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ABSTRACT

PREACHING DOCTRINE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

by

C. Mark Gooden

The Church is in danger of forgetting doctrines that provided instruction and growth over the centuries. Postmodern philosophy has caused many people to pursue other avenues for meaning and direction by promoting pluralism, consumerism, and cynicism.

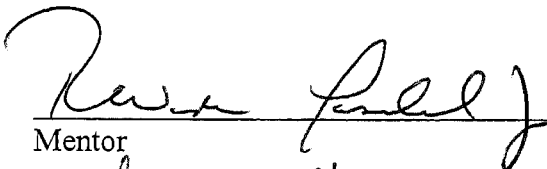
The Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale (SCO) was used to measure the impact of preaching doctrines on those who attend Central United Methodist Church, Lenoir City, Tennessee. Five persons were also interviewed to determine the effect of the sermon series. The SCO results revealed the congregation had a high orthodoxy belief system. The eight-week sermon series did not produce any notable changes.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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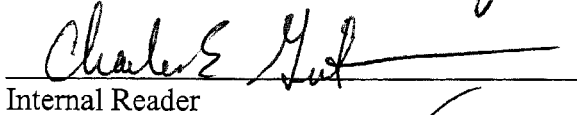
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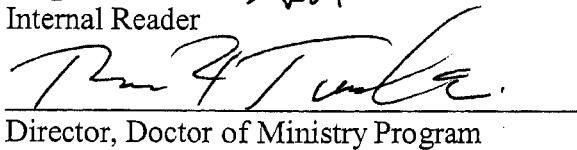
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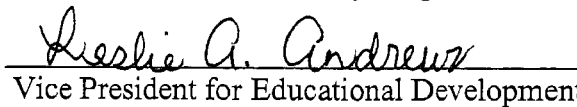
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A Dissertation

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Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

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by

C. Mark Gooden

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In February 1997, a contemporary worship service was started at Central United Methodist, Lenoir City, Tennessee. The service has praise music, dramas, multimedia productions, and a sermon. I believe that the contemporary service has contributed significantly to the overall growth of the Church. At the traditional service, the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer are recited. In the non-traditional service, the Apostles' Creed is not mentioned. I often wonder if the people of Central United Methodist are in danger of losing their identity as United Methodists and as the Church. The Church is in danger of forgetting who and whose it is (Brueggemann, Biblical p. 11).

While the contemporary worship experience has brought more people into this community of faith, I am concerned that culture influences the congregation more than the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Preaching is more important than ever before. People are hungry for truth, and preaching seeks to clarify and reinforce basic beliefs. Preaching is one tool that helps people remember who they are or introduce them to who they could be.

The Emergence of Postmodernism in Today's Culture

The most common description given to contemporary culture is "postmodernism." As the term implies, postmodernism suggests people exchange a modern culture for a new worldview. Modernism replaced the previous age of premodernism. The premodern era was the age of the Church. In the premodern era, the Church held power and prominence over the culture because the Church dispensed revelation, interpretation, and salvation. Modernity was born with the advancement of technology and the explosion of knowledge.

The modern era began to emerge in the fourteenth century slowly but completely loosening the grip of premodernity on society. As Chuck Smith writes, “Modernity’s break with premodernity came in revolutionary stages, the most notable being the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment” (17).

The Renaissance marked a cultural awakening. From the 1300s to the 1500s, artists such as Leonardo de Vinci and explorers like Christopher Columbus reflected a spirit of discovery and change. The concept of human freedom began to emerge. The worldview was shifting from God to humanity. Humanity still needed God, but humanity was not as dependent on God as in the past (Smith 17).

The Reformation accelerated the Renaissance emphasis on the individual. For Martin Luther, the individual Christian interpreting Scripture could confront the Church. Staunchly Christian as he was, Luther placed a new authority on the individual, which is the key element of modernism (Smith 17).

The Enlightenment era completed the turn from revelation to individual authority and freedom. Enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, and Hume continued to develop the concept of individual freedom. “Enlightenment thinkers arrived at truth through reason and the five senses rejecting religion as a source of truth. At the same time the notion of human rights replaced the notion of divine authority” (Smith 18).

The modernistic approach was wrapped up in reason, empirical observation, and rationalization. People believed that science and education would help to solve all the world’s problems. Technology became the way of dealing with the problems of the world. Oden speaks of “the enchantment of modernity,” characterized by “technological messianism, enlightenment idealism, quantifying empiricism, and the smug fantasy of

inevitable historical progress” (Death of Modernity 24).

Over the past two centuries, inventions of the telephone, automobiles, airplanes, space ships, and computers have improved peoples’ lives. Most people believed that humanity could overcome anything given enough time to ponder and contemplate the situation. If a problem existed, then someone or some group would find a solution. Technology was the savior of the world (Paschal; Grenz, Primer; Oden; Craig Miller).

However, modernity did not deliver on its promise of infinite progress. Science, even with its remarkable achievements in the last few years, has not moved people toward a better society. Technological advancement does not always mean society advances morally. The Columbine shootings in 1999 underline society’s growing disappointment and disillusionment because the shootings exposed more fully the lack of moral stability in a culture based on reason. A moral chasm has developed in society, and neither science nor technology has answers to fix the problem. People have lost trust in modernity’s promise of a brighter and better world. Smith states the following in his book The End of The World As We Know It:

We would love to discover a cure for cancer, AIDS, and even more trivial problems such as baldness and acne. On the other hand, we fear the possibility that some wide-eyed physicist may attempt to clone himself in a secret laboratory or a radical terrorist group may be able to deliver a nuclear or biological weapon of mass destruction to the heart of our nation.
(41)

War, prejudice, and hate have marred every culture. The genocides in Germany, Cambodia, and the former Yugoslavia have further exposed the moral vacuum in modernity. Craig Miller writes the following in his book Post Moderns: The Beliefs, Hopes and Fears of Young Americans:

As the twenty-first century dawns, it is not so easy to plan optimistically for the future. Increasingly Americans live with a sense of chaos. They do not trust their institutions. Jobs are not secure. Violence is random and capricious. People are facing a confusing set of choices and few solid answers. (14)

On 11 September 2001, I believe modernity once again was seen lacking in its ability to promote the concept of knowledge being inherently good; therefore, people are not looking for answers to life's questions in science and technology alone. Society is in a period of transition from the modern world to the unfamiliar and ever changing postmodern world.

Before people become too fearful of the emergence of postmodernity, people need to remember that modernity was not so kind to Christianity. "If the dangers and challenges of postmodernity seem terrifying, it might be helpful to remember the intense hostility of the modern era toward Christianity" (Smith 20).

Postmodernism, then, is a reaction to the failures of modernistic optimism. As postmodernity emerges, a new worldview is developing. As Smith writes, "So when we turn to culture as a whole we see that modernism with its optimistic promises, its overconfidence in rationalization and science, its naive trust in knowledge and progress is no longer a dominance theme" (47).

The modern values of individualism, industrialism, and egocentricity are being replaced by a society desiring something more than what science and technology have provided. With the arrival of postmodernity, people want and desire the following: choices, connectedness, experiences, and interaction with life (Smith 32-35).

The Desire for Choices

In the premodern world, one's life, job, and future were largely defined by the

accidents of birth and culture. As the modern world emerged on the scene, industries provided new ways of supporting family. Education also opened the door to new careers for all social levels.

The postmodern world has exploded with choices. In the not so distant past, a customer would go to a shoe store and select Converse high tops or low tops. Today, a customer can go to an athletic shoe store and find shoes for running, jumping, kicking, swimming, walking, hiking, boating, climbing, and aerobics. The styles, colors, and brands are numerous. A customer goes to a car dealership and is offered many options. Dual climate control, leather seats, sun roof, heated seats, fog lights, CD player, and, of course, a global positioning satellite system are some of the choices available to the customer.

As a result, people expect to have multiple choices in spiritual matters. Jesus may be a choice, but Jesus is one choice among many choices. People can also choose to explore other avenues to satisfy their spiritual hunger such as witchcraft, Mideastern spiritualism, and channeling (Craig Miller 125; Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims 60).

The Desire for Connection

While listening to the radio one day, the announcer presented a new idea about the dating scene. The new type of dating is called speed dating. People gather at a bar and line up opposite one another for an eight-minute chat. A bell rings, and the participants move to the next person. People are hungry for relationships.

One of the reasons people are hungry for relationships is because people are now interacting more and more with machines. If people pull up to a gas pump, people do not even have to interact with a human being. The computer screen leads people through the process. As Sweet states, "The more connected we become electronically the more

disconnected we can become personally” (Postmodern Pilgrims 115).

The more impersonal business transactions become, the more people seek relationships. The modern emphasis on individualism still exists, but now people are also seeking connections, and people expect religious institutions to provide both options and connections.

The Desire for Experience

A spiritual awakening is going on in the world today, but Christianity is not leading the way. Sweet points out that many movies such as Contact, Fallen, The Devil’s Advocate, Michael, and City of Angels deal with spiritual matters. Hollywood producers understand that people are searching for truth and meaning in life. The Church, which has the words of good news, seems to remain silent. A do-it-yourself kind of spirituality exists in the world (Soul Tsunami 412-15).

In Postmodern Pilgrims, Leonard Sweet makes the following observation:

Western Christianity went to sleep in a modern world governed by gods of reason and observation. It is awakening to a postmodern world open to revelation and hungry for experience. Indeed, one of the last places postmoderns expect to be spiritual is in the Church. (29)

The postmodern’s motto might be summed up as “I feel; therefore, I am.” The emphasis on feeling is evident even in worship. I was talking with another pastor the other day, and he said, “I just want people to feel something in the worship experience.”

Leonard Sweet says the following in Postmodern Pilgrims: “Moderns want to figure out what life’s about. Postmoderns want to experience what life is, especially experience life for themselves. Postmoderns are not willing to live arm’s-length distance from experience. They want life to explode all around them” (33).

The Desire for Interaction

Postmoderns long to interact with life. Television is no longer the leading choice of younger generations. Children are reading interactive books or playing educational games on the computer (Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims 62). In Postmodern Pilgrims, Sweet believes postmodernists crave interaction:

Postmoderns are not simply going to transmit the tradition or the culture they've been taught. They won't take it unless they can transform it and customize it. Making a culture their own doesn't mean passing on a treasure that they've inherited, but inventing and engineering their own heirloom of the treasures of the past. (58-59)

Postmodernists want to make lasting and significant changes. People have always participated in life at some level, but postmoderns long for a deeper interaction with life. Ordinary special events are becoming opportunities for interaction. For example, weddings have become participatory events. Cameras are on each table for family and friends to capture the unique moments at the reception. In the funeral business, a new craze is called the signature casket. People will come up and sign the casket during the funeral. People are looking for ways to interact in life (Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims 63).

Definition of Postmodernism

J. L. Packer, theologian at Regent College, says, "Postmodernism is a word that has never secured a dictionary definition. Different people use it different ways" (qtd. in Goetz 51). Goetz states that "postmodernism is a throw-away word that means everything and nothing" (51). Many books are written on the subject of postmodernism, and I am not sure that one precise definition can be chosen. The postmodernists would say that postmodernism is whatever people want it to be. As Loscalzo states, "Is postmodernism a movement, a philosophy, a reaction to modernism or merely a modern

shibboleth academicians use to impress other academicians? The answer: all the above”

(13). Chuck Smith, in his book The End of the World As We Know It, mentions Jean-Francois Lyotard, who defined postmodernism “as incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv).

Craig Loscalzo labels postmodernists in generational terms. The children who were born from 1965-1981 are considered postmodernist. Loscalzo believes that the modern era died somewhere in the 1960s, and from the 1960s to the mid-1980s, a cultural revolution was set into motion. The GI generation (1908-1945) was in conflict with the Baby Boomers (1946-1964). The postmodern generation was born during this conflict. “Postmoderns were the ones caught in the middle of the many ideological wars and social changes that marked their birth years” (Loscalzo 13).

Many scholars believe postmodernism can best be described as what follows modernism. Some scholars think that the modern age started with the siege of the Bastille in the French Revolution and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Grenz believes that the modern age began in the Renaissance which gave new importance to humanity. “Building on the Renaissance, the Enlightenment elevated the individual self to the center of the world” (Grenz, Primer 2). The point is still made that a postmodernistic philosophy of living developed in reaction to modernity’s values and ideals. (Loscalzo 13; Grenz, Primer 2-3).

I believe that postmodernism is more than a generational issue. While present generations are truly more postmodern, the roots of this movement began much earlier than the 1960s. Furthermore, while postmodernity did come after modernity, I believe any discussion of postmodernity begins with the philosophers of the enlightenment period.

Postmodernism has taken centuries to evolve just as the modern era emerged over a period of time from the premodern era. Modernity is stubbornly giving way to postmodernity as premodernity gave way to modernity.

As a basic definition, postmodernism is a rejection of the modern mind-set. As Grenz states, “Postmodernism refers to an intellectual mood and array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set” (12). At best, postmodernism begins with a cynicism for all claims of authority and is cautious about any sources of power.

This emerging postmodern culture obviously presents a challenge and opportunity to the preacher. In today’s culture, I believe a preacher is called to preach doctrine and at the same time, welcome and respect the questions of the postmodern world. That is the question this dissertation sought to answer.

Description of the Study

This study consisted of eight sermons on United Methodist beliefs that were preached at the contemporary service at Central United Methodist Church of Lenoir City, Tennessee, from September to October 2002. The sermons were prepared to preach doctrinal beliefs of the United Methodist Church employing a style of conversation and dialogue (see Appendix A). The doctrines preached were God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, grace, perfection, resurrection, and life everlasting.

The sermons provided the congregation with the following:

1. Information was provided to correct misconceptions about truth;
 2. Information was provided to rename experiences in relation to God’s authority;
- and,

3. Information was provided to help the congregation respond to the concept of community.

The sermons were preached without a pulpit or any type of notes. The style of the sermons was conversational. The sermons were based on the doctrines of the United Methodist Church and the Apostles' Creed (The United Methodist Hymnal 881).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of preaching the basic doctrines of the Christian faith on the people of Central UMC while living in a postmodern world. I have drawn my sermon topics from the Apostles' Creed (The United Methodist Hymnal 881), which gives very specific doctrines of what Christians believe, and from the doctrines of the United Methodist Church.

Methodology

The research project was an evaluative study in the experimental mode utilizing a pretest and a posttest design. No comparison group was used to evaluate the impact of preaching of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith on the people of Central UMC.

Research Question #1

What knowledge about the doctrines existed prior to the sermon series?

Research Question #2

What changes occur in the postmodern participants' knowledge of the doctrines because of the sermon series?

Research Question #3

What other variables might coincide with changes in the participants' responses to doctrines?

Delimitations

Many factors are involved in the spiritual growth of each human being. I would be amiss to believe that one study could determine each and every factor enhancing spiritual growth. This study has measured the impact of doctrinal preaching on participants' attitudes, knowledge, and behavior at Central UMC in Lenoir City, Tennessee. The study identified key elements of the postmodern thinker that enhance receptivity to doctrinal preaching.

Population

The population of the study were those who attended Central UMC in Lenoir City, Tennessee. Lenoir City is a small town of twelve thousand according to the 2000 census (United States Bureau 5284). The Church has 644 members. Every adult, eighteen and older, was a participant in the study. The sample of the population was sixty-four people. These sixty-four participants completed both the pretest and posttest Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale and the pretest and posttest Postmodern Survey. The five people interviewed were from the the sixty-four person sample.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

I used the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale (see Appendix J) as a way of measuring the effects of doctrinal preaching on the participants of this proposed study (Hunsberger 360-65). A pretest survey was given to each participant two weeks prior to the sermon series (see Appendix B). This pretest gave a baseline of the participants' knowledge of Christian doctrines found in the Apostles' Creed.

I devised a four-code identification number to help track individual responses. The congregation was asked to participate through the bulletin and newsletter. The Short

Christian Orthodoxy Scale was handed out before and after the contemporary worship service. I also had copies available at key locations in the Church.

A posttest was given after the eight-week series of doctrinal sermons. The purpose of the posttest determined if the sermons made any difference in the belief system of each participant (see Table 4.8 p. 93). The posttest survey had eight boxes at the bottom for participants to check off the number of Sundays attended (see Appendix C).

I conducted a pretest interview and a posttest interview (see Appendix D) with the same five individuals selected on the basis of age (general age categories), gender, involvement in Central UMC activities, and regularity of worship attendance. The participants were asked to answer four questions. Each of the individuals attended the contemporary service at Central UMC.

I also conducted a pretest and a posttest questionnaire adapted from an unpublished work of Stanley Grenz to determine the extent of postmodern thinking of the members of the congregation of Central UMC (Grenz, Postmodern, see Appendix K). I devised a four-code identification number to help track individual responses.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 of this work establishes the biblical, theological, and homiletical context for this study. Chapter 3 explains the design of the study. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Chapter 5 provides a summation and interpretation of the research findings.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE--
THE NEED FOR DOCTRINAL PREACHING

Pastors have the responsibility to uphold the doctrines of the Christian faith. The intent of this project was to test preaching as a tool to enable pastors to witness effectively to a postmodern culture.

The postmodern culture is not familiar with Christian doctrines or beliefs. To make matters worse, many Christians do not have an adequate understanding of the Christian faith. The tendency among some Christians to speak legalistically has caused an even wider gap with the postmodern world. Postmoderns perceive the Church as an institution of authority and power. Postmoderns are suspicious and skeptical of such institutions that make truth claims. The word doctrine conjures up negative images for many people. “Many secular people are turned off by dogma, and therefore may not be open to part of the biblical canon ... that they associate with dogma” (Hunter, How to Reach 94).

Postmodernists can hardly think of doctrines except as something constructed by humans, an artificial barrier to fence some people in and other people out. “Doctrine refers to a body of beliefs forged by other humans in a previous era” (Smith 122). Therefore, in the postmodern context, doctrinal teaching and preaching may be heard and at the same time deconstructed. The postmodern audience is not persuaded by a preacher’s mere claim of authority. Robinson makes the following statement in his book, Biblical Preaching:

Men or women who speak effectively for God must first struggle with the questions of their age and then speak to those questions from the eternal truth of God. To expound the scriptures so the contemporary God confronts us where we live requires the preacher study his [her] audience.
(77)

The Biblical Mandate

Pastors throughout the ages have been instructed to teach and keep the doctrines of faith (2 Tim. 3:1-9; John 8:32-14:6). The Greek word translated as doctrine (*didache*) is the same word the New Testament translates as teaching. Paul speaks to Timothy often about the responsibility he has to carry on the traditions of the faith:

Teach and urge these duties. Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. (1 Tim. 6:2-4)

Paul also urges Timothy to take care of all that has been entrusted to him:

“Timothy guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith” (1 Tim. 6:20-21).

Titus is urged by Paul to choose carefully who teaches doctrine. “He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching so that he may be able both to preach sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it” (Tit. 1:9).

Paul urges followers in Acts to be on guard:

Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (Acts 20:28-29)

The preaching and teaching of doctrine were very important to the early Church. Leadership was entrusted with the responsibility to instruct and protect the Church from false doctrines.

Early on, Christianity was linked to both the Jewish and Greek world. The Greek

world was polytheistic and philosophical, and both influences had an impact on the early Church. For example, in Ephesians 4:14, Paul urges, “We must no longer be children tossed to and fro and blown about by every doctrine, by people’s trickery.” The letter to Ephesians was quite possibly a letter circulated from church to church in Asia Minor. Paul knew some people were teaching false doctrine in the region of Ephesus. Paul does not mention specific examples in verse 14, but he alludes to dangers that are threatening the unity of the Church. Ralph Martin suggests that one problem could be a lack of moral responsibility:

The point seems to be that Gentile Christians, who were streaming into the Church, were adopting an easy going moral code based on a perverted misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching (cf. Rom 6:1-12). At the same time, they were boasting of their supposed independence of Israel and were becoming intolerant of their Jewish brethren. (5)

The people of the church at Ephesus were not growing in faith nor love. Paul reminded the Gentile Christians that Christ Jesus is the Head of the Church and the Messiah of both Jews and Gentiles. As followers of Christ, the Church at Ephesus was being called to put on the new nature of Christ and put off the old nature (Col. 4:22-24). “Christians, who share the risen life of Christ are raised above the pitiless control of cosmic forces. Equally they are lifted onto a high plane of noble living that opposes all that is sensual and debasing” (Martin 9).

The teachings of the Gnostics heavily influenced people in the Ephesus region and caused a division within the early Church. Gnosticism, which taught a separation between God and creation, had infiltrated the Church, and Paul was trying to dissuade such beliefs (Martin 7).

Paul wrote a letter to address the false teachings circulating among the followers

of Jesus:

The letter to the Colossians is thus concerned with those aspects of the Gospel which were chiefly threatened by the Colossian heresy—the uniqueness of the person of Christ, in whom the plenitude of deity was embodied; the perfection of the redeeming and reconciling work accomplished by his death on the cross, and the spiritual liberty enjoyed by all who by faith were united to him. (Bruce 26-27)

Paul also saw Gnosticism as a real threat to the church at Colassae and spoke out against the teachings of Gnosticism. “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the elemental signs of the universe and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

The Gnostics believed that Christ was one of many mediators between heaven and earth. The Gnostics also believed that Christ only pretended to be human; therefore, God was set in opposition to the world. Martin writes the following about the Apostle Paul:

Evidently Paul had to face tendencies and teachings at Colossae that set God and the world in some sort of opposition. God was distanced and made remote; the world was spurned and the human body held in contempt and its physical appetites held on unnaturally tight rein. (95)

Recent Jewish converts to Christianity also had an impact on the followers of Jesus. Dietary laws, Sabbath observances, and other restrictions observed by these new Jewish converts was causing confusion and disruption in the church at Colossae. Paul spoke out against all these issues and implored the Colossian church to hold fast to the teachings of Jesus (Martin 91-93).

Because Judaism focused on the Torah, the early Church was faced with the conflict of integrating the Old Testament law with faith in Jesus Christ. The Jerusalem council was convened to deal with this controversy (Acts 15). Some believers wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised and to observe the dietary laws. Many Gentiles balked at these

restrictions. The resulting edict represented an early doctrinal formulation in response to questions of real-life issues.

Throughout the New Testament, people were faced with the decision to follow Jesus or walk away from him. As the early Church developed, many questions had to be addressed between faith positions and practical questions (1 Cor. 4:12; 15:3-4; Gal. 8:9; 2 Tim. 6:20, 21; 1:4, 2:2, 3:14; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Pet. 1:18; Jas. 2:14-26) (Artmann 17). As one scholar states, “When we think about it, we realize that Christianity was actually born in a time of cultural chaos not unlike our own” (Killinger 57).

The Growing Church’s Development of Doctrine

As the early Church faced conflicts from outside and inside the Church, concerns on points of faith were forged over time:

Toward the middle of the second century, a number of Christian writers took upon themselves the task of defending their faith in the face of false accusations that were at the heart of persecutions.... These attacks and accusations were numerous. Some claimed that Christians committed incest, that they ate their children, that they worshiped the sexual organs of their priests. (Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought 98-99)

With the growth of the Church, many troubles developed within the Church’s own community concerning doctrine. “There arose a variety of doctrines, all claiming to be the correct understanding of Christianity, but many of which seemed to contradict, or at least leave aside some of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith” (Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought 123). The Church criticized the Gnostics for taking any doctrine and molding that doctrine for the Gnostics’ own purposes: “When they came to know early Christianity and saw its great appeal, they attempted to take those aspects that seemed most valuable to them and adapt them to their system” (129).

These rival claims within the Christian community forced the Church to define its own beliefs. Seven great councils met to formulate and develop doctrines. The first council of Nicea met in AD 325 to deal with the Arian controversy. The Arians questioned the divinity of Christ; the council of Nicea defended the divinity of Christ.

Biblical text and creeds were developed in response to differing worldviews. Each and every generation has offered opposing worldviews, and Christianity has sought to offer the truth of Christ over against individual claims or opinions. As Artmann states, “The Church has developed the discipline of systematic theology” (21). Systematic theology forms a consistent view of God by combining knowledge and experience together.

The Twenty-First Century Church’s Emphasis on Doctrine

Today’s culture offers a familiar challenge. Hunter states the following in Church for the Unchurched:

The shape of the Church’s emerging opportunity thus looks like

- Christendom is largely dissolved, and the peoples of Europe and North America are increasingly secular.
- The enlightenment which provided the world view for the secular west, is a spent force. Consequently, people are increasingly receptive to, and searching for, a satisfying world view.
- We are once again in the Apostolic Age—much like the age that early Christianity engaged (23).

The new “Apostolic Age” is a field ripe for harvest. The present world is similar to the ancient world because culture in North America is no longer as Christian as it once was:

The West appears to have said its definitive farewell to a Christian culture.... Our secular colleagues are happy to recognize the debt our civilization owes to the Christian faith to the extent that the faith, having

been absorbed by culture itself, has become simply another cultural artifact. (“Seeking Christian Interiority” 654)

As with the ancient Church, many Church leaders do not recognize that a problem even exists, and “most Churches continue doing Church as usual, as though most people in our communities are Christians” (Hunter, Church for the Unchurched 23). Furthermore, as with the ancient Church, few people are trained or willing to go out into the world to share how life is different with Jesus Christ. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few: therefore ask the lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).

As with the ancient Church, Christianity is just one of many options to pursue for spiritual significance. Christ emerged from the cradle to face many competing philosophies and religions, and the voices of contention have continued to grow throughout the centuries. The Church has had to deal with certain philosophies and religions that were contrary to Christian beliefs and doctrines. In this sense, postmodernist thinking is only one of many challenges that the Church has faced since God became flesh and dwelt with humanity.

The Church has a great opportunity to reaffirm and teach the doctrines to a new generation of people. The Church is called to explain faith. Preachers cannot simply assume that doctrines are understood, nor can preachers demand obedience to doctrines that are not explained. Preachers proclaim what they believe and then act out those beliefs in the world. Postmodernists take notice when truth has a claim on a person’s life.

Each and every generation is in danger of forgetting sound doctrine. This study sought to find methods to help people of the Church remember. Carder states the

following in Living Our Beliefs:

The Church that does not know its own origin and destiny receives its identity from the world around it. Without a memory of what the Church is called to be, the Church becomes what people want it to be. The self-defined needs and wishes of the people become more influential than God's mission to the world. Sociological surveys, marketing strategies, and multiple option activities become more basic than doctrinal clarity, accountable discipleship, missional focus, and liturgical and theological integrity. (93-94)

This study sought to help people remember the rock from which they were hewn.

People of God are called to remember who and whose they are, and doctrine seeks to define the relationships of human beings with God in order to direct life. As Artmann states, "If doctrine is truth that enables us to understand how we are to relate to God, then the door is opened that helps us explain the importance of doctrine to our world" (27).

The United Methodist Church's Emphasis on Doctrine

In this study I used two basic sources to define what I mean by "doctrine." The first is the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord:
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen. (The United Methodist Hymnal 881)

I chose the Apostles' Creed over other creeds because the congregation of Central United Methodist Church is more familiar with the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed is also one of the creeds shared across denominational boundaries. "In a real sense, the affirmations found in the Apostles' Creed form an essential part of this catholic story that all Christians share throughout the world" (Phillips and Phillips 22). C. E. B. Cranfield describes the Apostles' Creed in The Apostles Creed: A Faith to Live By, "as a compact and felicitous summary of the New Testament teaching" (5). Craig Loscalzo writes, "The creed comprises some basic tenets of the faith that are universally understood as part of Christian teaching" (73).

With the Apostles' Creed, I also used the statements on theology defined in The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church. The Apostles' Creed leaves a few gaps in the story of Jesus. As Guthrie writes, "A weakness of the Apostles' Creed as a whole is that it says nothing about Christian life, suggesting that it is possible to think like a Christian without living like a Christian" (231).

As a United Methodist pastor, I am obviously greatly influenced by historic Methodist doctrine. Much of what United Methodists believe is common to all Christians:

- A belief in the triune God;
- A belief in the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ;
- A belief that God's redemptive love is realized in human life by the activity of the Holy Spirit;
- A belief that the reign of God is a present and future reality;
- A belief in the authority of Scripture; and,
- A belief that United Methodists are part of a universal Church (The Book of

Discipline 41-44).

Part of the genius of John Wesley was his emphasis on practical divinity. Doctrines were not used for theoretical speculation nor for identifying heretics. Doctrines were to guide Christians in living a more holy life. Bishop Ken Carter states the following in Living Our Beliefs: “His [Wesley’s] primary concern was the relationship between beliefs and behavior, doctrine and discipleship, theological concepts and Christian character. In other words, beliefs are to be lived, doctrine is to be practiced” (v).

The following statement is found in The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church:

Devising formal definitions of doctrine has been less pressing for United Methodists than summoning people of faith and nurturing them in the knowledge and love of God. The core of Wesleyan doctrine that informed our past rightly belongs to our common heritage as Christians and remains a prime component within our theological task. (50)

The Apostles’ Creed and the disciplinary doctrinal statements of the United Methodist Church provide a basic and practical summary of the Christian faith.

Issues in Postmodernity

Two keys lie at the heart of postmodernism: the issues of truth and authority. The postmodern thinker will listen to what a Christian might define as “true” and respond with a statement “That might be true for you but I do not see it that way. Far be it from me to tell others how to live” (Johnston 29). As Johnston says in Preaching to a Postmodern World, “In light of the disillusionment with the Enlightenment, society is naturally skeptical. Postmodernism after all, maintains that a person can really only say, ‘according to my perception, that is true’” (29).

Another issue to be addressed in postmodernity is community. Modernism was

rooted in individualism, and postmodernists are very critical of the individualism found in the modern society. Postmodernists long for community and, at the same time, cling to their individuality. Postmodernism is a search for community in the midst of pluralism.

In this thesis, I tried to find an intersection between doctrinal claims of truth and authority and the longing of postmodernists for community. Doctrine makes truth claims and claims of authority that help to create community in Christ. I attempted to show that one of the chief drawing powers of preaching doctrine is that doctrine calls for a community that challenges rather than holds back the individual.

Premodern Thinkers

Postmodernism can be seen as a reaction to previous philosophical developments. The first of these philosophical developments was Platonic Idealism. In Platonic Idealism, the world did not shape the mind, but the mind was what formed and responded to the world:

Generally, idealists believe that ideas are the only true reality. It is not that all idealists reject matter (the material world) but they hold that the material world is characterized by change, instability, and uncertainty, while some ideas are enduring. (Ozman and Craver 2)

Plato thought that humanity's main reason for existing was to search for truth. Since the material world of matter is constantly in a state of change, truth could not be found in the material world. As Colin Brown states "The Athenian Plato ... had taught that the world which we see with our eyes and touch with our bodies was in reality only a world of shadows" (15). The world of matter was not to be trusted. Humanity needed to separate the world of ideas from the world of matter.

Plato relied heavily on dialectic reasoning. He argued that all ideas begin as a thesis

or a point of view, such as “gambling is evil.” The philosopher would point out all the ways that gambling destroys life. Truth did not lie in the thesis alone. Truth was found when an antithesis was presented to counter the thesis. The antithesis would be that “gambling is good.” Gambling supports education and provides a good tax base. These two parties would come closer to an agreement, or synthesis, when in dialogue with one another. Truth was found in this dialectical discussion (Ozman and Craver 2-10).

Aristotle and his followers represent a second approach to truth. Aristotle found truth through what he touched, heard, and saw. “It was Plato’s pupil Aristotle, however, who developed the view that while ideas may be important in themselves a proper study of matter could lead us to better and more distinct ideas” (Ozman and Craver 41). A tree, a plant, or a stone exists with or without humanity’s perceiving them to be so.

Realists base truth on facts that are repeatedly confirmed. When people stick their hands in the water, their hands are going to continually get wet:

The Aristotelian influence has been one of immense importance and includes such things as recognizing the need to study nature systematically, using logical process in thought, deriving general truth through a rigorous study of particulars, and emphasizing the rational aspects of human nature. (Ozman and Craver 44)

In the pre-Enlightenment period, Christian thinkers combined knowledge through revelation with knowledge derived from logic and observation. Aristotle’s ideas were incorporated into Christian thinking by Thomas Aquinas. Although he would not place reason above revelation, he did turn to reason to support his faith and beliefs. “Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that we come to universals by study of particulars” (Ozman and Craver 146). Furthermore, Aquinas maintained that humanity could use reason and revelation together in searching for truth. Reason was, for the most part, the servant of

revelation and the Church. In the premodern times, reason could take a seeker so far, but faith was needed to complete the journey. In the premodern era, Christianity dominated European thought, and Christian thinkers assumed that revelation and reason were compatible.

Modern Thinkers

As the premodern era began to give way to the modern era, certain events helped to usher in modernity. One such event was the Renaissance. The Renaissance, in the thirteenth century, began to place more emphasis on humanity and less emphasis on God. Myths and legends were replaced by observation and deduction. “With the Renaissance, the principle of perspective made its appearance. Perspectiveism shifted the angle of vision from God to that of an individual human being” (Powell 117).

A second turning point was the Reformation. The reformers of the sixteenth century, leaned more heavily on faith than on reason. A relationship with God was rediscovered. Brown writes the following about the understanding of God in the Reformation:

He was neither the object of abstract speculation nor a mere article of the Church’s creed, but the one with whom all men have to do, one who had stepped into human affairs, who had spoken through Scriptures, who continued to speak through them and who deals with all men personally.
(38)

An interesting by-product of the Reformation was the divorce of science from revelation:

Having found God in Christ through the Scripture, the Reformers had no interest in medieval natural theology. To many this meant that they could stop looking at nature for proofs of a reality beyond it; they could study it and appreciate it for its own sake. (Brown 38)

Therefore, in the modern world, truth began to be studied, received, and supported by correspondence and coherence. When talking about correspondence, a scientist would use the empirical method to observe and confirm data. "An idea would be true if it could be confirmed by data received through the five senses" (Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston 60).

At the same time, idealistic assumption of the nature of the universe continued to hold sway. The coherence theory of truth was based on the belief that universal principles existed all the time and in every case. The modern thinkers sought to find systems that would reveal truth consistently. "A claim is true (or false) to the degree that it is logically consistent with other ideas within a system of related statements" (Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston 60).

Revelation was being replaced by scientific observation and deductive reason. Truth was approachable, obtainable, and observable through reason and logic. "Truth makes reference to orders, values; depends on logic, rationality, and reason" (Rosenau 77). Revelation was slowly being viewed with scepticism and cynicism.

The period of Enlightenment began to create problems in the late 1700s for those who believed in God. Philosophers who believed in God could not give adequate reasons for God's existence, nor could these philosophers give adequate reasons for living life with meaning, purpose, and direction. A kind of radical skepticism began to emerge. David Hume insisted that the only way to knowledge and truth was by observation. Hume totally rejects any idea of revelation. Moreover, Hume believed people could not possibly tell anything about objects unless they experienced them (Paschal; Grenz, Primer 73).

At the same time, Hume probed the weaknesses of empirical observations. As a sequence of events unfolds, the observer gains perceptions on what is taking place. From

these perceptions, the observer decides the cause and the effect, but cause and effect cannot itself be personally experienced or observed. Hume believed *causality* was an unsupportable concept. An observer may watch a cue ball smash into another ball on the table. The observer would conclude that the cue ball caused the other ball to move; however, the observer is not the cue ball. The observer draws conclusions from what he or she perceives to be true. As Grenz states, “David Hume ... notably embraced skepticism, and other philosophers likewise reached the conclusion that the empirical method demanded by the Enlightenment ... could never lead to true and certain knowledge” (73).

Substance was another concept that could not be supported by empirical observation. A person does not actually experience size, color, or shape. A person only experiences impressions of these substances. “Our imagination attributes these impressions to objects, but we have no actual knowledge of subjects existing in the world” (Grenz, Primer 75).

Hume’s skepticism spilled over into the religious arena. Hume believed that if one could not justify the existence of matter, then one could not justify the existence of God (Brown 68; Ozman and Craver 10; Grenz, Primer 76). Hume said if people have no actual experience with God as creator then people cannot assume God created this world. Colin Brown makes the following observation about David Hume:

He rightly doubted whether it was possible for a cause to be known only by its effect. Hume was making a valid point when he pronounced the idea of first cause to be useless; because our knowledge of this cause being derived from the course of nature, we can never, according to the rules of just reasoning, return back from cause with any new inference. (69)

The result of Hume’s work is a radical skepticism that led to doubt about any and all knowledge. Naturally, many philosophers reacted to Hume’s ideas, notably Immanuel

Kant:

The Hegemony Of Enlightenment thought came to an apex in the work of Immanuel Kant, who represented both the culmination and the destruction of the rationalist mind-set. Kant opened the way for the modern theological situation through the rejection of both the classical orthodox and the purely rationalist understandings of theology. (Franke and Grenz 184-85)

Kant radically individualized the understanding of truth. Grenz makes the following statement about Kant:

Rather than viewing the self as one of several entities in the world, Kant envisioned the thinking self in a sense “creating the world”—that is, the world of its own knowledge. The focus of philosophical reflection ever since has been this world-creating self. (79)

Kant said that humanity could find truth in the world by reflection and observation organized in the mind through preexisting categories. The world was waiting to be known by the knowing self. Kant saw humanity emerging from a state of immaturity, which was self-imposed, to a more confident person:

The ideals of the thinking self knowing itself and the mechanistic universe opened the way for the modern explosion of knowledge... At the heart of this society is the desire to rationally manage life, on the assumption that scientific advancement and technology provide the means to improving the quality of human life. (Grenz, Primer 81)

Humanity was seeking to rely on its own understanding, observation, and experimentation to make the world a better place (Grenz, Primer 79-81; Brown 91).

As Colin Brown states, “Kant agreed with the empiricist in saying that ‘all our knowledge begins with experience’” (93). In other words, humanity uses the senses to perceive the outside world and then processes what is perceived through the mind. The mind or human self was the main organizing unit that combined rationalism and empiricism. Kant preserved the possibility of knowledge by asserting the basic reliability of

our physical senses. However, Kant believed religious knowledge went beyond the ability of reason to determine what was truth. Kant preserved the reliability of sense perceptions by hypothesizing a structure in the brain which is again beyond proof. In this way, Kant sets the stage for a radically idiosyncratic and personal approach to truth and knowledge (Brown 93).

Postmodern Thinkers

Arguably, Friedrich Nietzsche was the first postmodern thinker. Nietzsche believed the only true world was the one humanity creates. "Everything is a 'perspectival appearance' the origin of which lies within us" (Grenz, Primer 91). If one is looking at a fish, is it really a fish or is the fish an illusion created with knowledge? "Nietzsche argues that what we commonly accept as human knowledge is ... merely a self-contained set of illusions" (Grenz, Primer 90). If one is to find self, then one must create self. Nietzsche's starting point "was the non-existence of God. Man is therefore left to fend for himself. Since God does not exist man must devise his own way of life" (Brown 139).

The goal of life is to shape one's own values and to live a life that depends on no one but self. Nietzsche made the bold statement that "God is dead!" and if God is dead, then humanity has the responsibility to form and shape life. Humanity needs to ask such questions as "Who Am I?" "Why am I here?" Humanity has the responsibility to evaluate and reevaluate all values. Moreover, humanity being the creator of ideas can at times think of despicable ways of living, but humanity can also create new ideas to replace the bad ideas. Into the vacuum created by God's death, Nietzsche calls for the will to power, which is a desire to improve species or people. "As an extension of this human motivation, the 'will to power' refers to the pragmatic use of language, values, and moral systems for

personal or social advancement” (Grenz, Primer 93).

Nietzsche was instrumental in laying the foundation for postmodernistic thought. As Grenz states, “Nietzsche formulated most of the themes that would be essential to the development of the postmodern intellectual climate” (89).

Nietzsche began to connect the idea of truth and the functional language.

Nietzsche asserted that language speaks its own truth. Interpreters are not as worried about being correct as seeing numerous possibilities in a text. Rorty makes the following notation about Nietzsche in his book, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity:

Nietzsche has caused a lot of confusion by inferring from “truth is not a matter of correspondence to reality” to “what we call ‘truths’ are just useful lies.” The same confusion is occasionally found in Derrida, in the inference from “there is no such reality as the metaphysicians have hoped to find” to “what we call ‘real’ is not really real. (8)

Words have power and postmodernists use words in a variety of ways to speak truth. As Rorty writes, “I begin ... with the philosophy of language because I want to spell out the consequences of my claims that only sentences can be true, and that human beings make truths by making languages in which to phrase sentences” (9).

Nietzsche believed humanity was called to create a world suited for humanity’s own benefit, pleasure, and development. Language provided one way of creating and sustaining Nietzsche’s worldview. Language was used to stretch and bend truth to meet one’s desired end, and all truth became relative, interpretive, and illusionary; however, relativism was not a presupposition of postmodernism but a consequence of its critique of modernism.

Foucault and Derrida also continued the assault against modernism. In the modern age, one developed confidence in order and progression, but postmodernist

philosophers are highly suspicious of claims to make society better and more improved (Grenz, Primer 123).

Postmodernism has been even more suspicious of attempts to define ultimate meaning. As Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston state, "Traditionally, the branch of philosophy that considers such questions of ultimacy has been called metaphysics.... The center of any particular structure determines, encourages, and limits the meaningful practices and patterns that arise from it" (71). Derrida sees history as a succession of "centers" that sought to define "truth." "The entire history of the concept of structure ... must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center" (279). God is followed for awhile, then other gods may become the center of humanity's focus. These gods are nationalism, consumerism, individualism, and other substitute centers. The center is not as stable as the structure because the center is illusive and ever changing. The structure is what holds everything together not the center. Derrida does not believe in a center that gives all the answers; however, neither does he say that a foundational center is completely absent. Derrida speaks of a trace that stands beyond our self-produced centers (Derrida 278-300; Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston 71-79).

Foucault and his colleagues also view attempts to define "truth" as a tool in the hands of those who have or want power. The result is a skepticism toward all truth statements and the motives of those who make them. What one believes is true is based on one's point of reference. Two people may be asked to look at a picture and tell what they have seen, yet each may observe something totally different from the other. Both observations are considered relevant; therefore, postmodernists seem to have no absolute truths. One point of view is just as important as another. In the book The Search for Signs

of Intelligent Life in the Universe, a teenage girl sums up this view of truth: “The last really deep conversation I had with Dad was between our T-shirts. His said, ‘Science is Truth found out.’ Mine said, ‘Truth can be made up if you know how’” (Wagner 88). Thus, preachers begin their task in an atmosphere of distrust.

However, to lump all postmodernists in Foucault’s or Derrida’s camp is too simplistic. As Franke and Grenz state, “The wholesale identification of the term postmodern with radical relativism, however, is simply too narrow to do justice to the actual breadth of the phenomenon” (19). While relativism is a by-product of the basic postmodern project to test all truth claims, hope still exists for the preacher. “Whatever else postmodernism may be, it embodies a rejection of the Enlightenment project, the modern technological ideal, and the philosophical assumptions upon which modernism was built” (Grenz, Primer 81).

A Profile of a Postmodernist Thinker

Even people who are not consciously postmodern in philosophy are influenced by postmodernist ideas and convictions. Media and art are permeated by this thinking. While a full-blown embracing of postmodern concepts is not evident in culture, the influence of postmodernism is emerging. I see this in the way that claims for authority are viewed with suspicion and the way that individuality and choice are celebrated. Postmodernism has influenced cultural perspective whether or not one realizes this.

I have taken various authors perspectives and developed a profile of a postmodernist thinker. While the list may not be all inclusive, I believe the following statements do certainly highlight some important traits of a postmodernist culture.

1. Postmodernists see meaning in the message not scientific inquiry.

2. Postmodernists believe in multiple story lines.
3. Postmodernists believe whatever works for them is the path to follow.
4. Postmodernists believe options are available for personalized choice.
5. Postmodernists believe experience leads to truth.
6. Postmodernists believe multicultural, diversity, and tolerance are key words.
7. Postmodernists are more interested in spirituality than religion.
8. Postmodernists are plugged into information.
9. Postmodernists are suspicious of tradition and claims for authority.
10. Postmodernists desire community.
11. Postmodernists have little knowledge of the Bible.
12. Postmodernists long for authenticity.
13. Postmodernists challenge authority.
14. Postmodernists avoid long-term commitments.
15. Postmodernists often compromise language because they see language as a tool to be used.
16. Postmodernists reject any claim for a single unifying metanarrative.
17. Postmodernists relate to images and metaphors (Sweet, Soul Tsunami; Grenz, Primer; Craig Miller; Smith).

When I reflect back on the characteristics of the postmodern culture, I believe the preacher has a wonderful opportunity to preach good news. The above-mentioned profile clearly shows that the postmodern audience is very interested in spirituality, images, options, multiple story lines, and longs for authenticity. Considering these characteristics, and others of the postmodern culture, the preacher has many preaching tools at his

disposal to connect with the postmodern listeners. In the next section of this paper, I will discuss various preaching methods used to reach out to the postmodernists.

The Issue of Authority in the Postmodern Ethos

Modernism was convinced that one truth was “out there.” Truth could be found through science and reason. Postmodernism is not so sure; thus, postmodernism is open to other sources of truth including religious experience.

In premodern times, traditions were authoritative. People did not question those who were leaders of the faith community. Traditions functioned as the foundation on which all of life was shaped. The doctrines, the creeds, and the text were used by the preacher to explain traditions and how these traditions impacted the listener’s life.

In the Enlightenment period, tradition was replaced with reason. Empirical research and observation determined how much authority could be claimed by anyone. Authority became based on the five senses not the first five books of the Bible (Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston 36).

Along with this intellectual challenge came moral questions:

A series of military conflicts, commonly lumped together as the Thirty Years’ War, had devastated Europe in the early seventeenth century. In the eyes of many intellectuals, the doctrinal disputes that divided Christians into competing confessional camps lay behind the armed conflicts. Their disgust with confessional wars led these thinkers to question the validity of doctrine itself. Doctrinal commitments ... only serve to divide people. (Grenz, Primer 63)

The Enlightenment shifted authority to the individual thinker. Rene Descartes’ famous dictum, “Cogito ergo sum” (I think, therefore, I am), placed the human mind as the basis of knowledge. By relying on personal knowledge and experience, the individual could determine what was true or false. “Descartes exercised immense influence on all

subsequent thinking. Throughout the modern era, intellectuals in many disciplines have turned to reasoning ... rather than revelation as the starting point of for knowledge and reflection” (Grenz, Primer 65).

Science also played a role in wresting authority away from the Church. After the earth was no longer considered to be the center of the universe, scientists began to think about the world in a new way. New research methods were based on mathematics and energy methods of measurement. “In turning to this method, enlightenment investigators narrowed their focus of interest—and hence begin to treat as real—only those aspects of the universe that are measurable” (Grenz, Primer 66).

With the emergence of the twentieth century, anthropologists began to see the importance of myths and stories in human society. These myths and stories shape and form society today. Larger systems and stories that seek to give an overriding explanation of life are called “metanarratives.” Metanarratives are “master stories that explain, ground, and legitimate the beliefs and practices of a society” (Pell 30).

Postmoderns are generally skeptical of metanarratives. As Grenz states, “Postmodern thinkers speak of these systems of legitimizing myths, as ‘narratives’ (or metanarratives). They contend that a narrative exercises a force apart from argumentation and proof” (44).

Metanarratives seek to explain reality in terms of an overarching system. Religious metanarratives do this through revelation claims. Science offers a metanarrative through a system of natural laws. Political metanarratives (e.g., Capitalism, Marxism) offer political explanations. Postmoderns believe that every metanarrative favors some people and exploits others, and the individual has the right—even the obligation—to wrestle control

away from the metanarrative and reclaim power. Authority comes not from outside ourselves but within ourselves. “Significant to postmodern thinking, the authority to derive meaning lies in the hands of each individual; authority is from within, not without” (Johnston 34).

The criticism of many postmodernists is that the metanarratives do provide closedness not openness, exclusiveness not inclusiveness, homogeneity not heterogeneity. As stated in In Spirit and Faith, “Claims to truth are often seen as ways to establish power over others, manipulate them for cynical ends” (Phillips and Phillips 19). “Authority is derived by proclaiming to be the guardian of truth and truth is a tool which those in authority use to persuade, manipulate, dominate, and exploit” (60-61).

“As the Enlightenment has faded, postmodern people are increasingly suspicious of people and institutions that claim authority” (Hunter, Celtic Way 97). In the past, metanarratives provided some basis of authority for people’s lives; however, many postmodernists are challenging each and every metanarrative. “If a group claims to base a belief system on certain absolutes, that group is appealing to a dogma that is locally accepted but not universally true” (Smith 51). Power is shifted from the text to the individual, and with this shift of power comes a shift in authority. When authority is shifted to individual taste, then life is a wide-open venture. People come up with slogans. “My body is my own. I will do what I want with it.” “Celebrate me.” I saw a T-shirt that said, “I am my own role model.” Authority that rests in self becomes a license to live life as a person wishes. “You deserve a break today.” “You have to answer to no one but yourself.” In the postmodern world, the value of the sexual ethic, the value of work, the family system, and other metanarratives are being drained of their authority.

The attack against metanarratives has some legitimacy. Communism, capitalism, patriotism, religion, and other similar metanarratives do tend to leave “winners” and “losers” in society. Beliefs are compromised when metanarratives are used to exploit the powerless. Westphal writes, “Perhaps we need to see Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, along with Luther and Barth, as expressing a Promethean protest against all the Zeuses of instrumental religion, the piety that reduces God to means or instrument for achieving our own human purposes” (29).

Painfully, the Church has, at times, used the metanarratives to defend, control, manipulate, and expand its power. Christianity has used the metanarratives to manipulate and control individuals and groups. “At the worst illusions of legitimacy as supposed ‘truth’ serve a power hungry ecclesial priesthood or religious leadership by claiming they promote ‘truths,’ they seduce the gullible ... into following where they lead” (Thiselton 5). If people do not give money to the Church, people will not be blessed. If people do not believe the right things, they will not be a part of the kingdom of God. If people do not worship in a proper manner, they will never find a solid religious base. Thiselton believes that God is used by those in power to control and scare people into submission (5-7).

At other times, doctrine has been used to set rules and agendas that were not necessarily God initiated or supported. Westphal writes, “We represent God to ourselves not in accordance with evidence available to us but in accordance with our wishes” (62). Truth and authority become subordinate to one’s happiness. When truth is placed within humanity’s realm of authority, then “the created” replaces “the creator” as the sustaining force in the universe; and then beliefs become nothing more than a system of stories and superstitions meant to keep the powerful in power. Truth does not rest in God or the

living out of beliefs but in humanity's own wants and wishes (60-62).

Pell suggests that postmodernists want to challenge assumed notions or positions of authority, but problems arise when no authority exists:

Having deconstructed realism, postmodernism is left with no reality. Having decentered the self, it is left with individuals who are the constructed products of society and language. Having demythologized all metanarratives, it is left with no standards of normality to guide human ethics and actions. (70)

Individual autonomy can lead to mere greediness and selfishness. Brueggemann states the following in his book Texts under Negotiation:

When we fill that emptiness alone, on our own terms, in our desperateness, we tend to fill it in less than satisfying ways. We fill it with objects of our own construction, and we want more and more of them... The outcome of greed, acquisitiveness, and idolatry is commoditization, the reduction of everything and everyone ... to a commodity, a means, an object or control. (53-54)

Christianity derives its authority from the authority of Christ. Authority is derived from the call of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was always calling people to follow him (Matt. 4:19-22; 8:19-23; 16:24-26; 19:20-23; Rom. 10:15). The miracles and teachings of Jesus convinced people of his authority, and Jesus' willingness to die on the cross, an act of self-giving love, validated his claim for authority. Jesus' authority was acceptable because of the Resurrection.

The Issue of Community in the Postmodern Ethos

No one definition of community seems to fit all circumstances in the postmodern world. "Community has become a buzz word" (Franke and Grenz, Primer 215). In today's society, people float in and out of several communities. "Most of the funniest sitcoms or television shows—Seinfeld, Frazier, Cybil, Murphy Brown—... are about people

who are unbearably fragile and lonely” (Killinger 60). Franke and Grenz suggest three aspects helpful in defining community: people who are in community have similar world views; people have a group focus; and, people have an identity drawn from the community (218).

In the premodern world, people thought of themselves as living in community. The animals, the world, and God were connected with one another. In Genesis 1, God intended for humanity and nature to live together in harmony. The preacher's task was to help individuals connect with the cosmic community and live together responsibly.

As stated earlier, in the modern era, individualism took center stage. Nature existed for the progress of humanity. The individual was the prime focus of all of life. Self-improvement, self-interest, self-expression, and self-fulfillment were particular characteristics of the highly individualistic modernistic society. Modernism focused on the importance of the individual over community.

Postmodernists desire individuality, but postmodernists also desire community and connectedness. Grenz states the challenge well: “In the postmodern world, we can no longer follow the lead of modernity and position the individual at center stage. Instead, we must remind ourselves that our faith is highly social” (168). Many in the postmodern world are wanting to belong to some group or organization that gives them some sense of identity and opportunity for service. Postmodernists are also attracted to a community that calls for commitment, sacrifice, and vision. In Acts Chapter 2, such a community existed. The people prayed, studied, and worked to bring transformation to their community of faith and the world. Each person was willing to sacrifice individual comforts for those in need:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

As in Acts 2, an authentic community of faith calls people to experience forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, power, and transformation in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12; Acts 4:37-39; Eph. 5:21-24). "The Christian life is life in the body of Christ, a life which involves the identification of ourselves with his death and resurrection" (Newbigin 91). The Church provides a community connected to Jesus Christ, connected with the tradition of Church, connected with other churches in a common mission to usher in the kingdom of God, connected with other Christians in helping the poor and the lost. People are part of the community of the Church by choice not by coercion.

Doctrine creates community by helping those who are disconnected by their own individuality become connected to something greater than themselves. The postmodern listener can be challenged to find connectedness in the body of Christ. The community of Christ waits the return of Christ and, at the same time, begins to experience the fruits of the coming kingdom. Franke and Grenz state the following:

Above all, God comes to rulership in the community of Christ's disciples, in the fellowship of that people who by the Spirit have entered into covenant with the God of history ... and consequently live out their covenantal life through worship of God revealed in Christ, through mutual care, and through mission in and for the world. (238)

Various Authors' Perspectives on Preaching in a Postmodern Context

Leonard Sweet, in his book Postmodern Pilgrims, believes that certain key factors

need to be considered in preaching to a postmodern world (see Table 2.1 p. 48). Sweet believes the sermon method that works best for a postmodern is the participation-observation hermeneutic because, as Sweet says, “A worshiper is both active and reflective, participating and observing, both in and out of the worship experience. You can’t reflect without refracting” (147). Sweet believes that people can observe God’s world and the beauty he has given them, but people can also participate in bringing God’s kingdom to fulfillment.

Sweet also emphasizes the need to use story or narrative in preaching to a postmodern people. The emphasis on story is found in every writer reviewed in this literature summary (Loscalzo 80; Graham and Johnston; Hughes and Kysar; Calvin Miller; Bullock; Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnson; Grenz, Primer; Henderson). In the following summaries, I will take this idea to be acceptable to all authors unless noted.

Calvin Miller and Sweet agree that preachers do well to know the audience to which they are preaching. They should tune into the secular world and understand what motivates and challenges the postmodern thinker. Preachers would also do well to identify and address the audience’s pains, hurts and frustrations.

In The Theology of Preaching, authors Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston argue that Scripture depends on tradition and experience (see Table 2.1 p. 48). “One of the implications here is that Scripture and tradition as well as the experience of others and the experience of self, will be partners” (48). The experience of a listener and of the preacher are important means of reaching out to an audience wanting to experience something besides deadness and boredom.

Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston believe that the preacher is called into dialogue with

offering options to the listener. The best method of preaching will vary with the audience. Because all persons do not listen or communicate in the same way, to be effective communicators, preachers must take into account the fact that people process information differently.

Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston believe that preachers need to be open and honest about the doubts they face, the fears with which they struggle, and the questions they find so hard to answer (Henderson; Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims; and Calvin Miller).

John Franke and Stanley Grenz, in the book Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, also mention several key factors for preaching to postmoderns (see Table 2.1 p. 48). Scripture is very important in communicating to a postmodern world because it is a vehicle through which the Spirit speaks. “That is to say the authority of the Bible is ultimately the authority of the Spirit whose instrumentality it is” (115).

Today, preachers also are called to interact with culture and seek to take down walls of misinformation that cause division and separation. Preachers are not to be of the world but in the world. Christ’s authority came from his humanity and divinity. Jesus was divine and what made him divine was/is the fact that he’s God’s son. Jesus was also very human. He immersed himself in the culture, and met people where they worked, lived, cried, rejoiced, and sinned (Calvin Miller; Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims). “Viewed in this perspective, the task of theology includes ‘understanding the times’ to assist the community of Christ in living as a gospel people in the wider contemporary social context and proclaiming the gospel message in that context” (Franke and Grenz 159).

As preachers learn the culture, Franke and Grenz believe they will develop

sermons that are conversational and narrative in nature. The trinitarian narratives speak to postmodern listeners because of the mystery, transcendence, and communal nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. “A truly Christian theology must be Trinitarian because the biblical narrative, which speaks about the history of God, focuses on the Triune God” (177).

Chuck Smith, who wrote The End of the World As We Know It, stresses the importance of Scripture when dealing with a postmodern audience (see Table 2.1 p. 48). Smith believes preachers are calling listeners to turn to Scripture and learn of the love God has for all who follow him. The preaching of Jesus is the most effective way to show and then tell about the love of God because Jesus was willing to give up his life to release people from bondage to sin.

According to Smith, one method of preaching is not any more effective than another method of preaching, but what is important is that preachers enter into conversation with a postmodern audience. One way to be in dialogue with a postmodern listener is by speaking language familiar to the hearer (Calvin Miller; Frank and Grenz; Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims; Henderson; Loscalzo).

David Henderson, in his book Culture Shift: Communicating God’s Truth in Our Changing World, discussed several key factors to be considered when preaching to a postmodern world (see Table 2.1 p. 48). Henderson views Scripture as a doorway to a self-giving God. The Scripture should not be used to beat people into submission but to point the way to the living God.

In the message itself, preachers are called to be honest with their listeners about the victories as well as defeats of following Jesus. Preachers have no message to those

who are listening unless they are willing to be authentic and real. If their lifestyles do not match up with their words proclaimed from the pulpit, then the message will be ignored.

Henderson believes that one of the most appropriate methods of reaching postmodern listeners is through the first person narrative. If the preacher can tell the story through the first person narrative and maintain a dramatic tension, then the audience will remain engaged in the message (87).

Craig Loscalzo, in Apologetic Preaching, believes Scripture can be used effectively to reach out to the postmodern listener by creating an illusion of the first time (see Table 2.1 p. 48). “The idea of the illusion of the first time comes from stage theatre. Actors have to create for the audience the illusion that what is happening on stage is actually happening for the first time as the audience watches it” (104). Therefore, the Scripture is alive when read with new eyes. The stories become more real and exciting.

In the sermon, preachers are better received by a postmodern audience when they can engage the audience in a conversation. Often the easy way to get past the skepticism of the postmodern listener is by asking questions, struggling with the questions, and offering not all the answers but options for the listener to consider (104).

Calvin Miller takes a different approach in Marketplace Preaching. Miller suggests a couple of different ideas when dealing with a postmodern audience. Preachers are called to speak the language of the postmodern listener. Preachers learn to speak the language of the postmodern listener by reading books, listening to music, and watching movies or television shows to which postmodernists are connected (20-3).

Calvin Miller suggests that the inductive-indicative method of preaching works best and most often in the postmodern world. Induction leaves listeners free to make their

own decisions and indicative sermons give them the information they need to make these decisions intelligently” (57).

The Bible becomes a useful tool in helping people to see that choices bring consequences. Preachers do not say, “Thus saith the Lord,” but they say here are the consequences if certain choices continue to be made.

Graham Johnston has written a book, Preaching to a Postmodern World, and he too mentions several key components to reach out to a postmodern listener (see Table 2.1). Johnston starts with the premise that God’s Word, the Bible, is good. Moreover, in God’s Word, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is offered to all who listen. Johnston points out that the postmodern audience is open to all types of truth, and Jesus is intriguing because of his claim to the Resurrection. Preachers do well to respect the postmodernist’s openness to a variety of truths, and they share the good news much like a missionary would by entering into dialogue with the culture around them (110).

Johnston speaks of sharing that good news with a personal touch: “A good technique, then, is to clothe the Biblical passage in your messages with the testimonies of real people who lend plausibility to the stories from their own life experiences” (110). One way preachers share these messages is with humor, which breaks down the defenses of the listener.

Jeffrey Bullock has written in his book, Preaching with a Cupped Ear: Hans Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern World, that one of the most effective means of reaching a postmodern culture is to rely on the practicality of Scripture because the Scriptures offer a simple way that appeals to postmodern listeners (see Table 2.1). The Scripture calls people to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength and one’s

neighbor as one's self. One of the practical applications of the Bible is that Jesus was, and is, always present with humanity. Jesus can be experienced in the here and now, and for the postmodernist experience, interaction and feeling are important.

Another key component to preaching to a postmodern audience is to enter into dialogue with the congregation by the either/or method:

The unique feature of this kind of stylistic intervention is that it allows the reader to undergo an experience of meaning unlike the information that may be received through a lecture or sermon based on the propositional model of preaching. (Bullock 63)

Bullock refers to Soren Kierkegaard's communicative practice, which was based on the either/or method. Kierkegaard believed that preachers did not have to build a hermeneutical bridge from Jerusalem to Lenoir City because Jesus could be encountered immediately in the text. "As a Christian apologist, Kierkegaard believed that the single individual must encounter Jesus not as a historical being, but as an immediate presence where both the temporal and the eternal contemporaneously intersect" (640). By the either/or method, a hearer is not a distanced observer. The hearer is an active participant in the preaching event. The preaching event is not about the Word of God. The preaching event is the Word of God. Listeners are often taken down different paths of truth by the Spirit of God.

The listener is indirectly affected and infected by the message. Craddock calls this indirect dialogue "overhearing" the gospel. Craddock describes an incident in which Kierkegaard overhears a conversation, and that indirect encounter deeply impacts Kierkegaard:

Kierkegaard was walking through a cemetery late one afternoon when from beyond a hedge he overheard an old man talking to his grandson beside the

fresh grave of the one who had been son to one and father to the other. Totally unaware of Soren Kierkegaard's presence, the grandfather spoke tenderly but forcefully of life, death, and life eternal. The substance of that conversation, not all addressed to him ... helped determine Soren Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication. (Craddock, Overhearing the Gospel 105-06)

Bullock believes that Kierkegaard's style of either/or helps postmodern listeners experience the Word of God. The technique most often used by preachers is talking about the Word of God, and the listener is not allowed to participate nor encounter the living God. Preachers help to communicate and create an experience in which the text and readers meet. A poetic event takes place in the listeners' lives.

In the book, Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty-First Century, Robert Hughes and Robert Kysar mention several ideas helpful to any preacher interested in addressing a postmodern audience (see Table 2.1). One particular sermon design the authors promote is the kaleidoscope design that sets up a dialogue for listeners by presenting antithesis and paradox. A preacher might identify apparent contradictions in Scripture and then set up a dialogue with the listeners throughout the rest of the sermon.

Hughes and Kysar also believe that imaginative pictures in story form speak effectively to the postmodern listener. "By imagery we mean the mental and imaginary pictures evoked in the listener by language. Any use of words that results in an imaginative sketch is imagery" (54).

The preacher is also strongly cautioned against shoving doctrine down the throats of postmodern listeners. Preachers are called to enter into the journey with postmodern listeners looking for life's meaning and purpose. "Doctrinal preaching will no longer consist of the preachers telling the congregation what they should believe. Rather the

congregations will ask the preacher to share with them their quest for life’s meaning and purpose” (Hughes and Kysar 18).

The story of Jesus is so effective in this day and age because he became flesh and dwelt among us. He experienced life’s frustrations, temptations, and problems along with the celebrations, joys, and victories of life (Calvin Miller; Bullock; Johnston; Loscalzo; Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims).

I did a further study on the above-mentioned factors by comparing various authors to one another. I also added another category, “method of preaching,” which I discuss in the next chapter (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Key Factors for Preaching in a Postmodern Context

| | Scripture | Jesus | Integrity of Preacher | Dialogue | Story | Method of Preaching |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Loscalzo | Illusion of first time with spirit intervention | Bridge to culture | Know audience | Ask questions | Human interest | Narrative |
| Johnston | God’s Word is good | Unique | Missionary | Socratic | Humor | Expository |
| Sweet | Partners in knowledge | Love is universal | Tune into secular | Interaction | Identify with audience | Participation and observation |
| Smith | Focus on issues in Scripture | Cross | Live Jesus | Building a bridge | Special familiar language | Various methods |
| Hughes Kysar | Radically biblical | - | Trusted teacher | Conversation | Imaginative pictures | Kaleidoscope |
| Miller | Holy Spirit makes scripture relevant | Hope | Know marketplace | Speak language of hearer | Personalize | Indicative induction |
| Bullock | Practical application | Immediate presence | Familiarity with world | Either/or | Poetic | Inductively create an experience |
| Allen Blaisdell Johnston | Scripture translation reason Partners | Center of centers | Entrusted responsibilities | Weigh other options | Develop community identity | Various |
| Frank Grenz | Sola Scriptura | Divinity & humanity | Interact with culture | Conversation | Trinitarian | Narrative |
| Henderson | Doorway to self-giving God | Transformer | Walk the talk | Honesty | Dramatic tension | First person narrative |

These comparisons revealed some points of interest.

1. The above-listed issues are important because each author discussed them in some degree.
2. The authors had various methods and means of addressing issues in Table 2.1.
3. No one method of preaching was agreed upon in dealing with the postmodern world.
4. All believed the integrity of the preacher as the messenger was significant.

Preaching Methods in the Postmodern Ethos

Preaching used to be divided between inductive preaching, which sought to explain a text, and deductive preaching, which sought to develop an idea. In fact, both approaches were primarily modernistic because reason was applied to the text or the particular problem in life. Somewhat related to inductive methodology, “narrative preaching” was introduced as another possibility in sermon development. Whether the deductive, inductive, or narrative approach to preaching is the most effective is an question to be investigated.

The Deductive Method of Preaching

The deductive sermon method relies on historical facts and is instructive in nature. This method of preaching is centrally focused in Scripture. Stories are not used very often. Preachers often believe that outside material is not needed; the text provides plenty of information. The use of deductive propositions is strongly urged. Preachers could offer a line-by-line proposition or a thematic exposition (Craddock, As One without Authority 54-55)

Deductive preaching is a method containing a clear statement of the main biblical

idea in the text. The structure of the sermon is dependent on the text being addressed.

Deductive preaching incorporates an idea, an outline, applications, and illustrations. The subject and its complement are presented to the audience (Carson 87-89). In deductive preaching, one observes, interrogates, and exegetes the text. Preachers ask such questions as, “What does this text mean? About what is the author talking? How should people respond to the truths of the text?” Preachers present the word, explain what is in the text, and then listeners are asked to apply the text to their own lives (Chapell 11-12; Robinson 18-19).

Some people lump topical and textual preaching under the single classification of deductive preaching:

Tradition advocated expository preaching as the epitome of biblical preaching. In their classes and in their books, seminary professors told us that expository preaching involved preaching long texts while textual preaching utilized short texts. My predecessor in the chair I now occupy ... taught a generation of students that when both main points and subpoints of the sermon were taken directly from biblical material, it was an expository sermon; when only the main points came from the Bible, it was textual preaching, and when points came from one’s own brain, the preacher was topical. What must we conclude? That the terms “expository preaching” and “textual preaching” are at least worthless. (Duduit 82)

Clarence Roddy states, “A textual sermon is one in which both the topic and the divisions of development are derived from and follow the order of the text. The text controls and dominates both topic and development in this type” (34). Blackwood says the following about textual preaching:

1. The textual sermon fixes attention on one part of the Scriptures;
2. The textual sermon is comparatively easy to prepare;
3. The hearer can follow the textual sermon with ease and satisfaction; and,

4. Textual preaching brings the hearer close to the heart of the Bible (55).

The main problem with deductive preaching is the lack of dialogue. The listener is presented with a general truth and given particulars to support that truth. The sermon is often given in outline form. The big idea is laid out at the first of the sermon, and the listener has a tendency to say, "So what? Big deal! Who cares?" Deductive preaching tends to be logical, rational, and argumentative. As Loscalzo says, "Deductive logic requires a predisposed commitment to a premise or proposition. The primary homiletic method of the modern era used deductive logic for presenting the Gospel" (39).

The Inductive Method of Preaching

The inductive method of sermon delivery begins with the particulars of an experience and then moves to a general truth. "Inductive preaching often begins with the human experience and moves to the truth of biblical revelation" (Loscalzo 40). The inductive method does not require that preachers start with a specific claim, but preachers unfold information throughout the message which leads listeners to a response. Therefore, listeners are invited to participate in the entire sermon process. Authority is not handed down by preachers, but the message makes claims of authority on the speakers and listeners (Craddock, As One without Authority 56 -57; Loscalzo 40-41).

Certain problems arise with the inductive method of preaching. If preachers fail to develop the ideas bridged together throughout the message, then listeners can be left in the dark. "If people in the pew fail to carry out their end of the experience ... neither the preacher nor the congregation will arrive at the conclusion together" (Robinson 125). In the inductive method of preaching, preachers are responsible to make sure listeners hear the message:

Although the hermeneutical underpinnings for this inductive approach are undeveloped, it is fair to infer that the sermon's meaning is still located in the Biblical text, and that the sermonic experience has more to do with the preacher's ability than his or her hermeneutical commitments" (Bullock 65).

The Narrative Method of Preaching

In ancient times, preachers taught with stories. "The original controlling structure of Christian preaching was narrative, the recollection of what God in Christ had done, was doing, would do to intervene graciously in human affairs" (Greidanus 146).

When Christianity spread to the Hellenistic world, Christian preachers began to use the rhetorical methods of the Greek school. An argument was set forth in a logical sequence. In the modern era, one could preach a sermon steeped in reason and move from point to point explaining ideas. "The modern world was word-based. Its theologians tried to create an intellectual faith, placing reason and order at the heart of religion. Mystery and metaphor were banished as too fuzzy, too mysterious, too illogical" (Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrim 86). Stories, Scriptures, and symbols were scrutinized, analyzed, and often found to be inferior when exposed to the god of reason. As Smith states, "Modern theologians that is, theologians who were the true children of modernity, subjected the Bible to scientific scrutiny and decided it could not up under the light of reason" (101).

Postmodern folks are story oriented. "In fact, rational arguments sound suspicious to the postmodernist. They are more willing to explore spiritual belief systems that cannot be neatly analyzed and categorized but must be approached through intuition, ambiguity, symbols, and story" (Smith 102). Stories that present the gospel in a clear and meaningful way are effective in reaching postmodern persons.

Postmodernists assume that claims for authority tend to serve the persons making

those claims. Therefore, preachers are often perceived to be attempting to preserve their own interests. Stories that are real, personal, and genuine can effectively reach a postmodern audience. Therein lies the call of the Christian gospel to share the good news of Jesus Christ lovingly to those who are misguided, misinformed, and misdirected. A postmodern audience will listen to a story told with vulnerability, realness, and sincerity. “A love in which a self genuinely gives itself to the other in the interests of the other dissolves the acids of suspicion and deception” (Thiselton 160).

Preachers can share stories of how God can transform and change people’s lives. Experiences of God’s redeeming love can be shared through a conversational style of preaching. Listeners are linked to the sermon through experiences or questions. People are longing for spiritual experiences that pull them out of their boring and mundane existence (Craddock, As One without Authority 51-75). Narrative preaching is more inviting, less coercive. Narratives give people information and invite intelligent decisions. The information provides more than knowledge of Christian beliefs; the narratives invite listeners to participate in experiences. In a narrative style, hearers are allowed through story to discover an experience for themselves. The task of preachers is to take hearers into the story and let them become engulfed in the beauty of the story. The narrative story allows the imagination of the listeners to be opened up and possibly transformed (Greidanus 146-52).

Eugene Peterson mentions imagination when he talks about the parables of Jesus:

As people heard Jesus tell these stories, they saw at once that they weren’t about God, so there was nothing in there threatening their own sovereignty. This relaxed their defenses. They walked away perplexed, wondering what they meant, the stories lodged in their imagination. And then like a time bomb they would explode in their unprotected hearts. He

was talking about God; they had been invaded. (32-33)

The listeners' imaginations were challenged to action through the images of the story. Faith often develops from such imaginative journeys. Postmodern people also look to metaphors and symbols with an appreciation for the mysterious and transcendent. Pictures are created within the mind, and the image drives people to action. For example, people do not forget the images surrounding 11 September 2001: burning buildings, collapsing buildings, concrete-powdered firefighters, people running, people crying, flags waving, dignitaries speaking. Images fueled the resolve and commitment of the American people. The stories told by preachers create images in the mind. Stories are an important tool in reaching out to a postmodern audience in a non-threatening way.

Postmodernists do not want to be bombarded with theological truth. Preachers can preach and teach doctrine by also offering options. Narrative preaching provides a wonderful opportunity to offer options to the listeners (Calvin Miller 71-73).

In deductive preaching models, listeners are often told what to think. In the inductive models, listeners are given some responsibility to draw conclusions and make applications from sermons. In the narrative method, listeners are offered mystery, metaphors, and stories that seek to engage them in the message. Listeners are given more authority than ever before. The narrative message is helping to create an experience not a point-by-point summary. Listeners and preachers become engaged in the preaching moment.

Moreover, most people do not live their lives in a deductive fashion. People do not think with order, progress, or unity. People react to the world much like a story. People plot, visualize, criticize, and rejoice in living out this story called life. In the book The Big

plot, visualize, criticize, and rejoice in living out this story called life. In the book The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching, the authors stress the importance of stories

While people are laughing, crying, and identifying with real life stories in drama and music, they are adopting values that contribute to a declining cultural morality. In other words, it is the stories and ideas taught by stories that influence people more often than scholarly presentations. (Wilhite and Gibson 69)

Eugene Lowry states the following in How to Preach a Parable about the effective use of stories in the Biblical text:

Sometimes when writers in the fields of preaching speak of narrative sermons, people think they mean either (1) that every sermon ought to be chocked full of stories, or (2) that every sermon ought to be some long story.... The intended meaning of the term may well be that the writer thinks all sermons ought to follow a narrative sequence of opening conflict, escalation, reversal, and ... closure. (25)

The postmodern culture is also hungry for community, and narrative preaching promotes participation in community. The biblical narratives speak of God the Creator, God the Incarnate, and God the Spirit. Through biblical narratives, humanity is called to participate in God's story.

As Franke and Grenz state, "In the aftermath of the Enlightenment,... the biblical narrative began to suffer neglect due to incredulity toward the truth of the narratives displayed in the Age of Reason and corresponding rise of biblical criticism" (175). The biblical narrative became suspect. "The effect of this suspicion toward the biblical narratives was a shift away from the accounts of Scripture as providing the basis for belief, a shift that led to the rejection for Christian doctrines such as the Trinity" (175).

The biblical narratives tell of God's relationship with humanity. God's relationship is based on love. Franke and Grenz make the following observation:

Love expressed and received by the Trinitarian persons among themselves provides a description of the inner life of God throughout eternity. In this way, God is love within the divine reality, and in this sense, through all eternity, God is the social Trinity, the community of love. (195)

The postmodern can be challenged to participate, to be connected, to interact with the loving God who became flesh and sent his Spirit to empower people for new life.

Concerns with Narrative Preaching

The open-ended, experiential nature of narrative preaching is attractive, but the narrative method raises questions for the project. Problems do arise when using a narrative method of preaching because the use of story can sometimes leave listeners wondering what was to be taken from all this information.

Images can be misinterpreted and misunderstood. Images can cause more harm than good. People do not react in the same way to an image. A person might look at the American flag being burned with great offense. Another might see it as a great expression of freedom. In every preaching setting, listeners are given some freedom to interpret what the message is for their lives. In the postmodern setting, when preaching narratively, listeners might interpret Peter, Paul, and Mary as a rock group.

In preaching narratively, preachers have a tendency to produce experiences instead of letting the Holy Spirit speak to them at their point of need. Preachers explain the story to such an extent that the imaginations of the listeners are suppressed. Preachers are wanting to make sure listeners understand what is being said. Mystery and transcendence are pushed aside for application and authority.

Narrative preaching is useful because much of the Bible is written narratively, and postmodernists like stories. However, not all the Bible is narrative, and doctrine cannot be

limited to one method of preaching. Furthermore, an “absolute” homiletical method would be quite amusing to postmodernists.

Preaching in a Postmodern Context

While modernistic thought is still lingering in the world today, modernity is quickly losing its grasp on society. People are on different points of the continuum between postmodernism and modernism, shifting to postmodernism. “The postmodern person has been through the best and worst that modernity has to offer. The postmodern person is looking for something beyond modernity” (Oden, The Living God 60).

Certain challenges exist when preaching Christian doctrine in a postmodern context.

1. Preachers can no longer assume that people in the Church are familiar with basic Christian doctrines. Preachers can never assume “that the congregation has an accurate grasp of Christian vocabulary or doctrine, not even basic doctrine. The vacuum of understanding of Christian doctrine suggest the time is ripe for preachers to preach regularly on what Christians believe” (Allen and Jenson 25).

2. Doctrine by its very nature claims authority and makes truth claims, yet preachers do well to remember that they speak in a postmodern context that suspects every claim for authority. The postmodern audiences start with skepticism toward any claim of truth.

3. The proposition of this study was that preaching doctrine can be effective if preachers keep the following in mind:

- The authority of preaching rests totally on the authenticity of Jesus,
- The integrity of the preacher wins the right to be heard,

- Preaching is an open and humble conversation with the congregation,
- Story and human experience can be used to communicate doctrine, and
- The Holy Spirit makes the Scriptures relevant to any cultural context.

The Authority of Preaching Rests Totally on the Authenticity of Jesus

The key to reaching a postmodern world is to preach Christ who came as God's self-revelation to a world in desperate need of a savior. The incarnation makes Jesus so appealing because he dealt with the everyday issues of life. Jesus faced temptations and battled the powers of evil. The writer of Hebrews stresses the importance of Jesus' humanity:

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast your confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 12:1,2)

The postmodernists are willing to listen to stories about Jesus because of his integrity. Jesus was with those people who were the marginalized, outcast, and excluded: the leper, the harlot, the tax collector. The Pharisees were outraged that he would eat with sinners. In Matthew 9:11 the Pharisees asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He picked up on their conversation and said in verse 12, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Christ was constantly reaching out to those who were searching for ways to become well.

Jesus offered connectedness. He promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb.13:5). "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you" (Isa. 41:10). Healing takes place for those who can get connected to the

creator and sustainer of the universe. Self-sufficiency leads to self-deception. Jesus was really in love with humanity. The bottom line is that he loved the least, the last, and the lost.

Jesus was willing to lay down his life for others. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-14).

With the incarnation, God became flesh and offered grace and reconciliation to humanity. Through Jesus Christ, God sought to love the world back to himself (John 3:16). Through God, every situation is redeemable. The pain and death of Christ seemed to show defeat. Through his death came resurrection. Therein lies the hope of humanity. Jesus offers, through the Holy Spirit, one thing that gods and idols of this world cannot—relationship. “Jesus is Truth. Truth resides in relationships, not documents or principles. The Gospels don’t teach us about Jesus as a principle but Jesus as a person” (Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims 131). Thus, the challenge for preachers is to connect Christ with doctrinal faith. Doctrine expresses what being in relationship with Christ means.

The Integrity of the Preacher Wins the Right to Be Heard

In the postmodern setting, preachers cannot rely on either reason or tradition to impress postmodern listeners. Preachers are called to live what they preach. Postmodern people are looking for authenticity and integrity. “People in our emerging postmodern world look for wholeness that combines the messenger with message; and message with the market place of life” (Artmann 50). The postmodern listener is seeking evidence of the message upon the messenger’s life, and the message is authenticated by the life of the messenger. “The listener’s trust in the message can be further instilled by the preacher’s

authenticity when people are uncertain as to what to believe, all they have to go on is what they have before them” (Johnston 92). Haddon Robinson says, “If listeners know you love and identify with them, they will let you say strong things. Most people are just asking that you be aware of them and not write them off” (103).

The postmodern person is looking for faith that ties into real life experiences. The preacher must not only say, “This is how I believe,” but also, “This is how I live.” Postmodern people ask people of faith to live up to the beliefs that they profess with their lips. Integrity, not only of the preacher, but also of the laity, is of real importance to the postmodernists. Words are mere instruments of manipulation for those who do not follow words with action. The challenge for the Church is to help people become disciples for Jesus Christ (Sweet, Soul Tsunami 407-33; Johnston 91-3; Robinson 100-03; Thiselton 5-7).

Preaching Is an Open and Humble Conversation with the Congregation

In doctrinal preaching, options are offered to those who have different or no faith experiences. “This approach makes it possible for preachers to make their way through the tensions between the search for universal claims for truth and the fact that experience is always particular and contextual” (Allen, Blaisdell, and Johnston 65). Preachers speak assuredly of what they know and with conviction of what they believe; however, conversation also involves listening to others’ experiences. Claims that are unfamiliar to preachers’ traditions should be evaluated. The doctrines of faith help to evaluate other persons’ experiences as valid or not (59-67; Paschal).

Modern preachers must take seriously the honest question asked by postmoderns. Theologically, Derrida asks the Church to explain God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and

other spiritual matters more completely and fully. Derrida questions the Church's claim that Christ is the center of its life when infighting exists in the Church over doctrines, when often little evidence of a belief system transformed by truth is seen, and when worship is exclusive. Jesus is calling the faithful not to protect the Church's self-developed truths but to follow him. As Barth asserts, "The gospel does not exist as a truth among other truths. Rather it sets up a question mark against all truths" (35).

At the same time, Jesus did not turn away those who doubted his claims to truth.

For instance, Thomas doubted his resurrection:

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:24-28)

Jesus did not say, "Thomas, I am through with you." Jesus welcomed Thomas' skepticism and called him to greater faith. The Great Commission is issued in Matthew 28:16-20 to the eleven disciples who had once deserted Jesus:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain he had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus issued the Great Commission with some still doubting his authority and his truth. Jesus did not say, "If you are a doubter, would you please leave my presence." No,

Jesus issued a challenge to be part of a community of faithful followers who would teach and preach the doctrines of faith. In the same way, preachers can respond to the valid argument of postmodernism without giving up the integrity of their beliefs.

Preachers are also called to talk to the world in a language the world understands. Preachers are asked to talk honestly with the people. Preachers are called to offer the truth of Christ against all other options. Preachers are called to speak not dogmatically but with love and compassion. Calvin Miller states the following, “Start with people where they are, not where you wish they were” (73).

When entering into conversation with postmodernists, Graham Johnston makes the following suggestions for preachers to consider:

1. Choose carefully and strategically what to say,
2. Learn to speak in a positive manner about what the Christian faith is and not what it is not,
3. Openly acknowledge even Christians face a world of gray, where not all life’s answers are cut and dry,
4. Admit your own struggles and allow listeners to see that you know you have not arrived, and
5. Don’t go looking for a fight (94).

Story and Human Experience Can Be Used to Communicate Doctrine

Preachers bring the doctrines of the Christian tradition into dialogue with those experiences that are based on different traditions. If preachers have no set doctrines, then they become silent in a world hungering for truth. Preaching in the postmodern world is a dialogue between experience and tradition. Tradition must test experience and also be

tested by experience.

Doctrine is not devoid of experience. The apostles spoke from experience and proceeded to tell how these experiences lead to a more complete knowledge of God. Paul met Christ on the Damascus road, and his life was changed forever (Acts 9). The woman at the well was living a life that was meaningless and filled with empty relationships. The woman's life was transformed when she met Jesus (John 4:1-38). Bartimaeus, the blind man, was changed because of his encounter with Jesus (Mark 10:46-51). After an encounter with Jesus, a sinful woman, possibly Mary Magdalene, was forgiven her sins (Luke 7:36-50). Throughout the Scriptures God is revealing himself to humanity. These encounters with God are the stories that fill the pages of the Old and New Testaments.

Preachers are asked to proclaim the truth to a postmodern world that leaves room to experience the mysterious and the spiritual. Postmodernists are searching for spiritual meaning. People are turning to witchcraft, Eastern mysticism, weeping icons, bleeding paintings, ghosts, channeling, and communication with the dead. People are seriously looking for something to give meaning and purpose to their lives, but religion has become privatized and put into a sort of non-covenantal agreement.

Despite this individualism, the postmodern world is still looking for a spiritual perspective that will help them deal with the questions of life. Where did I come from? Did I just happen? Why am I here? What is my purpose? How should I live? Can I claim any absolutes? How can I know that God exists? If God is good and loving why is evil in this world? Is life experienced after death? Where am I going after I die? With so many religions in the world, how can we know which will lead us to God? Story and human experience can help communicate truth in a powerful and life-changing way.

The Holy Spirit Makes Scripture Relevant to Any Cultural Context

The Bible is God's living word and is relevant in each and every cultural context because of the actions of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit speaks through the Bible:

In so doing—in appropriating these texts as the instrumentality of this speaking—the Spirit performs the perlocutionary act of creating *world*, and the world the Spirit creates is not simply the world surrounding the ancient text itself. It is the eschatological world God intends for creation as disclosed in the text. (Franke and Grenz 77)

Preaching that depends on the Spirit does not exclude careful exegesis, but preaching is more than explaining what the text means. The Spirit can speak through the text in a new context. As Justo Gonzalez says, “The knowledge of Christ never comes to us apart from culture, or devoid of cultural baggage” (Out of Every Tribe 3). The Spirit communicates to people in their present situation, and the community seeks to discern what the Spirit is saying. The community then, is called to act upon the knowledge ascertained. The Spirit, through Scripture, helps them to live daily in obedience and service to God.

When sharing doctrine, preachers have to rely heavily on the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to create, renew, transform people's worlds. Paul Ricoeur makes the following observation about Scripture:

The meaning of the text always points beyond itself—it is ‘not behind the text, but in front of it’—for it projects a way of being in the world, a mode of existence, a pattern of life, and it ‘points towards a possible world.’ (87)

The Spirit works through the word of God to change and transform the world. To preach doctrine, preachers are called to listen to the Spirit speaking through all text and apply the information to the present situation (Loscalzo 33-35; Craddock 2, 64-65).

As Franke and Grenz state, “Another way of putting it is to declare that reading

Table 2.2 A Comparison of Various Preaching Tools Used to Communicate Doctrine in the Eight-Week Series

| | Conversational Style | My Own Personal Life Experience | Personal Real Life Experience of Others | Images | Stories | Asked Questions | Holy Spirit |
|-----------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---|--------|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| *Sermon 5 | • | * | * | | * | * | * |
| Sermon 6 | * | * | * | * | * | * | * |
| Sermon 7 | * | * | * | | * | * | * |
| Sermon 8 | * | | | * | * | * | * |

* This tool appears in the sermon

I used two deductive sermons, which were not overly authoritarian, three inductive sermons, and three sermons which were more narrative in nature (see Appendix A).

Determining a sermon method can be somewhat confusing and frustrating because many sermons have a mixture of homiletical patterns within each message. A deductive, inductive, and narrative approach may each be used at different times in the sermon.

I believe that sermons one and two were primarily deductive in nature. Each of these sermons moved from general truths about God and Jesus to particular truths about God and Jesus. In sermons three, four, and five I used the more inductive approach. These sermons were inductive because they moved from particular truths to general truths. Sermons six through eight are more narrative in nature. Each of these sermons follow the narrative flow of the biblical story instead of arguing ideas or developing logical points.

Because of this dissertation process, I have started imagining sermons as a hiker crossing a stream. When a hiker comes to a stream, the hiker carefully selects which rocks to step on to get across the stream. I preached this series on sermons using certain “rocks”

to cross the hermeneutical streams.

In a postmodern context, preachers are well advised to not be locked into one method of communication. In Chapter Four, the results of Table 4.4 support the fact that the eight-week sermon series had an impact on the participants (see p. 88). I believe the mixture of the deductive, inductive, and narrative approaches helped to reinforce the beliefs of some participants and helped other participants rethink their belief systems in the following ways:

1. The conversational style that I used in the eight-week series provided an atmosphere of openness, honesty, and humility. Ecclesial authority and reason were overshadowed by the Holy Spirit working to make God up close and personal.

2. In the sermons I told some of my real life personal experiences. The personal stories made me human and vulnerable, and I was seen as a fellow traveler on this journey called life. The preaching monologue is no longer an effective method with a generation brought up on Nintendo and reality television. For example, in sermon four the stories I shared about my earliest memories of church gave listeners an opportunity to relive some of their earliest childhood memories. I believe the struggles that I shared of church, helped other listeners to rethink their own ideas about church.

3. In the SCO results, a significant change occurred in question two which dealt with the issue of Scripture (see Table 4.4). I believe the various methods used in the sermons helped to engage the listener in the text. In sermon seven, I was with the two companions on the road to Emmaus. In sermon eight, I was with the lawyer as he questioned Jesus about issues of faith. Hopefully, through the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance, the listeners also participated in the story.

I was a fellow traveler on this journey. In the past, I would have been telling the listeners about the path, but I would have been far removed from the path. The research I have done throughout the project has helped me to realize that listeners in today's audience need a preacher who is sincere, vulnerable, and real. I am still working on becoming more real to the audience to which I am speaking.

Summary of the Research Method

The survey for this study was the Short Christian Orthodoxy scale. The survey was conducted in a non-experimental setting. I used the longitudinal design. The data was collected over a short period of time, before and after the eight-week sermon series.

As Wiersma states, "Longitudinal designs involve the collection of data over time and at specified points in time" (161). Many types of longitudinal studies exist, but the particular type of longitudinal design used here was the cohort study. "A cohort study is a longitudinal study in which a specific population is studied over time" (162).

The cohort study enabled me to study change in knowledge and behavior of participants in the 8:45 a.m. contemporary service at Central UMC in Lenoir City, Tennessee. I employed a one-group, pretest-posttest survey.

I also attached a cover letter to the pretest survey and the posttest survey that explained the purpose and value of the individual filling out the survey. With the cover letter, I hoped to stimulate participants to fill out the survey and attend the eight-week sermon series (see Appendixes F and L).

I also conducted pretest and posttest questionnaires. The questionnaire was taken from an unpublished work of Stanley Grenz (Grenz, Postmodern). The purpose of the pretest and posttest questionnaires was to determine the influence of the postmodern

philosophy on the members of Central UMC.

I believe the most difficult aspect of the research was to determine attitudinal changes. Although the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale measured participants' attitudes, I pursued even more evidence of the impact of the sermon series on the listeners' lifestyles. I conducted pretest and posttest interviews with five individuals I selected. The five people interviewed before and after the sermon series were chosen for the following reasons:

1. The people interviewed regularly attended the contemporary service of Central UMC,
2. The people interviewed were from various age categories. I did not choose any of these people because I deemed them most likely to be postmodern, and
3. The people interviewed were very active in the ministries of Central United Methodist Church.

I met with each individual at a prearranged time to conduct the interviews. I had a tape recorder present to record all interviews, and, then, I had Edie Shanahan, the Administrative Assistant at Central United Methodist Church, transcribe the material (see Appendix N).

The type of interview I conducted was an open-ended format. With the selected-response format, participants are forced to make certain choices; the open-ended format allows participants more freedom to express their feelings. A major drawback to the open-ended format was the tabulation of the responses. As Wiersma states, "A disadvantage of the open-ended items is that responses tend to be inconsistent in length, and sometimes in content.... Both questions and responses are susceptible to misinterpretation. Irrelevant information may be included in the responses" (170).

Summary of Key Findings

Today's culture is in a state of transition. A paradigm shift is taking place in Western culture. As Stiver observes, "When one surveys the panorama of contemporary thought it is evident in field after field, in discipline after discipline, that a significant critique of modernity has arisen along with a discussion of a paradigm change" (242). As Franke and Grenz state, "In the modern era, the pursuit of knowledge was deeply influenced by the thought forms of the enlightenment" (23). In the postmodern context, concepts of knowledge, truth, and authority are challenged.

As with other major culture shifts, change brings uncertainty and uneasiness. Each time a cultural change takes place, Christians are called to evaluate basic beliefs and practices. The emergence of postmodernism has brought cultural upheaval. "One common approach to the emergence of postmodernity has been of the negative variety. Many Christian theologians and thinkers have come to view postmodernity primarily as a threat to Christian faith" (Franke and Grenz 19). Many theologians have seen postmodernity as an enemy of the Christian faith. Many evangelicals "tend to think that postmodernism opposes the truth, and in particular, the absolute truth of the gospel" (McLeod 281).

However, while postmodernity is to be taken seriously, postmodernity should not be feared. As theologians addressed the world making a transition to modernity so, too, will theologians lead humanity from modernity to postmodernity. Throughout history, theologians have used times of transition to mold and shape new ways of thinking. As Franke and Grenz state, "In one sense the current situation bears similarity to other periods in history when cultural upheaval led to the rethinking of accepted norms of Christian theological discourse. The expression of Christian through has taken shape and

has been revised in the context of numerous cultural transitions”(3).

The transition from modernism to postmodernism offers many opportunities:

When I first heard about postmodernism, it seemed too academic and erudite to provide a realistic opportunity for Christian witness on a grand scale, but the more the ideas and values of postmodernity permeate society, the more sense it makes to dive in and reshape our preaching (not our message) and practice (not our values or God’s commandments) to give Christian ministry currency in the emerging new world. (Smith 92)

I have learned that postmodernists are not turned off by spiritual matters.

Postmodernists are hungry for the mysterious. Many postmodernists want to experience something, and postmodernists are turning to religion (not Christianity) to find meaning and direction in life. Postmodern people are open to the teachings of Jesus.

Postmoderns are also hungry for relationship and community. Christianity already has community in place to develop fellowship and discipleship; however, to attract postmodernists, the community needs to be authentic and involved in outreach and mission.

Postmodernists want to be in conversation. Doctrine can be offered in a non-combative way by offering options in the preaching context. Postmodern people will listen. I did not say all will agree but many will listen.

The postmodern traits listed above, and many more, are not to be dreaded but welcomed. Within this culture, Christianity has been called to adapt and be in ministry.

Newbegin believes the following:

We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture.... Every interpretation of the gospel is embodied in some cultural form (144).

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Problem and Purpose of the Study

The lack of doctrinal understanding is a problem in today's Church. Throughout the ages, the Church has had to battle with forgetting who and whose it is. The postmodern way of thinking has compounded the problem. In this postmodern ethos, doctrines have not been looked upon favorably. The task of preachers is to find effective ways to communicate truth, explain authority, and promote community.

Chuck Smith states the following in his book The End of the World as We Know

It:

Three themes that characterize all of postmodernity:
 pluralism (expressed in eclecticism, combining a variety of historical, ethnic, and artistic styles)
 a suspicion of realism (a rejection of the idea that anything exists other than the work itself)
 an undermining of authority. (31-32)

Pauline Rosenau states that "truth makes reference to order, rules, and values; depends on logic, rationality, and reason, all of which the postmodernists question" (77).

Artmann makes the following observation:

Postmodernism contends that all histories are only constructs by a particular person or group of people that enable those people to cope or exert power.... Christianity holds that God revealed himself in history and entered history in the person of Jesus Christ. (62)

People continue to search for meaning and direction in life; therefore, the doctrines highlighted in the Apostles' Creed and the beliefs found in the United Methodist heritage can help provide meaning and direction. The preaching of these doctrines cannot be dry nor unimaginative. The preacher cannot be dogmatic nor intolerant but listener-friendly

and practical in nature.

In the preaching of doctrine, I have listed below the basic themes I used to communicate with the congregation:

1. The truth of Christ is an option leading the listener to experience God's love, power, and grace;
2. The authority of the Church's message comes from the authenticity of the life of Christ; and,
3. The doctrines of the Church offer a community of meaning and hope for people.

Research and Operational Questions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of preaching the basic doctrines of the Christian faith on the people of Central United Methodist Church in Lenoir City, Tennessee, while living in a postmodern world. The sermon topics were drawn from the Apostles' Creed and have a distinctive United Methodist flavor. The research questions helped to determine the effectiveness of the study.

Research Question #1

What knowledge about the doctrines existed prior to the sermon series? The answer to this research question provided a baseline reading of the congregation's understanding of doctrinal beliefs according to the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale. The independent variable was the sermon series. The pretest helped to determine if the sermon series made a significant impact on the listeners.

Research Question #2

What is the measure of the participants' understanding of doctrinal beliefs after the sermon series? This research project was based on the idea that preaching can make a

positive impact on postmodern listeners. The eight sermon themes in this preaching program used three criteria: truth, community, and authority. What is the relationship, if any, between these three criteria and a change in the Short Christian Orthodoxy scores?

Research Question #3

What other variables might coincide with changes in the participants' responses to doctrines of the faith highlighted in the Apostles' Creed and the United Methodist beliefs.

Intervening variables could include age of the participants. Do certain age groups show a significant change in their Short Christian Orthodoxy scores?

The literature review focused on the use of stories, believability of the speaker, life application, and different sermon methods to appeal to postmodern listeners. These factors could also play an important part in the impact of the message on the hearers.

Population and Sample

The population for this study is the membership of the church (669), and the sample are attendees eighteen or over, who attend the 8:45 a.m. contemporary service at Central United Methodist Church. The participants of the study were members and non-members who were asked to fill out the pretest and posttest Short Christian Orthodoxy Survey. A four-digit identification code was used to record each participant's response. I asked participants to use the last four digits of their social security number for their identification code.

Lenoir City is a satellite community of Knoxville, Tennessee. According to the 2000 census, the population of Lenoir City is twelve thousand. (5284) Central United Methodist did a Percept group study in 1998 (see Appendix E). Within a seven-mile radius of the church, the number of people with a high school education is 5.3 percent below the

national average. The number of people with college degrees is 5.6 percent above the national average. The primary concerns were family problems and personal and spiritual growth. The number of rural families located within this radius is 149.1 percent about the national average. An interesting point is that the number of affluent families is 120.5 percent above the national average. In searching for spiritual development, the respondents were 16.9 percent above the national average (Percept Group).

In the fall of 2002, Central United Methodist Church had a membership of 669. The average worship attendance at the traditional service was 146. The contemporary service was started in 1996. The average attendance was 107. The average attendance at the contemporary service in 2002 was 216.

Methodology

The study used the Short Christian Orthodoxy Survey with a pretest/posttest design. The pretest survey provided a baseline reading of the understanding and knowledge of doctrines of faith. A posttest survey was also given to participants to determine an individuals' growth in the knowledge of doctrine.

The Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale

Before discussing the Short Christian Orthodoxy scale, background is needed in the Christian Orthodoxy scale.

The book, Measures of Religiosity, describes the Christian Orthodoxy Scale in the following manner:

a relatively unidimensional measure of the degree to which someone accepts beliefs central to Christianity.... There are certain beliefs that are common to all who would use the name "Christian." These are the "bedrock" statements that define the faith and are expressed in the Apostles' Creed. (Hill and Hood 15)

The Christian Orthodoxy Survey addresses the major categories of the Christian faith. The survey taps into the doctrines discussed in the Apostles' Creed: God's power and authority; Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life; the Trinity, Holy Spirit, resurrection, and the Church. The scale is composed of twenty-four items and takes about thirty minutes to complete (see Appendix G).

Bruce Hunsberger states, in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, that one of the problems of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale was the scale's length. "The 24 items apparently discourage its use among researchers who desire a relatively brief measure to complement or supplement other measures" (360).

The Short Christian Orthodoxy (SCO) scale was developed to cut down the length of the survey and still maintain integrity. The SCO has only six questions (see Appendix J). Hunsberger makes the following observation about the SCO scale:

Several criteria were used to select the six items from the CO scale. First, items were selected based on their item-total correlations for the CO scale and the extent to which they loaded on the one large factor evident in the factor analysis of the Christian Orthodoxy scale. Second, equal numbers of pro- and con- trait items were retained in order to maintain a balanced scale. (361)

In the fall of 1989, the short version of the Christian Orthodoxy scale was given to 691 students at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, and 669 students completed the survey. The longer version was also given to the same set of students, and 641 completed the survey. The results from the shorter and longer versions were not significantly different. As Hunsberger states, "Scores on the SCO scale correlated with a variety of variables and scales virtually as strongly and significantly as did the original CO scale" (362). Hunsberger draws the following conclusion: "Thus, it would appear that the

SCO scale may prove to be a useful measure in both research and practical settings” (364).

As with the CO scale, half the items were worded negatively, and the other three positively. The responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale from -3 strongly disagree to +3 strongly agree with no response recorded as “0.” Therefore, I chose to use the shorter version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale. The shorter version, as the name implies, took less time and was easier to compile and decipher the data.

Information Sheet

The demographic information, which included age (general age categories), sex, number of weeks, months, or years in attendance at Central United Methodist Church, was placed at the bottom part of the pretest and posttest surveys. Participants were also asked to list the last four digits of their social security numbers in the spaces provided on the pretest and posttest surveys.

An information sheet was given to the five individuals in the pretest interview. This demographic sheet asked for the age (general age categories), gender, and number of weeks, months, or years in attendance at Central United Methodist Church, and the last four digits of the participants’ social security numbers were listed (see Appendix H).

An information sheet was given in the posttest interview to the same five individuals of the pretest interview. On the posttest information sheet, eight boxes were placed at the bottom of the sheet to record the number of Sundays attended in the eight-week series (see Appendix I).

Instrumentation

The SCO was passed out to participants prior to the contemporary service or after

the contemporary service. Copies were mailed to interested people who regularly attended Central United Methodist Church. The newsletter and bulletin were effective ways to remind participants to get their surveys in by the end of a four-week period. The surveys were turned in no later than four weeks after they were distributed. All information was kept confidential, and participants were reminded that the Short Christian Orthodox Survey was offered to participants to fulfill my requirements for a doctor of ministry program.

A posttest survey was given at the end of the eight-week sermon series with an eight-week code at the bottom of the survey to determine attendance. The procedure that was used for the pretest was also used in the posttest.

Interviews

I conducted a pretest interview with five individuals, and a posttest interview was given to the same five individuals (see Appendix D) The five participants were selected for the interview on the basis of age (general age categories), gender, involvement in Central United Methodist Church, and regularity of worship attendance. These interviewees also participated in the pretest and posttest surveys for both the SCO and the postmodern questionnaire.

Questionnaire

I also passed out a pretest and posttest questionnaire, which was adapted from an unpublished work by Stanley Grenz (Grenz, Postmodern, see Appendix K). The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the extent members of Central United Methodist were influenced by the philosophy of postmodernism. The questionnaire was given to members and non-members who attended the early service at Central United Methodist

Church.

Variables

The independent variable in this study was the sermon series on doctrinal truths (see Appendix M). Validity was sought on two levels. The sermons were reviewed by the research group and a select group of colleagues who approved the sermon material. The content of the sermon was also presented to the dissertation committee to question and approve.

The dependent variables in this study were the knowledge and application of doctrine by the participants. The pretest and posttest survey and pretest and posttest interviews measured the impact of the sermon series on the listeners.

A possible intervening variable was the age of the participants. "Related literature suggests that people of the G. I. generation and the builder generation (those fifty-five and older) may react differently to the approach taken in the preaching style being studied" (Artmann 69-70). Age categories were added to the study to try to determine if a correlation existed between the age of the participants and the participants' responses to the sermon series.

Sermons on Christian Doctrine

I was intentional about presenting doctrine in an enthusiastic and passionate way to a postmodern world; thus, the three theological elements—truth, authority and community—were addressed in the eight-week sermon series.

The sermons on Christian doctrine dealt with these theological elements in a specific and a general manner. For example, the subject of community was addressed in the sermons dealing with the Church and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the sermons also

addressed community in a more general way. For example, as I stated earlier, a thriving community offers a meaning, purpose, and direction for life. Each of the sermons discussed the foundational beliefs of the body of Christ, which offer meaning, purpose, and direction.

Truth and authority were handled in much the same way, offering specific and general information for the postmodern listener.

Data Analysis

I reported the data results in a descriptive manner. "Descriptive Statistics ... are exactly what the name implies: procedures and measures by which we describe quantitative data" (Wiersma 324). The type of descriptive statistics that I used was correlation, which is "a measure of relationship between two variables" (331). The relationship between the eight-week sermon series on doctrines and the knowledge and the application of doctrines by the participants was measured by use of the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale. "The Christian Orthodoxy Scale is a relatively unidimensional measure of the degree to which someone accepts beliefs central to Christianity" (Hill and Hood 15).

The results of the changes in the variables are recorded in Chapter 4. As Wiersma states, "The measure of correlation is called the correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient is an index of the extent of relationship between two variables. It can take on values from -1.00 to +1.00, inclusive. Zero indicates no relationship" (331). The data for the pretest and posttest postmodern questionnaire was also analyzed and recorded in a descriptive manner.

The data for the pretest and posttest interview was analyzed by inferential

statistics. Wiersma says the following: “Statistics are computed from the sample data on the basis of these statistics, generalizations ... are made” (343). The five participants of Central United Methodist’s 8:45 a.m. service were selected for an interview on the basis of age, gender, involvement in Central United Methodist Church activities, and regularity of worship attendance (see Appendix D). The data was compiled and is presented in Chapter 4.

I researched the feasibility of using a computer program to analyze the survey results, but I decided to use pencils, paper, and a word processor. “Smaller projects in particular may welcome the modern word processor as a flexible and full-featured tool for document exploration and offer analysis documents that relate themselves neatly to source document and other media” (Handbook of Qualitative Research 450).

The reason I chose to go this direction were as follows:

1. The data was only twelve pages of verbatim from five interviews;
2. I was the only researcher;
3. My research was only conducted for a brief period of weeks. I did not have time to forget valuable information; and,
4. Interviews were completed before the analysis began.

I also enlisted the help of Tanasi Associates, the Statistical Department of the University of Kansas, and Dr. William H. Balch, Director of the Holston Conference Counseling Center, to analyze the data.

CHAPTER 4

INSTRUMENTS OF MEASUREMENT

In the summer and fall of 2002, I conducted a pretest and posttest Short Christian Orthodoxy Survey at Central United Methodist Church in Lenoir City, Tennessee. The survey sample was given to the participants of the early service at Central UMC. I also conducted a pretest and posttest postmodern questionnaire of the above-mentioned population.

Five persons were interviewed for this project. They completed the pretest and posttest SCO and postmodern questionnaire.

A total of one hundred and twenty people were sampled in the early service. Of the one hundred and twenty people sampled, sixty-four people took both the pretest and posttest SCO, and the pretest and posttest postmodern questionnaire (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Comparison of Results of Subjects Completing Instruments of Measurement

| Instruments of Measurement | SCO | PM | Interview |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| Pretest | 120 | 101 | 5 |
| Posttest | 75 | 101 | 5 |
| Both | 64 | 64 | 5 |

I measured the changes in the population sample with the following tools: a pretest and posttest SCO, a pretest and posttest postmodern questionnaire, and five persons were interviewed before and after the sermon series.

Findings of the Study

The first research question posted in this study was “What knowledge about the doctrines existed prior to the sermon series?” I addressed the first research question on two levels. A pretest interview and a pretest SCO were conducted to help answer research question #1.

A pretest interview was conducted in August 2002 with five people. I selected each individual on the basis of age (general age categories), gender, involvement in Central United Methodist Church, and regularity of worship attendance. Of the five subjects, two were male and three were female. The years of worship attendance ranged from two years to thirty-two years. As one would expect, the participants’ involvement increased with years of attendance.

Overall, the first interview helped me to get a better handle on the participants’ belief system and knowledge of doctrines. One would not expect the participants to be in agreement on every question, and indeed similarities as well as differences emerged in this first interview. When talking about truth, all of the participants struggled with the concept. The followup questions helped tremendously. Four of the five participants saw truth as being related to God. Only participant #3 referred to truth as what is experienced. When speaking of authority, once again, four of the participants spoke of authority being found in Scripture, and reason was also a valuable tool in making good decisions. One participant believed that reason was a more valuable tool than Scripture. This participant did not imply that Scripture was worthless, but when faced with a decision, the participant did not consider scripture the first option to which to turn.

All the respondents agreed that community was a very important part of any

person's life. Interestingly, common goals and interests were mentioned as important traits of any community in some way by all the respondents. When the participants were asked, "Have you ever felt disconnected from society?" I assumed that everyone had felt that disconnectedness from society at one time or another, but two of the participants had not felt a separateness from society. Both of these participants, #2 and #4, were over 45 years old and were able to find connection with society by looking outward to neighbors, by being involved in civic groups, and by growing up in a small town atmosphere.

When asked about the foundations of belief, four of the participants answered all the questions about God, sin, salvation, and eternal life in a similar fashion. Participant #3 believed in God but did not list any unique qualities about God. As participant #3 states, "I believe there is a God. I believe he has many names and identities. God cannot be limited by the labels we put on him." Participant #3 saw sin as a mistake that was no "big deal."

The first interview did show that the participants have a basic working knowledge of the Christian faith. Although participants have varied opinions to the questions, each participant seemed to feel strongly about his/her set of beliefs. I believe the first set of interviews gave a good sample of the congregation's belief system as a whole.

Along with the interviews, I also conducted a pretest survey. One hundred and twenty subjects completed the pretest survey and seventy-five completed the posttest survey. Sixty four subjects returned both the pretest and posttest survey (see Table 4.1). Of the sixty-four subjects, twenty-four were male (37 percent), and forty were female (63 percent). The subjects were divided into age categories (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Survey Age Categories

| Age Range | Number of participants | Percentage |
|-----------|------------------------|------------|
| 18-28 | 12 | (19%) |
| 29-45 | 18 | (28%) |
| 46-65 | 19 | (30%) |
| 66+ | 15 | (23%) |

The years of attendance ranged from one year to seventy-eight years. The average years of attendance were fourteen. Subjects responded to each survey question on a six-point Likert scale. The Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale worded three of the six questions in a negative fashion, and answers to the negatively worded questions were scored in a reverse fashion. The scores ranged from 1.0 being very unorthodox to 7.0 being very orthodox. The results of the pretest Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale indicated a very orthodox belief system of the participants of Central United Methodist Church (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Pretest Survey Score by Question (N=64)

| Question # | Mean | SD |
|--------------------|------|-------|
| 1 Son of God | 6.94 | .42 |
| **2 The Bible | 6.32 | 1.332 |
| **3 God | 6.82 | .59 |
| 4 Forgiveness | 6.90 | .63 |
| **5 God's Presence | 6.85 | .60 |
| 6 Resurrection | 6.92 | .61 |

**These negatively worded items were reverse scored.

The internal consistency of the SCO has already been established by the scales' developer, Bruce Hunsberger, who drew the following conclusions from several years of research:

Consistently, a single factor has emerged from the factor analyses, which accounts for a large proportion of the total test variance (always more than 74%). Mean inter-item correlations have remained high across samples (ranging from .69 to .78), Cronbach's alpha has ranged from .93 to .95, and the six items of the scale have loaded (usually considerably) higher than .75 in all analyses. (3)

Wiersma points out that reliability can be measured by a test-retest. "In this procedure, the same test is administered on two or more occasions to the same individuals. Again, if the test is reliable, there will be a high positive association between the scores" (298).

Did the Sermon Series Help?

The second research question was, "What changes occur in the postmodern participants' knowledge of the doctrines because of the sermon series?" The sermon series began 8 September 2002, and ended 27 October 2002. In November 2002, the posttest interview was also conducted with the five selected individuals. For the most part, all five participants had the same answers as in the pretest interview. While this particular sermon series did not change the participants' opinions on doctrine in a significant way, as one participant stated, "The sermon series really helped to reinforce my beliefs." One question that needs to be asked is, "Can an eight-week sermon series have a significant impact on a person's belief system?" What amount of time is needed to affect people's belief patterns? A sermon series does not always have to change a person's perspective to be effective. A sermon or series can reinforce what one believes. When the participants were asked,

“Have the sermons on doctrine impacted your beliefs?” participant #2 said, “Yes, the sermons have helped make me stronger and more committed to what I believe.”

Participant #4 said, “I believe the sermon series helped to reinforce what I believe. For instance, when you talked about God, I was reminded of how good and faithful God is to me.” Participant #5 said, “I realized that doctrines are very important. When you talked about grace, I had a new insight on how wonderful God’s grace is for me, and how little I deserve it. Grace is truly a gift.” Participant #3 responded in the following way: “Well, I guess one thing your sermons have done is caused me to think. I do not agree with everything you preached on, but I at least am thinking.”

Certain similarities existed in the pretest and the posttest interview responses. All the participants responded in much the same way about truth, authority, and community. I did find some things of interest. In the pretest interview, participant #4 had not felt disconnected from society, but in the posttest interview, when asked if she had felt disconnected from society she states, “Yes, when my own beliefs differ from the world’s beliefs, I feel disconnected from society.” “How so?”

I have a twenty-eight year old daughter who believes that a person can get to heaven many ways. She said if I believe Jesus is the only way, then I am being exclusive and intolerant of others’ beliefs. I sometimes get confused about this matter.

I did not find any other significant changes in the responses that were given in either the pretest interview or the posttest interview.

The Short Orthodoxy Scale was administered in November 2002 to the participants of the early service at Central United Methodist Church. The results of the posttest are listed in Table 4.4. The posttest survey also shows a high orthodoxy belief

system.

Table 4.4. Posttest Survey Score by Question (N=64)

| Question Number | Mean | SD |
|--------------------|-------|------|
| 1 Son of God | 6.95 | 0.49 |
| **2 The Bible | 6.43* | 1.28 |
| **3 God | 6.96* | 0.5 |
| 4 Forgiveness | 6.93 | 0.6 |
| **5 God's Presence | 6.79 | 0.57 |
| 6 Resurrection | 6.93 | 0.66 |

* Significant change

**These negatively worded items were reverse scored

After the preaching series, the subject scores showed some interesting data (see Table 4.5). In question #2 the mean score changed from 6.32 to 6.43 with a difference of .11. The standard deviation decreased by .04. In question #3 the mean score changed from 6.82 to 6.96 with a difference of .14. The standard deviation decreased by .05. My survey population began with a very orthodox stance. Nevertheless, I still saw significant change in the answer to question two and three (concerning beliefs about the Bible and God). This suggests that sermons can be an effective means of influencing doctrinal commitments in a congregation.

Table 4.5. Comparison Score by Question

| Question Number | Survey 1 | | Survey 2 | |
|------------------|----------|------|----------|------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| 1 Son of God | 6.94 | 0.42 | 6.95 | 0.49 |
| *2 The Bible | 6.32 | 1.32 | 6.43 | 1.28 |
| *3 God | 6.82 | 0.59 | 6.96 | 0.54 |
| 4 Forgiveness | 6.90 | 0.63 | 6.93 | 0.66 |
| 5 God's Presence | 6.85 | 0.60 | 6.79 | 0.57 |
| 6 Resurrection | 6.92 | 0.61 | 6.93 | 0.66 |

*Significant change

Variables

The third research question was, "What other variables might coincide with changes in the participants' responses to doctrines?"

The interview process has potential errors that might explain some of the changes in the participants' responses:

Although the interview is well suited to probing the feelings and perceptions of the individual, the items of the interview itself do not ensure accurate measurement of those feelings. The individual must be willing and able to respond accurately with adequate oral expression; difficulties arise if the individual does not have the information necessary to answer the question or if there is an uneasy feeling about the divulging the information. (Wiersma 188)

Firstly, the procedure used in conducting the interview could have possibly led to preferred responses because the interview was conducted in the pastor's office. The setting could have made some participants uneasy about giving truthful answers. The interviewer had one participant say before the interview, "Oh I did not know we were

meeting in the 'Inner Sanctum.' I feel like I am being called to the principal's office."

Secondly, when an interviewee does not understand the question being asked, difficulties arise in the interview process. For example, most of the participants struggled with the concept of "truth." Although adequate time was given to discuss the issue of truth, most of the participants had difficulty formulating responses. The followup questions helped, but participants still struggled with the whole issue of truth.

Thirdly, another question that needs to be addressed is the diversity of the population sampled. The parameters set for the population to be interviewed were age, attendance, and involvement in Central United Methodist Church. The five people interviewed were from five different age categories, had varied attendance patterns, were slightly to heavily involved in Church activities. For example, participant #1 was highly involved in the Church while participant #3 was only slightly involved. The persons interviewed seemed to represent adequately the population as a whole who attend the early service of Central United Methodist Church.

The correlation coefficient from the pretest and posttest survey was -0.1 indicating that the intervening variables of gender, age, number of years of attendance, and involvement in Central United Methodist Church had no significant impact on the results.

Wiersma describes the correlation coefficient in the following way:

The correlation coefficient is an index of the extent of the relationship between two variables which can take on values from -1.00 through 0 to +1.00 ... whereas a correlation of 0 indicates no relationship between variables, in which case it is said that the variables are independent. (331)

The number of sermons attended is listed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. Sermons Attended

| Number of Sermons Attended | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 0 | 0 | |
| 1 | 1 | 1.50% |
| 2 | 0 | |
| 3 | 0 | |
| 4 | 1 | 1.50% |
| 5 | 4 | 6.25% |
| 6 | 16 | 25.00% |
| 7 | 21 | 32.8% |
| 8 | 21 | 32.8% |

Another variable to be considered in conducting this project was the influence of postmodernism on the congregation of Central United Methodist Church. A pretest and posttest questionnaire was conducted to help determine the postmodern tendencies of the participants in the early service at Central United Methodist Church. The questionnaire was an unpublished survey by Stanley Grenz (Grenz, Postmodern, see Appendix K). The pretest questionnaire was distributed at the 8:45 a.m. service on 24 August 2002, to people who were 18 years and older. People were also able to pick up questionnaires in the office. A very postmodern person would answer the questionnaire in a certain manner (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7. Postmodern Survey Scale

| Question Numbers | Agree or Disagree |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1 - 5 | Agree |
| 6 - 10 | Disagree |
| 11 - 15 | Agree |
| 16 - 20 | Disagree |
| 21 - 22 | Agree |

The influence of postmodernity was determined by the number of questions each person agreed or disagreed with in the survey. I divided the questions in the following manner:

| | | |
|---------------------|---------|--|
| Very modern | 0 - 5 | answers coincided with the chart above |
| Modern | 6 - 10 | answers coincided with the chart above |
| Somewhat postmodern | 11 - 15 | answers coincided with the chart above |
| Postmodern | 16 - 20 | answers coincided with the chart above |
| Very postmodern | 21 - 22 | answers coincided with the chart above |

One hundred and one persons completed the questionnaire. Of the one hundred and one participants, sixty-three were female, and thirty-eight were male. The age breakdown is listed in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8. Age Categories

| Age Category | Number | Percentage |
|--------------|--------|------------|
| 18 - 28 | 5 | 5.0% |
| 29 - 44 | 19 | 18.8% |

Table 4.8. Age Categories

| Age Category | Number | Percentage |
|--------------|--------|------------|
| 46 - 65 | 45 | 44.6% |
| 66+ | 32 | 31.7% |

No respondent fell into the “very postmodern” scale, and a small percentage of the subjects were “postmodern.” However, from the pretest and posttest results, 48.5 percent of the participants were categorized “somewhat postmodern” which means of the twenty-two questions, the “somewhat postmodern,” participants answered eleven to fifteen questions in a manner that coincides with Table 4.8. Over 46 percent of the subjects were categorized as “modern,” and 3 percent were considered to be “very modern.” As I contended at the beginning of the paper, postmodernity has had an impact on many in today’s culture. Although Lenoir City is in more of a town and country setting, postmodernity still has had some influence on the subjects of this study. The pretest and posttest survey was completed by sixty-four people. No significant difference could be determined between the pretest and posttest responses. This suggests that the sermon series did not significantly affect the influence of postmodern ideas in the congregation. This is not a surprising result since the sermons were directed toward doctrinal issues and not against postmodern thought as such.

Table 4.9. Frequency of Responses

| PRETEST SURVEY SCORES | | |
|------------------------|-----------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Valid Very modern | 3 | 3.9 |
| Modern | 47 | 46.5 |
| Somewhat postmodern | 49 | 48.5 |
| Postmodern | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 101 | 100 |
| POSTTEST SURVEY SCORES | | |
| Valid Very modern | 3 | 3 |
| Modern | 45 | 44.6 |
| Somewhat postmodern | 49 | 48.5 |
| Postmodern | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 101 | 100 |

Informal Feedback

One lady cornered me at a Wednesday evening meal and made the following

comment:

Your sermons on beliefs have really got me to thinking about what I believe. Your sermon about being 'breathless' hit me hard. I had found myself 'out of breath' lately. I felt like my spirit had dried up, but your sermon got me to thinking about my prayer life and my relationship with God. I am trying to allow more time to allow God to breathe His breath upon me.

Another man wanted to talk with me after an Administrative Council meeting. The man made reference to the last sermon in the series entitled, "The Lawyer":

I have never witnessed a sermon presented as a drama. At first you caught me off guard when you came out dressed in your garb, I was not real

comfortable with your appearance, but as you got into the message you got me hooked. I hope you will present the message that way again in the future.

Another person really enjoyed the stories in the whole series.

Not all comments were favorable. One man did not like the dramatic presentation.

He said, "If you have to entertain everybody then you have weakened the message significantly." One person wrote me a letter:

I did not agree with your sermon on John 14. I believe Jesus is a way, but I am not sure He is the only way. How could you believe that we, as Christians, have the only way to God. I do not think that God would be so unloving to so many other religions in the world. Your stance seems to be too intolerant and narrow-minded.

When filling out the SCO, some people were more worried about giving the right answers than giving the honest answer. As one person said, "We do not want to appear too dumb." Another said, "I hope these results will help you get a good grade."

Besides the data collected from the formal surveys, interviews, and questionnaires, I also received feedback from notes on the returned surveys and questionnaires. The postmodern questionnaire produced a number of comments. One said, "I am not even sure that I understood the questions." Another said, "This survey was too tricky and difficult." One elderly woman wrote at the bottom of her survey, "I was not sure what to put down. I hope I got it right!" One man over 65 refused to give the last four digits of his social security number, and the man's results could not be tabulated. I explained that the entire social security number was not needed to complete the survey, but this man believed four digits of his social security number was too much information to give out.

Summary of Key Findings

- Question two and question three of the SCO showed a statistically significant

difference between the pretest and posttest surveys. I believe the sermon series did help to strengthen the beliefs of some participants in the study.

- The intervening variables of gender, age, number of years attending church, and involvement in the church did not help explain any changes
- The number of sermons attended did not affect the participants' belief systems in a positive or negative manner.
- The results of the interview process, pretest and posttest surveys, and pretest and posttest questionnaires suggest that a person's belief system cannot be changed in an eight-week process.
- The participants in the study were, for the most part, very orthodox.
- Although no significant changes were reported, the reinforcement of beliefs is also important. The interviewees helped to remind me of that principle.
- The interview process revealed no significant changes in a person's belief system; however, as participant #3 stated in the interview process, the sermon series did challenge her to ask more questions of why she believed the way she did.
- The philosophy of postmodernism has had an impact on the subjects studied at Lenoir City.

The results suggest that the sermon series did not significantly impact the postmodern tendencies of the subjects.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

A new way of thinking and living is sweeping over the world, and change is in the air. The world in which people are living is in a state of transition. As Chuck Smith writes, “We are undergoing one of the most radical cultural transformations of the last three or four centuries, and there is a very real danger that Christians will ... find themselves on the sidelines, helplessly watching the world transform” (xiii-xiv).

Many changes started centuries ago with the break of modernity from premodernity. As the modern world emerged, reason began to replace truth. God was gently nudged off center stage to make way for observation and experimentation. Philosophers speeded up the process by strongly suggesting that God’s existence could not be proved. As Henderson stated, “In our world, it isn’t that God is dead so much as that he is simply not, as they say in the business world, ‘a player.’ We have shoved God aside” (124). God had become insignificant, irrelevant, and impersonal to many in society. Christianity failed to respond quickly enough to the questions raised by philosophers and scientists because the Church refused to recognize the Church’s weakening influence. For many years, the Church had enjoyed a “privileged” status, but with the advent of modernity, the Church’s authority and tradition were severely weakened by philosophers and scientists promoting reason over faith.

Many preachers and teachers tried to combat modern philosophers by returning to premodern tactics. “They used a heavy-handed and intimidating mix of argumentation, Scripture quotations, hell fire sermons, and mockery of secular philosophers” (Smith 23). The Church failed to provide adequate answers to a modern skeptic. Over the years the

Church worked hard to catch up with modernity and made great strides in bridging the gap between reason and faith.

However, as modernity gives way to postmodernity, a new set of ideals and dreams are emerging. The Church is prepared to offer reasons as to why people should believe the truth in a three-point sermon and the audience is asking questions like, Who is God? What is God like? What happens when we die? Who is Jesus? What is Truth? Where can I find community? "It would seem that just as Christians are arriving on the playing field of modernity carrying their bats, gloves and baseballs, everyone else has switched to soccer" (Smith 24). Therefore the study sought to educate, encourage, and empower people to live in a world that is being shaken at the foundations.

The question that remains is whether preaching can support the doctrines of the faith and, at the same time, respect the questions of the postmodern world. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of preaching the basic doctrines of the Christian faith on the people of Central United Methodist Church while living in a postmodern world.

As I began this project, I was uncertain whether postmodernistic thought had actually infiltrated a small town population like Lenoir City, Tennessee. The postmodern questionnaire suggests that, while postmodernity was not a major influence on the subjects studied, postmodernity still has had an impact on the congregation of Central United Methodist Church. The questionnaire revealed that over 46 percent of the subjects studied were somewhat postmodern, and another 3 percent were postmodern.

The Church is being called to address the cultural change that is taking place. What once worked in church circles may no longer be effective. As a part of the Church, preachers are also called to consider new strategies for effectively communicating with

and reaching their audiences. As Calvin Miller writes, “Dogmatic theology must soften to pulpit reason. We can no longer fill our preaching with only high doctrine aimed at those who are unchurched” (29). Doctrine can be preached in this evolving cultural quake called postmodernism, but preachers will do well to understand that what worked a few years ago in the pulpit may no longer be an appropriate means of communicating with people. Doctrines can be preached in a creative and innovative way. The Church is not called to change the message, but the messengers are called to change their methods. In Mark 2:21-22, Jesus states the following:

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.

Before I started this project, I saw postmodernism as a completely bad thing. I believed as postmodernism emerged in this world, the world was going to be lost in the pit of darkness; however, the literature review helped to remind me that postmodernism also brings some qualities that make listeners more open to Christian truth. Postmodern people want to know more about the mysterious and powerful Holy Spirit. Postmodernists want to be more involved in the world. Postmodernists in their individualism have sometimes been called selfish, but I would characterize this as a drive for personal meaning and significance. Jesus, I suspect, would react to postmodernists as he did to the crowds of his day. The Gospel of Matthew states the following about Jesus: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). “As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34).

“What a great opportunity to a people searching and seeking for anything and everything to give meaning and purpose to their lives. Not since the Middle Ages or the Reformation have such mighty winds swept the homiletical highlands” (Wilson 12).

I would much rather preach in the postmodern era than in the modern era. People in the postmodern era are seeking answers, asking questions, and searching for something or someone in which to believe. Granted, the postmodernists may choose to dive into a satanic cult or be swayed by the teachings of self-made guru like Shirley MacLaine but the point is still made that the postmodernist is open to spiritual matters. I had not always found that to be the case with modern thinking people

The Interviews

Five persons were interviewed before the sermon series and after the sermon series. While no significant changes occurred in the interviewee’s worldview, I do believe the sermon series helped encourage the participants to continue developing a stronger relationship with God. All were at different stages of faith development. For example, participant #3, who was one of the youngest and least involved in the church, was at a different place in faith development than was participant #4. Participant #3 had serious questions about faith and I found the conversation with participant #3 to be rather refreshing. I do believe participant #3 was seeking a deeper relationship with God.

In Chapter 2, I mentioned that Bishop Ken Carder believed many people of this day and age have a spiritual amnesia. Many people have forgotten that they are children of God. The preaching of doctrines helps people to remember that God is a God of grace; helps people to remember that Jesus truly loves humanity; helps people to remember that power is available from the Holy Spirit for all who will seek power. I believe the sermon

series helped to reinforce the beliefs of the five persons interviewed. The sermons helped these five persons remember their status as sons and daughters of God.

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?... So faith comes from what is heard and what is heard is from the word of Christ. (Rom. 14:14, 17)

The Surveys

The pretest and posttest surveys did provide at least one example of participants' views being altered. In looking back at question #2 of the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale, the statistical data shows that five participants changed their responses from the pretest to the posttest. The pretest results showed that in the pretest forty-nine subjects strongly disagree with question #2, "The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were any other books in human history" (see Appendix J). The posttest results showed that fifty-four participants strongly disagreed with the statement.

In looking back over the other responses to Question #2, I also noticed that in the pretest eight persons moderately disagreed with the question and in the posttest survey only three persons moderately disagreed. Five persons moved from moderately disagreeing to strongly disagreeing with the statement in Question #2. A 7 percent increase suggests that the sermon series did cause some participants to reevaluate their understanding of the activity of God in the world.

The results of the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale also revealed that most participants in the study had a very orthodox belief system. In the pretest, sixty-one of sixty-four people strongly agreed with Question #1. In the posttest, sixty-two of sixty-four

people strongly agreed. In the pretest, sixty-one of sixty-four people strongly disagreed with Question #3. In the posttest, sixty-two of sixty-four people strongly disagreed. Question #2, #3, and #5 were scored in a reverse fashion. In the pretest, sixty of sixty-four people strongly agreed with Question #4, and in the posttest, sixty-one of sixty-four people strongly agreed with Question #4. In the pretest, sixty of sixty-four people strongly disagreed with Question #5, and in the posttest, fifty-nine of sixty-four strongly disagreed with Question #5. In Question #6, sixty people strongly disagreed with the statement, and in the posttest, sixty-one people disagreed.

Except for Question #2, the results were very similar for the pretest and posttest survey. The standard deviation was a little high on question two in the SCO survey. For question two, the standard deviation of the pretest survey was 1.32, and the posttest survey's standard deviation was 1.28 (see Table 4.4 p. 88).

I have two possible explanations for the deviation being somewhat high. First, question 2 was one of the questions asked in a negative manner. If a person strongly agreed with question two, then the person did not believe in the issue being addressed. Of the eight people who answered +1 or higher, six people were over 66 years or older. I believe that these folks may have not understood the scoring method for this particular question. A second explanation could be that modernity had a significant influence on the participants in this study. Question 2 dealt with the issue of the Bible, and modernity has often reduced Scripture to a literary work. "Since faith had been pushed aside, there was nothing to prevent scholars from looking at the Bible as they would any secular document. The dynamic impact that Scripture had in people's lives and society as the divine word of God was diminished" (Smith 22). While the congregation is more modern than

postmodern, I do not believe this explanation is very feasible because the participants' responses to question 2 was totally the reverse of previous and subsequent answers. The sermon series did not seem to have any significant impact on the sixty-four participants of the study, which took place from August to November 2002.

The Questionnaire

A few anomalies in the responses to the questionnaires raise some question about the research process. The postmodern questionnaire was passed out in August 2002 and again in November 2002. The pretest questionnaire had 101 respondents while the SCO had only sixty-four respondents. I was somewhat puzzled by these numbers because the SCO was a much easier form to complete. As previously noted in Chapter 4, respondents commented on several occasions to me the difficulty of the postmodern questionnaire. One woman said after completing the posttest questionnaire: "I never want to see that questionnaire again. I was so confused, I did not know what to put down."

I looked at the difference in number of responses for the pretest and posttest survey and the responses to the pretest and posttest questionnaire. I found several factors that contributed to the Christian Orthodoxy Scale having only sixty-four respondents while the postmodern questionnaire had 101 responses. First, the attendance was lower on the Sunday that the SCO was given. Secondly, the SCO was the first survey handed out, and many elderly respondents evidently did not trust me and refused to put down the last four digits of their social security number. Thus, the respondents' pretest survey was considered invalid. Other respondents failed to list age or gender. Thirdly, I did not stress the importance of returning the surveys. A cover letter was attached to the pretest survey, and I assumed that information provided in the letter would be enough to secure a good

survey sample.

When only a portion of the surveys were completed in pretest, I made an extra special effort to stress the importance of completely filling out the postmodern questionnaire. I also stressed that no information, neither the last four digits of the respondents' social security numbers, nor any other information filled out in the survey would be shared with anyone else. Although the cover letter spoke of confidentiality, I reaffirmed my commitment to confidentiality. I also stressed the importance of completing all requested information.

Fourthly, many people failed to fill out or return the posttest SCO scale; therefore, only those who returned the pretest and posttest could be included in the study for comparison. More people completed both sets of the postmodern questionnaire than completed both sets of the SCO. One hundred and thirty-three people completed the pretest postmodern questionnaire, and 101 completed and returned the posttest survey (80 percent).

Of the 101 subjects that responded to the questionnaire, 46.9 percent were categorized as somewhat postmodern, and 3 percent were categorized as postmodern. None of the subjects were found in the very postmodern range. Most people fell into the modern category with 45 percent categorized as modern and 3 percent of the subjects were listed as very modern. The results from the pretest to the posttest did not vary significantly. In reflection, the results should not have varied much because the research project was not administered in order to change a postmodern person's values. The project was set up to engage all people including the modern participants, but especially the postmodern participants in the audience. I sought to create dialogue about God, Jesus,

the Holy Spirit, the Church, grace, perfection, resurrection, and life everlasting. The pretest and posttest postmodern questionnaire helped to confirm that many people attending the early service at Central United Methodist Church were influenced in some way by postmodernistic thought.

The Sermon Series

Eight sermons on doctrinal beliefs were preached at the 8:45 a.m. service at Central United Methodist Church from 8 September 2002, to 27 October 2002 (see Appendix M). The sermon series was preached to educate, expand, and encourage each hearer's belief system.

“Beliefs shape our self image, our view of our own worth and destiny. It matters whether we consider ourselves worthless creatures or children of God, unredeemed sinners or forgiven disciples” (Carder 11).

One person made the following comment during the sermon series: “Why are you preaching a sermon series on beliefs? I thought we were United Methodist and being United Methodist we could believe whatever we wanted to believe.” Pluralism and diversity are topics in which the United Methodists believe. The United Methodist Church is not indifferent to doctrine. The Book of Discipline states, “Wesley’s familiar dictum was: ‘As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think’” (49). The Book of Discipline refers to the fact that United Methodists “were fully committed to the principles of religious toleration and theological diversity. They were equally confident that there is a ‘marrow’ of Christian truth that can be identified and that must be conserved” (49-50). Beliefs influence believers’ relationship with God and the world.

The Book of Discipline states, “No motif in the Wesleyan tradition has been more constant than the link between Christian doctrine and Christian living” (47). Beliefs do truly matter, and I sought to use the study to help change or at least reinforce the participants’ understanding and acceptance of doctrine. Four of the five persons interviewed mentioned that the sermon series had helped them reaffirm what they had already believed or reestablish feelings of confidence that had been shaky.

In today’s society, the word doctrine has taken on a negative connotation. Over the years doctrines have been pushed to the back burner for more practical matters. As denominational ties have become less important, practical application of the Bible has become the message for the listeners. For example, topics like how to manage one’s money, how to love oneself, how to develop spiritual habits, how to become a better wife or husband, and how to live life more fully have replaced sermons on doctrine. Certainly every one of these examples listed above contains doctrinal issues, but many times preachers will present the applications and do not deal with the basic doctrines of the faith. Paul encourages the Ephesians to grow in their faith “to the measure of the full stature of Christ ... grow up in every way into him who is the head, the Christ” (Eph. 4:13-15).

The eight sermons were delivered in a conversational style, and I used personal, real-life experiences of my own faith journey. I also relied on personal stories of other people’s faith experiences. Images and stories were used to communicate the love of God and share the other doctrines in a non-threatening manner. I asked questions and offered options. I also delivered each message without a podium or notes.

Too many times sermons on doctrine are preached in a condescending way. I avoided words like “should, ought, must” in the sermon series. In the emerging

postmodern world, listeners turn a deaf ear to “should, ought, and must.” The postmodern audience would not listen to truth being shoved down their throats. If I had used condescending language and stayed behind the pulpit covered in notes, then the results of the posttest survey might have been significantly different in a negative way.

As in most church settings, people relate to certain sermons better than others. For instance, after the sermon on the doctrine of the Church, a couple of women came to me and said, “We want to get more serious about our beliefs. What can we do?” I suggested that these women start a small group that would pray, read Scripture, and hold each other accountable. The women did create a small group and are meeting on a regular basis (Acts 4:32-35).

The same sermon on the doctrine of the Church brought an interesting reaction from one of the men attending that service. This young man came up to me after the service and said, “Awesome, totally awesome! I never thought of the Church in that way. I am charged up by what you had to say this morning.” Another person wrote a letter to the preacher sharing how the sermon had touched off good memories of Church that she had buried for a long, long time. One person remarked that the sermon series as a whole helped her to become more confident in what she believed.

I had another occasion when a woman came up after sermon #6. The text of the sermon was Philippians 3:12-17, and the subject of the sermon was perfection. In the sermon, I had mentioned that the Greek word for saints, *hagioi*, which is related to the word sanctification. I also stated in the sermon, “Sanctification is the process by which we become Christlike.” To my surprise, I thought the woman had been inspired by explaining what the Greek word meant or explaining sanctification. The woman said, “I was touched

by the song you played.” During the sermon I played the song by the Doobie Brothers, “Running on Empty.” The woman I had interviewed shared what the song “Running on Empty” meant to her:

That song brought back a lot of memories and pretty much describes my feelings right now. If you look at the third and fourth line of the chorus, ‘Running on, running into the Sun, but I’m running behind’, I have been running into the Son lately and have been pursuing everything and anything but Christlikeness. I have not been trying to become more like Jesus. I wanted you to pray with me because I am tired of running.

In every preaching event, the Holy Spirit is working to help the listeners interpret and apply what they need at that particular point in their lives. After preaching sermon #5, a person came up to me and asked if she could meet with me. Later that week, we met, and she began to tell me how wonderful the sermon was and how much the message had inspired her to “turn over a new leaf.” I asked her what in particular brought about this desire to turn over a new leaf. In the sermon I said the following, “Each of us was created in God’s image. We were created to live in union with God.” I also talked about sin and God’s grace. I thought the woman would refer to some theological issue on which I had elaborated. She said, “Do you remember the story you told about the GI Joe outfit?” I had told a story of going with my mom to meet my dad.

You know, preacher, I used to wait at home every night for my dad to come home from work. He would make a big deal of the whole encounter. My dad would swoop me up in his arms and tell me how much he loved me. I miss that hug and love from my daddy. But, I miss something even more. I miss the loving relationship I used to have with my heavenly Father. I do not know what happened, but somehow I have let my relationship with God falter. I miss the love and acceptance I used to have with my heavenly Father. I used to spend more time in prayer with him. I used to spend more time reading my Scripture, but now all I have is a feeling of emptiness. Your GI Joe story helped me to get back in touch with my heavenly Father.

After this person left, I leaned back in my chair and thought of how wonderful God's grace really is. Here I had been thinking that something I had said had changed this person's life, but the Holy Spirit took what was a foolish story and reawakened grace within this woman. One little story took her back into the past where her feelings of love and acceptance became her doorway into a new journey of faith.

Preachers tend to spend a lot of time in study and preparation and one insignificant, or what is perceived to be insignificant, story brings grace to a woman in desperate need of grace. The pastor is called to prepare for each and every message, and, at the same time, the pastor should remember that God is continually working through the Holy Spirit to make the message alive in the heart and soul of the listeners. Jesus said, "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said" (John 14:25-26). The Holy Spirit is the one who guides us into truth.

The Holy Spirit works through many different means to communicate with listeners. One way is through the Scripture. In the interview process, persons were asked, "What or who gives authority to your life?" Four of the five participants answered that authority was found in the Word of God. The Holy Spirit uses the Scripture to bring change and renewal in the life of the hearer. Some people want to move away from using Scripture in any capacity. As Chuck Smith states, "Believers who think we need to move away from the Bible to appeal to postmodern culture underestimate the power of God's revelation and its startling relevance to contemporary issues" (177-78). God still reveals himself through the sacred text by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was talking to Nicodemus and makes the following statement: "The wind blows when it chooses, and

you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Weaknesses of the Study

This study could have certainly been strengthened by a longer observation period. Another observation period in May or June 2003 would have helped to measure the lasting impact of the sermons on doctrine.

While the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale was an easy measurement to administer, I was not sure the SCO was the best measurement for this study. The six questions were answered so quickly, I wondered if the posttest was answered from memory. Some delay in passing out the posttest survey might have been helpful.

The sermon series was not very long. Can an eight-week sermon series make a significant change in a person’s beliefs and behavior? I tend to think a twelve-week series divided over a four to six month period might have served as a better way to measure the results. Eight weeks may not be enough time to effectively confirm and/or challenge a person’s belief system.

I would have also set up a measurement for specific sermon tools. I would have liked to have known how stories, illustrations, and the dramatic presentation affected the participants’ response to the surveys, questionnaires, and interviews of the research project.

I would have only administered the postmodern questionnaire one time. The sermon series was not designed to change postmoderns back to moderns but to preach doctrine in a postmodern setting.

I would have also done the interview selection and process in a different manner.

While the persons interviewed did provide a good sampling of the early service participants at Central United Methodist Church, I may have been wiser to invite four or five non-attendees to church for the eight-week period, and then measure the results. The interview process was also awkward. I was not always sure if the interviewees were giving honest answers or answers to please me. However, finding five to seven people to attend church who are not regular church attendees for the basis of research presents problems, too. The persons to be interviewed may or may not show up each week.

My inexperience in conducting interviews also presented some problems. The tape player stopped working on one interview, and at another interview, the church phone kept ringing causing some distractions. On another occasion, I forgot to turn on the tape recorder until half way through the interview process. Fortunately, the person being interviewed did not give a lot of detailed answers.

The questions themselves could have been a little less leading. The interviewees struggled with the word "truth," and, at times, trying to provide assistance, I supplied too much information for the interviewee. A little more patience on my part would have allowed the interviewee an opportunity to formulate an answer.

Concluding Thoughts

Postmodernism is here to stay, and preachers continually are going to find creative ways to deal with postmodern culture. Whatever methods preachers decide to use, they will have to employ many of the same tools I employed for this sermon series. To be an effective communicator, preachers will have to include the following in their sermon delivery:

1. Use conversational style,

2. Share stories and be honest about personal struggles,
3. Share stories of Jesus,
4. Rely on images and metaphors, and
5. Live the message preached. Integrity is everything.

Following these guidelines helped me to continue to preach doctrine, to provide innovative messages, to be open to the creative leadings of the Holy Spirit, to bring change to those people worshiping at Central United Methodist Church, to bring change to the world, and to bring change to my own attitude and actions.

I look back on the six years of the Doctor of Ministry process, and I am reminded how little I understood or cared to know about postmodernism. At the same time, I noticed my sermons had taken on a certain aspect of mediocrity. I had become isolated and insulated from the world around me. The past three years have helped me to get back in touch with the world. I began to see the influence of postmodernism on art, television, architecture, law, movies, and spirituality. I began to understand the nature of the beast and seek ways to address people in a relative but also scriptural way.

The world is emerging as postmodernistic in nature. As the premodern world gave way to the modern world, so too will the modern world give way to the postmodern world. The problem lies in the fact that churches, church leaders, and pastors also want to cling too tightly to the ways of the past. Change is chaotic and uncomfortable, but change also brings newness. I still have trouble letting go of years of trying to live the American dream. To the credit of the postmodernists, simplicity is not such a bad way to approach life. Jesus said keep it simple: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one. The first is this: You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all

your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:29-31). I truly see some troubles with the postmodern culture, but I also see some great possibilities to present the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Postmodernism is definitely emerging as the dominant cultural view. Therefore, I believe this paper has merit because the sermon methods listed in this study such as the use of stories, the integrity of the preacher, openness and honesty of the preacher, and use of images are effective ways of preaching doctrine in the present cultural setting. Preachers that communicate effectively with their audience are the preachers that know the personality of the audience. The postmodern survey helps to identify postmodern tendencies of a congregation where the preacher is serving. The SCO gives the preacher another standard by which to measure the congregation's belief system. The above-mentioned tools help the pastor to communicate effectively with his audience.

APPENDIX A
SUMMARY OF DOCTRINAL SERMONS

| Scripture | Title | Theme | Doctrine | Method |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---------------------|-----------|
| What Do You Believe? | | | | |
| Sermon One Isaiah 65:17-25 | Does it Matter What You Believe? | God Is the Creator Who Never Stops Creating | God | Deductive |
| Sermon Two John 14:1-6 | A Point of Reference | Jesus Offers Us the True Way to Life | Jesus | Deductive |
| Sermon Three John 16:5-15 | Are You Breathless? | The Lord Is with Us through the Presence of the Holy Spirit | Holy Spirit | Inductive |
| Sermon Four Matthew 16:13-20 | Earliest Memories? | Humanity Needs Community | Church | Inductive |
| Sermon Five Ephesians 2:1- 10 | Just be Yourself | Grace Will Transform Us | Grace | Inductive |
| Sermon Six Philippians 3:12-21 | Why Are You Running? | God in Christ Restores the Divine Image within Us | Perfection | Narrative |
| Sermon Seven Luke 24:13-21 | I Reckon I Will Always Remember That Walk | Jesus Is Resurrected to Bring New Life to Humanity | Resurrection | Narrative |
| Sermon Eight Luke 10:25-37 | The Lawyer | Eternal Life Can Begin Now | Life Everlasting | Narrative |

APPENDIX B

PRETEST SURVEY

This survey includes a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your opinion on the line to the left of each statement, according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement, by using the following scale:

Write down a - 3 in the space provided if you *strongly disagree* with the statement.

- 2 in the space provided if you *moderately disagree* with the statement.

- 1 in the space provided if you *slightly disagree* with the statement.

Write down a + 1 in the space provided if you *slightly agree* with the statement.

+ 2 in the space provided if you *moderately agree* with the statement.

+ 3 in the space provided if you *strongly agree* with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about a statement, write down a "0" in the space provided.

1. _____ Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
2. _____ The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in the history of [humanity] Man.
3. _____ The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
4. _____ Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of [humanity's] Man's sins.
5. _____ Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of [human's] Man's actions.
6. _____ Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but on the third day He arose from the dead.

Please complete the following:

Age: 18 - 28 _____
 29 - 44 _____
 45 - 65 _____
 66 + _____

Sex: Male Female

Attendance at Central United Methodist Church:

_____ Weeks

_____ Months

_____ Years

The last four digits of your social security number: _____

Please return by September 4, 2002.

APPENDIX C

POSTTEST SURVEY

This survey includes a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your opinion on the line to the left of each statement, according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement, by using the following scale:

Write down a - 3 in the space provided if you *strongly disagree* with the statement.

- 2 in the space provided if you *moderately disagree* with the statement.

- 1 in the space provided if you *slightly disagree* with the statement.

Write down a + 1 in the space provided if you *slightly agree* with the statement.

+ 2 in the space provided if you *moderately agree* with the statement.

+ 3 in the space provided if you *strongly agree* with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about a statement, write down a "0" in the space provided.

1. _____ Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
2. _____ The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in the history of [humanity] Man.
3. _____ The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
4. _____ Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of [humanity's] Man's sins.
5. _____ Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of [human's] Man's actions.
6. _____ Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but on the third day He arose from the dead.

Please complete the following:

Age: 18 - 28 _____
 29 - 44 _____
 45 - 65 _____
 66 + _____

Sex: Male Female

Attendance at Central United Methodist Church:

_____ Weeks

_____ Months

_____ Years

The last four digits of your social security number: _____

Please check the number of Sundays attended during the eight-week sermon series from September 8 to October 27, 2002:

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

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Please return by November 20, 2002.

APPENDIX D

PRETEST AND POSTTEST INTERVIEW

1 What does the word “Truth” mean to you?

- a. What does the phrase absolute truth mean to you?

- b. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

- c. What steps do you take to verify truth?

2. What or who gives authority to your life?

- a. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

- b. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

- c. Is Jesus both divine and human?

3. What does community mean to you?

- a. Have you ever felt disconnected from society ?

- b. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

c. Where do you find community?

4 What are the foundations of your belief?

a. What do you believe about the following:

God

Sin

Salvation

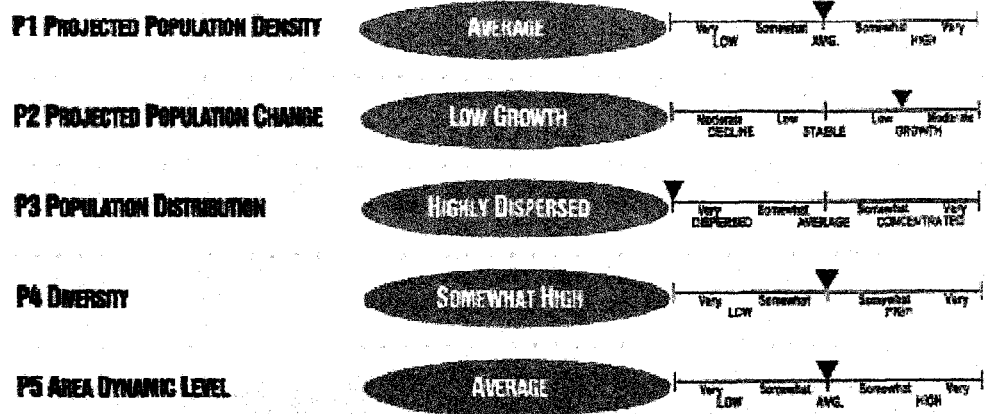
Eternal life

b. Have your beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

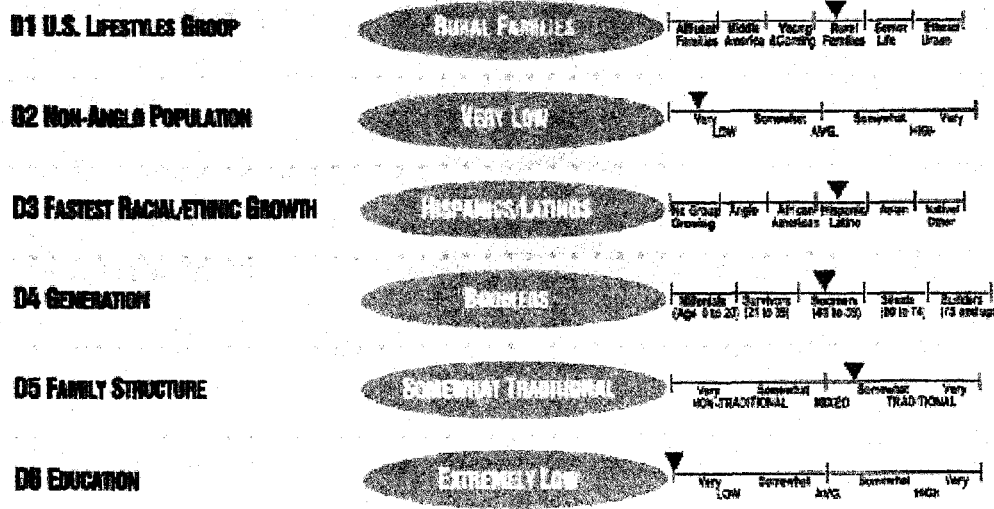
[c. How have the sermons on doctrine impacted your beliefs? - *To be used in Posttest Interview only*]

APPENDIX E PERCEPT STUDY

People and Place



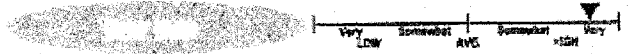
Faces of Diversity



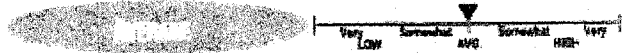
C1 PRIMARY CONCERNS



C2 RISC LEVEL (Stress Conditions)



C3 POTENTIAL RESISTANCE TO CHANGE



Faith Preferences

F1 FAITH RECEIPTIVITY



F2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT POTENTIAL



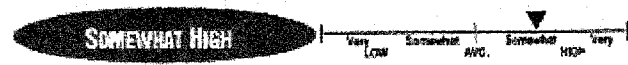
F3 CHURCH STYLE



F4 CHURCH PROGRAM PREFERENCE



F5 METHODIST PREFERENCE



APPENDIX F

PRETEST LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION

August 13, 2002

Dear Friend,

You may be aware that I am pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. I started this process in the summer of 1997 because I wanted to enhance my preaching abilities. After taking nine classes and working for over a year on the first three chapters of my dissertation, I have come to the point of collecting data. I am writing to ask for your help in the following ways:

1. Complete the enclosed survey. It should not take over 20 minutes.
2. Return the survey to the Church office or to me.
3. Please return it by September 4, 2002.

I make the following covenant with you:

1. I will in no way attempt to match surveys with persons in the congregation.
2. Every survey will be received and included in the results of the study.

Will you please make the following covenant with me to return this survey.

Thanks for your help.

In Christ,

Rev. C. Mark Gooden

CMG/els

APPENDIX G

CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY SCALE

This survey includes a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your opinion on the line to the left of each statement, according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement, by using the following scale:

Write down a - 3 in the space provided if you *strongly disagree* with the statement.
 - 2 in the space provided if you *moderately disagree* with the statement.
 - 1 in the space provided if you *slightly disagree* with the statement.

Write down a + 1 in the space provided if you *slightly agree* with the statement.
 + 2 in the space provided if you *moderately agree* with the statement.
 + 3 in the space provided if you *strongly agree* with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about a statement, write down a "0" in the space provided.

1. _____ Gods exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. _____ Man is *not* a special creature made in the image of God; he is simply a recent development in the process of animal evolution.
3. _____ Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
4. _____ The Bible is the Word of God given to guide man to grace and salvation.
5. _____ Those who feel that God answers prayers are just deceiving themselves.
6. _____ It is ridiculous to believe that Jesus Christ could be both human and divine.
7. _____ Jesus was born of a virgin.
8. _____ The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in the history of Man.
9. _____ The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
10. _____ Christ will return to the earth someday.
11. _____ Most of the religions in the world have miracle stories in their traditions,

but there is no reason to believe any of them are true, including those found in the Bible.

12. _____ God hears all of our prayers.
13. _____ Jesus Christ may have been a great ethical teacher, as other men have been in history, but he was not the divine Son of God.
14. _____ God made man of dust in His own image and breathed life into him.
15. _____ Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of man's sins.
16. _____ Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of Man's actions.
17. _____ Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but on the third day He arose from the dead.
18. _____ In all likelihood there is no such thing as a God-given immortal soul in Man, which lives on after death.
19. _____ If there ever was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, He is dead now and will never walk the earth again.
20. _____ Jesus miraculously changed real water into real wine.
21. _____ There is a God who is concerned with everyone's actions.
22. _____ Jesus' death on the cross, if it actually occurred, did nothing in and of itself to save Mankind.
23. _____ There is really no reason to hold to the idea that Jesus was born of a virgin. Jesus' life showed better than anything else that he was exceptional, so why rely on old myths that don't make sense.
24. _____ The Resurrection proves beyond a doubt that Jesus Christ was the Christ or Messiah of God.

APPENDIX H
INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRETEST INTERVIEW

Please complete the following:

Name: _____

Age:

18 - 28 _____

29 - 44 _____

45 - 65 _____

66 + _____

Sex: Male Female

Attendance at Central United Methodist Church:

_____ Weeks

_____ Months

_____ Years

Please list activities you are involved in at the Church below:

APPENDIX I
INFORMATION SHEET FOR POSTTEST INTERVIEW

Please complete the following:

Name: _____

Age:

18 - 28 _____

29 - 44 _____

45 - 65 _____

66 + _____

Sex: Male Female

Attendance at Central United Methodist Church:

_____ Weeks

_____ Months

_____ Years

Please list activities you are involved in at the Church below:

**Please check the number of Sundays attended during the eight-week sermon series
from _____ to _____ 2002:**

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

APPENDIX J
THE SHORT CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY SCALE
ATTITUDE SURVEY

This survey includes a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your opinion on the line to the left of each statement, according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement, by using the following scale:

Write down a - 3 in the space provided if you *strongly disagree* with the statement.
 - 2 in the space provided if you *moderately disagree* with the statement.
 - 1 in the space provided if you *slightly disagree* with the statement.

Write down a + 1 in the space provided if you *slightly agree* with the statement.
 + 2 in the space provided if you *moderately agree* with the statement.
 + 3 in the space provided if you *strongly agree* with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely *neutral* about a statement, write down a "0" in the space provided.

1. _____ Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.
2. _____ The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in the history of [humanity] Man.
3. _____ The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.
4. _____ Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for the forgiveness of [humanity's] Man's sins.
5. _____ Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of [human's] Man's actions.
6. _____ Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but on the third day He arose from the dead.

APPENDIX K

PRETEST AND POSTTEST POSTMODERN QUESTIONNAIRE

Are You Modern or Postmodern?

Agree or Disagree

- | | | |
|-------|-------|--|
| _____ | _____ | 1. Interpreting is more important than knowing. |
| _____ | _____ | 2. It was impossible for the O. J. Simpson jury to be objective. |
| _____ | _____ | 3. Reality is socially constructed. |
| _____ | _____ | 4. Perception is reality. |
| _____ | _____ | 5. MTV is cool. |
| _____ | _____ | 6. I believe in timeless truth. |
| _____ | _____ | 7. I prefer realism in art. |
| _____ | _____ | 8. Classical music is the finest music ever composed. |
| _____ | _____ | 9. The meaning of most biblical text is self-evident. |
| _____ | _____ | 10. "I" exist separate from my body. |
| _____ | _____ | 11. I prefer "appropriate" to "right" and "inappropriate" to "wrong" |
| _____ | _____ | 12. We need to "celebrate the differences" in people. |
| _____ | _____ | 13. Remember: There is always another story. |
| _____ | _____ | 14. Think globally; act locally. |
| _____ | _____ | 15. Identity crises are passé. |
| _____ | _____ | 16. I'm optimistic about social progress. |
| _____ | _____ | 17. Men and women should not share the same cologne. |
| _____ | _____ | 18. It's possible to know the truth. |
| _____ | _____ | 19. I am the same person I was yesterday. |
| _____ | _____ | 20. Knowledge is values-free. |
| _____ | _____ | 21. The new interest in spirituality is good. |

_____ 22. The Church needs to adapt to culture.

Please complete the following:

Age:

18 - 28 _____

29 - 44 _____

45 - 65 _____

66 + _____

Sex: Male Female

Attendance at Central United Methodist Church:

_____ Weeks

_____ Months

_____ Years

The last four digits of your social security number: _____

APPENDIX L

POSTTEST LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION

November 13, 2002

Dear Friend,

I want to thank you for completing the survey in September of this year and returning the results to me. You have been most helpful in providing information for my doctoral studies at Asbury Theological Seminary. I am writing to ask for your help in the following ways:

1. Complete the enclosed survey. It should not take over 20 minutes.
2. Return the survey to the Church office or to me.
3. Please return it by December 4, 2002.

I make the following covenant with you:

1. I will in no way attempt to match survey with persons in the congregation.
2. Every survey will be received and included in the results of the study.

Will you please make the following covenant with me to return this survey.

Thanks for your help.

In Christ,

Rev. C. Mark Gooden

CMG/els

APPENDIX M

DOCTRINAL SERMONS

Sermon #1

Does it Matter What You Believe?

Isaiah 65 :17-25

Does it matter what you believe? Let me ask that question again, Does it matter what you believe? I have seen surveys where many people say that they believe in God. In fact, over 70 percent of people surveyed say that they believe in God. I wonder if many of those are listening to the small voice within themselves instead of God. I remember a story told by a professor of mine in seminary.

George Morris tells a story about a hostage crisis involving a TWA airliner. Negotiations took place for days in Beirut between authorities and hijackers. A pastor walked into a local barbershop to catch up on the latest news. On the television screen was the TWA pilot with a gun to his head as he spoke to reporters from the cockpit window. One of the men in the barbershop said, "Preacher you know anything about Islam? Look they say their god Allah is telling them to do this. I even hear their god promises them a reward if they do this. You know preacher it sure does make a difference the kind of god you believe in does it not?" (Fox and Morris 7).

The kind of god we follow surely does affect how we live our lives. What we believe about God affects how we follow God. A lot of confusion about God exists these days. I read a recent article about Shirley MacLaine who stated the following, "Not that I am God but that we are God, that all is God, that we're all part of a cosmic oneness. And if we don't feel that we're God, that's simply because we are ignorant" (qtd. in Brisco 20).

Beliefs do matter, and I ask you this morning to examine what you believe about God. Let me ask a few questions. Why is it possible to believe in God? I would be foolish to think that one sermon could answer all the questions about God. We could talk of God's purpose, God's character, God's omnipresence, God's omnipotence, and God's promises. Yet, these characteristics and numerous others depend on what we think about the nature of God. We cannot prove the existence of God like we can a mathematical equation. However, if you are open to believing or at least listening, I would like to identify several reasons for believing in God.

Arguments to support the existence of God are as follows: Plato spoke of the cosmological argument that the world exists due to a first cause. Some thing or some being started the process. We, as Christians, believe it was God who set the world into motion. Other people believe that a big bang took place, and things just sort of fell into place.

The teleological argument suggests that we look at the design and order of the universe. The universe is like a fine working machine with various parts depending on one another. Christians believe that God was the master designer. Some people turn to Darwin's theory of Evolution to displace the Master Designer theory and suggest that a microbiological species had to adapt to a changing environment in order to survive.

The aesthetic argument contends that the beauty, which exists in the universe, did not happen by accident. You can watch a snowflake fall so gracefully from the sky and know all other snowflakes that follow will be different in structure and style. You can watch an eagle glide through the air or watch a whale frolic in the ocean and know that God intended for them to be that way. Many are opposed to this argument because the

world is not always so beautiful. Earthquakes destroy villages in San Salvador. Hurricanes will rip into the eastern seaboard, and tornados will pillage the plains states.

The moral argument contends that a goodness code is built within each individual. If you will, a moral code. Thus, many Christians believe that God set up that code within them. Those opposed to Christianity believe that the moral code is nonexistent.

These arguments come from solid thinkers. These arguments are not by some way-out fanatics. If you do not believe in God or doubt God's existence, why not ponder these observations of the existence of God?

Reason alone does not support the existence of God. Experience also helps to strengthen one's beliefs about God. People today are searching for meaning to life. Many are turning back to the Church because many people are looking for something outside of themselves.

In my own experience, believing in God gives me purpose and direction by helping me to remember that I am accountable to someone outside myself. God gives me some purpose and reassures me that I am never alone in this world, thus instilling within me a hope that nothing can separate me from his love.

Others have done the same from all walks of life. The rich, the poor, the strong, the weak, the black, and the white have experienced the almighty, living God.

The first line of the Apostles' Creed states the following: "I believe in God the father almighty maker of heaven and earth." I would like to refer to the Apostles' Creed to help clarify what I believe about God. Why look back to such an ancient text? This creed was written to combat all kinds of beliefs that were contrary to the teachings of Christ. The early followers came up with a statement of faith.

The situation of the early Church is not much different from the present cultural context. A story is told of an attorney meeting with a pastor: "I take a role in the Church. I pray at the Lord's table. I teach Sunday school. I bring my wife and children. Now, if God does not exist, I'm a liar. And I'm leading other people in a lie. And actually I'm helping them to waste time they could be using more constructively to help themselves and to help other people. Either God exists or this God thing is a big hoax and I need to get away from it for my own sake and for the sake of the people I am misleading." "What tipped the scale?" "Finally it dawned on me that you believe in God on the basis of circumstantial evidence. I can't bring God into court for questioning. But it makes logical sense to think that something like God is behind all this. I'm putting my integrity on the line to believe."

John Wesley was searching desperately for meaning in life. Wesley could not find purpose from his good works. He was very religious. He studied, prayed, and helped the poor. Yet, Wesley felt something was missing in his life. One evening he experienced the love and mercy of God in a strange new way. He later wrote in his journal that he felt his heart "strangely warmed." Once you have experienced the unconditional love of God in Christ, you want to reach out and offer that love to others. Wesley did turn the world into his parish.

In 1980 El Salvador, four women were making their way to San Salvador. They were stopped on the road by security forces, raped, tortured, and killed. What was their crime? They were bringing food and supplies to the remote areas of El Salvador. Why did these women even travel to San Salvador? Because they had experienced God in a new and transforming way.

When deciding what to believe about God, we need reason, we need experience,

and we need to hear what the Scripture says about God. Isaiah 65:17-25:

For I am to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, And its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the works of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain says the Lord.

In the Apostles' Creed, God is referred to as the creator of the universe. Is God still creating? Has God already finished creating? We read in Genesis that God made the world out of nothing. God set the sun in the sky by day and the moon by night. He separated the land and the sea. He shaped and fashioned the plants and animals. He formed man from dust and a woman to boot. Isaiah 65 states that God is still creating.

Many used to view God as a clockmaker that set the universe in motion. God was like the Maytag repairman. Yet God is still in the workshop, creating, sustaining life. God cares about what is happening now. He will not abandon his work in progress. He will not turn away before there is a kinder, gentler world.

Humanity has not often relied on God's creativity but on humanity's own industrialization and technology. Technology has made some rapid advancements in the last few years. The changes are happening so quickly, society has a hard time keeping up.

Do you remember the commercial of the boy driving home with a computer in his car? He stops at a red light, looks up at a billboard, and a new computer is being advertised where he just bought his equipment.

Newsweek has listed some marvelous advancements in the twentieth century:

1. 1903 first flight,
2. 1905 blood transfusions,
3. 1913 modern assembly line,
4. 1914 the zipper,
5. 1918 electric mixer,
6. 1924 frozen foods,
7. 1926 talking movies,
8. 1945 nuclear fission,
9. 1950 credit card,
10. 1951 color television,
11. 1967 heart transplants,
12. 1969 astronauts on the moon,
13. 1975 personal computer,
14. 1977 fiber optic communications,
15. 1990 world wide web, and
16. 1997 cloning of an adult mammal.

Technology is still probing into the future. The following are examples of what is on the horizon.

1. Tactons are little electrical impulses in clothing that will send tiny stimuli all

over the body to transmit preprogrammed experiences.

2. The human genome project is planned for 2010. Scientists hope to have a molecular blueprint for human beings.

3. Nanotechnology studies the atomic structure of matter with the intentions of using nanobots, tiny engineering molecules, to rearrange atoms and create anything out of the commonest substance. A few cents worth of ordinary elements will help us create all we need. I was listening to the radio the other day. A general was talking about a star wars system. He said technologically we can do anything we want.

A word of caution. Technology has not been without its problems. Modern science has helped to create weapons of mass destruction. Modern science has developed a less than desirable appreciation for God and God's graciousness. The more we discover, the less we give God the credit for our discoveries. We congratulate ourselves on how smart we are. Yet, is what we discover really creating? To discover is to uncover what already exists. To create is to bring something out of nothing. God is proclaimed as the creator. Do we not only discover, unearth, or uncover what God has already laid upon the universe? It matters what kind of God you believe in. It matters what kind of God or what kind of philosophy fills your life. What kind of God you follow will determine what kind of life you live. If you have some idol that you worship, then that lifeless idol will determine your meaning and direction. That lifeless idol will determine how you deal with your family. That lifeless idol will determine how you deal with your spouse. That lifeless idol will determine how you deal with work

God is the almighty creator of heaven and earth. God is the beginning and the end. God is above and beyond, and yet, God chooses to be close and near. The basis of our

trust rests in God's "almighty-ness" evidenced in creation and experienced in grace. Fate, chance, nor even Satan is in control of this universe.

God is the one who is bringing in a new heaven and a new earth. God is always creating. God is always bringing something new out of something old; something good out of something bad; something wonderful out of something terrible; something creative out of something chaotic.

God is the one who puts away the past. Former things are not remembered. Former things are not kept on a record. God offers forgiveness. God offers reconciliation. I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. God will give us a new memory. The former things will not come to mind. Look at what God is creating and be assured of his love. Rest assured that he loves you.

God loves to bring about change and transformation. God does not like to leave things as they are. God does not like to leave things unfinished. God does not want to leave us to ourselves. God does not leave us to our own means. God is continually calling us to himself. God gets a kick out of us. He rejoices when we start living up to our potential. He rejoices when we start doing what he has designed us to do. He rejoices when he sees the power of his love and grace flowing through us.

God is offering us a future and a hope! One of these days, there will be no weeping. One of these days, no one will hear cries of distress. One of these days, no one will know heartache or sorrow. One of these days, no one will know pain or suffering. One of these days, children will not die from abuse or starvation. One of these days, things will not be as they are now. Just you wait and see.

When was Isaiah writing this? What was his reason for talking about the creativity

of God? This writer was working during the post exilic years. Many Judeans had returned home from Babylon. The future of the people was by no means secure. These exiled people had been through terrible sufferings. The Israelites had endured many hardships. These people had lost homes and lived the lives of slaves. Now these people would own land and plant vineyards. The Israelites would be able to sit under a tree and eat fruit that they grew for themselves and not for somebody else. Isaiah reminds the Israelites that God is going to bless them in a new way. God is going to provide them with a new direction. God has not forgotten them. God will help them as no one else can. God is going to provide for them as no one else is able to. God and no one else can do this.

Isaiah's message is for us today. God hears the cries of the needy. What makes him different from the other gods? He is hopelessly in love with us. He truly cares for us. He does not sit back and leave us to ourselves.

The transformation mentioned above does not take place only in a futuristic sense. The transformation begins now! Hear me, the call of all creation is to usher in the kingdom of God. Nothing short of restoration of all God's creation will be acceptable. Yes, evil is still rampant in our world today. Evil raises its head at Columbine and Lockerby, Scotland. Evil raises its head in Texas when a mother kills her five children. Evil raised its head on 11 September 2001. The world seems to be falling into the darkness; however, God has the final word. For example, God's kingdom breaks through when relief workers in Somalia continue to work amidst an endless sea of suffering people. The relief workers' efforts save one out of ten people. These relief workers work out of a hope that one day it will not be this way. The young woman working in Bosnia takes food to remote mountain villages. Do her efforts change the terrible problems? No, but her efforts bring hope to

those she serves. The young man working with the homeless in Philadelphia is helping to usher in the Kingdom of God by providing hope to those who have none. The community of faith can offer to the world a unique gift of hope.

What is our future? Will the future be like the past, filled with wars, bloodshed, and violence? Will the earth be destroyed by the effects of global warming as experts predict? Will the earth be struck by a meteor thus starting a new ice age? I do not know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future. The future will be established by God, not by the ability of humanity. Many in the world seem so lifeless. Many in the world seem so empty. Many in the world seem so hopeless. Hope lies in the fact that God is accessible and able to answer those who call upon him. Hope is grasped by those who yearn to be so intimately connected with God. I believe in God the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. In the world today, what one believes about God makes all the difference in how they live their daily lives. How about you? What do you believe about God?

Sermon #2

A Point of Reference

John 14:1-6

What guides our lives? In ancient times, sailors used a variety of devices to navigate the oceans. One navigation device, which was constant, was the North Star. The first essential tool of navigation is to establish a point of reference. The North Star served as that reference point. The North Star never changes, but what does change is our point of reference.

We are modern day explorers, making our way through life, and we have to pick our star carefully and wisely. Who is at the helm of your life? Who is in control of your life? Those who follow Jesus believe he is the point of reference. Because Christianity is a relationship with Jesus, all things depend on how well we keep that relationship. If that relationship falters, then despair, depression, and dread of the future sets in.

Many people do not believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, or the life. In modern times, three specific methods of thinking have challenged the idea that Jesus is truth:

(1) The emergence of the individual against community has been a major shift in society;

(2) The development of scientific research has placed technology over against relationship; and,

(3) The concept of individual freedom also has had its effects on relationship.

In a recent poll, 74 percent of Americans strongly agreed that there is only one true God. Yet in the same pole, 64 percent strongly agreed or agreed somewhat with the assertion that there is no such thing as absolute truth.

An overwhelming number of other choices also exists in our world today. In the past, a person would go to school, and then go to college or get a job. Next a person would get married and have kids. A job was seen as a ladder that one climbed with performance and loyalty. Children were raised to go to school and get married. A system was established for doing things. People today do not have that sense of order to life. When I was growing up, we had a Krystal in downtown Chattanooga. We drove twenty miles to eat one of those greasy burgers. Then one franchise after another showed up: McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, and Hardees. It was hard enough to choose which fast food place to eat, then Burger King started making it our way.

A lot of confusion and frustration exists in the world. People are searching for something or someone to provide that direction or meaning. An old drinking song sums up the mess the culture is in: "Show me the way to go home. I'm tired and I want to go to bed. I had a little drink about an hour ago and it went right to my head." Please show me the way to go home. Television promotes a sea of truths. Swearing is a wonderful expression of the soul. Sex is the way to go. The world is chaotic, so throw a party. If you can shoot a round ball into a hoop, you can get rich. If you want it, whatever it is, we've got it for you. Commercials state their own truths. If you want to get the girls, drive this sleek sports car. If you want to have fun, pop this can of beer. If you want to stay connected, try this wireless service. If you want to get rich, try powerball. What guides your life?

So many people are searching for some point of reference. Many people do not remember the way home. Their sense of direction is muddled. Many people are confused, overwhelmed, and lost because they have no point of reference. Let me ask you what it is

that guides your life. What gets you up in the morning? What allows you to lie down in peace in the evening? Is your point of reference your financial portfolio? Is your point of reference your job? Is your point of reference yourself?

People also have choices spiritually in our world today. A spiritual awakening is going on in our world, but Christianity is not leading the way. People are engaged in an intense search for truth and meaning in life. The Church, which has the words of good news, seems to remain silent. As Sweet says in Postmodern Pilgrims,

Western Christianity went to sleep in a modern world governed by gods of reason and observation. It is awakening to a postmodern world open to revelation and hungry for experience. Indeed, one of the last places postmoderns expect to be spiritual is in the Church. (27)

People are searching for a truth that works for them. Many in our world say that Jesus is truth, but Jesus is one of many truths. If everyone has their own avenue to truth, then everyone's view of truth is valuable. Therefore, truth is a subjective matter, and everything is relative. The person down the street has his or her view of truth, which is different from my view of truth. One truth that is superior to others is seen as a falsehood. In our culture today, beliefs are a matter of personal preference, or beliefs are culturally conditioned.

The fact is when one turns to Christ one turns from something else. When one turns from Christ one turns to something else—apathy, atheism, agnosticism, or selfish pursuits.

We are called to be tolerant of others' beliefs. As one said, "I am absolutely against religion that says that one faith is superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism. It's a way of saying that we are closer to God than

you.” People call those who follow the way, the truth, and the life narrow minded, bigoted, and perverted. In this current culture of relativism, truth is often denied, and no fact is considered true at all times, at all places, for all people, in all cultures. Another religious leader believes that Jesus is the only way to God and makes the following statement: “The more than five billion people who live on the earth revere or worship more than three hundred gods. Are we to believe that only Christians are right?” (Strobel 145). This exclusive claim of Jesus is a big obstacle for many believers.

I was reading a book by Lee Strobel, and he interviewed one of the leading thinkers of our time, Ravi Zacharias. Strobel asked Ravi Zacharias if other religions claimed exclusiveness. Ravi said that other religions are also exclusive in nature. For instance, Muslims turn to the Koran for guidance, but the Koran is in Arabic. A basic understanding of the language is required. Buddhism was formed out of the rejection of Hinduistic beliefs. Some might say that Christianity is too exclusive, and yet so are other religions.

The fact is that truth does exclude. When faced with the truth of Jesus Christ, people are asked to decide to follow him or turn away from him. The woman at the well was challenged by Jesus to live a different way. Jesus challenged the rich young ruler to go and sell all that he had and follow. Jesus challenged the woman caught in adultery to go and sin no more. Jesus challenged Simon Peter to live the life that God had intended for Simon to have. Truth does call for decision. Hear me carefully, Jesus always offered compassion with each challenge. Jesus always offered grace to those whom he called to follow him. Jesus Christ did not come into this world to make bad people good. He came into this world to make dead people live.

A teenager was in the hospital for a botched suicide attempt, A friend went to his hospital room and introduced him to John 14. His mother read to him through verse 6 and onto verse 18. This teenager had tried all sorts of religions and found that each venture left him even more confused. He had no real point of reference. The Bible says, "If you seek me, you will find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). The truth is that young boy's life was changed forever. The teenager asked Jesus to give him new life.

In the Scripture, Jesus proclaims himself as the truth. John 14 is one place that Jesus proclaims that he is truth. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me" (v. 1). Jesus is talking to his disciples about what is to come. Jesus is saying do not let your heart take on worry. Do not be anxious. Do not be overwhelmed with what the future has in store. Do not be so overcome with worry that you cannot function in the world.

Jesus calls us to believe in him as the son of God. When we believe in something, we place our trust and our hope in that entity. To believe is to trust that Jesus is able to carry out his words. Jesus says I have a place prepared for you. I will not leave you to yourself. I have plenty of room for you. Would I lie to you? Would I tell you a story? If I go and prepare a place for you, I will not forget you. I will not leave you to your own means. I will not leave you to your own ways. I am coming back. You can count on me. I am not going to turn my back on you. I will take you to myself. Do not forget what I told you. Keep the faith! Do not lose heart! I am not going to leave you forever. I will not turn away from you. I will not turn back from you. You trusted me in this life. Will you trust me in the life to come?

Jesus goes on to say, "And you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way" (John 14:4-5). Thomas spoke up. I do not know the way that you are going. I do not know what you are talking about. How can we know the way? How can we know what to do? How can we know where to turn? What are we supposed to do? Have you ever said that? Have you ever said I do not know the way? I do not know which way to turn I am so confused. I have lost my point of reference!

Thomas asked the question that many of us ask: What is the true way? What is the life that we should live? What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of life? I have asked that question often. How about you? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6). It is interesting to note that even in Jesus' time, people were bombarded by leaders proclaiming to have the way to life and meaning. When Jesus says that he is the way, he is speaking against someone or some worldview. Maybe Jesus is speaking to the John the Baptist sect. Maybe the Jewish synagogue officials. In New Testament times, Jesus was seen as a magician, a political revolutionary, a rabbi, and even a peasant.

Jesus makes the following statement about who he is. Jesus says that he is the way, the truth, and the life. How does that statement hit you? What do you think about that statement? Is Jesus one of many truths? Is Jesus the only way to God? Are there other ways to God? Is Jesus the only truth, or is he one of many options? Is he one of many solutions? Is he one of the selections, or is he the only way? What of the Jewish people? What of the Muslims? Is this view of God too limiting? Is this view of God too restrictive? Some would say, "Oh give me a break." This is not the way God intended for us to live. You Christians have a mighty haughty attitude if you think you have the only

way to God. That is an elitist attitude to think you are the only people that God will be letting into his kingdom. What guides your life?

Jesus invited Thomas to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus proclaims his divine nature: I am the bread of life; I am the good shepherd; I am the door; I am the alpha and the omega; I am the light.

Jesus declares himself as the way to the Father. His statement was pretty short and to the point. Jesus says that I am the way to life. I am the way to find life eternal. I am the way to find life in all its joy. I am the one who will give you life and give it to you right now. Do not turn from me. Do not turn to another source to try to find life. Turn to me and to me alone. Jesus says that I am the way. I will not leave you. I am the truth. No other truth is reliable. Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth" (John 18:15). The truth is not found outside of Christ. The truth is found by turning to Christ. The truth is found by opening up and receiving all that God wanted to give us through his Son, Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God sent down to love us and return us to the Father. The Muslims say that Jesus was a great prophet, but the Muslims do not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus was constantly working to give people life and calling people out of their fears. Jesus was calling people out of their prejudices. Should we not do the same? While I respect the Muslim people, I believe Jesus came as the incarnate Word of God. I know that is a big word "incarnate," but it simply means the word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus came to offer us a relationship not a religion.

The Apostles' Creed states the following about Jesus Christ:

I believe in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord; born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right

hand of God the Father. (The United Methodist Hymnal #881)

It is interesting that people believe in God but do not believe in Jesus as the only son of God. When Christianity declared that God was the Father and creator of the universe, religions like Hinduism and Eastern spiritualities took a major hit. When the creed declared Jesus as the only Son of God, Judaism and Islam took a hit.

In my own experiences, I have explored other philosophies and thoughts. What I found out was that each of these avenues of thought only left me more empty inside. I have followed other paths trying to find life, and what I have found is only more confusion. None of the other paths that I chose could explain my reason for being born. Only in Christ did I find what I was looking for: life, hope, and fulfillment.

Jesus is hope for those scanning the horizon for any sign of hope. Jesus is the way to find meaning and direction in life. Jesus is the one who will give life to all. Jesus is the one who will give meaning to all. Jesus is the one who will see us through. What is Jesus all about?

To the imprisoned, Jesus is the key to freedom, the door of salvation. To the sick, Jesus is the great physician. To the naked, Jesus is the lily of the valley, more adorned than all of Solomon's raiments. To the attacked, Jesus is advocate and redeemer from the law. To the addicted, Jesus is supplier of every need. To the debtor, Jesus is the payer of our debt, our earnest. To the lonely, the comforter has come. To the drowning, Jesus is an anchor and green pastures. To the homeless, Jesus is the cornerstone to that mansion, just over the hilltop. To the depressed, Jesus is the sun of righteousness, the rose of Sharon. To the educationally harassed, Jesus is the alpha and omega. To the lost, Jesus is the north star, the bright and morning star, the day star. To the wanderer, Jesus is the way. To the dead, Jesus is the life. To the seeker, Jesus is the truth. To the hungry, Jesus is the bread of life, the bagel of the day. To the thirsty, Jesus is the cup of heaven, the vine that can turn water into wine. Jesus is all of the above, to all of the above. But to the world, to everyone everywhere, Jesus is the world's greatest lover. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun. Doth his successive journeys run; His kingdom stretch from shore to shore. Till

moons shall wax and wane no more. (Sweet, Aqua Church 43-44)

I believe that Jesus is the eternal son of God who became a man through the incarnation. Through the incarnation God made himself known to the world. Jesus came to free humanity from the grasp of sin and death. By Jesus' own death, he did away with the sting of death. By Jesus' death sin no longer was or is able to overpower us. We have brilliant technology, but we can't live with one another.

What guides your life? What is it you believe in? Do you believe that Jesus is the way to life? Do you believe that Jesus is the way to hope? Do you believe that Jesus is the way to fulfillment? Do you believe that Jesus is one truth among many truths? Do you believe that Jesus is too extreme in his claims? If you are not basing your life on belief in Christ, then what truth are you basing your life on? Our lives were made to worship God in Christ; however, if we are not worshiping God as the ultimate truth we are worshiping some other truth. Do you believe that Jesus offers life eternally? What is your point of reference? If Jesus is not your point of reference, what is guiding your life? What is giving you meaning? What is giving you direction? We have been created to believe in something. What is giving your life direction?

Do you believe that Jesus is the one who will provide you with the abundant life here and now? When you listen to Jesus' claim as the way, the truth, and the life, he challenges you and me to check him out. Jesus challenges us to explore who he is for our lives. Let me ask you a question, what are you basing your life upon right now? Are you finding life or losing life? Which way is your life heading? Jesus says, "I do not want to enslave you. No I want to challenge you to a fuller life." What is it you believe about Jesus? If you do not believe in Jesus, what do you believe in? What we believe shapes and

forms our life. What we believe is truly our point of reference.

Sermon #3

Breathless
John 16:4-16

When some events happen, we are never the same. Some circumstances happen that change our lives forever. I was on my way to work 11 September 2001. For the first time in a long time, I decided to study at home. When I finished up sermon stuff, I headed out to make some visits. The time was 9:00 a.m. I turned on National Public Radio. The commentator was asking someone, "Is the government in chaos? Is the President safe? Have any other buildings been damaged or attacked?" I thought the White House had been attacked. I was in utter shock when I learned that the Pentagon had been attacked. The more I listened, the more sad I became. Terrorists had also attacked the World Trade Center in New York City. Both towers came crashing down, and thousands of people died. I do not guess I will ever forget the sight of the airplane crashing into the south tower, and within a few minutes, both towers come tumbling down. The scenes of people fleeing from the falling buildings and the people jumping to their death from the top stories of the trade center was about too much to bear.

Some events happen in life that change our life forever. What took place on September 11, 2001, was a terrible, tragic, and devastating event. The stories, the scenes, and the smoke were something one might see on a Hollywood movie set. In later days, reports of families looking for loved ones tore my heart out. I will never forget the people who were searching for any word from loved ones. I remember a fireman saying that he had never, ever seen such carnage. It is hard to watch a grown, tough New York City fireman break down into tears. I cannot forget the story of the nurse working at a hospital

near the World Trade Center. She had e-mailed her husband, and he had e-mailed her back. Then the e-mail stopped. The nurse saw her husband's building falling to the ground. We must not forget those who were killed in the crash outside of Pittsburgh.

I guess I will never forget that day. I believe the events of September 11 have changed me forever. I remember thinking that this cannot happen in America. No way can this be happening in our nation. The United States shut down that day. All air traffic was halted. Federal buildings were closed. Schools were closed. Agencies were shut down, and a general fear settled over our land. Many people commentating on television said that America would never be the same. America has changed since the terrorist attack. I remember having such a heavy heart. A sadness that would not go away. The September 11 bombing, the Pentagon, and the crashed plane in Pennsylvania brought a real change to America. When some events happen, we are never ever the same. Life would no longer be lived in the usual manner.

One of the most graphic images I saw that day was a policeman covered in concrete ashes and debris embracing a black woman also covered in ashes. The woman was having a hard time breathing. The ashes had gotten into her mouth and nose. This woman was gagging, choking, and gasping for breath. She was not able to get a good breath. I remember thinking to myself, she look so breathless. I believe that is where many people are today. People are breathless. People feel as if their breath has been taken away.

I believe we live in a world where the spirit is sagging in spirit. Hunger exists for a new freedom. Boredom, meaninglessness, burnout, and hopelessness have had their way too long. People are looking for something or anything to help them feel alive again.

Max Lucado tells a story about Judith Bucknell. She was killed in Miami on June

9, 1980. She was thirty eight years old and weighed 109 pounds. Judith was stabbed several times and strangled to death. We would probably not remember her except that she kept a diary. Her diary showed a woman having constant struggles with weight, self-worth, getting old, marriage, and just getting by. Judith was not on drugs, nor was she on welfare. She did not do time in jail. She held down a good job, wore fashionable clothes, and had a nice apartment. Yet, she was terribly lonely. She wrote in her diary, "I see people together and I'm so jealous. I want to throw up. What about me! What about me!" She goes on to write, "Who is going to love Judith Bucknell? I feel so old. Unloved. Unwanted. Abandoned. Used up. I want to cry and sleep forever." Though she died on June 9, 1980, does it not seem her spirit died some time before? One of her last entries was the following: "I'm alone and I want to share something with somebody" (43).

Many people in our world today are breathless. Life has taken the very life from them. Outwardly a smile is mustered up for friends. The job is stable, and the clothes are nice, but deep inside a hunger exists for something else in life. A meaningful relationship. Deep within is a desire to breathe again. Are you simply tired of the weight of the world being on your shoulders? Although no building has come crashing down on you, you still feel the ache, the pain, and the breathlessness.

John 16 is part of Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples. In a farewell speech, you tend to focus on relationships. On September 11 at 7:45 a.m., a passenger named Mark made a call to his family. He was on United Airline 93. He talked to his mother, and he told her that he loved her very much. He did not discuss the little insignificant things that people sometimes focus on. He was speaking about relationship. The phone went dead shortly after that exchange. At 8:00 a.m. the plane crashed in the Pennsylvania

countryside.

Listen to what Jesus says in John 14:

Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the father, and he'll provide you another friend so that you will always have someone with you. This friend is the spirit of truth.

Then Jesus goes on to say in John 16:4 and following,

I didn't tell you this earlier because I was with you every day, but now I am on my way to the one who sent me. Not one of you has asked, "where are you going?" Instead, the longer I've talked, the sadder you've become. So let me say it again, this truth: it's better for you that I leave. If I don't leave, the friend won't come. But if I go, I'll send him to you. When he comes, he'll expose the error of the Godless world's view of sin, righteousness, and judgement: he'll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the father, out of their sight and control; that judgement takes place as the ruler of this Godless world is brought to trial and convicted. I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot handle them now. But when the friend comes, the spirit of truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself, but he will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said he will honor me: he will take from me and deliver it to you. Everything the Father has is also mine. That is why I've said, "He takes from me and delivers to you."

I look back at the Scripture, and I notice that the disciples' hearts were sad. The followers' hearts were heavy. The followers' hearts were deeply burdened. The disciples' spirits were deeply distressed. The disciples' spirits were agonizing on being left alone to cope with this world. The phrase "their hearts were saddened" speaks volumes to us today. The ache that will not go away. The pain of loneliness or separation from the one we loved. Our lives will never be the same when something happens to us that causes separation and alienation. With separation, loneliness, and despair comes breathlessness.

In the New Testament, the word for spirit means breath. Breath is what you have

when you are alive. When we are not breathing, we are considered dead. We cannot give ourselves breath. When low on oxygen, the oxygen has to be given to us. The Holy Spirit is not some spiritual journey into self. We are called to look outside of ourselves to find new breath. If we are trying to create new breath by looking at our own personal feelings, then we continue to be breathless. Spirituality is centered in God and not in ourselves.

The Holy Spirit is the one who brings life to our bodies. The Spirit is the friend that comes to us and offers us a new way. A way to rise out of the chaos and find new life. The Holy Spirit will help show us the right way. The Holy Spirit will guide us into new ways of thinking and new ways of living. The Spirit will pour down from heaven the grace and kindness you and I need. You can count on it. The Holy Spirit has an empowering presence.

In the Apostles' Creed, we say that we believe in the Holy Spirit. We are saying that we believe that the Holy Spirit is real and is a person. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God breathing new life into humanity. The Spirit gives new life to those whose lives seem out of control. The Spirit breaks in on the old ways of life and offers new and more fulfilling options. The old and boring are left behind for the new and transforming.

The Holy Spirit desires to help us to desire to be in a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. The Spirit is sent as a friend to continue the work of Jesus Christ, to continue the relationship with God.

In order for a relationship to be healthy, one party is asked to be truthful with the other party. Judy and I have been married for eighteen years, and during that time we have had our struggles as every marriage does. Over the years, we have grown to trust one another. I remember a time when that was not the case. Every once in a while we would

keep secrets about purchases that had been made. Secrets will destroy a relationship in a hurry. We both found that for our relationship to grow, we had to be truthful with one another in order to grow in our love for one another. The Spirit helps us to grow in our love and trust of God in Christ. Trust is the foundation of any relationship, and for us to have relationship with God in Christ, we definitely need trust.

The Spirit leads us into all truth. Jesus says “And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of the world has been condemned” (John 16:8-11). The real nature of sin is the rejection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit brings into light the dark deeds that lead us away from serving Jesus Christ. If you go into a darkened room, you cannot see very much. Only when you turn on the light, do you see the cobwebs and dusty spots. The light shows what needs to be addressed. The Holy Spirit does the same for us by exposing those attitudes and behaviors that are keeping us from following Christ. The Spirit comforts us but also confronts us with those things that are keeping us from following Christ more faithfully.

The Spirit is the one who guides us into all truth. In our world today, a lot of spirits and spiritualists exist. I read a story of a young man that committed suicide. His girlfriend was distraught, and to try to calm her down, friends invited her to a seance. The group sought to get in touch with the boyfriend’s spirit. The group did make contact with something, and that something suggested that the girlfriend also commit suicide to join her boyfriend where they would both be happy. Yes, people are intrigued by spirits. Within the heart of the Appalachia mountains, a witch commune exists. People are intrigued by

fortune tellers and other spiritualists who proclaim to see into the future. The Spirit of truth will not lead us into our own ruin or demise. The Spirit of truth will not lead us to destroy ourselves. The Holy Spirit would not ask us to commit suicide. The Holy Spirit challenges us to live life not escape life.

The Holy Spirit is the source of new life for which we hunger. Our spirits are hungry for the spirit of God. However, many opt for experience in things of this world. In Seattle, a retail store is also an amusement park. The Recreational Equipment, Inc., has a 300-foot waterfall in the building. The Recreational Equipment, Inc., also is proud of a 475-foot long bike trail. I went to the Mall of America a few years ago. What an experience! This mall had roller coasters, kiddie rides, and even a gold mine. People are looking for some experience to take away the deadness inside. Spirituality is in! A spirituality is taking place in our culture. Some have turned to goddess religions. Classes exist on college campuses that use books on goddess religions. Society has a pretty simple message for everyone—believe what you want as long as you believe in something. The hunger for spirituality is in reality a hunger for God.

The Spirit of God is wanting to work in people's lives. The Holy Spirit teaches, guides, and reminds us to follow the way of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit inspires us into mission and energizes us in doing God's will. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives to bring change to our desires, our aspirations, our agendas, our wants, our longings. The Spirit calls us to be at work in the world as Christ was, and is, at work in the world. We are not called to escape the world; no, we are called to live in the world. The more the Spirit has of us, the more we will want to be in the world. I think of people of the world who are so filled with the Spirit that they can do no less than to go to the world offering hope. I think

of a young man in Washington who has made an abandoned church into a homeless shelter. I think of the lady who is constantly visiting the nursing home to care for those folks who have no family or their family has lost interest in visiting.

Jesus was not stuck behind some synagogue wall. He was out among the people hearing their deepest pains and calming their greatest nightmares. The Spirit urges us to do the same. It is not how much we pray that is important, but how much our prayers make us sensitive to the world. It is not how much we read the Bible, but how much the Scriptures influence our lives each day. To be filled with the Spirit means we are not on some private self-preservation mission but on a mission into the world.

The Holy Spirit works in our lives as the comforter. Some use the word comforter, and that term might be a little misleading. When we think of comfort, we think of one who helps one feel good or relaxed. I have a comfortable chair at home that I get into every once in a while to relax and let the cares of the world flow by. However, the Holy Spirit comforts us in a different way. The Holy Spirit comforts our spirit by giving us hope, by giving us strength, by giving us assurance that we are not alone, by encouraging us not to quit or give up. I do not know about you, but I need that kind of comfort. The kind of comfort that will challenge me at times and encourage me at others.

The Holy Spirit is always calling us to not let fear get the best of us nor let worry rob us of joy in life. The comforter is always ready to help us face whatever comes in our lives. America may never be the same after September 11, 2001, but we can choose to remain breathless or not. The Holy Spirit does not push his way upon us. The Holy Spirit is continually pulling at our heartstrings. I think back to those words someone uttered on September 11, 2001: "Things will forever be changed." I must admit that since I opened

my life up to Christ, things have never been the same. A terrorist attack changed how Americans approach life. My allowing the Holy Spirit to fill my soul has drastically changed how I live my life. I think back to this tragedy in September, and I kept hearing people call upon God. I kept hearing commentators saying we should pray, and pray we should. Yet, the Holy Spirit was given for everyday living to keep us from being helpless. I have found the Holy Spirit to be a friend. The one who confronts me and at the same time comforts me. The Holy Spirit gives me new breath for each and every day.

Let me ask you, are you running out of breath? Are you having a hard time breathing? Is life throwing you some curves? Do you feel overwhelmed? Do you feel that you have lost your ability to cope with the world? Has the world knocked the breath out of you? Has some event or circumstance taken your breath away? Is life boring and stale right now? Do you feel smothered by the duties you have in the world? What are you turning to? What are you turning to for strength? What are you turning to for comfort?

Jesus says turn to the Holy Spirit which will lead you unto all truth. Turn to the Holy Spirit who will guide you to a newness in life. When the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we are called out of ourselves. We are called into the world. Jesus has called each one of us out of ourselves into the world. Where could you make a difference in the world today? Where could you express your love and grow in that love for people of different cultures and backgrounds? The Spirit offers breath to all who will receive it. I ask you to check out this Spirit and see for yourselves how much He can change and transform the world. I do believe in the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit changes my life, and I will never ever be the same.

Sermon #4

Earliest Memories
Matthew 16:13-16

What are your earliest memories of church? Have you had any previous experiences of church? I can remember attending Hixson United Methodist Church. One of my earliest memories was sitting on the wooden pews in a sanctuary that seated one hundred people. The floor slanted down to the front of the sanctuary. The pulpit was centered in the middle of the sanctuary. The carpet covered the aisle. Underneath the pews was a wooden floor. My brother and I would sit on the back row and roll pennies to the front of the sanctuary. The preacher would be delivering the message, and a penny would come rolling down the wooden floor and crash against the altar rail. I also remember my mom leaving the front of the sanctuary and making her way back to where my brother and I were sitting. She was in a hurry, and she sort of picked us both up on the way out the door. My mom proceeded to take us to the bottom of the church steps and administer corporal punishment. I never will forget those memories of church.

I also remember Sunday school and stories about Noah, Moses, Joseph, and, of course, Jesus. I remember the covered dish dinners and candlelight services at Christmas. I remember communion and the good taste of the juice and the terrible taste of the little wafer. Most of my earlier memories were of people who loved one another and enjoyed being with one another. The church seemed to be one happy family.

As I grew up in the church, I began to see the church in a new light. I saw people who were not acting in a loving manner toward others. I would see people passing each other in the sanctuary and not saying a word. WHY? One person had upset another

person. I saw people fussing in the hallways about a chair that had been moved from the sanctuary. I saw people ignore and actually make fun of an associate pastor. Oh I know things were not all that bad, but to a teenager, the church had lost some of its innocence. I grew disillusioned with what I saw of the church. The love that the pastor spoke of from the pulpit was not often evident in the pews. One evening a black teenager attended the church. I was astonished by the treatment he received from those professing to be followers of Christ. The young man was not asked to leave, but he was not welcomed with open arms either.

I also witnessed a single mom come into the sanctuary one day. She had three children. The youngest one was crying and whiny. People were literally turning around and giving this lady unpleasant looks. You know the look: "Why do you not leave and rather quickly. You are disturbing our worship experience." I felt sorry for the woman because she definitely noticed the stares and the looks. The lady got up and left the service. I wish someone would have walked over to her and said, "I have some extra crayons and paper. My kids need them all the time. We are glad you are here to worship with us. Why do we not grab a bite after the service?"

The more I became involved in the activities, committees, and administrative boards, the more I saw people claiming the church as their own private possession. In one meeting, we discussed the color of carpet in the parlor. We had people almost coming to blows over red or sea foam green. Give me a break! Later in the meeting, someone said that they were concerned about the poor in our community and wondered what we should do. No one had an opinion on how we could help the poor.

I really became disenchanted with the whole concept of the Church. Just give me

Jesus, and I can do without the Church. I even had a pastor whom I idolized. I knew that he and God had a direct connection. He delivered powerful messages and helped our church to grow. After he left our church, I learned that he was accused of child molestation. Who could you believe in? Who could you trust in? The church was not the church I grew up with. Have you ever thought that the Church was irrelevant? Out of touch? Too hypocritical? Have you ever been disillusioned with the Church?

As I entered the ministry, I found out that Hixson United Methodist was not different from other churches. People somehow forgot the things Jesus said about forgiveness. People were concerned about new people crowding their space and taking over their responsibilities. People were a bit confused as to whom the Church was to serve. Many thought the Church was for their own benefit and enjoyment. For a time, I considered quitting the ministry. The Church of the twentieth century was not what I had hoped it would be.

Have you ever been turned off by well-meaning Church folks? I was in a meeting the other day, and I was talking about inviting others to Church. An elderly lady in the back spoke up. "Preacher I need to say something." I must admit that I am a little scared at this point. "Preacher this is the first time I have been in church in thirty years. The last time I attended church, I witnessed a shouting match in the sanctuary. People were choosing sides, and the yelling did not stop. I got up and walked out and never went back to that church nor to any church."

Another spoke up and said, "I was treated poorly in church one time, and it took me a long time to get over it. I was a little bit early to church so I slipped into the sanctuary. I found a pew in the back. A lady came up and asked me to move because I

was in her seat. I moved up a couple of rows. Would you believe it? The same thing happened again. I moved a third time clear across the sanctuary, and a third time someone asked me to vacate their God-given seat. I finally left because there was nowhere to sit.”

Granted people have had bad experiences with the Church.

Someone wrote, survey after survey shows that while religion is still popular in our country, the Christian church and its message does not significantly influence church members. Their attitude and practices in sex, marriage, and divorce, and race relations, their ideas about poverty, war and other social issues, their dread of old age, attitude toward death and the way they conduct their funerals—in all these ways church members are generally indistinguishable from non-Christians. They consider religion to be a good thing so long, and only so long, as it gives the personal comfort and confirms the generally accepted American life (Guthrie 350).

Is this statement true? Does church have an impact on individuals' lives or does the Church seem to have lost its significance in the world? What images come to mind when you think about the Church? Do you think about buildings, budgets, meetings, or organizational structures? What you and I think about the Church is important. What you and I think about the Church does matter. However, I believe we should also consider what Jesus thought about the Church.

In Caesarea Philippi, Jesus seeks feedback from his disciples. Caesarea Philippi was at the headwaters of the Jordan river. The waters of the Jordan sustained the Israelites throughout their history. Jesus was baptized in the waters of the Jordan. Jesus chose this spot to ask his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

When Jesus came into ministry, people were continually asking who is this man?

Who is this fella called Jesus? Where does Jesus get this power to conduct miracles?

Where does authority to teach come from? Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" "Some say you are Elijah returned from the dead. Some say you are a great prophet. Some say you are John the Baptist. Some say you are Jeremiah." Then Jesus gets a little more personal and he says to the followers, "But who do you say that I am?" I imagine everyone of the disciples sort of looked at each other and were uncomfortably silent. Simon Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ. You are the Messiah. You are the son of the living God." Jesus was relieved someone had gotten the message. He said, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven"(Matt. 16:15-17). Jesus called Simon Peter the rock on which he would build his Church. People still debate on the importance of Simon Peter, but one thing is for sure: The Church has survived these many centuries. The gates of hell have not prevailed against the Church.

When I use the term Church, what do you think of? The Greek word for the Church in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, which means "called out." The Church has become the ultimate concern of many congregations. People have lost a sense of urgency to the mission of Christ. The Church only finds life when the Church is in mission to others. Any separation of proclamation and service will hamper the mission of the Church to the world.

Jesus came into this world pronouncing the kingdom of God to the homeless, the blind, the sick, the widow, the least, the last, the lost. Jesus brought the kingdom to people. If Christ were with these folks, should we not be going into the same situations. The Church, you and me, are called to be Christ to the world. We are called to explain,

teach, and show who Jesus is to the world. The world needs to hear and experience what we believe about Jesus Christ.

In the Apostles' Creed, we say we believe in the holy catholic Church. We say we believe in the universal Church, the Church that includes Christians of all nations, races, classes, and all cultures. The Church was there for a young man twenty-eight years old. This young man had been on drugs and alcohol for eight years. Several times his family had bailed him out of jail. The last time the young man was in jail, he did some deep thinking. He knew to get out of the clutches of alcohol he was going to have to change his peers. One Sunday, he went with his grandparents to church, and a college student asked him to attend a Sunday school class. The young man also started going to a Sunday night Bible study. With the help of his pastor and friends at the church, the young man got himself on solid ground. After a few months, the young man was received into the membership of the church and he told the congregation, "Thank you for helping me when I could not help myself."

The Church is still available for those who are searching for a way out of the darkness, people who are looking for a way to move out of the loneliness and the isolation of life. I had a young woman in the office the other day, and she kept saying over and over again I am just so lonely I do not know what to do. Jesus would say that the mission of the Church is to get out into the world to proclaim and to bring the good news of the kingdom to a world that is in desperate need of some good news.

Jesus was right: the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church. The Church is called to usher in the kingdom. The Church is called to speak out against racism. The Church is called to bring hope to the hopeless. The Church is called to offer unconditional

love to the world. As the Church, we receive our identity from Christ, and as the Church we take up the call of Christ to go into all the world.

In Matthew, one of the last statements that Jesus made to the disciples was about baptizing, making, teaching, and going into all the world. The call is the same for all who seek to carry on the mission and ministry of Christ. Christ was loving people that the religious folks of his day would not be caught dead with. Jesus was calling his disciples to start living up to their calling. When we are living out our calling, we are the Church. We are the Church when we are in mission to the world!

Maxie Dunnam tells a story of a young man who was willing to live out his faith beyond the walls of the institution. This young man was a singer. He was imprisoned with thousands in the national stadium in Santiago. As he stood among the frightened and demoralized prisoners, he began a solitary song of praise. A guitar was passed to him and the Holy Spirit began to blow over the stadium. Soon thousands were singing with him. The authorities seized the young man and took him away. When he returned not only had his guitar been smashed but he had no fingers. Horrified, his fellow prisoners drew back, but he walked into an open space and began his song of praise once again. Once again, the people picked up on the song and as before the authorities moved in. The singer was taken away. This time when he came back he had no tongue. Many wept. Everyone was watching him and this singer began swaying in silence. Some thought he was delirious. People began to realize he was dancing in praise to God. The whole stadium began to sway inspired by his glory. The guards came once again and took him away. They shot this young singer to death thinking that this would end his influence. However the Spirit continued to blow and change lives (6).

Christ also set the Church up as a community. We are called to offer love to one another. We are created with responsibilities to the creator God, and we are bound to each other in a community of faith, hope, and love. As members of the community, we are called to proclaim faith, hope, and love. The Church does not exist to promote individualistic religion. The Church is called out into the world. The Church is not a building. The Church is not pews or seats in a worship setting. The Church is not brick or aluminum siding. The Church exists in the world as people live out their faith and beliefs. Yes, there have been times I have been disillusioned with Church, but during the most important times of my life the Church has been there for me. The Church was there when my grandfather was dying with cancer. Each and every day some member of the Church was at my granddad's house with food. I cannot remember the number of people who showed us love and support. The Church was there when we buried my grandfather. Say what you will about the Church, the good things done in the name of Christ outweigh the bad.

The Church was there to help celebrate my wedding day and the birth of my children, The Church was there to help me celebrate the baptism of my children. The Church was there when my oldest child, Timothy, contracted meningitis at twelve days old. The Church was sitting with Judy and me in the intensive care unit. The Church was praying with us and crying with us. The Church was with us when the doctors told us that Timothy was going to die. The Church was with us to hold and embrace us. When we were not strong enough to pray, the Church prayed for us. The Church was with us to help celebrate the news that Timothy had miraculously taken a turn for the better. The Church was with us to help keep the powers of darkness from overwhelming us. In the

most exciting and challenging times in my life, the Church was able to celebrate and cry with me.

The Church is also a people of God called to be in covenant with God. The Church is a people called out into a responsible relationship with God. The Bible mentions that God is holy, and as followers of Christ we are called to be holy. Some have taken holiness to mean that we excuse ourselves from the world. We think of reasons why we cannot reach out to certain folks. To be holy is to be like Jesus, and Jesus was full of love for all of humanity. We say, with John Wesley, "The world is my parish." We do not run away from a humanity that is sinful. We go offering hope, peace, joy, grace to a world searching for a way to find meaning and direction. We view all people as redeemable.

I remember my encounter with Billy Bob Partin. He lived in Bledsoe County, Tennessee. Billy Bob had a reputation for being downright mean. He would just as soon shoot you as to look at you. A friend asked me to go and see Billy Bob who was at the hospital. I was not so sure about this endeavor. I decided to go to the hospital. His room was on the third floor, and I remembered praying, "O Lord help him be asleep. O Lord help the nurses to be cleaning Billy Bob up." I even had a note scribbled out. I was going to place the card gently in the door and be gone. I got to the door, and it was open. I had no place to put the card. I decided to knock softly on the door. I waited a few seconds, and I was headed down the hall. As I was turning to leave, I heard a person with a raspy voice say, "Come in." I walked into the room and before me was the infamous Billy Bob Partin. He said, "Who are you?" I tried to keep from speaking an octave higher. I told him who I was and why I had come. We talked briefly, and I was on my way out the door. Billy Bob said, "I wonder if God still loves me after all I have done? How could he?" I

looked closer at Billy Bob and saw not a thug but a child that was lost and wandering in the wilderness. I left him a few Scriptures to read, and I headed home. I must be honest with you; I did not expect what happened next. The following day the phone rang, and my wife answered it. She handed it to me. "Who is it?" I asked. Some fella named Billy Bob. I told her to tell him I was not available. She told me that he had specifically asked for me. Was he going to kill me? Was he going to cuss me out? I cautiously picked up the receiver and said, "Hellooo?" Billy Bob said, "Preacher, I need to talk. I have been reading these Scriptures, and I need some guidance. Will you help me?" I did, and two weeks later Billy Bob was baptized and taught how to be a follower. Jesus says to us, "Who do you say that I am?" If we believe Jesus is the savior of the world, then we are called to do our part.

You may not believe that the Church has much to offer today. You may think that the Church is irrelevant. Let me ask, what do you turn to for support? Where do you find fellowship? Where do you find direction for life? Where do you find avenues for service? Where do you find folks to support you in the good and bad times? Where do you turn to find truth for life?

Whether we admit it or not, we need something beyond ourselves to give us direction, and we need each other to make it through this world. I have not been able to find any other institutions or organizations that help meet my needs. The Church, with all its difficulties and troubles, is still the only living organism that will help us through life. The Church, the body of Christ, has stood the test of time and brought change and renewal to the world. The Church has brought change and renewal to my life. What about you? What are you looking for in life?

Sermon #5

Just Be Yourself
Ephesians 2:1-10

Have you ever heard the phrase just be yourself? Many will tell a person going on a job interview—whatever you do just be yourself! People will say he or she is just trying to find himself/herself. People do not seem to be themselves today. The harder we try to be ourselves, the farther away from ourselves we seem to wander. Have you ever looked in the mirror and wondered who was looking back? Why all this confusion? Why all this trouble? Why do we have that animal mentality? Why do we try to play God? Why can we not just be ourselves?

Ephesians 2:1-10 may hold some answers for us. The Apostle Paul was speaking to a group of people struggling with their identity as people of God. The people of Ephesus were not living the lives God intended for them. The Ephesians found that beliefs do matter. The Ephesians found what one believes does affect how one lives. Paul seeks to help these people reclaim the image that God intended for them to have.

Each of us was created in God's image. In the early chapters of Genesis, we were created to depend on God. We were created to live in union with God. We were created to worship God. We were created to find ourselves outside of ourselves. Paul was saying to the Ephesians as well to each of us we cannot just be ourselves. Why? "You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived" (Eph. 2:1-2). Sin has distorted, twisted, and corrupted the relationship with the father. Sin is not allowing God to be God. However, sin is missing the mark. An archer tries to hit the bull's-eye of the target. If the archer is distracted, he or she is likely to miss the target. Sin causes people to get

distracted and turn their focus from God to themselves or some other idol. Why are we frustrated? Because we are trying to live as something we are not. Sin caused the Ephesians to become dead inside. Sin kept the Ephesians from being themselves.

We may not believe in this sin nonsense. We may not believe we were created in the image of God. People begin to think that believing in God is bogus. People think that dependence on something other than themselves is a sign of weakness. People believe that they should seek their own destiny. Let me ask you. What gives your life meaning and direction? The world around us has all kinds of answers on how to live life. The world states that life is found by purchasing all we can. Our self-worth and meaning in life is wrapped up in what we produce and collect. We build larger houses and bigger closets to store the stuff we have no where else to put. The world says be yourself by living it up. The way to find yourself is to immerse yourself in the party life. Pleasure is the suggestion for finding yourself.

I know we do not like to use that word sin any more. In our world today, we use words like phobia, freedom, individuality, nuances, and quirks in behavior to describe why we just cannot seem to be ourselves. Sin is not a word we say. However, society is seemingly spinning out of control. Chaos and confusion seem to be leading the way.

We often cannot be ourselves because we are filled with guilt. I was reading Philip Yancey's book, What's So Amazing about Grace?, and he mentions a unique call-in service in Los Angeles. The service is called "Apology Help Line." The telephone service gives people a chance to relieve themselves of guilt. People will call in and confess wrong doings. The service receives over two hundred calls a day. People will call and confess criminal acts, child abuse, and violent crimes. Many will call confessing acts of adultery.

Some people will call and apologize for hurting someone else (35).

My intention this morning is not to heap more guilt upon you. Religion has done a very good job of that in the past. Religious people are not very gracious sometimes. Islamic cultures have the moral police that patrol the streets to make sure that no one is breaking some religious law. We, who claim to be Christian, often heap guilt on one another and on society. I read a story the other day of a recently divorced mom standing in the sanctuary after Church services. The pastor had delivered a sermon on the benefits of loving one's neighbor as oneself, and everyone was making their way out of the sanctuary. A church member approached the divorced mom who was standing near the front of the sanctuary and made the following statement: "I hear you are divorcing. What I cannot understand is that if you love Jesus and he loves Jesus why are you doing that?" Guilt is often what we offer to the world and to each other.

A relative of guilt is fear. We let the world tell us about living, and the result is that we are torn apart by guilt or fear. We just cannot seem to be ourselves because we are filled with fear. Fear keeps us from living freely and openly. Fear paralyzes and strangles the very life out of us. We have a fear of change. We have a fear of being alone. We have a fear of being isolated. We have a fear of being hopelessly lost. We are afraid to start a relationship or venture into a new job. I remember in my own life fear has been at times a controlling factor. I looked within myself and found only darkness and emptiness. I was so afraid of failure that I opted for mere existence. I would not attempt anything that might bring embarrassment or humiliation. My life became based on what was the safest route to follow. Even in ministry, I have allowed fear to ruin my life. I have often sought to please people over God. Why? The reason is simple. I did not want to be rejected by those I was

trying to serve. Fear makes us miserable and keeps us frustrated. Fear keeps us from being who God intended for us to be. Fear robs us of the life that God intended for us to live.

What bothers me about the path that the world offers is it's not the path God wants us to follow. God wants us to be driving around in a Cadillac, but we opt for a Yugo. Fear swept over the country on September 11, 2001. People were afraid to board airplanes, invest money, or be far away from home. I had an elderly lady come to me and ask if she should purchase a gas mask. Fear can take control of our lives.

What does God want to offer to us? Paul says in Ephesians verses 4-8:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in all the ages to come He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Jesus Christ. For by grace you have been saved.

What does Paul mean by this word grace? You are not alone when you ask that question. I recently read a story of a young girl having a conversation with another passenger on a commute home. "What are you reading?" asked the other passenger. "A book a friend gave me. She said it changed her life." "Oh yeah? What is it about?" "I'm not sure. Some sort of guide to life. I haven't got very far yet." She flipped through the book "Here are the chapter titles: discipline, love, and grace." The man stopped her. "What's grace?" "I do not know I have not gotten that far yet."

Grace is the love that God in Christ offers to each of us. This grace is not earned nor is it deserved. God had every reason to condemn humanity throughout the ages and yet God has chosen to grace humanity. God has chosen to love humanity unconditionally and freely. Grace comes calling us out of ourselves. Because sin is so destructive and

powerful, God sent Jesus to free us from the clutches of sin and death. Sin was so terrible and had roots so deep into the human soul that the only way for God to get rid of it was by allowing Jesus to die on the cross. By Jesus' death and resurrection, sin and death were defeated. We needed help outside of ourselves to find life.

I remember when I was a little boy I would escort my mother to the top of the hill to wait for my dad to come home from work. This was a dangerous mission because we had to cross the only four lane highway in Hixson. Each afternoon, no matter how hot it was, I would put on my G. I. Joe outfit. I had a helmet, a toy gun, a canteen, green army shirt—long sleeves no less—and pants, one walkie talkie, and of course cowboy boots. In my imagination, I saw danger around every corner. However, I was up to the task. Nothing would stop us from getting up the hill and across the road. Every mission that year was a huge success. Well almost every mission.

One day something unusual happened. Things started out okay. I had a helmet, a toy gun, one walkie talkie, a canteen, green army shirt and pants, and cowboy boots. I remember it was a sultry summer day. The plastic helmet was sticking to my burr head, and the long sleeves were almost too much to bear, but I stuck it out. Battling back the river of sweat, I forged on to the top of the hill and across the street to meet dad. The climb up the hill had tuckered me out, and we were a little bit early. Mom suggested we find a shady spot, and I heartily agreed. An eight foot planter was close by, and we made our way to it. I must admit the planter looked as big as Mt. Everest to me. Mom placed me on the top level. At this level, I could be on the lookout for dad or for the forces of evil that might try to sneak up on us. I was moving around on top of the planter and keeping watch when something happened. I could not have made this up. The top level of

the planter gave way. One minute I was at the top; the next I was down at the bottom. I scratched myself up a little, but I was mainly scared. I tried to get out, but those slick cowboy boots would not climb the sides. I cried out to Mom. She had not even noticed I had disappeared. I remember her calling out, "Mark, Mark where are you?" "Mom, I'm down here." "Where?" "In the planter." "What?" "Yeah, I am in the planter." "Are you okay?" "I skinned my elbow, but I am okay." My mom is not a very tall lady, and she was not ever very athletic, either. I remember looking over the top of the planter and every once in a while my mom's head would appear. She was jumping up trying to peer inside. I guess she was trying to see if I was all right. Then I heard her trying to climb the planter, but that was to no avail. I needed help to get out of this jam. I could not get out by myself. I was close to tears when I looked up and saw a familiar hand reaching down for me. My dad had arrived on the scene and had scaled the planter to free me. We need help outside ourselves to be ourselves.

The grace God offers is not condemnation but acceptance. The grace God offers is not fear but freedom. The grace God offers is not guilt but forgiveness. Paul knew of the harmful and destructive nature of sin. Paul knew that looking inside of himself only produced more chaos and confusion. Paul chose to look to Jesus Christ for salvation. Paul was able to find himself by losing himself in Christ's love and mercy. Salvation is freeing us from guilt, shame, and fear. Forgiveness is offered to all who will receive it. If we want to be yourself, then reach out and grasp grace.

Paul reiterates in verse 8 that we are not saved by our own actions nor our own deeds. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God." I have seen many people trying to save themselves or trying to earn

their acceptance. A young teenager starves herself and becomes anorexic. She is not able to make herself as beautiful as a model on television. The executive works harder and longer at his place of business trying to make someone in the company recognize him. The executive's self-worth becomes wrapped up in his job. We have been conditioned at an early age to earn our way. We have been taught at an early age to be self-sufficient, and yet, grace is received. Grace is freely given.

The Apostles' Creed says, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." I believe that God has that endless supply of grace for all to receive it. We are changed and transformed by what we believe. If we believe in the forgiveness of sins, then we believe that we matter to God.

The same holds true for each of us. God will surprise us with his grace. God is continually looking for ways to let us know how much we are loved. Jesus was always showing up at the most unlikely times offering grace. Zaccheus was up in a tree when Christ came his way. Zaccheus was a despised tax collector. Jesus showed up offering him grace. Jesus met a woman at Jacob's well. She was a Samaritan and possibly an outcast. Jesus met her at noon, and no one else was around. She came at noon to avoid the other women's comments. See she had been married five times and was living with man. Did Jesus condemn her? No, he offered her grace. He offers that same grace to you and me. He offers that same grace to all who will respond. He does not offer grace only to the rich. He does not only offer grace to the wise. Jesus offers grace to anyone and everyone who will receive it.

Jesus does not give us grace to make us satisfied. Jesus gives us grace to make a difference in the world. I would dare say that most people's greatest fear is that they will

live their life never having made a difference in this world. An elderly man was in my office the other day, and he said, "I am afraid I am going to die and will not have made any difference in the world." Paul says in verse 10: "For we are what he has made us created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." If you want to find meaning and direction in life, Jesus would say that you need to look outside of yourself and offer yourself to others. If you want to make a difference then reflect on how you might impact the world for good. When we think about people making a difference, we can often mention high profile people, those people who have done great things. However, each and every day people are making a difference. These people do not make the headlines nor the morning news, but they do help to make difference in the world. As Paul says, we were created to make a change in the world. We were created to offer the same grace that was offered to us. We were created to offer forgiveness to others because we, too, have been forgiven. I remember a story of a dad in Spain who was estranged from his son. The boy had moved away. The man went to the city where he thought the boy was living and put out the following message: "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Monterro noon Tuesday. All is forgiven. Papa." Paco is a common name in Spain. Eight hundred boys showed up. In our world, people are experiencing so much brokenness and pain. The world is in need of grace.

A man named Doug never made the headlines, but he did make a difference. On a cold wintery morning, Doug was on his way to work. He drove the same road every day. Doug was traveling by the river bridge when he noticed a young lady leaping from the railing. Doug stopped his car and jumped into the frigid river. Doug dragged the girl to safety, and as he was getting out suffered a heart attack and collapsed back into the water

to his death. Doug did make a difference in the world.

I think of a boy named Ryan that made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Ryan was so overcome by grace that he had to do something for Jesus. Ryan decided to start collecting hams for the homeless. Ryan decided to distribute the hams on Easter Sunday. He went to local businesses and laid out his plan. Local business began to get excited about Ryan's vision. The first Easter he fed more people than he ever imagined. The program has grown tremendously. Why? Ryan knew he had received grace, and he wanted to pass on that grace to others. Do you want to make difference? Do you want to make a change in the world? Then offer the grace and love of Jesus Christ to the world.

If you are not sold on this Jesus business, then what gives your life meaning and purpose? Is guilt a problem? Has fear got a grasp on you? Have you tried some of those self-help methods only to be frustrated by what you have found? Have you looked within yourself and found a way through life? Some people will help you get deep within yourself, but they never help you get out of yourself. Have you looked deep within yourself only to find that you did not like what you discovered? Have you asked for grace? Have you asked for the forgiveness of your sins? Have you found that being yourself has not given you fulfillment? I would contend that trying to be yourself will only lead to more and more confusion in life.

Why not try grace? Why not open up to Jesus' challenge to live life to its fullest? Why not try Jesus' way in order to change the world? Please note, Jesus is asking you to use your strengths to change the world. The Apostle Paul is not asking you to feel guilty, but the Apostle Paul is calling you out of yourself into new life. Will you receive the grace that Christ is wanting to offer? Will you offer that grace to others?

Sermon #6Why Are You Running?
Philippians 3:12-21

I had someone ask me an interesting question the other day. After I turned forty, I noticed that the waistline was beginning to expand. Because of work and some outright laziness, I was having trouble fitting into my clothes. Strange, the same clothes fit so well last year. I decided to make myself exercise more regularly and watch my diet. Running was my choice of exercise. In high school I ran cross country, and I thought running would be the quickest way to take off the extra weight. The first day I went out to run around the block. It was ninety-five degrees. I had made it half way around the block, probably two hundred yards, and I was dying. I thought about stopping, but I decided to push on. I was just completing my first lap and trying to decide if I wanted to do another, when a car pulled up beside me. In the car was a neighbor, and he asked me that most revealing question, “Why are you running?” I mumbled something about wanting to get back in shape but the question, “Why are you running?” “Why are you doing what you are doing?” was a question that followed me home that day. I was not running because I enjoyed it. I was not running because I got a kick out of running. No, I was running to inflict pain on myself. I might add that I was doing a good job of it. I am sure some of you are thinking, “Mark, as the saying goes: no pain, no gain.” You might be right to a certain extent, but I was running because I had become undisciplined in my eating habits. I had forgotten to push away from the table and watch the snacks.

Let me ask you a question. Why are you running? In this culture I see us running. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that read, “Mom’s taxi.” We run out the door to

work. We run to the doctor. We run to soccer practice. We run to piano practice. We run to dance lessons. We run the pet to the vet. We run to activities at church. We run to plays at school. We run to the grocery store. We run to the video store. We run faster and faster at work to give ourselves a sense of self-worth. We run to keep ahead of others. We run to keep up with others. In cross country I usually ran to keep up with others. We run so we won't have to come home to an empty house. We run to keep from facing problems at home. We run to try to deal with the boredom and emptiness in life. Why are you running?

Why did the Apostle Paul run? Paul says in Philippians 3:12,

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining for what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the Heavenly call of Jesus Christ.

Paul was running to become more like Christ. Paul knew we had been given the gift of relationship with God. We choose to claim that gift. We choose to open up and receive that gift. Paul is saying I want to become more and more like Christ. Look at verse 13 again: "I forget what lies behind." As one said, "God created us as reflections of God's own nature and character. Our identity and our destiny are rooted in our potential images of the one to whom we belong."

In Jesus' time, many people were convinced Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had asked the disciples on one occasion, "Who do people say that I am?" The followers responded, "Some think you are a prophet. Some think you are a brilliant teacher. Some think you are John the Baptist returned." Even in Paul's time, people were not friendly to the cause of Christ. As Paul says in verse 18ff, "For many live as enemies of the cross of

Christ. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.” Paul would say that these people were running because God was whatever they wanted God to be. Some people had been running to a group of people from the synagogue. The leaders of the synagogue were telling people that to follow Christ they would need to be circumcised and believers of the law. Other people were running to attend to their selfish interest. Zealots were speaking up for the traditions of their faith. Gnostics were looking for knowledge to set them free. The gnostics were running away from any type of theology that spoke of Jesus’ humanity. The cross and all that suffering was inconceivable to them. The gnostics focused on Jesus’ divinity and overlooked his humanity. Other groups of people overlooked Jesus’ divinity. Jesus was a good teacher and a prophet, but he was not the Son of God. People in Jesus’ time and in Paul’s time were running to and fro looking for something to find.

Today, people are running from one thing to the next to find guidance. With all the scholars that have provided rich insight throughout the centuries, who are people turning to for spiritual advice? Who else but that great thinker of our time, Oprah. Some are running to mystics at a 1-800 number. Would you believe it? Some people are running to channellers to help them get in touch with themselves in their previous life. Other people are running to witchcraft to try to fill the emptiness inside. I see so many people sadly looking for something to run to. Paul says not in a condemning way but with a sad heart, “I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is their destruction.”

In the 1970s the pop rock group called the Doobie Brothers had a hit song “Running on Empty.” I would like to read you some of the lyrics. (I may play them on a

CD.)

Looking out at the road rushing under my wheels.
 Looking back at the years gone by like so many summer fields;
 In sixty-five I was seventeen and running up one-on-one;
 I don't know where I'm running now, I'm just running on.

Running on—running on empty;
 Running on—running blind;
 Running on—running into the sun;
 But I'm running behind.

Looking out at the road rushing under my wheels;
 I don't know how to tell you all just how crazy this life feels;
 I look around for the friends that I used to turn to to pull me through;
 Looking into their eyes I see them running too.

Running on—running on empty;
 Running on—running blind;
 Running on—running into the sun;
 But I'm running behind. (1)

I recently ran across an old article about former major league baseball player Mike Schmidt. Mike is now in the hall of fame. He played many years with the Philadelphia Phillies. Mike had all he had ever hoped for. Mike had a fine house, plenty of money, and fine cars to drive around. Mike felt an emptiness inside, a dull ache that would not go away. There surely had to be something more to life!

I believe people are looking, searching, and running this place and that to find something more than what life can give them. Why are you running? What is it that you are running to? What is it that you are running from? You may be asking what makes Christianity so different from other religions? Do not other religions call for us to grow more in the image of the one we worship? If we believe in reincarnation do we not come back better than before? If we believe in evolution do we not mature and develop as a species? What is Paul saying that is so different?

One girl grew up with a dad who was a professor of psychology at Ohio State University. She writes that her dad gave up the religion of his childhood. The professor ran to other philosophies to give him meaning and direction. His daughter tells of a family in chaos and turmoil. She said that her family started coming apart at the center. Emptiness and alienation filled the life of family members. She writes, "God began in me a longing for himself."

Paul saw that he needed help outside of himself to pursue perfection. Most other religions or philosophies say look within yourself to find your way. Paul says I want to have the same mind as Christ. Paul is saying:

I had let go of the past. I had to let go of the idea that I could make myself holy. I had to let go of the idea that I could save myself. I had to let go of the idea that I could make myself holy and perfect. Hey, you want to brag about keeping the law. I was good at keeping the law. I had grown up doing what I should do. I was circumcised on the eighth day. I was of the tribe of Benjamin. I was of the people of Israel. I was a Pharisee. I was righteous under the law.

Paul is not saying I have been a terrible person. No, Paul says I am being transformed into a new person. I am moving toward perfection. I consider rubbish all the ways I tried to make myself more holy. I did not succeed in making myself perfect. Only when I came to faith in Christ did I find what I was looking for. Paul let go of what was slowing him down. Paul let go of his own desires to save himself. Paul discarded the idea that by human effort he could obtain the standard God desires.

Paul came to realize that perfection starts with repentance. We seek forgiveness for our sins. Then we accept God's acceptance of us. We respond in faith to God's justification of us. God declares us not guilty.

Justification is what God does for us. Moving toward perfection is what God is

wanting to do in us. Paul urged the people of Philippi to strive for maturity in Christ. Because God has already laid claim of our lives, we try to become what God has in mind for us. We seek to become perfect in His love. Perfection is not freedom from mistakes, nor freedom from heartaches, nor freedom from temptations. Perfection does not mean that we will never fall short of the goal. Perfection does not mean that we will never experience frustrations nor turmoil.

Perfection is relying on God's power. Paul says, "Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (1 Tim. 2:10). The same power that raised Christ from the dead will be the same power that will transform our lives. God does not require of us what God is not willing to carry out in us. God loves us so much that God will not leave us to our own means.

In 1992 at the summer olympics, I witnessed something that truly touched my heart. The race was the four hundred meter semifinal heat. Runners were lining up to start the race. Each one got into position and waited for the gun. Bam! The runners flew out of their lanes and were making their way to the two hundred meter mark. All the sudden one of the runners pulled up lame. The British runner Derek Redmond was lying in agony on the track. Derek tried to get up and run, but he fell to the track again. Derek had torn his hamstring, and he lay on the track in agony. The network camera focused in on a character making his way across the track. The man had a golf hat on, and he seemed to bust his way through the security guards. The man was heading toward Redmond. The man in the golf cap approached this fallen athlete and knelt down beside Derek and then helped Derek to his feet. Commentators would later tell us that the character in the golf hat was

Derek's dad. Derek had pushed away medical attendants and coaches. Derek was still trying to get up and continue the race. Mr. Redmond said, "You don't have to do this." "Yes, I do!" "Well, then, we're going to finish together." Mr. Redmond put his arm around his son, and they walked the last two hundred meters to the finish line. We have a loving father that will not leave us to ourselves. I know of no other religion or philosophy where a god is actively involved. God loves us so much he seeks to help us through this life.

In the New Testament, those who are followers of Christ and are pursuing perfection are referred to as saints, but saints are not mentioned for individual acts. No one is ever holy by oneself. To be a saint is not to be holier than thou. The Apostles' Creed mentions the belief in the communion of saints. The Lord provides the power of the resurrection and calls us into community. Paul says in verse 17, "Brothers and sisters join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us." Paul was saying no one can live the life Paul is calling us to live by themselves. We do not make this journey all alone. We need God and each other to pursue God's purpose for our lives. If we try to live the life Paul is urging us to live, we cannot do it on our own. We are called to continue to strive each and every day for the likeness of Christ.

The fact is that we turn to God to help us become more like Him. Paul calls his followers and each of us to become more holy, more perfect. When talking about perfection, Wesley would use the term "sanctification." God seeks to bring new life to us by working in us. The Greek word for saints is *hagioi*, which is related to the word sanctified. Sanctification is the process by which we become Christlike. The grace of God works to begin a new creation in us. Humanity throughout the ages has tried to run their

own lives only to end up ruining their lives by running from one suggestion to the next trying to find life. We also have a part to play in becoming more holy.

Perfection is putting away all that is keeping us from being more Christlike. Other philosophies and religions call us to get deep within ourselves. Paul is challenging us to get out of ourselves. We move to put aside what may have some value for us in order to follow the higher calling of Christ. I believe we often get distracted and sidetracked. We lose focus on what is most important to us. I was watching some children playing follow the leader the other day. Everyone was marching, sliding, jumping, and skipping just like the leader until a monarch butterfly flew across their path. The group of children left the leader marching, sliding, jumping, and skipping, and the children pursued the butterfly.

Faith is a process in which we move toward Christlikeness. Paul certainly does not believe he is at the place of full perfection, but Paul is walking, running, struggling, sweating, agonizing, and straining daily to be more like Christ.

In order to keep our focus, we have to abandon things that might slow us down. I remember running cross country one day. We started off from the high school and ran an eight mile course everyday. The road we ran along had a creek and long flowing meadows. We would run four miles over to the middle school and turn around and come back. This day was extra special because we were running time trials for the next meet. The top seven would be on the first string. The day was cloudy and in the mid-fifties. Most of us had our sweats on. Three miles into our run, the weather turned nasty. The heavens opened up and drenched us. I do not know if you have ever tried to run in soaking wet sweats, but if you have, you know that they get pretty heavy. I truly loved my sweats. The school logo was on the hooded shirt and shoes with wings were on the pants.

The farther I ran, the heavier the sweats became, and at the four mile marker, I had a decision to make. Should I lose the sweats and run faster or should I keep the sweats on and get left behind? I decided to lose the sweats. I was wanting to finish with a top seven time. I must admit I finished with the eighth best time that day; however, if I would have tried to run in those rain-drenched sweats, I might still be out on the course. Sometimes we have to decide to give up what is valuable to reach a higher calling.

Judy and I were talking of taking the kids out west. I have been reading a little about the wagon trains that made their way over the rocky mountains. Those pioneers that had a dream of a better life had some tough decisions to make. When the snow began to fall, the wagons would begin to get bogged down. The wagon train boss would give the order to lighten the loads in the wagons. People were having to throw pianos to ravines below. Chests and valuable furniture were chucked over the side in order for the pioneers to complete their journey. Was it an easy decision? No! Yet, to get where they were going, some things had to be discarded. The items tossed over the side were precious but not as precious as getting to their destination.

Perfection is intention. Those who pursue the likeness of Christ will be intentional about reaching the goal. A runner runs a race to get to the finish line. I wonder sometimes if we have not gotten distracted. I wonder sometimes if the desire is within our hearts to finish the race. My daughter taught me about intention. Kylie was out playing in the yard one day. The flowers in our yard had begun to bloom, and she came over to me and asked if she could pick some flowers for Mommy. I told her that I thought that would be a great idea. I thought she would go over to the flowers and break off one or two and run them into her mother. A four year old has a different perspective on gathering flowers. Kylie

walked over to the daisies and pulled them up roots and all. Dirt was all over the roots, and grass was snuggled in with the flowers. I believe there was more dirt and grass than flowers. Kylie said, "How do these look, Daddy?" I told her the flowers looked wonderful. "Do you think Mommy will like them?" "Oh yes, I am sure she will be thrilled with that bouquet." Then Kylie said, "I just want her to know how much I love her." She headed off into the house. I followed to watch what would happen. Kylie presented her mother with her hand picked bouquet of love. Then she hugged her mother and said, "Mommy I love you! You are the best mom in the world." Now I have sent Judy flowers before, and these flowers were neatly wrapped and packaged, but I do not believe I could ever have given such a gracious and loving gift as Kylie gave her mom that day. Oh, I know there was much more dirt and grass than flowers, but love was also abundantly present in that gift. The daisies stayed on our kitchen table much longer than my flowers from FTD.

Intention is what matters in moving toward perfection. Was Paul saying he was perfect? Of course not! Was Paul saying he was close to perfection? Absolutely not. Was Paul saying that he was intentionally seeking to be more like Christ? Most definitely. Paul was challenging the people of Philippi to look closely at their motivation for seeking to become more like Jesus. Paul asks those who follow, how can you claim to be a follower and keep your own agenda? How can you claim to be a follower and hold to your pride? How can you claim to be a follower and refuse to let go of selfish interest? Are we straining, pushing, and running in the direction God has intended for us to follow? Are we like Paul seeking to let the spirit of Christ grow in us?

In Japan in the 1940s , a man named Kagawa was a wonderful servant of Jesus

Christ. Kagawa spent much of his life working with the poor. Kagawa was born into a wealthy family, but at an early age both of his parents died. He was shipped off to a boarding school where he began to visit a missionary's home. At the missionary's home, Kagawa learned English, and he began to read the Bible. Kagawa was captivated by Jesus' life and teachings. One day as Kagawa was leaving the missionary's home, he knelt and prayed, "O God make me more like Christ." Kagawa had a desire to be more like Christ Jesus.

The call of Paul is to live life and not just to exist in life. Perfection is moving toward holiness. The more holy we become, the more we seek to reach out to people around us. The word holy makes some people uncomfortable. Wesley said for us to pursue holiness of heart and life. Holiness is developing a more loving attitude toward the world around us. Holiness is living in the world as Christ taught us to live in the world. We offer hope, faith, love to a world running one way and another to find meaning in life. The more holy we become, the more loving we become. The more loving we become, the more we seek to go into the world to bring change and transformation. We go running into the world to bring hope. We go running into the world to bring peace. We go running into the world to bring purpose to life. We go offering love to a world searching for love. We are to offer to the world what the world cannot find on its own. St. Francis of Assisi wrote a prayer that reminds of our responsibility to the world:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where this is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. (United Methodist Hymnal
481)

I ask you again. Where are you running to? What are you running from? Is the chief goal of your life to imitate Christ, or have you gotten distracted? Have you gotten off course? Have you still got questions? Have you left the running to others? Something more important has come up in your life? Are you running on empty? If Christlikeness is your goal, then let me ask again. Where are you running? What do you have to let go of to pursue him more fully? Where is God in Christ calling you to work in the world?

Sermon #7**I Reckon I Will Always Remember That Walk
Luke 24:13-31**

Max Lucado tells the story of a slave named Mary Barbour. Mary was born on a plantation in the deep south in the late 1850s. Her father and mother had been brought over to America in a slave ship from Africa. Mary had never known what it was to be free. Her father told her stories of Africa and what freedom felt like. He kept saying one of these days she was going to be free, too. One night she and her family took a walk she would never forget. Listen to what Mary says, “We snook out of the house and along the woods path. Pappy toting one of the twins and holding me by the hand and carrying the other two. I reckon I will always remember that walk” (188).

The year was 1969. My family and I were glued to the television. What do you think was taking place? That is right. Neil Armstrong was getting ready to walk on the moon. The lunar module was sitting on the moon’s surface, and Walter Cronkite was talking us through the event. I was anxiously waiting for Armstrong to appear and start down the ladder. I remember wondering if he would be swallowed up in the moon’s surface or if aliens were waiting behind some crater to attack at an opportune moment. Hey, do not laugh. When Flash Gordon traveled to the moon, he had to battle fierce looking creatures. We waited and waited, and finally the door opened, and Armstrong proceeded down the ladder to the lunar surface. He did not sink, nor was he attacked. He firmly placed his feet on the surface of the moon and said—does anyone recall? “One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” I was so overcome with joy that I ran outside, pointed to the moon, and shouted, “Armstrong is on the moon! Armstrong is on the

moon!" I reckon I will always remember that walk. I reckon I will never forget Armstrong walking on the moon.

The year was 1985, and the day was March 17. I was holding Judy's hand, and the preacher was pronouncing us husband and wife. I kissed my bride, and we were pronounced to the congregation as Mr. and Mrs. Mark Gooden. The organ blasted out the wedding march, and we were off down the aisle. I reckon I will always remember that walk.

The year was 1986, I remember the day just like it was yesterday. The hearse pulled up to the grave site, and the funeral attendant came over to the car we were in and escorted us to the front of the car. The wind was blowing, and a chill was in the air. The pallbearers carried my granddad's casket to the graveside. I walked next to my dad, brother, and sister. The walk was only a short distance, but it seemed to take forever. I reckon I will always remember that walk.

The year was 1988. The day was July 30. Judy was in labor, and I was in distress. The coaching classes had not prepared me for the edginess of the mom-to-be. Everything I tried to do was either too late or too soon. I was holding her hand too tight or not enough. I was not sure what to do. I offered to step down and appoint her mom as coach. Needless to say that suggestion did not fly. Minutes of labor turned into hours, and finally the doctor came in and said we are going to have to take the baby by C-section. I politely excused myself and headed to the door. I had been trained in LaMaze classes for childbirth not surgery. The doctor said, "Where are you going?" I told him I would wait outside. Judy sort of glared right through me. I did not want to get in the way. If the truth be known, I did not want to be picked up off the operating floor. The doctor said, "Follow

that nurse. She will put you some scrubs on.” I followed the nurse into the operating room and watched our first child, Timothy, being born. I reckon I will always remember that walk.

We remember all kinds of walks. All kinds of events that have had an impact on our lives—the good times and the bad. The times you laughed. The times you cried. Some walks were easy to take, and some walks were life changing. Certain events or circumstances bring about change in our attitude or behavior. Certain circumstances have a tremendous impact on us. We are not the same as when we began the walk. A revelation takes place. Our eyes are opened as never before. Memory plays an important part in revelation. For instance, my wedding experience is based on memories. The memory of my wedding day is sweeter now than when I was living through it. The wedding day itself was full of chaos and turmoil. I was so nervous that I had to fight the flight syndrome. I thought once or twice about bolting out the door. Oh not because I did not want to marry Judy but because I was so terrified. I look back on the situation, and I think how silly I was to let fear speak so loudly to me. We often have to reflect back on a situation to understand and to grasp what has taken place.

Two disciples made a walk to a community outside of Jerusalem called Emmaus. The disciples’ walk is recorded in Luke. On the road to Emmaus, the followers experienced the resurrected Lord. These followers certainly needed their spirits lifted. If we could talk to these disciples today, I believe they would say, “I reckon I will always remember that walk.”

The journey the disciples were making was not a pleasant one. These disciples were leaving Jerusalem disillusioned by events that had transpired in Jerusalem that day.

The person that they had placed their hopes and dreams upon was stone cold dead in a borrowed tomb. The fella these followers were looking to for guidance and direction was Jesus Christ. A couple of days before, Jesus was cruelly beaten, mocked, shamed, and then crucified on a cross in a garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. These disciples and others thought that Jesus was the Messiah that the prophets had spoken of and Jesus was going to set them free from Roman domination.

These disciples followed Jesus, eagerly anticipating the day Jesus would wipe out the Roman government. Jesus' death on the cross put an end to any hopes these followers had of freedom. With nothing left to do in Jerusalem, these disciples left for Emmaus—sad, despondent, overwhelmed, directionless, discouraged, disenchanted, frustrated, and troubled. Have you ever been there? Not sure which way to turn? Not sure what to do after a chaotic event? You seem to be caught up in a spiritual tornado, and your life is spinning out of control. I had a friend tell me the other day that she was overwhelmed with life and that her life seemed so out of control. The disciples on the road to Emmaus surely felt that their lives were out of control. These disciples headed to Emmaus with heavy hearts and souls. The farther these folks traveled, the more depressed they became. So often life stomps on our hopes and dreams. So often life is not fair. With broken dreams, these travelers made their way to anywhere but Jerusalem. These travelers did not even recognize Jesus when he joined them on this journey. The followers were going over the events of the weekend.

Jesus joined them on this walk. Jesus asked, “What are you talking about? What are you discussing?” Cleopas said, “Are you the only one who has not heard the news? Where have you been man, in some grave or something?” Jesus said, “What things are you

talking about?" Cleopas said,

This fella named Jesus was an almighty prophet. He had many followers, but our religious leaders handed him over to be crucified. I reckon I will always remember that walk Jesus took to the cross. People were crowded all around him. The crowd was so large and rowdy. People were hurling insults at Jesus and mocking him. He looked so awful. The Roman soldiers really did a number on him. He was bloody, bruised, and beaten. The soldiers continued to whip him and beat him as he carried his crossbeam to the place of crucifixion. One said to the other, "I kept wanting him to call down all those angels. I kept wanting him to say okay the fun is over. I am going to destroy each and every one of you." He did nothing. He just kept stumbling forward to his doom. Why did he not fight back? We, as his followers, would have stood with him. Instead he just took it. I simply do not understand. I really thought he was the one we were looking for. The soldiers guided Jesus to Golgotha and crucified Jesus. He died on that tree a criminal's death. Some followers took Jesus' body down and placed him in a borrowed tomb. He said he was going to rise in three days. We hung around Jerusalem for a while but we did not see him. Oh, we heard rumors from some women, but who could believe them? These women went to the tomb early in the morning and did not find Jesus' body. The tomb was empty. The women came back and told us they had seen angels and the angels said Jesus was alive. Some of the disciples went to the tomb and found the tomb empty just like the women said, but no one saw Jesus. (Luke 24:19-24 paraphrased)

Then Jesus spoke up saying, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then Jesus went on to tell about all the things that had been said about himself in the Scripture.

The sun was setting as Jesus and his companions drew close to Emmaus. Cleopas and his buddy still did not recognize Jesus. Cleopas urged Jesus to stay with them for supper. As Jesus was breaking bread, the followers recognized him. As quickly as Jesus had come into their presence, he was gone. Cleopas and his buddy went straight back to Jerusalem. They found the disciples and told them all that had happened on the way to Emmaus. Cleopas saying especially, "I reckon I will always remember that walk." Cleopas

said to the eleven gathered, "The Lord is risen indeed, and He has appeared to Simon!" Jesus, himself shows up offering peace. A wholeness. A completeness.

In our world today, we have all kinds of people giving advice on how to find peace. When things get chaotic, try this new pill called ecstasy. You will feel no pain, and all your problems will simply drift away. If your life seems out of control, dial 1-800-tarot and you will find what you are looking for. If your life is difficult, go out and make a statement by buying an SUV. Why should anyone listen to the resurrection story? The world is full of disillusioned and overwhelmed people. Newspapers report floods in one part of the world and drought in other parts of the world. Wars have seemingly ended between super powers, but cultural and ethnic wars seem to be on the rise. The newspaper is full of stories about folks who have chosen to ruin their lives by drugs or some other form of abuse. I still remember the horrible story of the woman who killed all of her children. The forces of darkness seem to be overpowering. The forces of darkness seem to be winning. Do not fear, God always has the last word! Jesus resurrected, brought hope, transformation, and life to the followers.

Jesus simply offers peace. The peace that he offers comes because of his resurrection. The resurrection is the central message of the Church. The cross was important. Jesus died for our sins and made us at one with God; however, the cross has no significance without the resurrection. If Jesus had died on the cross and the resurrection did not happen, then he would have been included in a long list of people who died for what they believed in. When we as Christians say that we believe in the resurrection, we are saying that we do not have to fear what life throws at us. The good news is that God is stronger than death. The good news is that Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus was in

bodily form. Jesus could be seen and touched. Jesus was not a ghost. Jesus ate with the disciples, walked with the disciples, and talked with the disciples. Jesus was not reincarnated as something like a goat. Jesus' personal identity was not lost into a greater consciousness. He was not like a drop of rain that slowly makes its way back to the ocean. Jesus' body was transformed, and he was somewhat different from when he was with his disciples for three years.

Jesus' resurrection also meant that Jesus had overcome sin and death. By Christ's resurrection, we now have a choice when we are trying to deal with a temptation. We can ask the Lord to give us grace and strength to turn away from that which is calling us to sin. Hey, just because I told you that Christ is risen, you do not have to believe it. In fact if you do not believe at first or you have some doubts, then you are in good company. Jesus was met with disbelief and skepticism throughout the Scriptures. When his resurrection was announced, many disciples did not believe it. As I said earlier, the women came back all excited that the tomb was empty, and the disciples thought they were misinformed. Thomas said that he would not believe in Jesus until he saw Jesus face to face. Many witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, but no one witnessed the actual resurrection. The stories of Jesus are stories of his appearing after he had arisen. For some who doubted Jesus from the very beginning, the empty tomb only confirmed their suspicions. Some said the empty tomb was just a hoax. Jesus' body had been stolen by Jesus' followers. The missing body was some fanatic's way of trying to make Jesus into something he was not. What a silly idea to think that this Jesus person, son of a carpenter, was to be the Messiah. Can I make one observation here? All of Jesus' life was calling for humanity to choose to believe in him or choose something else to believe in, something like the law, Caesar, or

some idol.

Just because Jesus is risen from the dead, you do not have to believe it. Let me ask this question. If you do not believe in the resurrected Lord, then what do you believe in? What is it that gives meaning and direction to life? What helps you deal with tough and chaotic times? What helps you face situations that seem so hard to deal with? We often turn inside ourselves and find that we do not have the continual resources needed to battle life each day.

I read a story not long ago of a mother of four having to go to the morgue to identify her husband's body. I reckon she will always remember that walk. Her husband had gotten so overwhelmed with life that he saw no other options. Life had just stomped on him. He did leave a suicide note. The note had only one word on it "tired." Have you ever felt so tired you just wished you could die? You are tired of the demands of work, tired of the demands of parenthood, tired of the demands to keep up with the neighbors down the street, tired of trying to make a marriage work, tired of trying to make an advancement in your job, tired of trying to play fair all the time, tired of being stepped on, tired of being taken advantage of every day of your life, tired of being used as the scapegoat, tired of being so good when everybody seems so bad, tired of having to make choices on bread or medicine, tired of the family feuding. I truly believe many people are tired of being afraid. Cleopas and his buddy were tail draggin' tired. The events of the weekend had taken the very life from them. Cleopas and his buddy's feet were draggin', and their hearts a saggin'. Because of fear and doubt, these two travelers were not able to recognize Jesus.

I believe so many people have made walks that have led to ruin and destruction.

More and more people find it difficult to believe in the resurrection. The pains and tragedies of life take every desire to live out of us. We need some power outside of our lives to believe in and to give us meaning for each day of our lives. We need someone or something outside of ourselves to deal with life. We do not have the resources on our own to battle life.

I cannot convince you that the resurrection actually took place. All I know is that after the walk with Jesus, Cleopas and his buddy had their lives transformed. Revelation of the resurrection is a process that happens over time. Cleopas and his companion did not recognize Jesus for quite some time. In fact, Cleopas and his companion were not even looking for him. Jesus does not condemn them for their doubt and fear. Jesus is not threatened by their doubts or concerns. Jesus instructs them in Scripture, breaks bread with them, and then these two travelers recognize Jesus. Jesus calls for us to at least listen to what he said, taught, and did through his miracles. The Scripture reveals who Jesus was and can be for each of our lives. He will come near to each of us and ask us to give up our fears to follow him in a life to wholeness. We often opt for our fears. We fail to see that Jesus is the one who is traveling with us. Let me ask a question: Is Christ any less resurrected if we do not acknowledge him?

Jesus calls for us to have a personal relationship with him. It is not enough to be told that Jesus is raised from the dead. Jesus is saying to each of us, "Here I am! I am alive whether you acknowledge me or not!" But there is more. We are asked to invite Jesus to resurrect our lives. We are asked to invite Jesus to release us from our fears and sins. Each of us is called to a personal relationship with the Lord. Cleopas and his friend asked Jesus to come and stay with them a while. The longer these two travelers stayed in

Jesus' presence, the more their hearts burned with faith and not fear.

I cannot prove that Jesus was resurrected. However, I can say that I serve the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. I reckon I will always remember that day when I asked Jesus to come and reside in me. The year was 1970. I was eleven years old. The place was Hixson United Methodist Church. My parents had taken me to a week-long revival. Each night the evangelist talked about giving one's life to Jesus. On the last night, I felt something tugging on my heartstrings. A holy urging had come over me, and I heard in my heart of hearts, "Take just one step and your life will change forever. Just one step and you will never regret it." I was sitting on the end of the pew, and the evangelist was inviting people to the altar to pray. I put one step out onto the red carpet that covered the aisles of that sanctuary, and I made way down to the altar. I proceeded to give my life to Jesus Christ. I reckon I will always remember that walk.

In our own lives, we do not get to do it over again. We are called to let faith speak louder than fear. To say we believe in the resurrection is to say that we believe in the risen Christ who is for us and who is with us. I do not know where you are in your journey right now. To believe in the resurrection is to believe that life offers a fearless future. I see so many people so afraid of living or dying. I have been there myself. Yet with the resurrection, fear and death have been overcome. Cleopas and his friend took a risk going back to the disciples and telling them Jesus was alive. Mary Barbour, the slave, had to take a risk to be free. Neil Armstrong had to take a leap of faith onto that lunar surface. I took a risk walking down the aisle and saying I do. Every journey we make requires that we choose to carry on or we choose to quit. When we choose to carry on, we can say with others who have traveled the same way, "I reckon I will always remember that walk."

Sermon #8

The Lawyer
Luke 10 :25-37

Introduction

In thinking about the postmodern world, I have decided to do a dramatic presentation of one of the characters in the good Samaritan story. No, the character is not the Samaritan, nor the priest, Levite, or the wounded man. The sermon material will be on the lawyer or the theologian/religious scholar who was asking Jesus questions in Luke 10. I will wear a costume that would have been appropriate for that time. I will set the scene in a classroom in which the lawyer is teaching. The class might be called Torah 101. I will talk about my encounter with Jesus. I will need a small desk, a candle, some papyrus sheets, a rams horn, four students to ask specific questions, and an outfit.

A ram's horn will blow signaling the beginning of class. Hello class, my name is Professor Goodenstien, welcome to Torah 101. Over the next few months, we will be studying the Law. Moses left us valuable information on how to live a good and productive life. Before we get started, does anyone have any questions.

#1 "Professor how many exams will we have?"

I will give you a handout later.

#2 "Professor will we have homework?"

Yes, and that is in your packet, too.

#3 "Professor when is lunch? I am starving."

Soon enough.

#4 "Professor have you heard about this fella called Jesus? I hear he is doing

some strange things. I have heard rumors that Jesus heals the sick, helps the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the dead to rise back to life. Is he a prophet? Is he a good teacher? What do you know about him Professor Goodenstien?"

I have met this fella called Jesus. Not too long ago, I heard that Jesus was teaching in Jerusalem. I went to check him out. I was sure that he was a false prophet. He was out teaching all kind of things about the kingdom of God. The very idea! He had not even studied at the temple. He had had no formal training. I heard of two men lowering their friend down on a pallet. Jesus forgave the man his sins. If that is not blasphemy, I do not know what is.

#3 "Professor! Professor!"

Yes what is it?

"Did not the man on the stretcher take up his pallet and walk away?"

What is your name again? I would like for you to see me after class. Any more questions? Shall I continue?

This Jesus fella ate with crooks and sinners. He did not observe our laws on cleanliness. He even broke the law of the Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples were walking through the fields and pulling off heads of grain and eating them. Can you believe that? On another Sabbath he healed a man's crippled right hand. Jesus has no regard for our laws or our customs. If he were truly a faithful Jew, he would not be breaking our laws so much. The law is what separates us from the heathen.

What he was saying was not too bad. I must admit he has gotten some learning somewhere. He does have a certain wisdom, but I am not sure where Jesus got such knowledge. He spoke of giving life away to find it, and he was challenging people to love

their enemies. He spoke often of not being too quick to look at the splinter in your neighbor's eye when you have a plank in your own eye. I was impressed with his teaching about the foundation of the house. Jesus said those who build their houses on sand are in trouble when the rain comes. The people who build lives on solid bedrock are able to withstand the storms.

I went to observe Jesus in action. I was very agitated at him. I was going to see if I could expose him for what he was—a fake! A blasphemer! A false prophet! I remember the day I met Jesus as if it were yesterday. The day was overcast and a bit cloudy. I and some of my colleagues had come to try to expose Jesus as a crazy man. People were gathered around Jesus listening intently to all that he was saying. The more he spoke, the madder I got. I finally could stand it no more. I stood up and asked Jesus a question.

#1- “What did you ask him?”

Well I said, “Teacher,” in the most demeaning way. I thought to myself if he is a teacher then I should be high priest. I said, “Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?” I must say I was rather impressed with my question.

#2- “What did Jesus say?”

Jesus asked me a question. A mark of a good teacher. Jesus asked me, “What is written in the law? When reading the law, what is written about eternal life?” I was on that question like a fish on a worm. I knew this Jesus was not too challenging. I hesitated for effect, then I responded that we are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The law requires no less. Then we are to love our neighbor as ourself. I had my colleagues patting me on the back and congratulating me. Jesus even seemed delighted because he told me that I had answered well. I surely did not need Jesus

to tell me that. I knew I had answered well. Then Jesus told me to go live up to the answer I had given. Have you ever had one of those days when you should have stopped while you were ahead? You may have been pestering your brother, and he had warned you several times to quit, but you did not listen. Later you wished you had. What about having an argument with your husband. He politely asks you to stop, but you do not listen. Later, when you're not speaking to one another, you wished you would have left well enough alone. I should have left well enough alone. Yet, I wanted to embarrass this Jesus character. My first attempt had failed. So I came up with another question.

#4-What was the question?

I asked Jesus who my neighbor was. I just knew I had him. I saw my neighbor as someone who was part of my immediate family, my cousins, those who claimed to be of Jewish descent, and converts to Judaism. I was expecting Jesus, a Jew himself, to give me some boundaries on who I had to love.

#3 - What did Jesus say?

He told me a story. Let me see if I can remember how the story goes.

Once upon a time, there was a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Have any of you traveled that road? Is it not about seventeen miles from Jerusalem to Jericho? I believe that the road is now called "The Bloody Way." You definitely are in danger on this road. Many people have been robbed, beaten, and some even killed. This poor man became one of The Bloody Way's victims. The robbers came upon him quick as lightning. These thugs demanded he hand over his merchandise and money. He refused. The robbers beat him up, left him half-naked, and left him to die on the side of the road. This poor fella was a terrible sight. He was laying in a pool of blood. The sun was beating down upon him

mercilessly, and his throat was swollen from a lack of water. Luckily for him along came a priest. Guess what the priest did?

#1- Why he surely stopped to help the poor soul!

#2-Yeah any priest would have stopped.

Jesus said the priest crossed to the other side and kept walking.

#1-I cannot say that I blame him. The wounded man could have been a decoy.

#2-What if the priest had touched this man? The priest would have been unclean for days. He would not have collected an income that week.

#3-Maybe he was not capable of helping this man. I was at the market the other day, and a lady fell off her camel and hurt her leg. I was not able to fix her leg, but I ran and got help. Maybe the priest was hurrying off to get help.

Whatever the reason the priest went on his way. Then Jesus went on to say that a Levite was walking down the road, and what did he do?

#4-He surely stopped and helped this poor soul. Did he not?

Not according to Jesus. The Levite also passed by on the other side. Hold your questions, the story gets better. Who in your wildest dreams would you place on the road next? Who would be the most unlikely character to stop and help this man?

#1-A Samaritan did not stop did he? Unbelievable!

#2-No way! That is unbelievable!

#3- You got to be kidding! That makes me want to puke!

Jesus actually said a Samaritan stopped to help the man. A low down, no good, back biting, half-breed Samaritan. I admit I was stunned when Jesus said a Samaritan

stopped. The Samaritans who intermarried and defiled the faith. The Samaritans had built their own place to worship. A group of Samaritans defiled the temple many years ago by spreading human bones across the temple. Jesus could have picked a Roman or a Philistine, but a Samaritan, give me a break! Jesus said that the Samaritan saw the man's condition and went over to him. The Samaritan had compassion on this wounded person. I have thought a lot about that word compassion. The Samaritans have been treated poorly by our culture for many years. This good Samaritan knew what it was like to be passed by, to be overlooked, to be considered unimportant. He gave the wounded man first aid and cleaned up his wounds. This good Samaritan put the man on his donkey and took him to the local inn. In the morning, the Samaritan gave the inn keeper some money to cover the expenses of taking care of this wounded soul. The Samaritan also told the innkeeper that he would cover any extra expenses when he returned. This good Samaritan lost what business he was pursuing that day, and he gave up quite a bit of money to care for a person he had never met. Who would have ever imagined that a Samaritan would be a hero in this story.

Jesus finished the story and looked straight at me and asked me a question. What do you think? Which of these three became a neighbor to the man attacked by thugs? Jesus did not say who was the neighbor. Jesus did not let me off the hook that easily. If he had told me who was my neighbor, then he would have justified or condemned who I had included or excluded from my circle of neighbors. Jesus turned the question around and asked me to think about what kind of neighbor I was supposed to be.

#4- What did you say?

What would you have said? The answer was obvious. I responded by saying the

one who showed love and mercy to the wounded man. Jesus said something I will never forget. He told me to go and do likewise. I never have met such a character, and he was not condemning me. Although he had every right to be upset with me. He was smart enough to know I was trying to trap him. He seemed to be challenging me to think about eternal life not only as some future event but something that begins in the present. When thinking about eternal life, do we not have to have some place we are headed? When Jesus told me about the good Samaritan, I believe he was challenging me to put my beliefs into practice.

What you and I believe does matter. Our beliefs do affect how we approach each and every day of life. Beliefs are what get us up in the morning and keep us going through the day. Ironic is it not? The teacher had become the student. The phrase “go and do likewise” has haunted me many a night. Reflecting more on the encounter, Jesus was asking me to enlarge my boundaries. Jesus was saying, “You know what the laws say; now apply what you know!” Jesus was not willing to let me remain as I was. Is not truth called to challenge our motives and our reasons for living?

To be honest with you, I was looking for flaws and loopholes in Jesus’ thinking, but I could find none. The simple challenge to go and do likewise was a call to let go of my identity. However, I was not able to let go of what made me feel secure. I was seeking life in eternity through my ability to live up to the law. I believed that I could be good enough if I followed the law. That one statement, “Go and do likewise,” was a plea from Jesus to begin my life now. I was not so ready to give in to his request. To love those outside my culture would be suicide. I might lose my job. I might get fired from the seminary. I might lose tenure. When Jesus said, “Go and do likewise,” Jesus was asking

me to let go of my earthly securities. Do you all know what I am talking about? The statement by Jesus turned my world upside down. I cannot describe how those words sank into my heart. I became so angry that he would have even suggested such a thing. Truth has a way of making us angry does it not? Has anyone ever called you on a lie, and you became furious? Defensive?

Has anyone ever told you that you were doing something wrong and you knew it was true, but you did not want to admit it? When Jesus made that statement, he seemed to be peering deep in my soul and saying, "Why are you so miserable with your life? Why have you let your religion become your god? Why have you let religion replace relationship?" I was caught, and I reacted with embarrassment and shame. I knew the law, but I had not lived the law. I had not loved the Lord with my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I was more worried about what people thought about me than what God thought about me. The comment by Jesus forced me to look at my life, and I did not like what I saw. The Samaritan, imaginary or real, knew more about keeping the law than I did. Has God not put within each of our lives a desire to know God more fully? Do we not receive eternal life by loving God with our heart, our soul, and our mind? Do we not find life by giving it away? Sad to say, I was not ready to listen to Jesus. He was offering a way to find life, but I opted for the boring and familiar. I settled for security. I hope one of these days I will run into Jesus again. Things might turn out differently.

It truly matters what we believe! You asked me a question at the beginning of class. I have tried to respond as honestly as I could to this question. Now I want to ask you a question. What do you believe about eternal life? Who is your neighbor? The question is not what I think about Jesus. No, the question is what do each of you think

about Jesus? What do you do with this one called the Christ? What do you believe about eternal life? Is there life everlasting? Is there life eternally with God? Does that life begin by opening up to God's love, mercy, and grace now? Does eternal life begin in the here and now? My encounter with Jesus caused me to ask more questions.

A ram's horn will blow again. Well, time has sure flown by. Spend some time reflecting on the story of the good Samaritan and of eternal life. Let me say to you what Jesus said to me, "Go and do what you profess to believe. Then and only then will you find life." To have life that is everlasting, we are called to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Then go love not the neighbor we choose or who is convenient. No, we go and love the most unlikely candidate. The key to eternal life is loving others because God has loved us.

APPENDIX N

PRETEST INTERVIEW RESULTS

Pretest Interview #1

Person #1

Date: August 27, 2002

Age: 45-65

Sex: Male

Attendance: 3 years

Activities in church: Lay Leader, Small Group leader, Sunday School teacher

Q. What is truth?

A. I guess when you talk about truth, you are talking about God. I define truth as principles we live by. At the same time, truth is not so obvious all the time.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. Yes. God is the ultimate absolute truth. And absolute truths (principles, values, ideas) emanate from Him. They have been revealed specifically through the Bible, Jesus, and his people.

Q. How do you decide if something is true or not?

A. Check with God through prayer, meditation, Bible study, specifically paying attention to Jesus' words and actions. Through thoughtful evaluation and reflection, you may decide that something is true or not. You may also choose to consult with others you think may help assist you in this process. I think there are degrees of certainty about truth. Sometimes a truth will be clear and obvious. Other times there may be a leaning towards what you think is true, towards what you decide is true, but varying degrees of uncertainty may exist. With absolute truth, however, there would be no uncertainty.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. God gives me direction but I also look to other believers, and I rely on my own prayer life. I am trying to discern that still small voice of truth.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. Yes, it certainly does. I do not, however, consider all parts of the Bible equal in their power to provide authority in my life.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Yes. I think it is exemplified well in reading the Bible. There are parts in the Bible that play varying roles in guiding my life. Reason plays a part in determining which parts are absolute truth, which parts are important and worth considerable evaluation and which parts are relatively unimportant. We use our thoughts and reasoning abilities, through and with God, to help us understand the world (spiritual and physical) in which we live.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. Excellent question! Are *you* both divine and human? Am *I*? Is it blasphemy to utter such words? Because the Spirit of God dwells within my finite and mortal self (and I praise him for his presence—unworthy as I may be), does that mean I have a speck of the divine in me? Certainly I believe Jesus was connected and related to God more than any other soul who has walked this earth. I believe Jesus was fully divine and human.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. I would define community as a group of people who share a common interest and have a common God. Community is found by loving Jesus and being loved by Jesus.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. Yes. Hasn't everybody to one degree or another?

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. Yes, because I allowed myself to be distracted by society. I started listening more to the world than to God.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. My family, men's small group, church, with friends, Sunday school, work, etc. I wonder if there is community whenever there are two or more gathered together in some way. It may not be a good example of community or it may be somewhat dysfunctional, but it could still be some sort of community. I guess to some degree it depends on how you define community.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. I believe we have to have faith in God, a deep trust in God. I believe God is with me and continually working to bring good to my life.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. God is the ultimate reality. God is love. God is spirit. God is personal. God is our Abba Father. He is the alpha and the omega. God is working for the good of all those who love him.

SIN

A. Sin is intentionally doing that which he would rather not have you do. It is missing the mark.

SALVATION

Some would say that salvation is *believing* that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, admitting that you are indeed a sinner and then receiving the gift of eternal life. How many tracts have been handed out about that. And I do believe it. I was baptized at age 37 believing that very thing. I wonder if that message for one reason or another is losing its

power. Yet I also think there is more to salvation than just that. I don't think that is the whole story. The apostle Paul speaks about "continuing to work out your salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you" (Phil 2:12) and about running "in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Cor 9:24). And then you must consider Jesus' parables. The lost son ultimately realized he was lost and there his father, waiting for him all along, embraced him and threw a party! Yippee! Salvation! There is an element of recognizing our lostness. I think many people, many who have said that prayer of salvation, are lost and don't realize it. We become lost too easily. And what about the wise and foolish builders. Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and *puts them into practice* is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt 7:24). There is work to be done.

ETERNAL LIFE

A. I'm throwing a birthday party. Arrangements must be made. People invited. Cake baked. Ice cream bought. Presents wrapped. Games prepared. It is an exciting day. While doing all this arranging, I dip my finger in the frosting, I reminisce about what this person's life has meant to me, I rest with a cup of coffee, I prepare the table, etc., etc. It is a time of celebration. Eternal life has begun now. We get a taste of it now. But the life beyond this one will be the big celebration. The party will really begin then. And yes, there will still be work to do, but what indescribable joy it will be. And all without the cholesterol!

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. I don't think my basic beliefs have changed very much. But I am changing. And you probably think, then his beliefs must be changing. But I'm not so sure. I am becoming more committed. I am learning to trust God more. I am learning to rely upon Him more. I have a better relationship with Him now. And perhaps my beliefs, but better yet, my understanding has deepened.

Pretest Interview #1
Person #2
Date: September 13, 2002

Age: 66+

Sex: Male

Attendance: 32 years

Activities in church: Missions, Video services, Communications

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. I am a businessman, and businesses struggle with this concept of truth. I struggle with this concept of truth. I might miss a sale, but I do not give out false information. Truthfulness is godly.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. Absolutely without a doubt true. Scripture is absolute truth. People in our scientific world doubt too many things. People doubt creation, the formation of the universe. A gap is getting wider between scientific belief and religious belief.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. Yes. Absolute truth has to exist. Something, someone has to hold our universe together. Without absolute truth the world would be in total chaos.

Q. How do you decide if something is true or not?

A. I read my Bible. God's word gives authority to my life. I pray, seeking God's guidance.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. That is a hard question to answer. I do not look to human authority. I look to God to give me direction. God is the one who gives authority to my life.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. Yes, as I said earlier, Scripture is a very important part of my life. My faith is strengthened by what I read and study.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Yes, I believe reason does help me make the right decisions. I have to use my brain, as feeble as it is, to make wise decisions.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. I believe Jesus was human, and because Jesus was human, he understands what I am dealing with in life. He understands what I am going through. He knows what I deal with daily. I believe Jesus is divine, too! This is a little harder to understand, but I believe Jesus possessed godly qualities.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. Community is being with people you love and who love you. I also believe you share

the same hopes and dreams.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. No, not really. I have been on the verge of feeling disconnected, but I never have felt totally alone.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. You got to be kidding me. I have had these feelings of disconnectedness. I hope I am not alone.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I find community in church. I find community with my family. I find community in a good game of golf. I like being with people.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. My basic foundation is faith. I have faith that God is good and God loves me.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. I believe God sent Jesus to die for my sins. I believe God is the creator and sustainer of the universe.

SIN

A. God gives us the power to overcome sin if we want to. Most of the time we do not want to. We choose to sin. Humanity is separated from God by sin.

SALVATION

A. When I think of salvation, I think of God saving us from our sins—rescuing us from ourselves.

ETERNAL LIFE

A. I believe in eternal life. I believe God has a place for us called heaven. I believe we will live with God forever. The older you get, the more you think about such things.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. My beliefs have most definitely changed. I believe my faith has gotten stronger. When you get my age, your worries change. I have started worrying about my family, but I trust God will protect and take care of them.

Pretest Interview #1
Person #3
Date: August 28, 2002

Age: 29-44
Sex: Female
Attendance: 3 years
Activities in church: United Methodist Women

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. I believe truth is what is real. I believe truth is what is not fake. Truth is what you experience.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. I am not sure. I guess something is absolutely true in the world.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. I doubt it. If you mean my truth is the only way, no, I do not think so.

Q. How do you decide if something is true or not?

A. I think about it! If it is good for me, and it will not hurt me, I go for it!

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. I usually rely on my own ability to think things through.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. I read the Scriptures every once in a while, but I do not seek the Scripture's guidance first when I am trying to make a decision. God gave me a brain to think with, and I will support my findings with Scripture.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. As I stated above—yes. Reason most definitely has a place of authority.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. I really have never been able to understand how Jesus could be human and could be divine. I just do not see that happening. Sorry, I guess that was not the answer you were looking for, but how could Jesus be both at the same time? It makes no sense.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. A group of caring, supportive people who share common dreams.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. Yeah, all the time. I feel so out of it. I feel like I don't belong anywhere.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. Yes. Often, God seems so far away. I have a hard time making connections.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I have begun to make friends here at Central. I find community with my friends and with my family.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. I guess the foundations of my beliefs are God and family.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. I believe there is a God. I believe he has many names and identities. God cannot be limited by the labels we put on him.

SIN

A. What about it! Everybody ought to enjoy it! Seriously, sin—I do not think sin is a big deal. People make poor mistakes sometimes. Should they be condemned for it?

SALVATION

A. I believe God calls us to be good people.

ETERNAL LIFE

A Do you mean heaven? I believe there is life after this life. I am not sure what kind of life it is.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. No—not really.

Pretest Interview #1
Person #4
Date: September 4, 2002

Age: 45-65

Sex: Female

Attendance: 15 years

Activities in church: Children's Church teacher, Building Committee, Staff Parish, Greeter coordinator

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. Truth is found in God and God alone. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, the life." I believe truth is summed up in that Scripture passage.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. In our world, a lot of gray exists. People tend to think anything and everything is Okay. One person told me that there were no absolutes. I believe absolute truth means God's word.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. Yes, the Bible is God's truth. As I said a second ago, I believe God's word offers us truth, but we have to decide whether to believe it or not.

Q. How do you decide if something is true or not?

A. I look to God's word. I pray. I talk to other people seeking their advice. I rely on my experience. My gut feeling—if I feel good about it, after going through the other steps, I do it!

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. Oh, that is easy—Scripture give authority to my life. I lean heavily upon God's word to guide me and help me make decisions in my daily life. I believe Scripture is still relevant today.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. I believe I have made myself clear on that point.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Yes, I use reason to make many decisions. I try to keep from flying off the handle and make a mountain out of a mole hill.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. What a question! Yes, God sent Jesus to live a human life. Jesus knows what we are going through. He can help us with our problems. Jesus is also divine because he brought healing to the lame and sight to the blind.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. Oh, that is an easy one. Community is being with people you like or at least learn to like. Community is what we hold in common. We are drawn together by family connections or faith connections.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. I do not think I ever have felt disconnected. I cannot recall a time in my life when I felt God was not with me. Now do not get me wrong, I have sinned often, but God always forgives me.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. No I have not. I believe if you seek God with all your heart, you will find him.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I find community with family, church family, and a walking group in my neighborhood. I also belong to a Bible study group, and we have become a community for each other.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. I follow right along with the Apostles' Creed. I believe in God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the forgiveness of sins, and all the rest of the beliefs in the Creed. All of these help provide the foundation for my beliefs.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. Awesome! That says it all. He is the beginning, middle, and the end. He is loving, gracious, and forgiving.

SIN

A. We are all sinners. We are saved by grace. Sin is alive and active in our world today.

SALVATION

A. Salvation is a free gift available to all. Some choose to reject it.

ETERNAL LIFE

A. I believe eternal life is promised by God, and God promises a life with no pain, no wars, no tears. I can't imagine what it will be like.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. Why, yes. I believe God is continually calling me to grow more like him. My faith has grown stronger because I have seen God working in my life.

Pretest Interview #1
Person #5
Date: August 15, 2002

Age: 18-28
Sex: Male
Attendance: 2 years
Activities in church: Youth group

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. Wow. I guess I would say truth is found in God's word.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. Absolute truth is something that is true. No questions are asked. A person knows deep in their heart something is true.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. I often do not see it in my every day life. The only thing I have found that holds true in the world is the love of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only one you can rely upon on a daily basis.

Q. How do you decide if something is true or not?

A. I read my Bible. I talk with my parents and trusted friends, and then I make a decision.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. I believe my authority comes from reading the Scriptures. I rely heavily on Scripture to guide and direct my life. I believe Scripture is a road map to follow.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. I truly believe Scripture is a wonderful way in which God communicates his plan to me. The Scriptures say, "If you seek me, you will find me." I try to seek God's will for my life through the Scriptures.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Yeah, I like to reason things out. I like to ask questions, and by asking questions, you know why you believe what you believe.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. Yes. God came to be with us in human form through Jesus. Those who believe in his name also experience the "divine." Only God in Christ helps us to love ourselves and others.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. Community is hanging out with my friends. Community is having common goals, interests, hobbies, or agendas for life.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. Yes, I have, have you? I have had some hard times in the past, and I questioned what my purpose was for being in this world.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. Not very often. There are times I get upset with God, but I rarely feel disconnected.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. Everywhere I go, I find community. Think of the world as one big community, which is culturally diverse. I also find community with family, close friends, and, of course, with my church family.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. I believe the foundations of my faith are God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a good way to sum up what I believe.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. I believe God is the creator of the universe. God is the one who sustains the universe.

SIN

A. Human nature is sinful. I sin every day even though I try to live like Jesus.

SALVATION

A. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins to offer salvation. I am saved by the grace of God.

ETERNAL LIFE

A We have eternal life through the blood of Jesus and God's grace.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. I think I have evaluated stuff a lot more. In the past, I have believed stuff without thinking why I believed it. I have begun to claim my beliefs for myself!

APPENDIX O

POSTTEST INTERVIEW RESULTS

Posttest Interview #2

Person #1

Date: November 6, 2002

Age: 45-65

Sex: Male

Attendance: 3 years

Activities in church: Lay Leader, Small Group leader, Sunday School teacher

Attendance during 8 week sermon series: attended all 8

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. The word truth to me means that something is accurate, honest, factual.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. Absolute truth refers to truth that is constant and unchanging.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. God is the ultimate absolute truth, and God's truths (principles, values, ideas) have been revealed in the Bible, Jesus, and each of us as his people.

Q. What steps do you take to verify truth?

A. First I pray. I read my Bible. Then I reflect on the decision to be made. I sometimes talk with friends.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. God, the Bible, particularly in the representation of Jesus. Also, although this should be to a lesser degree, people that are placed in positions of authority over me. Also, others that I also respect and seek their counsel can have a degree of authority over me by my yielding to their insight and direction.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. As I said in the first interview, yes, Scripture does give authority to my life, but I do not consider all parts of the Bible equal in their power to provide authority in my life.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Yes, reason definitely has a place of authority in my life. We use our reasoning abilities to help us understand the world in which we live.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. Certainly, I believe Jesus was connected and related to God more than any other soul

who has walked this earth. I believe he was the Messiah, God's special emissary. A prophet, priest, and king. I believe this was a path God had in store for him. But it was also a path he had to choose. He could have said no. So how do I answer that question? Yes, if that makes any sense.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. Community means togetherness. It reflects a certain degree of affinity and closeness.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. Yes. I believe everybody has felt some distance from society.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. Yes, there are times I have felt very disconnected from God, but I do not feel that disconnectedness now.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I find community with my family, church, and prayer group.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. I am not sure how to answer that question, but I would say that we are called to believe in the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. God is the spring of living water. God dwells within us. I think he dwells within everyone. It's just that many have closed their lives off to him, at one level or another. God is awesome. God is worthy of honor and praise. God is power and truth and light and goodness. I could go on and on. God is God!

SIN

A. Sin is deviating from the way or path that God has intended for you.

SALVATION

A. Salvation is not something we earn. It is something we respond to. It is our response to a gracious and loving God. That is our salvation. Him seeking us, and us *responding* to him. And it is ultimately trusting him. And that in itself is a process, or a journey we take. Consider what it says in Psalm 27:1: "The Lord is my light and my salvation." We find our salvation in him!

ETERNAL LIFE

A. I believe I answered this the first time by saying eternal life is like a birthday party. I still believe eternal life begins now, but the life beyond will be a huge celebration.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. I don't think my basic beliefs have changed very much. I am becoming more

committed. I am learning to trust God more.

Q. How have the sermons on doctrine impacted your beliefs?

A. I am not aware that they have.

Posttest Interview #2
Person #2
Date: November 4, 2002

Age: 66+
Sex: Male
Attendance: 32 years
Activities in church: Missions, Video services, Communications
Attendance during 8 week sermon series: attended all 8

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. Word of honor—taken with trust.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. Without a doubt.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. I do believe absolute truth exists because God exists. God is absolute.

Q. What steps do you take to verify truth?

A. I'm a little naive. I accept most stuff as truth until I'm conned or taken advantage of.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. My belief in God and Jesus Christ.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. Yes, Scripture plays an important part in my life.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. To some degree—I still look to Scripture first but then I do think about the decision to be made.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. Yes. Jesus is God and at the same time human. I do not understand all of it, but I do believe Jesus is both.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. A comfort zone or location where there is trust and common goals shared with others.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. No, not at all.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. Not really—I try to work on my relationship with God daily.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I find community with my golf buddies, my family, and in my church.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. The Scripture, my being saved.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. He is the supreme being.

SIN

A. We sin when we do not follow the ten commandments and we do not love our neighbor as ourself.

SALVATION

A. We must have salvation to have everlasting life.

ETERNAL LIFE

A. We must believe in Jesus and have salvation to have eternal life.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. Yes, my beliefs have gotten stronger this last year.

Q. How have the sermons on doctrine impacted your beliefs?

A. Yes, the sermons have helped make me stronger and more committed to what I believe.

Posttest Interview #2
Person #3
Date: November 13, 2002

Age: 29-44
Sex: Female
Attendance: 3 years
Activities in church: United Methodist Women
Attendance during 8 week sermon series: attended 7 weeks

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. I believe truth is what you experience.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. I do not know. I would say what is true for you may or may not be true for me.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. I do not think so.

Q. What steps do you take to verify truth?

A. I believe I have been given a mind to make my own decisions.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. I look to my own interests and values to give me authority.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. I read Scripture occasionally, but I do not turn to Scripture for every decision I make.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Yeah, reason is very important to me. I believe I can think through every problem.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. I do not know. I guess I would have to say I have a hard time saying Jesus is both human and divine.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. Community is a group of people who share similar goals and ideals.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. Wow! I really do feel like I am disconnected often. I am not sure where I belong right now.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. When have I not felt a little disconnected from God. I mean, there are times God just

seems so far away. Such a hard concept to get hold of.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I believe I find community globally—on the Internet. I feel community at school and where I work.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. My what? What do you base your beliefs on? You know, that is a hard question. I guess family, friends, and somewhat faith.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. God is way beyond us. God is not limited by the restraints we put on him.

SIN

A. I believe I answered this one before. In fact, all these questions sound familiar. I do not see the big deal with “sin.”

SALVATION

A. If we try to live a good life, I believe God will reward us for that effort.

ETERNAL LIFE

A. We all go somewhere when we die. I am not so sure where that is though.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. I think that my beliefs have changed some. I am beginning to ask more and more questions about life.

Q. How have the sermons on doctrine impacted your beliefs?

A. Well, I guess one thing your sermons have done is caused me to think. I do not agree with everything you preached, but I am at least thinking about how God impacts my life on a daily basis with his grace.

Posttest Interview #2
Person #4
Date: November 11, 2002

Age: 45-65

Sex: Female

Attendance: 15 years

Activities in church: Children's Church teacher, Building Committee, Staff Parish, Greeter coordinator

Attendance during 8 week sermon series: attended 6

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. Truth to me means absolute, not changing. Truth means Jesus Christ.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. When something is absolutely true, and you have no doubt that it is true.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. Yes, Jesus Christ, God's word.

Q. What steps do you take to verify truth?

A. Compare against God's word.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. God's word and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. Yes, Scripture is a very important part of my life.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Somewhat. I do think about things, but I compare them to Scripture.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. Yes, Jesus is divine by nature and human by choice. Jesus can be with us in human form.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. Common bond with others.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. Yes, when my beliefs differ from the world's beliefs, I feel disconnected from society.

NOTE: I asked "How so?"

A. I have a twenty-eight year old daughter who believes that there are many ways to get

to heaven. She said if I believe Jesus is the only way, then I am being exclusive and intolerant of others' beliefs. I sometimes get confused about this matter.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. Not really. I always feel close to God.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I find community in my church, with my Bible study group, and with my family.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. God created the world and all that is in it. Man disobeyed and sinned against God. God sent his son into the world to save mankind from his sin. He paid the penalty for sin by allowing Jesus to be our sacrifice for sin. God loves mankind and created him and the world for his glory. God is love.

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. Creator of universe and all that is in it, creator of mankind.

SIN

A. Anything that separates man from God.

SALVATION

A. God's gift to mankind—forgiveness of sin through death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ.

ETERNAL LIFE

A. Forever, to live with Christ in heaven.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. My faith and my relationship to God has grown through guidance of the Holy Spirit, prayer, how God works in different circumstances.

Q. How have the sermons on doctrine impacted your beliefs?

A. I believe the sermon series helped to reinforce what I believe. For instance, when you talked about God, I was reminded of how good and faithful God is to me.

Posttest Interview #2
Person #5
Date: November 15, 2002

Age: 18-28
Sex: Male
Attendance: 2 years
Activities in church: Youth group
Attendance during 8 week sermon series: attended all 8

Q. What does the word "truth" mean to you?

A. Truth is what we discover in the Scriptures.

Q. What does the phrase "absolute truth" mean to you?

A. Did I not answer this a few months ago? I see absolute truth as something which is true all the time.

Q. Is there such a thing as absolute truth in our world?

A. Absolutely! We all need guidelines and boundaries. God provides those for us.

Q. What steps do you take to verify truth?

A. I read the Scriptures. I talk with my parents, and I think I could talk with you.

Q. Who or what gives authority to your life?

A. My authority rests in my relationship with Jesus.

Q. Does Scripture give authority to your life?

A. Yes, I believe I covered that. Scripture plays a valuable role in my thought process.

Q. Does reason have a place of authority in your life?

A. Yes, I do like to think things through, but I do not rely only on reason.

Q. Is Jesus both human and divine?

A. Yes, God became human in order to show us what God was like. God is also divine but that concept is a little harder to understand.

Q. What does community mean to you?

A. Community means sharing goals and interests with others.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from society?

A. Lately I have felt pretty out of it. These last few weeks have been tough.

Q. Have you ever felt disconnected from God?

A. Yeah, God has felt pretty far out there, and I sometimes wonder why he is for far

away.

Q. Where do you find community?

A. I find community in school, with my friends. I find community at church and in my recreational activities.

Q. What are your foundations of belief?

A. I find my foundations in the Trinity!

Q. What do you believe about the following:

GOD

A. God is the creator–sustained–giver of life. God is, was, and will be.

SIN

A. Sin is what draws us away from God. Sin separates us from the love of God.

SALVATION

A. Salvation is what we receive from God by believing in Jesus.

ETERNAL LIFE

A. Eternal life–well, I guess I would say eternal life is living with God forever.

Q. Have your basic beliefs changed in the last year? How so?

A. I believe my beliefs are always changing. My beliefs are never the same. My beliefs are in constant change. Are we not to move more toward God?

Q. How have the sermons on doctrine impacted your beliefs?

A. I realize that doctrines are very important. When you talked about grace, I had a new insight on how wonderful God's grace is for me and how little I deserve it. Grace is truly a gift.

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