of learning, operant conditioning. Operant behavior simply happens. The behavior appears as a spontaneous or voluntary reaction rather than a response to a specific stimulus. Operant conditioning refers to increasing the probability of a response by following the occurrence of the response with reinforcement (Hilgard 199).

One leads a subject to a desired response through shaping. By reinforcing even the slightest operant behavior toward the response, one increases the probability of a repeat in behavior. Let getting a rat to press a bar serve as the objective of an experiment. If every time the rat moves toward the bar, it is reinforced with food, the rat will eventually move to the bar and press it. This learned response to the outward stimuli serves as the basis of the operant behavior theory.

Interestingly enough, none of the psychological literature deals with the ethics of shaping behavior. The psychologists appear more interested in applying theory than with ethical ramifications. Yet those who preach the word of God must concern themselves with the ethics of manipulating a congregation in order to evoke a desired response. This

might result in people responding to the pastor's technique rather than experiencing the divine.

While such behavioral experiments raise serious ethical questions, they serve to illustrate that we learn in stages. Learning seems a process rather than a one time event. This process causes the pastor to consider how the sermon may shape the behavior of the congregation.

What the literature so far suggests leaves us with little more than rote memorization and excessive drills to instill learning. Yet we know the complexity of human conditioning. We still struggle with the idea of learning as a “relatively permanent change.” Do we define learning simply as a collection of facts or does learning lie in the understanding of what is being presented? How does this understanding take place?

Wolfgang Kohler saw learning as a cognitive process, or a process of perception and knowledge. The cognitive process consists of one's past, one's frame of reference, and previous trial and error. Learning occurs when a new event or idea is placed within the process to see where it fits. We call this new discovery a demonstration of insight. Once this new event takes place, understanding and learning result (174-175).

Kohler's experiments point out how the arrangement of the problem makes the solution easy or hard. He also demonstrates how a solution, once achieved with insight, applies to novel situations. Thus, upon attaining insight in a congregation, cognitive learning takes place and the listeners adapt the message of the sermon to their particular life situations. Only when a congregation accomplishes this can the preached word be said to affect their spiritual formation.

The need to be accepted, to belong, is one of the strongest in the human psyche. By creating an atmosphere in preaching of acceptance and understanding, the pathway to change and motivation becomes more inviting.

As personality takes a role in learning and motivation, so does our proclivity to either right-brained or left-brained thinking. Knowledge of this affects the structure of the sermon. A sermon logically set forth from prior evidence to conclusion, while a convincing argument, will lose part of the congregation. Not because they do not agree with the conclusion but because they have stopped listening. As previously stated, we cannot change those who do not hear (Lewis *Inductive Preaching* 160; Sommerville 38).

By downplaying and, in many instances ignoring, our right-brained thinkers, not only do we shut them out of the motivation process but we imply their way of thinking is incorrect. This goes against the biblical principle of *shalom* (peace or wholeness). As Lewis points out, left-brained appeals go against the many examples of right-brained appeals we find in the Bible such as the Psalms, the parables, and the vivid imagery of the Book of Revelation (Lewis *Inductive Preaching* 60).

Research tells us a left-brained approach may miss a majority of listeners. Bernice McCarthy states up to seventy percent of students are not analytic learners. Obviously other appeals must be made, ones that involve not only what we see and hear but what we do (McCarthy; Lewis 30).

If we want to instill permanent change in our congregation, we must preach in ways that call for action. We must move out of the realm of listening to seeing and doing. We

must be concerned with nonverbal communication. Only in this way will congregations learn and be motivated for change:

Today our preaching often allows for only the listening process seldom exploring other avenues to the listener's brain. . . . Whether all human learning or just most human learning demands learner participation, the challenge is set for our preaching. If we want to make a greater impact on our congregations, we must get them involved in our sermons. (Lewis 30)

So far we have been working under the assumption that learning equals motivation.

This is not always the case. Learning may take place and yet not motivate for change.

True motivation depends on what level the message appeals to the listener and to what degree the message meets resistance.

Previously we discussed the need to hold the attention of the listener. We can increase the attention of an audience by story, by starting within a common frame of reference, by appealing to different personality types, and by using language that appeals to both right-brained and left-brained thinkers. Minnick says attention tends to produce action (214).

Therefore, holding the attention of the congregation seems half the battle. Some stimuli, regardless of their meaning, hold attention:

1. *Intense stimuli*...has greatest sensory impact
2. *Active stimuli*...express activity will be attended to over passive ones
3. *Varied stimuli*...stimuli that change or that are out of the ordinary
4. *Patterned or Organized stimuli*...related stimuli are easier to attend to than jumbled, disorganized stimuli. (Minnick 215)

A caveat, holding someone's attention merely to hold it, not only does not create motivation but is also unethical. A call for change, or any desire to motivate people, should not arise out of a "let's see if we can do it" mentality. Nor should it be done for

one's own ego or personal gain. Christian motivation arises out of a desire to see all people fall under the discipleship of Jesus Christ. Its roots lie in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19). So, not only do people need stimuli with inherent attention-grabbing characteristics, but stimuli that relate to their needs and goals.

Minnick divides stimuli into four proofs. The first, emotional proof, requires arousing feelings beyond the usual everyday level. This seems the easiest proof to realize. Yet, here lies its danger: are people responding to the message or the emotion (215-216)?

Logical proof depends on the use of evidence in the form of facts, statistics, and the opinion of experts. By combining emotional and logical proofs a speaker induces trust. Minnick calls this the balance theory (222).

The third proof, ethical, provides balance (226-227). In this proof the message and messenger meet. If a preacher increases his/her credibility, the audience is inclined to support his/her proposal because of consistency tendencies. Integrity diminishes cognitive dissonance.

The final proof concerns social-conformity. As human beings, social by nature, the needs and desires of our group garrulity affect our motivation. This holds especially true for Christians living in the realm of *koinonia*, that unique fellowship found within the body of Christ. We say, "If you want to motivate me, motivate my group" (Minnick 229-230; Smith 310).

If these four proofs hold true, then the preacher who wishes to effect change in a congregation needs to take group dynamics into consideration. How these dynamics interact with the individual reflects in their ability and desire to change a behavior. Ralph

Lewis' and John MacDougall's appeals find their parallel in Minnick's proofs (Lewis *Inductive Preaching* 156-160; MacDougall 34).

Issues in Preaching

Preaching is speech communication. As such, all of the rules for communication, learning, and persuasion apply. Yet the literature clearly addresses the unique nature of preaching. One needs an understanding of the issues in preaching, as they apply to affecting the spiritual formation of a congregation, in order to be effective.

The primacy of preaching lies in our concept of God. Behind the concept and act of preaching lies a doctrine of God, a conviction about his being, his actions, and his purpose. The kind of God we believe in determines the kind of sermons we preach (Stott 93).

Our preaching on spiritual formation comes not out of some general idea that it would be good for the congregation or that somehow the people might be generally better off. Our call to growth and to deepen in our relationship with God lies in the very nature of God. Stott lists three concepts that carry the preacher through this process: God is Light (Truth in Johannine literature), God has acted (he has taken the initiative to reveal himself through deeds), God has spoken (he communicates himself through speech as well as nature) (Stott 96).

Therefore we preach because of who God is. Because God has spoken we must speak as well. A compulsion rests upon us. As the old hymn says, "I Love To Tell The Story." One preaches because he/she cannot do otherwise: "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.' But *His word* was in my heart like a

burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding *it* back, and I could not”

(Jeremiah 20:9).

This compulsion, this burning fire, keeps the preacher preaching even in the darkest moments. One does not preach for immediate results. We preach out of obedience because God has put a burning word in our hearts. For this reason people's lives are changed even when the rules of communication are broken or our effort is a poor one. God honors obedience.

Preaching, says Stott, is indispensable to Christianity (15). Christianity, in its essence, is a religion of the Word of God. All the literature agrees on this primacy of preaching in the Christian experience. In order to effect change, the preacher must realize this. He/she may enter the pulpit with every communication theory tucked into the sermon and still fail to soften the hearts of the people. Why? Because he/she did not understand the primacy of his/her task. Preachers need to know that preaching (*kerussian*), heralding a message, depends on *kerygma* (proclamation). The preacher has something to proclaim. Without a clear, confident message preaching becomes impossible (Stott 83; Morgan 21).

The issue of authority proves as important as the issue of primacy. Where does the preacher get his/her authority to preach in the first place? Who are preachers to call for a change, especially a difficult one, in someone else's behavior? Why should we listen to the pastor?

Thomas Oden says that ultimately the preacher's authority comes not from technique, or personal ethic, but from the word itself (137). We call for change not

because we say so but because the word of God calls for it. Oden refers to “the hearer's conscious sense of right” (138). On one hand, the listener responds when we preach with real authority, with the belief we have a right to be heard. But the hearer also responds because he/she perceives the rightness of the preached word. The Spirit of God within all of us, warped as it may be, responds because deep down we know the truth. This sense of truth gives the pastor authority. There is no need for apology when the word of God is preached; no explanation. The preacher approaches the pulpit knowing somehow the hearers will respond to the word of God.

This, of course, does not diminish the responsibility of the pastor to proclaim that word with clarity. Nor should pastors forget they are the vessel through which the message is conveyed, lest they shatter that authority.

So while we remain conscious of the form of the sermon, the authority to call for change arises out of the biblical text itself. This authority allows the preacher to move beyond the perceived need of the congregation, often a shallow symptom of a deeper problem, and focus on the work of God:

By beginning from and speaking for the authority of the Scriptures we can speak of God's deeds rather than Humanity's needs. . . most topical preaching goes astray when the preacher makes the life situation -- the topical need -- the specific content of the sermon rather than the topical form. . . . Such a treatment may be very helpful, but in the final analysis it is good advice, not good news. The sermon must be kerygmatic, before it is didactic or therapeutic. (Willimon 19-29)

Willimon speaks of an integration of primacy with authority. If the word of God has no authority with us, or in us, it has no authority for the congregation. Those who carry this authority do well to follow John Wesley:

God Himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unis libri* (A man of one book). (105)

The preaching of George Whitefield also illustrates this authority:

If I had come to speak to you in my own name, you might rest your elbows upon your knees and your head in your hands and go to sleep! . . . But I have come to you in the name of The Lord of Hosts, and (he clapped his hands and stomped his feet) I *must* and I *will* be heard. (Pollock 248)

Yet for all of this, a theme recurs throughout all the literature that the need to preach must also arise out of a love for the congregation.

Hugh Latimer held the primacy and authority of Scripture in high esteem. He grew angry when clergy did not take preaching seriously or see preaching as a call. His anger arose not out of what the clergy should have been doing, but out of his love for the people. Their “lostness” caused his anguish. John Stott noted that the preacher must also be pastor (Stott 118; Moorman 183).

As a pastor, the preacher finds motivation out of love for people. The primacy of the word burns within. The authority of Scripture gives courage to speak the truth and change lives, but the love for people draws him or her back into study each week and into the pulpit each Sunday morning.

Issues in Spiritual Formation

Let us think of spiritual formation as a movement toward maturity. By this process we become like Christ. We see salvation not as a one-time-only event, but as a process by which every facet of our lives comes under the lordship and direction of the Holy Spirit.

This spirituality grips us to the very end of our nature (Willard 31; Edwards qtd. in Foster and Smith 19).

Preaching that engages the heart of the congregation helps bring about this maturity. If the heart is engaged, preaching helps the listener see the need for Christ to mold and form all aspects of their lives to Christ's character. The difficulty arises out of the nature of our preaching, and the nature of spiritual formation.

Much of the preaching observed today consists of "how to," as in how to have a happy life, how to make a happy marriage, how to raise successful children. All worthy themes to be sure. Too often the pendulum of preaching swings too far away from practicality. This results in a sermon which leaves the congregation with no idea of what to do with the message. There is no direction. Yet a focus on the "how to" in preaching centers on the *doing* of Christianity. Too much focus on doing confines Christianity to the realm of rules and regulations. Christianity becomes nothing more than a list of do's and don'ts. Such a focus takes away from the intimacy with Jesus Christ which lies at the heart of our faith. A Christian's faith has much, if not more, to do with *being* than with doing:

...there is a strong temptation to see spiritual formation as a technique we do. We may even be seeing spiritual formation as something we do to revive a burned-out ministry. We may see spiritual formation as something we do to get right with God, instead of an offering of ourselves in worship through which God can draw us into the depths of his loving presence. (Mulholland 87)

If we follow Mulholland's thought, preaching only from the do's causes us to ignore the very nature of spiritual formation, the being. Why do we preach so much from the doing? Partly because we like the idea of helping people, giving our listeners something

they can use. Possibly because our congregations allow us to do so. The doing is easier to control. It is not as frightening as the being of the relationship. In the doing, writes Sue Monk Kidd, we find security (25).

So preaching from the doing may infer a cheap and easy Christianity. Such preaching teaches a congregation to go for the quick fix rather than explore the painful process of becoming and being, that place where not all the answers are known nor all paths brightly lit. I suspect one of the main reasons pastors tend to preach only from the doing is that we are uncomfortable in the being ourselves. In the being, we lose our sense of security. However, as vessels of the message (meaning we in our lives authenticate the word), we must confront our own reticence at becoming (Kidd 52).

If we hesitate to venture on this journey ourselves, how do we hope to draw a congregation onto the path of spiritual maturity? Although Peter Bohler counseled John Wesley to “preach faith until you have it” (228), Bohler advised Wesley to do so because he knew him so well. He saw the faith growing in Wesley. He felt an imminent breakthrough. Preachers cannot take such advice across the board. This counsel can quickly degenerate into hypocrisy. After all, Wesley’s triumphs in preaching did not come until after he experienced that faith.

How does one describe the movement from the doing mode to one of being? The movement comes as we cease viewing Christianity as something we do, as much as a life and a presence we experience (Merton 67; Mulholland 103).

So far, the literature is explicit on the connection between the sermon and the Scriptures. Using the Bible as the root for primacy, one upholds the authority of the

preached word. The preached word acts in accordance with the Word of God. If so, what happens when we substitute the word sermon for Scripture in the above statements? A new image of the sermon takes place. Mulholland likens Scripture (and if Scripture why not the sermon?) to an icon: “. . . is beginning to intimate that in Scripture you are encountering something that takes you beyond yourself. In part, Merton is illustrating the iconographic nature of scripture, but he is also pointing to a different mode of being” (Mulholland 70).

For not just the sermon but any spiritual discipline, this might be the best one can hope for. Spiritual disciplines provide a window away from ourselves into the reality of God. They become modes through which we encounter the divine, life-changing presence of God. The sermon becomes an icon, a window into the true reality. Preaching as a spiritual discipline becomes a reality when the preacher realizes that ultimately people do not change by what is said but by the God they encounter. The sermon affects the listener to the degree in which the listener encounters and participates in the presence of Christ (Demaray 91).

Mulholland asserts iconography as a major dynamic of scripture (67). If one moves from an informational approach to a formational approach, the Bible becomes a vehicle of spiritual discipline. Does not the same thing hold true for preaching? Iconographic preaching calls us into participation with the presence of God. If such participation does not occur, the listener neither understands nor changes in his/her spiritual formation. While we are comfortable emphasizing information and what passes in this world as

reality, we need to draw people into the mystery of Christ. Mulholland refers to this as a kairotic existence (67).

What does he mean by kairotic existence? As we said before, Scripture and preaching pull us out of this world into the world of the Kingdom of God. What does this existence look like? Mulholland gives us some insight:

Kairotic existence is a life in the world which is shaped by the will of God. . . secondly Kairotic existence is not only a life shaped by the will of God, it is also a life empowered by the indwelling presence of God. . . Kairotic existence is the state of being harmoniously in relationship with God. It is thankfully open and receptive to the shaping purpose of God in all the circumstances of life. It is humbly yielded to being the word of God spoken forth for others. (75-76)

Preaching that seeks to effect a congregation's spiritual formation, calling the people into this type of existence, bears a difficult message. We all seek to live our own lives, to control our own destinies. Submission is never easy, but so long as we preach that we have control over our lives, we will never increase the spiritual maturity of our congregation. Here our discussion of how we learn, are motivated and persuaded comes into play. We look for a place of commonality from which we can lead people into this type of existence which is so foreign to our world.

Kairotic preaching helps our people understand that our functional activities flow from our relational dynamics, especially our relationship with God. In doing so, we break the crust around their lives (Mulholland 111; Macdonald 104). Sue Monk Kidd sees this crust of self as a chrysalis from which we must emerge. Her comments help us see not one crust, but many (52-53).

Kairotic preaching breaks this crust of self and helps reveal the true self, the one God. This type of preaching calls the people to hear, rather than the preacher's voice, the still small voice of God (Nouwen qtd in Foster and Smith *Devotional Classics* 94).

Finally, kairotic preaching calls us into community. We cannot escape the importance of community when we discuss communication or learning and persuasion theories. Human beings were created to be communal creatures. Our communal nature reflects the Trinity (Genesis 1 and 2) and the call to live within the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12). We desire a fellowship that goes beyond just having a belief in common. We thirst for *koinonia*, a becoming one with another, truly becoming a body. Oddly enough, while this type of connection is what we long for most in our culture, we experience it the least.

Preaching out of the kairotic experience, one not only becomes aware of the dynamics of community as it plays on persuasion, but concentrates on the role we play within community and the role the community has upon our spirituality (Bonhoeffer qtd. by Foster and Smith 293). Yet this proves no easy task in this increasingly privatized, individualistic world. George Barna writes:

Unfortunately, America is a nation in which the yearning for strong friendship far exceeds their existence. The majority of Americans feel that they do not have enough close friends. Among reasons why we struggle with building and maintaining significant relationships are the high level of transience, which tears us away from those whom we have become friendly with; our inability, as a nation, to effectively communicate with each other; the fragmentation of our schedules, which makes sharing time together difficult; and the shifts in attitude that make us less willing to make commitments to long term relationships. (*The Frog in the Kettle* 71)

We have a call, not to accept the world as it is, but to see the world as God sees it, with his vision of what we will become. In an age where we see little hope, have little community, live for ourselves, float through life, and have no joy, preaching that allows people to participate in the Kingdom of God, to find this kairotic moment, is urgently needed.

Measurement

While much literature can be found concerning spiritual inventories, many devote themselves to the measurement of spiritual gifts. I discovered little written on the measurement of one's spiritual formation. The literature does agree on the difficulty in measuring spiritual growth and in particular the effect preaching has on this spiritual formation. Much of the difficulty lies in the sometimes slow process of spiritual formation itself (Tuttle 49).

Therefore, one could conceivably do all proposed in the literature so far and see no measurable difference. This fact does not mean nothing happened. God calls some of us to minister as number fifteen or seventeen in the chain. We still serve as vital links. It may be for this reason Jesus uses so many reaping and sowing parables (Luke 8:4-15). The preacher sows seeds that germinate in their own time.

The process by which we grow accounts for this slow maturation. Few of us grow at a fast pace physically so we take great notice when growth spurts occur. Most people mature spiritually at a slow, steady rate as well. At any one moment we may be growing mentally or emotionally if not physically. So, too, spiritual growth encompasses our entire being (Foster *Celebration of Discipline* 62; Murray 42; Kidd 63).

Several measurements prove helpful in finding the median between the fluctuations. Everyone is prone to mountain-top experiences as we are to times in the valley of the shadow of death. Measurements done only during these extremes do not give us a clear reading of what happens spiritually. Consistent measurement comes from measuring and re-measuring.

The spirituality wheel, devised by Connie Ware, examines where a person's spirituality falls against that of their congregation. Ware divided the wheel into quadrants labeled speculative, affective, kataphatic, and apophatic. If one looks at healthy spirituality as encompassing all of these, we can measure a sermon's effectiveness by how the message moves the congregation to a more balanced spirituality. In other words, if someone measures strong in one area but weak in the other three, an effective sermon may cause them to grow in the other three categories.

Summary

Opinion and behavior do not change by happenstance. Nor can the preacher hope to effect the spiritual formation of a congregation by adopting haphazard methodology. The pastor also cannot assume authority, for we are long past the day when people believed something just because their clergy said it. The preacher who hopes to effect that spiritual journey needs a plan to do so, a plan reflected in his/her preaching. This affects not just what he/she preaches, but how he/she preaches.

The literature reviewed calls for us to consider the inductive method of preaching, which moves from our commonality to the need for change. Inductive preaching, which moves from common experience to specific needs, holds the attention of the congregation.

The literature cites this as critical because it helps the congregation take ownership of the conclusion often before the preacher reaches that point. Attention, awareness of need, and ability to make a desirable change are considered critical to persuasion.

This type of preaching falls in line with much of the preaching found in the Scriptures and, with this emphasis on experience and movement, lends itself to affecting the spiritual journey. Much of the literature discusses our hostility to spiritual change and how inductive preaching often presupposes an audience hostile or indifferent to the material. Inductive preaching also lends itself to communicating with people who are left- or right-brained thinkers and of different personality types.

Yet above all else, the literature adamantly argues for technique as secondary to the truth. The primacy and absolute authority of the Scriptures over our lives is paramount to true change. The Scriptures, the seat of our call to preach, give us our only authority to preach. They also give communicators strength in knowing they do not speak alone but act as a conduit for the power of the Holy Spirit. Here we hope to find that which Augustine called victory, a change in the hearts and lives of the congregation.

The iconographic moments of life, those times when drawn into the presence of Christ, have a dramatic effect on our spiritual formation. Through a series of inductive sermons my congregation was introduced to an iconographic style of preaching. The literature suggests those subjected to this style of preaching experience a greater effect on their spiritual formation than those fed a steady diet of deductive sermons. As the literature points out, people learn and receive information in different ways and opinion

and lifestyle change due to different stimuli. I studied how this inductive style influenced the spiritual formation of the regular attendees in worship.

I selected participants from the congregation fitting the stated profile and evaluated them using a congregational survey over a specific four-month time period. Because, as the literature states, the sermon is not the only variable influencing one's spiritual formation, group was given pre-study and a post-study tests as well as being evaluated during the four months.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

Summarization of the Problem

How does a pastor help a congregation, made up of predominately first generation Christians who live within the postmodern world, grow in their spiritual formation through the preaching of the word? I do not presume to claim only one answer to this problem. Rather, I evaluated how the inductive sermon affected the spiritual formation of adults aged 18 to 42 in a United Methodist congregation.

Research Questions

- ◆ What is the level of spiritual maturity of the subjects prior to the sermon series? In order to answer this question I administered a “Congregational Survey” consisting of the following: the spirituality wheel spirituality selector test, the spending time in God's presence survey, and the sermon response sheet.
- ◆ What kinds of changes occurred in the spiritual formation of the congregation after listening to inductive sermons? Using the Congregational Survey, I evaluated the control group after a series of inductive sermons to measure their spiritual growth.
- ◆ What kinds of changes, as measured by the Congregational Survey, occurred in the spiritual formation of the congregation after listening to a deductive sermon? I also evaluated the subjects after they listened to a deductive sermon.
- ◆ What are the characteristics/indicators of spiritual formation in adults between the ages of 18 and 42? Prior to the inductive sermon series I gave the control group a pre-test

to evaluate their spiritual formation by assessing their overall sense of spiritual well-being and their participation in the spiritual disciplines.

- ◆ What is the connection between the preached word and a congregation's spiritual formation? At the end of the testing period, I administered a post-test to evaluate what changes occurred by participation in the inductive sermon structure.

Population and Sample Boundaries

I limited the population in this study to the congregation of Stonybrook United Methodist Church. Stonybrook UMC received its charter in 1961. Many of the original members, young adults at the time, remain active members of the congregation.

Stonybrook is situated in Gahanna, an upper middle-class suburb on the east side of Columbus, Ohio.

Until four years ago, when the senior pastor and I received our appointments, the congregation held to a liberal theology. However, we have experienced much spiritual growth and witnessed the church becoming much more evangelical. Now (November 1997), with membership over 1,000, the average worship attendance is 520. This indicates an increase of 132 in membership and 258 in worship over the past four years. The median age for the congregation is forty-five.

Sample

In this study I evaluated how the inductive sermon affected the spiritual formation of adults between the ages of 18 and 42. Therefore, in choosing a sample for the study, I focused primarily on those in the congregation who fell within this age range. Yet, I determined that age should not be the primary qualifier for the study.

More importantly, I limited the study to those people in the congregation who exhibited consistent worship habits. For the purpose of this study, those persons who attended worship at Stonybrook UMC three out of every four Sundays fell into an acceptable level of consistency. By researching the attendance records of last year, I defined 290 persons (adults and children) as consistent worship attendees. This included both members and non-members. Of this 290, 170 fell within the age range appropriate for this study.

The computer printed out the names of the 170 persons on mailing labels which were then arranged in a random order. By selecting every fifth name, thirty-five persons were chosen for the study. This sample provided a good cross-section of the church, exhibiting various degrees of commitment to the life of the church and different stages of the spiritual journey.

The thirty-five persons selected each received a letter describing the research and what I hoped to accomplish. I personally contacted and encouraged each person to participate. I mailed each member of this group a letter stating conditions of the evaluation: attending worship on the designated dates and completing the survey; along with a self-addressed stamped postcard to return signifying agreement these terms.

Instrumentation

Measurement of the factors which affect one's spiritual formation proved difficult indeed. One may find indicators of spiritual growth with no indication of what contributed to this growth. Many factors, both individual and corporate, play a part in aiding or

impeding one's spiritual growth. In truth, one does not determine a person's spiritual growth by one or two items, but by an amalgam of contributing factors.

However, by consistently measuring a group over an extended period of time, one may determine how certain variables affect one's spiritual formation. Since the sample group needed to complete the survey over a period of months, I required an instrument that would hold their interest while providing enough information in order to make conclusions.

To minimize the effect of the nuisance variable on the research, I designed a Congregational Survey. This survey has three components: one (the spirituality wheel) is a standardized instrument, the other two components, the sermon response sheet and the spending time in God's presence survey, I designed specifically for this study.

The spirituality wheel measures one's experience of corporate worship and compares it to one's own personal style of spirituality. For the purpose of this study, I used the spirituality wheel to measure what changes, if any, the inductive sermon structure had on one's spirituality experiences.

The spirituality wheel divides its questions into twelve categories; Order of Worship, Time, Prayer, Music, Preaching, Emphasis, Support of Causes, Criticism, Dominating Themes, Membership Criteria, Ritual and Liturgy, and Concept of God. Each section has four statements numbered sequentially which correspond to a like-numbered quadrant of the Spirituality Wheel. The quadrants explore different spirituality types: Speculative (mind), Kataphatic (God is revealed), Affective (heart), Apophatic (God is mystery). Those who take the survey choose the statements which describe their feelings about their

spirituality experience. For each statement they choose, they draw a line within the corresponding quadrant of the wheel.

The second section, the sermon response sheet, focuses on the sermon itself. Its design explores the participant's reaction to a particular sermon and the spiritual affect of the sermon.

One of the most vital indicators of spiritual growth is intimacy with God. Does the person enjoy being with God? Does he or she participate in the spiritual disciplines? The last section of the survey explored how the participant spent time with God. This scale examines the spiritual disciplines and how participants feel about the disciplines. Most of the questions concern prayer, meditation, and Scripture/devotional reading. I paid particular attention to how participating in the inductive preaching structure influenced the congregation's feelings about the spiritual disciplines as well as how it affected their participation in those disciplines.

I brought the congregational survey to the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee to discuss how it might best be used. All nine members received a copy of the survey. After much discussion the committee determined the survey's length might hamper the participant's interest in finishing. In order to create a more concise instrument I eliminated some overlapping questions.

The varied backgrounds of the Pastor-Parish Committee proved invaluable in refining the instrument. Two of the members have preaching and pastoral experience and another member currently serves as a professor of speech at a local university.

Validity and Reliability

Asking the question, "Does the instrument measure what it claims to measure?" helps one determine the validity of an instrument. How valid is the instrument chosen for this study? Let us look at the content of the instrument. As previously noted, spiritual formation has a multifaceted nature. One measurement may not give us a true estimation of the effect of the inductive sermon on a congregation's spiritual formation. Therefore, I created a multifaceted instrument.

The Congregational Survey looks at three specific areas of one's spiritual formation and its relationship to preaching. First, how does one receive the sermon? Does the sermon structure itself impede or enhance one's spiritual experiences? The survey questions which look at how one responds to the sermon and to the Holy Spirit through the sermon help answer this. Secondly, does the sermon affect one's basic experience with spirituality? The effect of sermon structure on one's spiritual formation measures as movement around the spirituality wheel. Taking the wheel as a measurement of balance, one should find something of oneself in all four areas. Growth in an area indicates growth in spiritual maturity. The final section deals with how one spends time in God's presence. How vital is this time? I measured not so much length of time but how the time was spent, and one's perceptions and attitude about spending time with God. Is it a necessary evil or central to one's life?

If indeed the inductive sermon structure affects one's spiritual formation, it should be measurable by this instrument. I predicted that as one becomes more positive in response to the sermon, one will seek out God's presence. Seeking out God's presence results in

movement on the spirituality wheel. Even if growth occurs only in one area, it does not mean the other areas remain unaffected. Since the spirituality wheel actually consists of four interrelated components, our spirituality resembles a helix more than a wheel.

One cannot, of course, plan for all the variables when measuring spiritual growth. People may have different responses to the same stimuli. Childhood experiences, difficulties in relationships, or health problems can all contribute to one's spiritual well-being. However, by extending the measurement over a period of four months, I achieved a valid measurement. Limiting the survey group to those who fit into the age range I wish to measure also helped attain validity.

By testing and re-testing the same individuals over this period of four months, I measured the consistency in their responses. This consistency helped prove the reliability of the instrument.

Data Collection

Each of the thirty-five received a contract stating an agreement of participation in the research, along with the dates for the sermons. The group took the survey on twelve different dates. The participants heard inductive sermons on eight of the dates, deductive sermons on the remaining four. A week prior to these dates I gave the subjects the Congregational Survey along with a self-addressed envelope. I asked them to fill out the survey immediately after the sermon and mail it to me on Monday morning (if possible). In order to get reliable data, I asked the subjects to at least respond within seven days.

I assigned each subject an individual number to protect anonymity. This number consisted of the last four numbers of the subject's Social Security number (see Appendix A).

The group took a pre-test in order to ascertain everyone's starting point as they began this single group time series of experiments.

Independent and Dependent Variables

For this study, I identified two independent variables, the inductive and deductive sermon structures. I distinguished the inductive structure as the main focus of the study while using the deductive structure for comparison and contrast.

The dependent variables centered on the spiritual formation, or spiritual growth of the congregation, specifically those who fell into the specified age range. The dependent variables included an increased sense of God's presence, a deepening intimacy with God, a sense of growing more Christ-like in character (sanctification), and an increase in interest in and use of the spiritual disciplines.

Control

A study of spiritual formation deals with a variety of variables. So many issues play a role in someone's spiritual formation that if a researcher does not control these variables he/she may have difficulty in determining the effects of the independent variables.

Age and frequency of worship attendance became determining. Of those people who fit into the age criteria (18-42), I considered only those identified as frequent worship attendees (three out of four Sundays). This served to control the possibility of someone missing church or failing to see worship and faith as a high priority. I included in

the contract the sermon dates to control the possibility of the subjects missing one or more of the survey times. If someone indicated a possible absence of more than two of the designated weekends I did not include them in the study.

Everyone experiences mountains and valleys in their spiritual walk over the course of the year. Marriage relationships, health, work, or participation in a spiritual retreat all influence one's spiritual formation. In order to control these confounding variables I staggered the surveys over a period of four months. By reviewing the subjects at varied times, one has confidence the changes being measured are the result of the independent variables, in this case the sermon structure.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data on the basis of the correlation between the inductive sermon structure and the spiritual formation of the congregation. In doing so, I examined the connection between one's overall sense of spirituality (via the spirituality wheel) and an increase in the use of or interest in the spiritual disciplines. The Pastor-Parish Relations Committee continued to assist in the statistical analysis.

CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

From October 1997 to March 1998, for the purpose of this study, the sample group listened to twelve different sermons, eight of these were identified as inductive in structure, the other four sermons as deductive. The sermon schedule varied to keep the participants from discerning any pattern for sermon structure.

The sample consisted of thirty-five people out of a population of 170 who fell into the appropriate age range of 18 to 42 and could be described as consistent worship attendees.

The group participated in the Congregational Survey after each of the sermons. I did this to reduce the effect of the independent variables (for example: a child in the congregation dies) on the outcome of the survey.

The Instrument

In order to discover the effects of the inductive sermon on the sample's spiritual formation, I administered a pre-test survey identical to the Congregational Survey given throughout the study. This survey measured the sample group's overall attitude toward the sermon, their interests in spiritual formation and their spirituality type.

Although specific to the last sermon heard, the sermon response sheet still provided a starting point for comparison throughout the study. The other sections of the survey which pertain to the sample's general spiritual formation, interests, spirituality type, and perception of the congregation's spirituality type are more general thus providing an

opportunity to observe the effect of the inductive sermon structure on one's total spiritual growth. The survey provides a probability of less than .05%.

Findings

Relationship Between Sermon Structure and Connection to God and Community

At the time of the pre-test, after experiencing nine consecutive weeks of deductive sermons, the sample group showed a definite sense of being disconnected from God and the rest of the congregation but, surprisingly, retained a high sense of excitement. 60% of the participants felt little to no connection to God and felt the sermon had little relevancy to their life. 65% reported that they felt little or no connection to the congregation during the sermon. However, 75% of the group reported they felt excited or touched emotionally by the sermon.

What do these findings tell us? We must be take care not to make too strong a statement based on a pre-test. However, from what I observed, the participants experienced a disturbing sense of not being connected to God or to those around them at the time of this survey. These findings parallel what my research revealed about the attitudes of this particular age group. The sense of not being connected to God or others characterizes today's society. This generation brings this sense of disconnectedness with them into the church. They tend towards individualism and the immediate gratification. The findings of the pre-test indicated the deductive sermon did little to change this sense of disconnectedness.

Why then did the participants score high in their excitement over the sermon? We must account for several variables before we can come to a definite answer. For example,

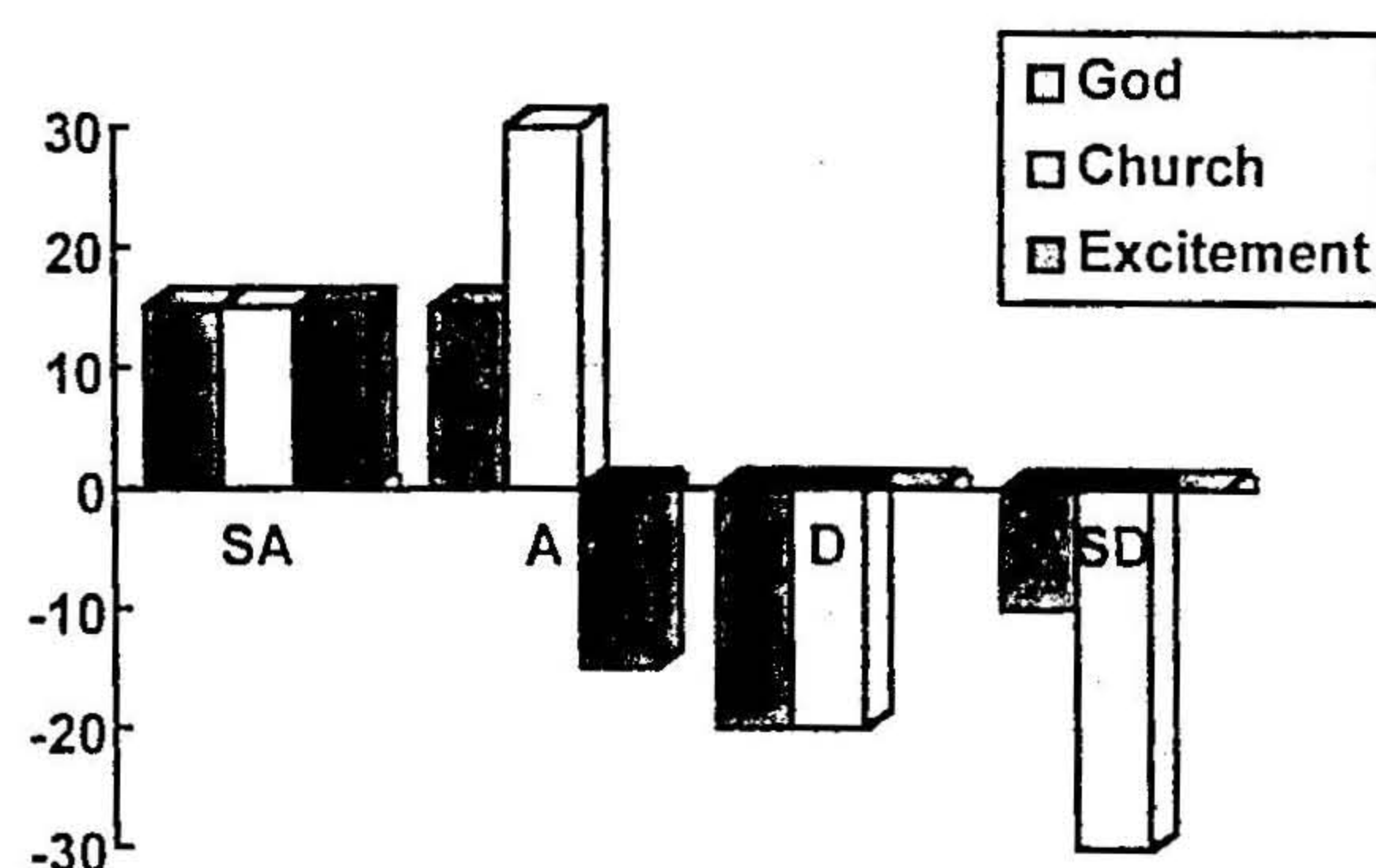
the rest of the worship service may influence excitement. If one designs a high-energy worship, the sense of excitement and emotion may carry over. This adult generation, geared toward entertainment, spends more money and time on leisure activities than any previous generation. An upbeat and participatory worship service may cause a greater sense of excitement as well as familiarity.

The findings do, however, serve to remind us that deductive sermons need not be boring. Emotional content and the deductive sermon are not mutually exclusive. A properly deductive sermon has both excitement and emotional impact.

After participating in the inductive process, the sample group showed a significant increase in their sense of being connected to God and to the body of Christ. When surveyed, 70% reported positively (strongly agreed or agreed with the statements) when asked if they felt connected to God. This reflects an increase of 30% (Graph 1) from the pre-test.

As the sample grew in their sense of connection to or experiencing God, their sense of koinonia or fellowship, designated here as connection to the congregation, experienced an even greater increase. 80% either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt connected to the body of Christ. This represents an increase of 45% (Graph 1).

Graph 1:



What role does the inductive sermon play in such an increase? The iconographic nature of the inductive sermon leads one into an encounter with God. The inductive process, beginning with concrete examples, asks the congregation to participate, to find the common connection. The telling of story or asking of questions, both a part of the inductive sermon, invites the congregation to journey with the preacher. The inductive sermon allows the listeners to take ownership as they often come to the conclusion before the pastor does. The participants have a sense of “I discovered something this morning” rather than “I was told how to live or what to do.” The inductive sermon provides that window where the congregation enters and there finds and experiences God for themselves.

Seen in this way, one understands the inductive process does not connect someone to God. This is the role of the Holy Spirit. But, the inductive sermon does provide a means by which the Holy Spirit meets the heart of the congregation.

The use of everyday concrete examples gives the inductive sermon a commonality. The listener understands “we are in this together.” The congregation listens, picturing themselves as not separate or different from others around them, but rather, notes the similarities. They take ownership of the sermon, realizing that they journey with the others in the congregation. This sense of commonality may account for the increase in the general sense of being connected to the body of Christ.

Overall, the sense of excitement did not increase. While more of the participants reported they strongly agree they felt excited (50%, an increase of 15%), the total for those who reacted positively still remains at 75% (Graph 1). This increase may indicate

the sample group feeling more connected both to God and those around them, creating a sense of relevancy, a moment when the congregation feels, “this message is for me” which naturally results in an increase in excitement. That the survey group indicated no increase in excitement or emotionalism has significance. Neither sermon structure strongly favored, or caused a greater level of, excitement.

These findings help us understand the impact of a sermon structure lies not in how the message addresses us on a purely emotional level, but how the sermon connects us to God and to the body of Christ.

Relationship Between Sermon Structure and One’s Orientation Toward Spirituality and the Practice of Spiritual Formation

What indicators of the participant’s spiritual orientation and, specifically, the practice of spiritual disciplines, did the pre-test bring to light? The sample group did not score particularly high in any category. In fact, the scores in the highest approval setting (strongly agree) barely reached an average of 8%.

Where did the test group score the highest? In the areas of the speculative (the mind) and the kataphatic (God revealed). At the time of the pre-test, 50% of the sample group stated their spiritual formation and interest revolved around the speculative disciplines. Yet, while 90% of the sample said they read their Bibles, only 40% said they did this on a regular basis.

Those disciplines listed as revealing God (kataphatic) found a positive response in 45% of the participants. Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and intercessory prayer are

disciplines we define in this category. Again, while most of those surveyed (98%) said they prayed daily, few (35%) said they had a regular time for prayer.

In those disciplines listed as affective (heart), only 30% of the congregation scored in the positive, only 5% said they strongly agreed. In light of the general enjoyment and excitement of the congregation, I find the fact the group scored low in this area interesting.

Very few of the participants in the pre-test experienced the mystery of God (apophatic) with any regularity. In fact, none of the sample group listed the apophatic in the highest categories, while 90% stated they rarely, if ever, participated in these spiritual disciplines.

Does the pre-test illustrate a connection between the deductive sermon and the spiritual formation of the congregation? As stated in previous chapters, we know the deductive sermon has a tendency toward linear, close-ended thought. The deductive sermon often follows a logical order of stating the general premise and then providing proofs. The spiritual formation categories which scored the highest, the speculative and the kataphatic, mirror the deductive structure. Linear action characterizes these two categories. This type of spiritual formation centers on the meaning of the passage rather than asking, "How does this Scripture connects me to God?"

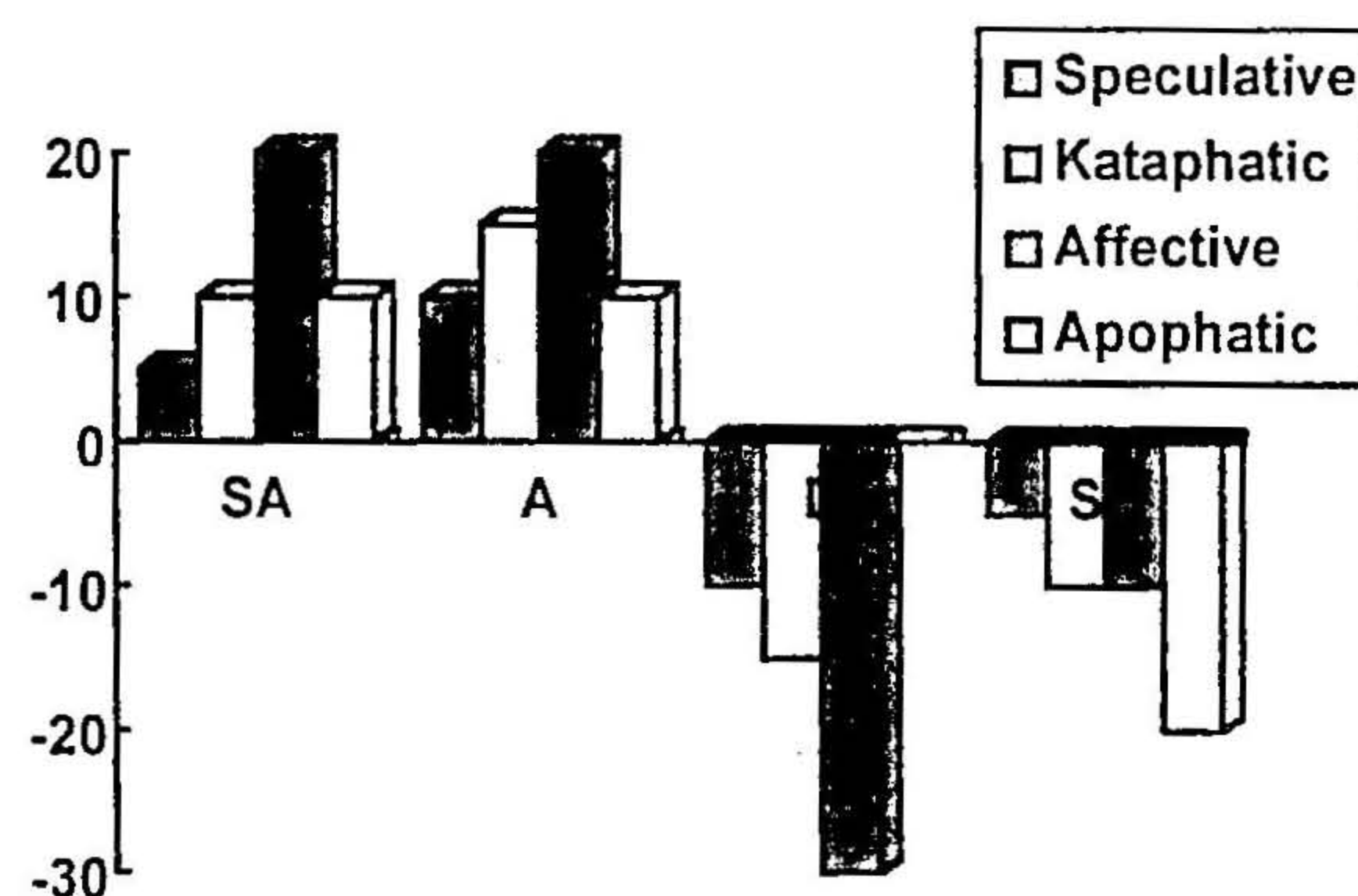
Why did the pre-test score low in the other two categories? These areas of spiritual formation have a more open-ended, circular nature. That the participants scored lower in these areas confirms the earlier findings. This pre-test group experienced a sense of not being connected to God. They lacked an awareness of the presence of God. The group

felt no connection to the body of Christ as they worshipped. Worship so centered in the mind and the revealing of God may keep the sample from experiencing the affective nature of spirituality. If a preacher uses the deductive structure in a very close-ended manner, the congregation may not feel they have permission to experience the mystery of God. This generation of adults, while interested in exploring spirituality, tend to exhibit an empirical nature. If this generation cannot prove something, they may not believe it. Simply put, they may not realize they have the option to experience the mystery of God. The deductive sermon, in this study, did little to affect a change.

The results of the post-test show a general increase in the four areas of spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines. The most significant increases came in the affective and apophatic areas. These findings parallel the results shown in Graph 1.

Participation in the affective areas of spiritual formation increased by 40% (Graph 2). 50% reported having a regular time for prayer, 90% reported an increase in expressing feelings toward God, spending time enjoying or feeling God's presence.

Graph 2:



The apophatic (mystery of God), though still the smallest area overall, gave evidence for the most significant growth. In the pre-test none of the test group said they strongly agreed when asked if they participated in this area or gave evidence of positive attitude

toward the apophatic. In the post-test 10% of the test group strongly agreed. In all, the positive response to the apophatic grew by a total 20% (Graph 2). 60% of the participants gave evidence of increase in meditation, times of silence, and walking/spending time in nature. While this area did not show the greatest numerical growth, given the fact the pre-test shows reticence of the participants to engage in these disciplines, any increase has significance.

The speculative increased by 15% with 98% of the sample group reporting they read their Bibles on a daily or weekly basis. The kataphatic increased by 25%.

At the end of the testing period the sample group's attitude toward and practice of spiritual formation increased by 100%. The participants gave evidence of a more open attitude toward spending time with God, revealing more to him of themselves in prayer, and willingness to explore new areas of spiritual growth.

However, not all areas increased. 96% of the test group stated on both the pre- and post-test that they never participated two venues of spiritual formation, visualizing one's self in a Scripture and keeping a spiritual journal.

Why did these areas score low? Remember, none of the sermons gave any instruction on spiritual formation or discipline per se. If the test group received no directions in how to take part in an unfamiliar discipline, we can't expect to see growth in that discipline.

On their own, these two sections proved inconclusive. How does the sample group see themselves? How do they understand their spirituality? Do they see themselves as a part of the larger whole of the church?

Relationship Between Perceived Congregational and Personal Spirituality Type

Examination of this part of the survey shows how closely the congregational and the personal spiritual tendencies mirror one another. Let me clarify. This section of the study does not measure the actual congregation spiritual tendencies but how the sample *perceives* the spiritual tendencies of the rest of the church.

This section of the survey becomes especially helpful when looking for areas of cognitive dissonance. Do we see evidence of a broad gap between where the sample group sees themselves spiritually and how they see the rest of the church? If so, this gap can cause confusion or a loss of self-esteem revealed as a sense of unworthiness.

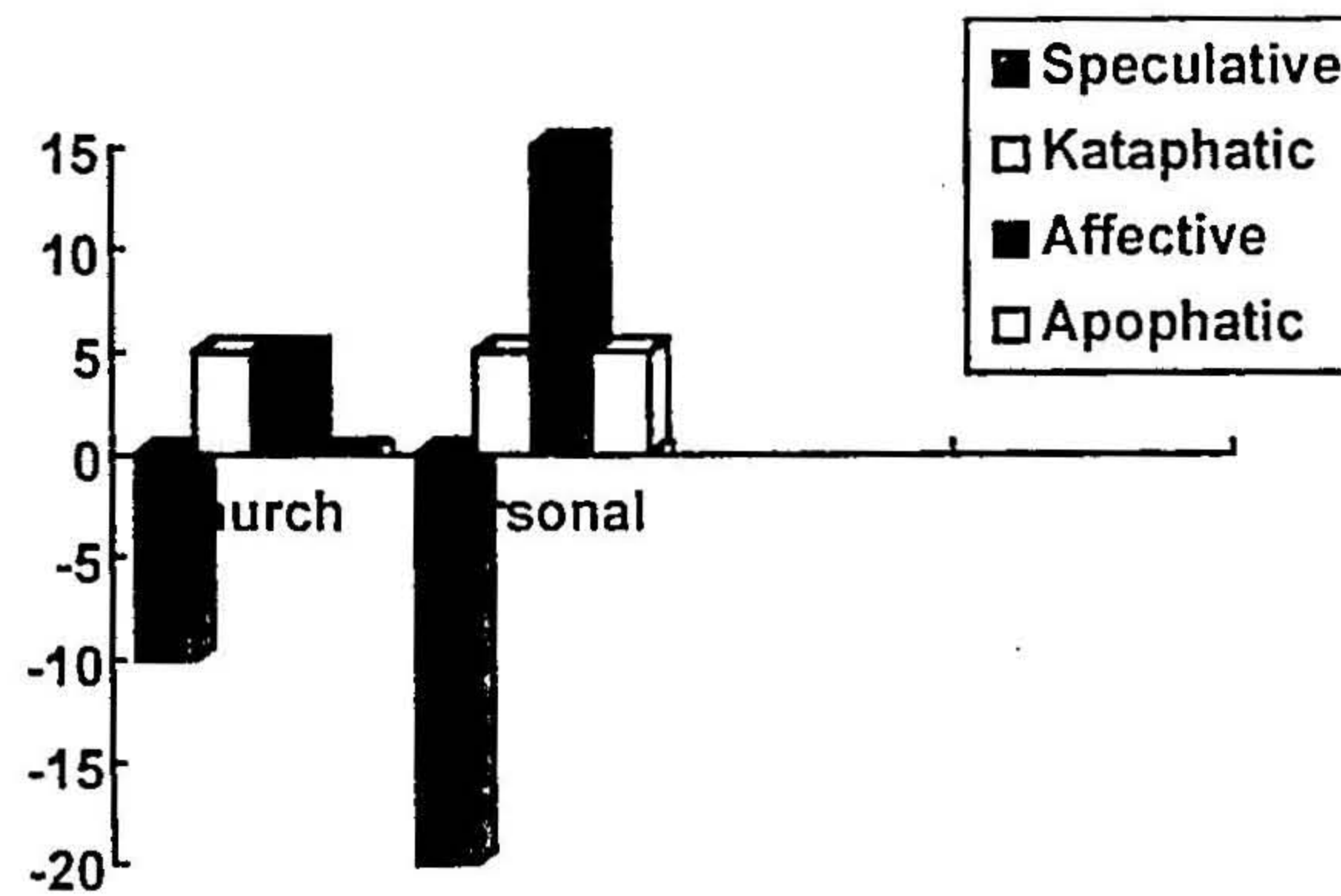
Here we find little evidence of any cognitive dissonance. The test group saw themselves as similar to the church as a whole. They considered themselves as less speculative but more kataphatic than the congregation, but only to a variance of 5%. This 5% variance remains consistent over all categories.

This perception falls in line with what we saw in the other sections of the survey. The sample group moved into the more affective and apophatic means of spiritual formation. As the test group experienced the affective and apophatic in the inductive sermon, they began to explore these areas in their own inner lives.

The survey results showed a marked decrease in the speculative realm. In the pre-test, the sample group perceived 35% of the congregation's total spiritual profile rested in the speculative, as compared to the 30% they saw in their own personal profile. In the post-test the percentage dropped to 25% and 10% respectively. This decrease represents the one area of cognitive dissonance. The participants perceived the rest of the

congregation and the worship service as more seated in the mind/speculative realm than they were themselves.

Graph 3:



Why did the participants such a change in this area? The sample group's perception of the congregation contains not only what the group believed about the lives of the congregation, but their perception of the worship service itself. So, the congregational profile often brings to light the test group's reaction to the worship service while the personal profile reflects the participants' inner lives. If the sample group perceives the worship service as linear and mind-focused, while the sermon causes them to grow in more affective areas, we can expect to see similar results each time we administer this profile. In order to reduce the cognitive dissonance, changes in the entire worship service must take place.

The findings of the profile illustrate the inductive sermon is not a panacea for a congregation's spiritual formation woes. The inductive sermon has some definite limitations. The profile shows if a preacher subjects his/her congregation to the inductive process only, he/she will see growth in certain areas of spiritual formation, specifically the affective and the apophatic. However, not all areas will see automatic growth.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Evaluation

The inductive sermon affected the test group's spiritual formation significantly by giving the sample group permission to investigate the affective and apophatic elements of their spiritual formation. The third section of the survey, the spirituality wheel, revealed a close connection between how the sample perceived the congregation's spiritual profile and their own personal profile. As the congregation listened to more inductive sermons, the participants in the study felt more at ease in exploring their spirituality.

This observation implies that how we preach will in part direct the congregation's spiritual formation. The literature I reviewed noted that we as human beings tend to depend on our support structure (Minnick 229-230). When the church, with its emphasis on *koinonia* and accountability, becomes this support structure, this dependence grows even stronger. Ralph Lewis and John MacDougall both agree the preacher who wishes to effect change in a congregation needs to take group dynamics into consideration (Lewis *Inductive Preaching* 156-160; MacDougall 34). While today's adults between the ages of 18 and 42 state that they have an interest in exploring new areas of spirituality, they will only do so to the degree they feel their support structure permits it. The inductive sermon, with its emphasis on the affective and apophatic spirituality, as well as its emphasis on taking ownership of ideas and coming to one's own conclusions, presents an atmosphere of exploration and acceptance.

How does the inductive sermon provide such an atmosphere? The literature noted the close tie between learning and acceptance. If we do not feel accepted, we may resist

change. Keirsy, Bates, and MacCarthy all wrote about the importance of understanding that people process information differently (Keirsy and Bates 4, MacCarthy 40). Not all of us process analytically. The inductive sermon, because it uses such vivid imagery, has a great appeal for right-brained thinkers. At the same time, the inductive sermon does not ignore left-brained thinkers. Left-brained thinkers relate to the inductive sermon characteristic of staying rooted in our everyday, common experiences (Lewis *Inductive Preaching* 40). Therefore, the inductive sermon provides an atmosphere which says we respect who you are and how you think. According to Kohler this emphasis on the common frame of reference aids cognitive learning (Kohler 174-175).

Although the inductive sermon may create such an atmosphere, it cannot dictate the congregation's reactions. To characterize the inductive sermon as open-ended does not mean the preacher has no definite conclusions or that the inductive sermon has little impact. While none of the sample group felt pressured to make a decision after the sermon, 90% reported they felt called to make a decision. The inductive sermon, by giving a congregation ownership and respecting their ability to make decisions, invites them to be on a journey with the preacher as they endeavor to discover the truth together. Sue Monk Kidd writes that a sense of journey creates a place for spiritual formation (Kidd 52). The inductive sermon is not entirely open-ended because the congregation feels compelled to do something with what they have heard. Not because the preacher told them to do something but because of a meeting with the Holy Spirit.

After being a part of the inductive process, the test group reported they felt more connected to God and the congregation than they previously did. How big a factor does

this sense of being connected play in the sample's spiritual formation? Mulholland and Merton saw this sense of connection as essential to spiritual maturity (Merton 67; Mulholland 103).

An examination of the second section of the survey, which explored the group's orientation toward spirituality and spiritual formation, reveals strong growth in the affective areas and disciplines. As the iconographic nature of the inductive sermon comes to bear on the congregation, they begin to enjoy being in God's presence. Thomas Merton saw this connection as the purpose of an icon (67). In my research this connection resulted in a 30% growth in those who said they have a daily time for prayer. As the congregation felt more connected with God, they came to understand him as an active presence in worship and in the sermon. This awareness of God's presence caused the congregation to grow in the disciplines more affective in nature.

The awareness of God's presence also drew the participants in the study into a new appreciation of the mystery of God. The sermon became more than a group of do's and don'ts. In doing so the sermon more closely mirrored Mulholland's description of spiritual formation (Mulholland 87). It became a place where they met God. In doing so, one must begin to come to grips with the mystery and vastness of God (apophatic). The open-ended aspect of the inductive sermon says to the congregation, "You must explore. We may not have all the answers." It introduces us in those iconographic moments that God is too big for us as human beings to understand everything about him. This mystery of God is strange to today's empirical society. So, although we see significant growth in the apophatic, this amount remains small in comparison to the other areas, perhaps

revealing a reticence in the sample group to explore something which ultimately evades their grasp.

Although participation in the inductive process produced an increase in the affective areas, the inductive sermon did not rate substantially higher than the deductive sermon in terms of emotional response. This disputes Will Willimon's belief that the inductive sermon plays on the emotions of the congregation (Willimon 19-29). Of course, in order to be effective the sermon needs emotional content, but emotion is not the same as emotionalism. The test group described both the deductive and the inductive sermon as exciting.

Why then did the inductive sermon cause the increase in affective spirituality? The inductive sermon rated high in terms of relevance. Graph 1 illustrated an increase in the sample group's attention to the sermon and an increase in feeling that "this sermon is for me." Robinson refers to this as "taking ownership" of the message (Robinson 185). This ownership made the participants aware of the sacredness of the moment. This connection to relevance became another facet to the iconographic nature of the inductive sermon.

The preacher will often speak of the "Ah-Ha" moment meaning the moment he/she discovers what a Scripture means. The inductive sermon creates the Ah-Ha moment in the listener. This revealing of the point of the message accounts for the increase in the kataphatic areas (God revealed).

Prior to this study, I made the assumption the inductive sermon, with its emphasis on keeping the listener's attention, the concrete, the relevant and the iconographic would lead to overall spiritual balance. Surprisingly, while all other areas increased, I discovered a

loss in the speculative areas. Perhaps the affective and apophatic nature of the inductive sermon drew the sample away from the speculative. However, this generation of adults' spirituality resonates more with the affective and apophatic. The inductive sermon structure allows them to exhibit the areas of spirituality in which they are the most comfortable. So, the research suggests a lack of balance at the beginning of the study and the inductive sermon brought the group back into balance. A healthy spiritual profile, says Mulholland, shows balance in all areas (75-76).

Can the inductive sermon aid in achieving this balance? Certainly the attributes of the inductive sermon have the potential to achieve this balance. Its concrete and participatory nature, as well as the attributes listed above, can prove helpful in causing an awareness of the need for balance and helping the congregation come to a decision about how they approach the spiritual disciplines (Lewis *Inductive Preaching* 60). This study suggests, however, merely using the inductive structure will not guarantee balance. The preacher should know both the inductive sermon's strengths and its weaknesses.

This does not mean when one wishes to help a congregation grow in the speculative, that he/she abandon the inductive method in favor of the deductive. Knowing the nature of the inductive sermon lies in the affective and apophatic, the preacher can take steps to assure growth in the speculative as well. He/she will need to become intentional about preaching or teaching the speculative aspects of spirituality to insure balance and not assume balance will come merely through the sermon structure.

What does not change, or shows little change, reveals as much as those areas which do change. In the pre-test, none of the sample group report practicing or displaying an

interest in visualizing themselves in a Scripture passage or keeping a spiritual journal. In the post-test, the sample group evidenced no change in these areas even though they fall under the areas showing growth (visualization has both affective and apophatic characteristics, the journal can be seen as affective and speculative).

Why? Remember during the research period no sermon dealt specifically with the practice of spiritual disciplines (for example: the congregation heard no sermon on learning how to pray). The participants in the study reported in the pre-test these two areas of visualization and journal-keeping as foreign to them. Since I gave no explanation or direction for the need of these disciplines, the sample remained reluctant to take part in them. Kidd describes this reticence as a natural part of our human nature (52).

The test group grew only in the disciplines they already practiced or had a prior interest in. This suggests that while the inductive sermon creates an atmosphere of growth in certain areas, in and of itself, the inductive sermon does not draw people into specific spiritual disciplines. Once more, the inductive sermon proves helpful in changing the attitude of a congregation and leading people into accepting new disciplines, as long as it's done intentionally. The inductive sermon is not a spiritual formation cure-all.

In his book, *Shaped By The Word*, Robert Mulholland states that iconography is a major dynamic of Scripture. In Scripture, as in the icon, one encounters something that takes one beyond oneself (67-70). Thomas Merton also believed the Scripture, like an icon, draws us from a mode of *doing* to one of *being* (67). This mode of being is dangerous, Merton asserts, for you cannot come to the Scriptures and leave the same as you were.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the life of Edwin Lewis. Lewis was a well known Methodist theologian who held to the liberal theological beliefs in vogue in the nineteenth century. In order to prove his beliefs, Lewis began an in depth study of the Bible. He intended to find foundations for his beliefs and assertions and to disprove the “conservative” viewpoint of the authority and inerrancy of the Bible. When finished, Lewis had what he described as a conversion experience, he became convinced of the truth, authority, and power of the word of God (Seamands).

The combination of Scripture and study brought about this radical change. Merton was right. Entering into the presence of the Scriptures is dangerous. No one escapes unscathed. Lewis experienced the iconography of the Scriptures as he moved from doing into being.

The participatory nature of the Scriptures caused this move from doing to being. One does not merely read the Bible. One participates in, and experiences, the story. When one reads the Scripture as a participant, one discovers his/her salvation story. Little wonder participant readers experience change.

Donald Demaray writes that the sermon will affect the listener to the degree in which that listener is allowed to encounter and participate in the presence of Christ (91). Demaray falls in line with Merton and Mulholland, asserting being over doing. If we take seriously the iconographic nature of the sermon, we must ask what structures of preaching best provide an atmosphere for spiritual growth.

This study provides a backdrop by which we examine the iconographic nature of the inductive sermon. The inductive sermon invites the listener to enter into an encounter

with Christ. As we have already noted in the examination of the spirituality wheel profile, the listener only grows when he/she feels he/she has permission. We illustrated this by the comparison and contrast of the congregational and personal spiritual profiles.

The inductive sermon does not depend on the minister to give the answers. Its use of questions and examples draws the listeners to participate. They cannot be bystanders in the process (Lewis *Learning To Preach Like Jesus* 27; Boomershine 27).

Most of what has been written on the inductive sermon over the past few decades centered in a few select areas -- methodology (i.e., how one preaches inductively), why the inductive message helps people to listen and remember the message, how it helps them participate in the message, and how the inductive message can create change in a congregation, especially a hostile one. I found little written concerning how the inductive approach itself affects the spiritual formation of the listener.

George Barna and other social commentators provide us with detailed descriptions of religious habits in today's society. Barna writes, the adults of today experience a sense of cynicism about the world and admit to a growing sense of being disconnected from the world around them. Grounded in the empirical, they have a sense there must be more to life than what they see (Barna *The Invisible Generation* 20-25, *The User Friendly Church* 1-10).

The inductive method seems tailor-made for today's society. While the inductive sermon begins in the empirical, it invites the listener to go beyond. Today's generation of adults will not respond to a linear, step by step approach. They must be allowed to participate at their own pace. My research shows the inductive method provides for this

leisure and space. Invited to participate, the test group grew both in the affective and the apophatic, more so than they did under the deductive method.

The study does have its limits. The study took place over a five month period. It cannot, therefore, examine the long-range effects of the inductive sermon. If the participants listened to a larger segment of inductive sermons, would it effect a different change? Would the congregation revert to the levels indicated in the pre-test? In the short timeframe of this study, we have no way of knowing. It could prove interesting to study how the sample group's orientation toward spiritual formation changes if they heard several inductive sermons dealing with specific spiritual discipline practices.

This study does not examine how the inductive sermon may influence various age groups. Few churches, however, including the one researched, consist of one homogenous unit. I did not explore in this study how this approach effected the older congregation or the younger generation now labeled as the Baby Echo generation (those born after 1982).

The methodology used provides a well-rounded insight into both how a person feels and experiences a sermon. It also proves instructive in examining not only a congregation's spiritual formation practices, but how a congregation perceives personal and corporate spirituality. Further studies may wish to use this methodology to observe how different sermon structures influence people of different generations.

Over the next few years, even with the "graying of the American church" adults between 18-42 will become the main population of the church. How will we as preachers met their needs and help them grow spiritually? As today's teenagers grow to adulthood,

the church faces an entire second generation of the unchurched. How will we help them grow? How will we get them into church and help them to listen? The inductive approach may be our best approach to reach these people. Even without speaking about specific approaches to spiritual formation, the inductive sermon helped the participants in this study to achieve a better balance than did the deductive method.

The inductive method provides many practical applications as the preacher attempts to aid his/her congregation's spiritual growth. Knowing how the inductive method affects the different areas of spiritual formation allows the preacher to provide an atmosphere for spiritual growth. It breaks down barriers of resistance and helps the listener to be aware of the message. The inductive structure helps the minister introduce methods of spirituality unfamiliar to the congregation, especially in the apophatic (mystery of God) and the affective (heart) aspects of spirituality. If the pastor teaches a class or if the church offers a series of classes on spiritual formation disciplines, the preacher can impact the church with the inductive method. Not only will participation in the class ask the congregation to consider new areas of spirituality, but they will actually get a chance to experience new areas through the kairotic moment of the sermon. Therefore, the sermon works as an important piece, but only a piece of the entire church's plan for spiritual growth.

In conclusion, we should understand that we do not affect change. That is the sole province of the Holy Spirit. God has a higher interest in the lives of our congregations than we ever will. However, how we present the Gospel provides pathways by which the Holy Spirit works. One factor from the research repeated itself over and over: people

tend to grow in their spiritual formation when the church provides an atmosphere of permission and openness. Hopefully, in whatever we do, we will give our people permission to grow.

APPENDIX A

The Congregational Survey

CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

I.D. NUMBER

AGE _____

SEX: MALE___ FEMALE___

OF YEARS AS A CHRISTIAN_____

OF YEARS IN THIS CONGREGATION_____

MEMBER: YES____ NO____

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
SERMON RESPONSE				
1. I felt I mattered to someone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I felt I was addresses personally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I was excited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I felt overlooked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I felt connected to those around me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I was bored	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I felt as if I did not matter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I sensed God speaking to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The message was meaningful to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I felt separated from others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. This message spoke to where I am in life right now	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 12. I felt taken seriously as a person | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. I had a sense of belonging | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. I sensed the presence of God | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. The Lord said nothing to me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. This was a sacred moment for me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. It was ordinary | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. I felt nothing special | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | SA | A | D | DA |
| 19. I felt connected to God | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. I felt connected to the body of Christ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. I felt I belonged | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. I felt moved to make a decision
about the message | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. The message must have been
meant for someone else | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24. I felt pressured to make a decision. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25. I felt respected | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

ALTHOUGH YOU MAY OCCASIONALLY ENGAGE IN THESE PRACTICES WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST REPRESENT YOUR REGULAR PATTERN?

- | | strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Read prayers from a book or Psalms | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Write own prayers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Memorize prayers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. Talk to God spontaneously | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 5. Express your feelings to God | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 6. Pray every day | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 7. Have regular time for prayer | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 8. Talk to God about others needs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 9. Pray for others using a prayer list | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 10. Spend time just feeling the presence of God | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| | | SA | A | D | SD |
| 11. Spend time quietly thinking about God | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 12. Listen silently for what God wants to say | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 13. Read Scripture | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 14. Visualize a passage of Scripture | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 15. Memorize a verse of Scripture | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 16. Read a devotional book | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 17. Read a devotional resource about how people have experienced God in their lives | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 18. Sing or play a musical instrument | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 19. Set time aside to pray over day | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 20. Do ministry or service for someone, visiting the sick, ministry to the homeless etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. Keep a spiritual journal or diary | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 22. Walk/exercise, spending time in nature | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

in order to experience God's presence
or beauty in creation.

23. Voluntarily deny an otherwise normal
function (television, food, sweets etc.)
for the sake of prayer or spiritual focus

24. Listen to tapes of music, or preaching

Spirituality Wheel Spirituality Type Selector Test Diagnostic Test

Marjorie Ware, D. Min.

The purpose of this exercise is to DRAW A PICTURE of your experience of corporate worship and compare it to the picture of your own personal style of spirituality.

Before you start, look at the last page of the test. You will see two circles, each divided into quadrants numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4. Each quadrant stands for a type of spiritual expression. In the top circle, you will "draw a picture" of spiritual experience in your particular congregation. In the bottom circle, you will "draw a picture" of your personal style.

Congregational Style

Read through the first set of statements (starting below) and select the one(s) that describe what you do in your worshipping group. You may select none or more than one if you wish. Notice the number that goes with your chosen statement. On the top wheel on the last page of the test, find the numbered quadrant that matches the number of your chosen statement. In that quadrant draw a line (a spoke going from the center to the outside edge of the circle). If you've chosen two statements, draw two spokes, each in a different quadrant. Before you go on to the next set of statements, fill in the "personal style" wheel for the first set.

Personal Style

Read through the first set of statements a second time. Now choose the statement or statements that describe what you personally prefer as part of your spiritual experience. You may select one statement or more than one. Match the chosen statement number with the quadrant number in the lower circle. In that quadrant draw a spoke-line. If you've chosen two statements, draw two spokes, each in a different quadrant. The result is a portrait of your personal style, which you can compare with the experience you have in your worship group.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP

1. A carefully planned and orderly worship program is a glory to God.
2. A deeply moving and spontaneous meeting is a glory to God.
3. Simplicity and some silence are important elements needed for worship.
4. It is not a service, but ordering ourselves to God's service that is important.

TIME

1. Stick to announced beginning and ending times of worship services.
2. It is important to extend the meeting time if one feels led to do so.
3. All time is God's time. A sense of timelessness is important.
4. Gather whenever and as long as you need to in order to accomplish the task.

PRAYER

1. Words express poetic praise; we ask for knowledge and guidance.
2. Let words and feelings evoke God's presence in this moment.
3. Empty the mind of distractions and simply BE in the presence of the Holy Spirit.
4. My life and my work are my prayer.

MUSIC

1. Music and lyrics express praise to God and belief about God.
2. Singing warms and unites us and expresses the soul's deepest heart.
3. Chant and tone bring the soul to quietness and union with God.
4. Songs can mobilize and inspire to greater effort and dedication.

PREACHING

1. The Word of God, rightly proclaimed, is the centerpiece of worship.
2. The gospel movingly preached is the power of God to change lives.
3. Proclamation is heard when the Spirit of God speaks to the inward heart.
4. What we do is our "preaching" and speaks louder than anything we say.

EMPHASIS

1. A central purpose is that we fulfill our vocation (calling) in the world.
2. A central purpose is that we learn to walk in holiness with the Lord.
3. A central purpose is that we be one with the Creator.
4. A central purpose is that we obey God's will completely.

SUPPORT OF CAUSES

(If necessary, circle the words that apply and select categories with the most circles.)

1. Support seminaries, publishing houses, scholarship, preaching to others.
2. Support evangelism, missions, spreading the word on television and radio.
3. Support places of retreat, spiritual direction, liturgical reform.
4. Support political action to establish justice in society and its institutions.

APPENDIX B

Four Samples of Inductive Sermons Preached During the Testing Period

“Getting The Stains Out”

1 John 1:7

A while back there was a commercial which said, “Because it’s never too late to make a good first impression.” I don’t know if I agree with this, but first impressions are important, aren’t they? Whether going for a job interview or on a first date with someone, you try to put on your best and to put your best foot forward.

I’ve been thinking a lot about first impressions the last few weeks. I’ve had the chance to watch my daughter Rebekah make her first impressions on our family, friends, church family. It’s easy for babies to make a good first impression. They’re cute and soft and cuddly. It’s a little harder when you are an adult.

I think first impressions are so important I always wanted to give my children a head start. Let me let you in on my secret -- and you expectant fathers out there take note. This really works. When people come to visit your wife and baby in the hospital, they usually put the babies in the nursery so you can look at them through the window. Now, what I do is I make sure my baby is one of the last ones to get down there. And then I scout the babies. Then, you have the nurses put your baby next to the ugliest baby in the nursery. Oh, now some of you are saying that’s not nice, all babies are beautiful. No, go to the nursery -- most of them are cute, but there is always one who has a harder time being born than others, they’re kind of squished, gnarled-up. That’s the baby you want your baby put next to.

And you have to do it then because once your children get to be a certain age it is almost impossible for them to make a good first impression. Not that the kids are bad but

once they hit that late infant, early toddler stage it is impossible to keep them clean. Oh, they try but they become stain magnets. Things will fly across the room and attach themselves to your kid's clothing. There is a rationale involved. The more important the function or event, the worse the stain will be. If they are going out to play, there may be a spot of mustard on a shirt. Put them in your grandmother's baptismal gown and that baby is going to stain that gown with every bodily function imaginable. And it's never stuff you can just wipe off.

Let me introduce you to the two great culprits known to mankind: baby cereal and Spaghetti O's. If your child gets this stuff on their face, you will not get it off. This is the most stubborn stuff known to mankind, especially if you don't get it off right away. I know a man who is forty-five years old who still has Spaghetti O's on his face because his mother went out of the room and didn't get it off in time.

The interesting thing is that once you have children, they become community property, especially if they are stained. People will come up to you in the market and talk to you. "You know a little soda water will get that out", or "my kids always did that -- if you use hydrogen peroxide it will come right out". And my wife acts as if this is the most natural thing in the world. She will nod politely to them, make small talk, and I am standing there thinking "who are you? Why do you feel it's okay to talk to me?" Of course, they are just trying to be helpful. They know how hard it is to get a stain out of clothes. If you don't do it, you can have some nice clothing ruined.

But the most stubborn stains we have are the ones we get on our souls, the stain of sin and guilt. And if we don't get rid of them they can ruin our hearts.

Several years ago a young man went hunting. He saw what he thought was a deer in the woods. He fired a shot, tracked down his prey to find he had shot and killed an indigent man seeking shelter in the trees. He never told anyone. But every time he looked at his hands he would see blood staining his fingernails. He would wash and wash his hands but he could not scrub the stubborn blood stain from his hands. He eventually went insane and the doctors surmised from his actions and from what he said that he was guilty of this unconfessed murder. He spent the rest of his life in an asylum washing his hands trying to remove the stain that would not go away.

There is a legend that Pontius Pilate, after condemning Jesus and washing his hands of the whole thing, left Jerusalem and ended up in the mountains of France. They say he spent the rest of his life wringing his hands, washing them in the air muttering "not guilty, not guilty." The locals claim even today up in the hills you might catch the image of a man in a robe washing his hands from a stain that will not go away.

We fool ourselves when we think we can sin and get away with it, as if it's some inconsequential matter. Sin stains. It destroys your relationship with God with ruins your relationships with others. It ties a millstone of guilt around your neck. It stains your very soul.

Oh, we can try to ignore it, but it won't go away -- you know it's there. You can try to cover it up so no one can see it but the stain leaks through. You can do good deeds, do something to avert your eyes from your stain but you find the eyes of your soul being drawn back, drawn back to your sin.

So what can we do how do we get rid of the dark ugly stains on your souls? When my son was two he broke a rule. I can't even remember what he did now, but whatever it was I was steamed; I was mad. And I took this little kid and I raised my voice to him and I told him he had better never do that again. I didn't ever want to see him do that. "Do you understand?" He nodded his little head and I picked him up and I marched him over to his time-out chair. I plunked him down and kneeled down eye to eye with him and said, "now you just sit there and think about what you did until I come back to get you." I turned on my heel and then I heard this little voice singing under his breath, "what can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Let me tell you right now: there is no way in the world you can keep a child like that in a time-out chair.

I had to let him go because he was right. All the punishment in the world wasn't going to take away the stain of sin from his heart, but, praise God, it didn't have to. Look at what the Bible says in our menu: "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." (NLB)

Well, that's very nice but you don't know what I've done. You don't know how deep my sin is. Guilt overwhelms me. My stain set in long ago and there is just nothing you can do about it. But what does it say? Does it say Jesus' blood, his sacrifice, only cleanses certain sins or the easy ones or the major sins? No, it says all sins. There is nothing you have done that God cannot forgive. But God wants to do more than forgive. He wants to cleanse you. He is the God of new beginnings. He can wash you clean of that guilt you have carried around. He can cleanse you of the desire to sin. Oh, so often we fall back into sin again and again, helpless to break the cycle when all we have to do is

go to Jesus and say “cleanse me. Wash me in your blood and cleanse me from the stain of sin.”

What can wash away your sin? Not being a good person. It’s not hiding your sin. It’s not punishing yourself with guilt. It’s nothing but the blood of Jesus. Do you need to be cleansed? Then pray with me tonight.

“Blown Off Course”

Acts 28:1-15

This has been, beyond a doubt, the most mild winter I can remember. How about you? Did you know this has been the fifth warmest winter ever in Ohio? And it's the warmest since 1932. Is that a good report for you or not? Some people love mild winters. They hate getting up, scraping off all the ice, driving through horrible conditions to get to work. Others hate a mild winter which means no snow, little skiing or sledding. Of course, we all know who is to blame for our mild winter, he's the bad boy of weather, *El Nino*.

We should be thankful of course. El Nino has not been so kind to other parts of the country. Have you been watching the news and what has been going on in California? The weather is so bad there that the rain and wind and mud are carrying whole houses away. Just sweeping them out into the streams. Whole parts of roads have been washed away. That's no figure of speech. The mud and wind have taken huge chunks out of the road and just swept them away.

The weather every night carries the same scene, it's a car getting pulled out into the water and away it goes. Some poor soul sitting in the driver's seat not knowing what to do until some rescue workers come and get them.

What must that be like? Driving in all that rain and wind, your eyes squinting to make out the road in front of you and suddenly it's full of rain and wind and mud rips the steering wheel out of your hand and you are taken off your course. Pulled away -- you're

not going where you are supposed to be going. You are out of control -- swept off course.

My family was coming home from a vacation in Tennessee, I was maybe fourteen at the time. We were heading up I-75. It was a dark, rainy day. My father couldn't see more than ten, fifteen feet ahead of him. He should have stopped but he doggedly continued. Finally, the rain slowed and we continued on driving under a slate gray sky. My father said, "It won't be long now. We are almost to Cincinnati." Sure enough, in front of us loomed the city skyline. But, there was something different -- it didn't look right. We looked around and saw a huge sign: "Welcome to Louisville." We had been blown off course. Just north of Lexington, I-75 and I-64, which are joined, split off -- I-64 going west to Louisville, I-75 continuing north. The rain and wind were so bad my father didn't see the split. And so we continued on unaware we had been blown off our course. Instead of getting closer to our goal we were getting farther away.

But those are easy things to fix. Aren't they? You turn around you get back on course. But how do you fix it when your life gets blown off course? A few years ago the national drug council ran ads on TV that talked about kid's hopes and dreams set against a black and white scene. I want to be a basketball player; I want to be a ballerina. The ads always ended with "no one ever expects to be addicted to drugs." Scenes of lives blown off course.

In this season of Lent, we are called to look at our lives. I wonder, how often have we seen ourselves in those ads? Oh, it may not be a drug addiction but how many of us have said "This is not what I thought life was going to be." How many of us look up at

some point in our lives and say, "What happened to my dreams?" When did I miss the road? When did my life get blown off course?

No one ever dreams they'll get passed over for promotions time after time or stuck in a dead-end job. But it happens. No one ever dreams their marriage will end in divorce but they do. No one dreams they will be a single parent. No one ever dreams they will lose their health but we do. It happens to all of us. Life is hard. You, young people -- high school and jr. high -- I know you are sitting out there saying that's for the old folks. My life won't get blown off course. Don't you believe it. The winds and storms of life blow on every one of us. All of us have places where we are blown off course in life. It will happen. The question is not *will* the storms of life come. The question is *what* will you do *when* it happens?

I have seen so many people build their lives around broken dreams. Oh, if only this had happened I would be set for life. If I had gotten the job I wanted we would be fine. If this person had fallen in love with me; if this tragedy hadn't happened... They spend their lives in the storm having the winds constantly crashing them up against the rocks of despair. As the winds howl around us we pick up our dreams our life plans, blown off course, torn and tattered and we hold them up to God and we say, "Look at what you have done! Why did you let this happen?"

It's surprising with all that happens to him Paul doesn't do this. Who would have a better right? Whose life has been blown more off course than his? There he is, a faithful servant of God, in chains, unable to preach the Gospel, being taken to Rome. And Paul takes this with a good measure of steadfast faith. Okay God, if that's what you want I will

go. But now this horrible storm and a shipwreck. Paul and the others, survive only by holding onto pieces of the wreckage. Shipwrecked, cold, and shivering Paul helps the others make it up onto the shore of Malta.

Malta. God, what are you thinking? How am I going to get to Rome. God, I thought you had great plans for me. I thought you were going to use me to accomplish something wonderful. How could you let me be shipwrecked on this island? Why would you let my life be blown off course?

Yet Paul utters none of these things. No, Paul's understanding of God's will and grace go deeper than that. And perhaps Paul has seen too many people whose lives are destroyed when they are blown off course.

You see, having your life be blown off course will not kill you. What kills us is when we refuse to see that God's redeeming power extends far beyond our souls. God can even redeem the moments when our lives are blown off course. Faith is being able to say "this was not my plan for my life but it is what I have to give you God. Take it and use it for your glory. Redeem and heal my wounded heart." Oh, what a powerful thing it is to see God work when our lives have been blown off course. Of course, we cannot predict the outcome. Sometimes God brings our lives back on course and gives us our dreams. Sometimes he points us in a new direction with new blessings which never would have happened if we had stayed on the original course. Sometimes God heals our woundedness and uses us to bless others because of what we have been through. But, rest assured, God will use it if you invite him into the places in your life that have been broken, blown off course.

Look at Paul. Had Paul remained in his cabin screaming at God for letting this happen, look at how many prisoners would have died. Instead, Paul is able to show extraordinary strength and compassion and saves all of their lives. How many came to Christ that day when they saw Paul life, blown off course, standing strong in his faith and bringing hope?

If Paul's life had not been blown off course what would have happened to the people of Malta? Malta was not some uninhabitable island. If Paul had only thought of his broken dream to reach Rome, he never would have seen all the good God had just placed in his lap. Paul shares the Gospel there in Malta. A revival swept across that land. So powerful was Paul's time there that Malta has proclaimed itself a Christian people since 60 AD -- the year of the shipwreck. All because Paul let God redeem his broken dreams.

A little while ago I asked you what were plans for your life that fell apart, where your life got blown off course. What part of your life had been broken? I ask you now, "What are you going to do with the pieces of your life you hold in your hands? Will you bring them as an offering before God? Will you let him redeem them and use them for his glory? Let him heal you."

God is still there when your life is blown off course. He doesn't leave us. He is a God who redeems all things given to him. What will you do? I know there are many of you holding pieces of your dreams. You have come and shared those. Today, I invite you to bring them to the altar. Bring them and let God work throughout your shattered hopes -- the place where life has blown you off course. Come and meet God's Grace.

AMEN

"The Rest of the Story"

2 Samuel 12

Psalm 51

How did it ever come to this? He never in his wildest imagination thought he could commit murder. Why, why did he have to be home that night? What compelled him to watch as she was taking her bath? Why didn't he turn away? What made him obsess on her? What was he thinking?

Questions he had asked himself a hundred times. How many times had he gone over the *if only*; if only Bathsheba had not been there; if only Uriah had slept with his wife; if only, if only. He was tired of putting the blame on others -- Bathsheba, Uriah. David knew it was his fault.

Nothing had been right since then no matter how he tried to fix it. He thought once Uriah was out of the way, things would get back to normal. But, now he knew nothing would ever be the same. This woman he obsessed over now turned away from him. Who could blame her? Every time David looked at her he saw his own shame. The baby, which should be the centerpiece of his life, was a constant reminder of his sins.

He was so sick of worrying if people would find him out. What a laugh: David, a man after God's own heart. He still attended the worship and the festivals. But when was the last time David prayed? His lyre rested in the corner of a room gathering dust. He no longer sang or wrote Psalms to God. What would he say? What would he have to say to God?

David's musing comes to an abrupt end. Nathan enters, "Sire, I've a story to tell you, one that needs your immediate attention. There was a man who had a prized lamb. He was a poor man. It was all he had. He loved that lamb like it was one of his family. A rich man came and killed that lamb to feed a guest, even though he had plenty of his own sheep to slaughter."

Nathan's story pulls at David's heart strings. David was always for the underdog. He would make things right; he would set things straight. "Nathan, bring me this man and I will punish him. As the Lord lives he will die."

Nathan points one bony finger at David and thunders, "Behold the man. God says, 'I gave you everything and you despised my word. You killed and took what did not belong to you. Your household will rebel. What you have done in secret, I will do in public view.'"

What a tragic story. David had everything going for him. And to have it all come crashing down on him. A sex scandal, the conspiracy to commit murder, to get away with his first sin. What arrogance to think he would get away with it. Now, it is all out in the open. David must be completely and utterly ashamed of what he has done. Now everyone knows Nathan's finger-pointing will spread to everyone in Jerusalem.

While we might feel sorry for David, after all he has done so many good things -- there is anger there too. He threw so much away. He could have turned away from his sin. He could have made the choice not to commit adultery or murder. And so it all comes crashing down around his ears. Well, he is getting his just deserts. That's the way

the story should end. David doesn't get a way with his sinful choices. He is made to suffer the consequences.

Yet, we don't feel particularly good at David's comeuppance, do we? We should, after all, he is the bad guy here and his crimes have been revealed. But there is a cloud of melancholy drifting over this story. There is a part of us that wants David to get away with it. Because David's story is our story. David's not a bad guy we argue; look at all the good he has done -- the killing of Goliath, the uniting of Israel. All that time spent in prayer writing those Psalms -- David's a good guy who made some horrible choices.

Behold the man! And so the curtain comes crashing down on David, his true nature exposed. As it must come crashing down on all of us some day when our true nature, our past, is laid out in the light of day. This is how the story should end. Because that's the way life is. We can't get away with our sins.

But, praise God, the story doesn't end here. Nathan tells David -- God is not done writing your story. He has a new story to tell. Please hear this: God is never content with revealing our sins. God will never be satisfied with anything less than a transformed heart. In the midst of this dark moment, a ray of light and truth shines forth. That which could have been David's ultimate downfall becomes his moment of great triumph. Because God doesn't want to just reveal David's sinful nature. He wants to bring David back home. God has more of David's story to tell.

It begins with a moment of great spiritual clarity for David. I have sinned against God. Is not Bathsheba; it's not Uriah; the One I have to deal with is God. Against him and him alone have I sinned. Oh, hear the Good News that comes from Nathan's lips,

“Yes, but God has forgiven you.” Why? David has done nothing to deserve such forgiveness. He has done no redeemable thing except perhaps marry Bathsheba. But God's forgiveness has nothing to do with David. It has everything to do with God's grace.

It is that moment, that moment when David begins to understand the depths of God's love for him. There in the midst of his revealed wickedness, that his trembling hand reaches for his harp and whispers as tears run down his face. “Have mercy on me, oh God, because of your unfailing love. Create within me a clean heart.” And God begins to write David's story anew.

Tonight we begin the most difficult session of the church year, Lent. How stark it is, how different it is from Advent. There is no hanging of the greens. There are no joyous lent songs. It is a somber time a dark season. Oh, we run to Advent and Christmas. We good-naturedly complain about how little time we have. But only the worst grinch amongst us doesn't look forward to Advent: Christmas is coming.

But not Lent. Lent makes us drag our heels -- we have to be pulled through lent. We come hesitantly because we know, unlike Advent, we will not find a cooing baby at the end of this journey but the lifeless body of a young man hanging on a cross. We will not gather around a manger but a tomb.

We run to Advent because we know we will find angels and wise men and shepherds. In Lent, we know Nathan is waiting for us. Waiting and pointing his finger at us. “I know who you are -- behold the man or the woman. Don't think you can fool all these people with how good you are trying to be I know what you are really like. I know your sins.” I know how often you have stared at the ceiling playing the same games David

did -- why did I do this, if only I had made a different choice in my life. Advent gives us a promise of who we might be: peace on earth, good will to men. Lent reminds us of who we are.

But I urge you, reluctant as you are, to enter into Lent. Come because meeting Nathan here in this time of mediation and reflections not such a bad thing. Painful, yes. Agonizing? It may be. But God uses these times of painful awareness to write the rest of the story of our lives. Lent is only a process. God does not leave us in Lent. God does not ask us to see ourselves as we really are, to lay our sins and poor choices in order to punish us. No, God leads us through Lent and Good Friday to bring us to Easter.

One of the most joyous events of going through Lent is finding that ray of hope shining from an empty tomb, saying this is not end of your story. God loves you. It begins as it did for David in that moment of clarity: I have sinned against God and God alone, yet he still loves me. He forgives me not because I deserve it but because he loves me that much. He has mercy on me even before I ask because of his unfailing love. Because of his great compassion, he blots the stains of my sin out of my life. And so, God begins to write the rest of our story.

God doesn't want to just reveal your sin. He wants to transform your heart. Cleanse me and I will be whiter than snow. Purify me and I will be clean. If I try hard enough? No, if God does it. If I have only committed a few sins? No, no matter how much sin has soiled your life Jesus can make you clean.

We come tonight and receive the sign of the cross on our foreheads. It's a sign of our brokenness, of our understanding of God's sacrifice for us. But, tonight it is also a sign of our understanding just how far God would go to tell the rest of our story. So come, receive the cross and rejoice -- for God has more of your story to tell.

AMEN

“Do The Right Thing”

Acts 25:1-22

In the early nineties, writer-director Spike Lee made a movie called *Do the Right Thing*. It concerned the racial tensions in a neighborhood in New York. At the beginning of the movie everyone has an understanding. There is tension but the people have learned to live with it. They understand the rules.

But, early on there is a misunderstanding between one of the black protagonists and the Italian-American owner of the local pizzeria. The misunderstanding grows slowly drawing everyone in the neighborhood onto opposite sides. The tensions build until the inevitable happens, a riot with disturbing violence touching all of the families.

The interesting thing about the movie is everyone seems to know it's all just a misunderstanding, yet they seem powerless to stop what is happening. Everyone can see that the anger is going to escalate but few try to stop it. They are too busy trying to protect their own little world and their insulated *status quo* to stem the tide of violence. Everyone knows what the right thing to do is, but no one does it. Lee's message, whether you agree with it or not, is that here is the problem with racial tensions and misunderstandings in this country. Everyone knows what the right thing to do is, but we do nothing about it.

Lee warns: ignore the problem for too long and we will all suffer the consequences. It's not enough to know what the right thing to do is. It's not enough to want to do the right thing. You have to do the right thing.

If Lee had lived back in the first century he might have made the same movie but in a different locale. Perhaps he would have chosen a court in Jerusalem and centered his story around the tensions between the Jews and the Christians.

Our good friend Festus might have found himself as one of the major players, for he too has trouble with doing the right thing. Festus is an interesting character in the book of Acts because he is a casual observer of the tensions between the Jews and the Christians. He obviously understands little of their religion and doesn't care to. He tells King Agrippa, "Well, I don't know what they are arguing about. Something about this guy's religion that disagrees with what they believe. It's really all beyond me. But this Paul says he wants to be tried in Rome so I am sending him on."

Now it's obvious Festus knows the law and he knows Paul is innocent. These charges don't concern the law he says. Whether he knows anything about Christianity is irrelevant. He knows Paul is innocent. But what does he do? Unable to bring himself to do the right thing, he passes the buck, and Paul, on to Agrippa. It's always easier to expect someone else to do the right thing. The problem is he has passed Paul on to a man who is living in an incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice. It remains to be seen if such a person is able to make the right ethical choices and do what is right.

So what do you think will happen? Will Agrippa do what is right and let Paul go? No, of course not. He does not have the moral or ethical foundation, we cannot possibly expect him to do what is right.

Nor should we be surprised. We in the church have played out this scenario time after time and the results are always the same -- disastrous. For if Spike Lee could make

such a movie in the first century he would find no lack of material to comment on in the church in 1998. We too are guilty of knowing full well what the right thing to do is, and yet we are apparently incapable of doing anything about it. The best we can do is to play Festus and pass on the problem to someone else and expect them to take care of it.

Look at the issue of abortion. The President has consistently refused to veto partial-birth abortions, but where is the church? Why hasn't the church said anything? I worry about a church who is unwilling to take a stand against such barbaric actions and wonder how we will ever take a stand against normal abortion procedures. Of course, we shouldn't be surprised. We passed on the issue of abortion to the government long ago and expected a group without the proper ethical foundations to know how to set proper ethical standards. So, we have come to the point where baby seals are more protected than human infants.

Now, here is an issue where the church has been quite clear. Read your Bibles, you will find no passage that supports abortion. Look at our Discipline, we might get called wishy-washy in our beliefs, but the United Methodist church has never sanctioned abortions for convenience or for gender selection. The only time we have even begrudgingly give a nod is when the mother's life is in danger and then we fall on the fact that it's a no-win situation and we want to be loving and minister to the family whatever their decision.

So, why aren't we doing the right thing? Well, we don't want to be labeled as some right-wingers or with a certain political agenda. Who cares? If you are doing the right

thing, doing what God wants you to do, who cares what the world thinks? Since when has the church depended on the good graces of this world?

So, what should the church do? First of all, we should not expect the world to understand. We should expect the world to mislabel us, to point fingers and turn their back. Just like they did to Jesus.

I see quite a few of you are wearing *What Would Jesus Do* bracelets. How committed are to living by that? Are you committed to continue on doing what is right when the world misunderstands? Is that symbol *WWJD* written on your hearts or are you more concerned with what people will say, how will they react? What will my family think? We cannot change the world by doing some things every now and then. We must be committed and consistent in our righteousness.

Today is the day we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord. Have any of you ever wondered why should Jesus be baptized. He has no sins to confess. John the Baptist doesn't even want to baptize him. So why does he do it? Because he is committed to doing what is right. His baptism symbolizes Jesus' commitment to being righteous and living as his Heavenly Father directed. It not enough to wear a bracelet. You have to wear that commitment on your hearts.

But Jesus' baptism not only signifies his commitment to consistent righteousness, but his identification with the human condition. It's Jesus' way of saying "I am one of you. I will be here for you." If we are only committed to consistent righteousness, we can come off as self-involved, holier-than-thou. Now you might be holier-than-thou, but

rarely does that do any good. Can you be consistent in your relationships with other people?

You see, when we talk about issues like this, so very often we get the wrong idea. Doing the right thing may not mean attending some big rally or writing your Bishop or congressman. It doesn't mean passing out fliers. It may mean finding one person, just one person whose life you can change. It's one thing to put a bumper sticker on your car. But it's another to go to someone you know considering an abortion and say, "let me help you. I will be there for you" and being able to love them despite the choice they may make. That's what Jesus would do. Inviting that angry teen who is troubled into your home and consistently loving them, even if they never change. That's what Jesus would do, that's the right thing. Praying and being there for the neighbor who is going through divorce. That's what Jesus would do, that's what it means to do the right thing. The other things are needed to be sure but we must not ignore our personal responsibility for our global ones.

Look at Jesus. He is consistent in his one on one relationships, doing the right thing for individuals as well as society. He heals a withered arm on the Sabbath. Is it right? he asks, to do good on the Sabbath? It is a question I ask you to reflect on as you prepare for communion this morning. As you come to take the body and blood of Christ into your lives, will you allow him to live through you? Will you commit yourself to consistent righteousness and consistent one on one relationships, changing one life at a time by doing the right thing? Commit yourselves. Close your eyes to what the world will say and listen

for what the Lord will say as he looks at you and says "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

AMEN

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