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## ABSTRACT

Formed by the Word: Biblical Narrative Preaching  
as a Means of Cultivating Holiness of Heart and Life

by

Marshall MacClellan

The mission statement or marching orders given by Jesus at the time of his ascension was, “Go make disciples of all nations, ...” (Matthew 28:19). Making disciples has two components; bringing unbelievers into a committed relationship with Jesus Christ, and developing believers into more mature disciples. To make mature disciples is to cultivate their growth in what John Wesley called holiness of heart and life. This study examines the use of biblical narrative preaching as a means of developing the Christian discipleship of those in United Methodist Churches.

This is an experiment in the use of biblical narrative preaching as a conduit through which people can experience the risen Lord Jesus and be formed and transformed by his presence. This study seeks to address the need for United Methodist Christians to enter the transforming power of Jesus Christ through biblical narrative. John Wesley a call to holiness of heart and life, the life of God living in the heart of men and women. Wesley articulated what it means to have that life of Christ living and moving us. Operationalizing Wesley’s practical divinity, I placed holiness of heart and life into seven categories for evaluation. This study measured the degree of growth in holiness of heart and life of those who experienced four-months of biblical narrative preaching.

The experiment took place in a United Methodist church in the Florida Annual Conference. The community was a combination of northern retirees and young middle to lower middle-class families with children. A researcher-designed instrument was used as a pre-test, mid-test, and post-test tool to explore the degree of change in subjects over a four-month preaching experience. The results were tabulated, and analyzed in chapters 4 and 5.

Statistical analysis of the resulting data confirmed a degree of significant change. This change was, however, temporary giving insight into the true role of preaching in the ongoing process of disciple making.

The study concludes that preaching is vital for opening the door to people's spiritual lives. Preaching brings people to repentance, sparks conviction and conversion, fosters growth, and inspires action. In order to move people from the temporary response to long-term growth in holiness of heart and life they must be integrated into other disciple building ministries.

**DISSERTATION APPROVAL**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
**FORMED BY THE WORD: BIBLICAL NARRATIVE PREACHING**  
**AS A MEANS OF CULTIVATING HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE**

presented by

**Marshall MacClellan**

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY** degree at

**Asbury Theological Seminary**

**Wilmore, Kentucky**

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March 31, 1999  
Program Date

**FORMED BY THE WORD:  
BIBLICAL NARRATIVE PREACHING  
AS A MEANS OF CULTIVATING HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE**

**A Dissertation**

**Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary**

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

**by**

**Marshall MacClellan**

**March 31, 1999**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several people have been instrumental in making this research project happen. My greatest support has come from my wife Christy. Her patience and encouragement kept this study moving.

Ralph Waldo Beeson for his vision and generosity;

Dr. Ellsworth Kalas for his example of leadership, preaching and pastoral care and, most of all, for his friendship;

Dr. Leslie Andrews and Dr. John Oswalt for their patient guidance and helpful insights

Dr. Stacy Minger, one of my Beeson classmates who spent time on the phone giving me counsel and encouragement.

My children Christina, Angeli, Katie, and Marshall Stephen for graciously putting up with my distractions as I finished this dissertation and for bringing me such joy.

Dr. and Mrs. Marshall O. Watkins who gave me the support and love to begin this journey of ministry.

Jackie Friesen whose skill and kindness provided the administrative support in preparing, sending out the questionnaires, and taking up the slack when I was absent even while in the office.

Dr. Bill Sterling, Mary Ann Davenport, Bob Davenport, Jerilyn Bush, and Vernon Hall who provided insight and support throughout the project.

Finally, a special thanks to the people of First United Methodist Church in Auburndale, FL whose love and support has made this dissertation possible.

## CHAPTER 1

### Understanding the Problem

#### Background to the Problem

Over the past several years in the pastorate I have been dismayed by persons who claim the name Christian and yet live lives unrelated and even contrary to the principles and guidelines of Scripture and the commands of Jesus Christ. I have experienced this as much in leadership as in those on the outskirts of the church. It seems as though a spiritual version of memory loss plagues the United Methodist congregations I have served. This spiritual memory loss strips churches and individuals of being able to embrace or live out Christian character. From a review of literature this memory loss is a widespread problem in our denomination. Though the body of Christ is present, the actions, words, and demeanor of its people are unrelated to the identity of who Christ calls us to be. I believe individuals and even whole communities of faith have forgotten who they are. Consequently the creed and the deeds of those who warm pews on Sunday mornings are incongruent.

I first became aware of the widespread nature of this problem as I read Robert Bellah's book, Habits of the Heart. In his classic work Bellah articulated the moral decline of Americans. His study of average Americans indicates that individualism has become like a cancer eating away the dynamic life of our nation (vii). Individualism has always been a strong part of our nation, becoming our first language, but religious, specifically Christian, authority and morality have traditionally held this in check (223). Today, moral relativism reigns (7). The dominant operating assumption is "...what I want to do and

what I feel like is what I should do”(14). Feelings have replaced God and God’s Word as a moral guide (76). As I read on I began to see how much United Methodist congregations of my own experience have been formed by this philosophy. I have counseled with individuals in my congregation, one who was planning to move in with her boyfriend and another who was bringing his girlfriend home for the night in front of his kids. Yet, I see little success in changing their moral reasoning. Their decisions were based on feelings. Where is John Wesley’s emphasis on holiness of heart and life? How does one address this kind of moral reasoning which is so prevalent in the pews? To stay with the current analogy, this problem has limited, but similar manifestations as Alzheimer’s disease. It has robbed congregational life of its identity as a “community of memory” that carries the values, virtues and moral life of God’s people (153).

#### Problem Developed and Grounded in the Literature

A consequence of this spiritual memory loss is shrinking congregations. In the United States alone, the United Methodist Church has lost on average more than 1,500 members a week for the past thirty years (O’Keefe D4). Church buildings still sit proudly on marginally kept property. Pastors still preach from these pulpits. Programs continue to fill the calendar. The lights come on Sunday morning but no one is home.

Bishop Edward Paup, in an interview with the Religious News Service, voiced the opinion of many leaders in the denomination, that the problem of such a mass exodus from United Methodist churches lay in the spurning of anything traditional by today’s generation. “It’s not attractive to be part of something that is seen as a traditional institution in this country” (O’Keefe D4). But is traditionalism the problem, or is it

something deeper? As United Methodist congregations are shrinking, conservative congregations are growing with the searching pilgrims from our denomination (Schaller Different 72). I believe Reeves put his finger on the problem when he states that Methodists do not know who they are any more (14). The United Methodist Church in general has turned bland from trying to be all things to all people and is irrelevant to the everyday lives and decisions of those who call themselves United Methodists.

“What’s a Methodist?” Reeves asks. “Who knows? That’s part of the whole mainline problem. They have lost their theology, so they’ve lost their identity. People go to their churches because they’re in the neighborhood, and they like the people there. That’s fine. But that’s not what Christianity is about. Christianity is an intentionally serious matter that leads you to a proper way of life and death.” (Reeves 14)

Several authors agree that our culture has developed what Wayne Booth terms the modern dogma of a fact-values split (Modern 12-14, Kiefert, Bellah). Facts are a part of our scientifically verifiable world. They are products of reason and observation and are available to all reasonable persons. Facts are part of the public sphere of life. Values are considered irrational and private emotions and are to be kept to oneself. Christianity is placed squarely, as are all religions, in the sphere of values. The average Christian lives in a Monday-through-Saturday world which bases its assumptions on human evolution and the triumph of modern science and technology. But to the church-goer the Sunday world proclaims the unseen that is most real; God is immanent and transcendent, humans depend on God, and belief, values, and moral action are the most important qualities (Keiefert 31-32). Bellah agrees with this assessment, stating:

Privatization placed religion, together with the family, in a compartmentalized sphere that provided loving support but could no longer challenge the dominance of utilitarian values in the society at large. (224)

Because of this, Christians and even whole congregations have come to believe that religious beliefs and morals are private matters between oneself and God. Faith should not express itself in the public arena of living because it belongs in the arena of feelings, values and opinions. Yet, a life of utilitarian individualism has left us empty and lonely. We grope restlessly in the dark with no sense of peace. Christians (or churchgoers) have lost their sense of identity because they have come to believe that Christian character is a matter of private choice. But this is not true. From the very beginning of biblical history the Old Testament laid down specific behavioral expectations. These behavioral expectations are reinforced in the New Testament. These expectations can be generally summed up as John Wesley did under the rubric of holiness of heart and life. Therefore the real question is, how can we both convince and empower people to recover their Christian identity?

Robert Bellah and Patrick Keifert strive to answer the question of Christian identity. They call the Church to go public, to engage the public life by asserting “that one’s obligations to God involve one’s life at work as well as in the family, what one does as a citizen as well as how one treats one’s friends”(239). The call is for churches to be involved in issues and needs outside of the walls of their own sanctuaries, expressing the meaning, values, and convictions of a true community of faith. Keifert asserts, “. . .the church needs a process for guiding people from private religious experience to a public identity in Christ. The church needs to move beyond making members to making



Christians, disciples of Jesus the Messiah”(118). While Keifert goes on to put forth liturgical strategies to address the need, he demonstrates the value of what takes place in worship as formative for Christian character which is exemplified in everyday living. Craig Dykstra states, “To grow morally means, for Christians, to have one’s whole life increasingly. . . conformed to the pattern of worship. To grow morally means to turn one’s life into worship”(106).

One vital element of worship has historically been the preached word of God. The Church’s life began with the preaching of Jesus. The apostles were commissioned to continue this approach to the transformation of people into disciples. The Apostle Paul later wrote to the Roman churches,

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?  
 And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?  
 And how are they to hear without a preacher? . . . So faith comes from  
 what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.  
 (Romans 10:14 & 17)

United Methodist congregations need to be formed by the Word of God. Acts 2:42 states that one of the most important aspects of the newly forming body of Christ was that they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. . .” The teachings of the apostles were the content of their witness of Jesus Christ. The apostles were fulfilling the great commission of making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them all that Jesus Christ had commanded them. John’s gospel says that those who love Jesus will live by his commands. “If you love me you will do what I command” (John 15:14). To be a worshipping Body of Christ is to faithfully participate in the preaching and teaching of the message of the Gospel and the teachings of Christ in the context of the Christian Bible.

Scripture speaks of the need for public living of that faith commitment for biblical faith development.

Bellah adds to this idea by offering what he considers to be the most formative experience for moral character and faith development, communities of memory (or churches) which engage their members in the biblical narratives which constitute their life. The primary function of a community of memory or church is to communicate the historical narratives which constitute the life of the community and gives life meaning. These narratives offer examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of community.

The stories that make up a tradition contain conceptions of character, of what a good person is like, and of the virtues that define such character. But the stories are not all exemplary, not all about successes and achievements. A genuine community of memory will also tell painful stories of shared suffering that sometimes creates deeper identities that success, . . . They carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspirations for ourselves and those closest to us with the aspirations of a larger whole . . .(153)

James Fowler asserts in Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church, “Narrative constitutes one of the first and most durable strategies human beings employ for the creation and shaping of experience. . . Narrative, therefore, serves as the most primal and memorable means we have for ordering and communicating the experiences that shape our personal and collective lives”(127).

The observance of the commands, ordinances, and statutes God laid before the people of Israel at Mount Sinai was to create and shape a new identity for these ex-slaves as a holy people of God. They were not identified as God’s people merely by a cultic sacrificial system but by how they lived each day before God and their neighbor.

This points us back to the problem in modern United Methodism. Many United Methodists see Christianity like a cultic system of sacrifice, (attend Sunday worship and perhaps serve on a committee) as the expression of Christian identity rather than a way of living and being. Jesus told his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion, “By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). The love Jesus referred to is not a feeling but an action, a way of being and of behaving toward others. Thus, identity as a disciple of Jesus corresponds directly to how one lives out this expression in heart and life. The observance of commands, ordinances and statues provide form and substance to the lives of God’s people, but it was and is biblical narrative which provides meaning, motives, and modeling for living out the faith commitment. In biblical narrative God’s people discover who they are. Both Old and New Testaments are largely narrative in form and nature, cradling the identity of God’s people. This provides meaning and substance to individual and community life. When we find out who we are, we also discover what we are to do and be as God’s people. We discover our role in the greater community; our mission.

Biblical narrative preaching is a powerful means God uses for spiritual and moral transformation. Reading biblical narrative sermons and listening to the sermon tapes of the late Peter Marshall has become one of the greatest conduits for my experiencing and being shaped by Jesus Christ. A plaque in the foyer of one of the buildings at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC where Marshall preached reads, “To Peter Marshall who made Jesus Christ a living reality to the congregation of New York Avenue.”

## Context of Study

This study took place in the First United Methodist Church of Auburndale, Florida. It was the oldest of two United Methodist churches in this city of 10,000 people. First United Methodist Church was seventy-six years old and, as of this study had 355 persons on the membership rolls. The congregation first built a small building holding approximately sixty to eighty worshipers. In 1970 they built and moved to its newer facility where the sanctuary holds approximately 325 people. First United Methodist Church now stands outside the center of Auburndale between the city's high school and middle school.

During the time-frame of this study the congregation was made up of a dynamic mixture of northern retirees, both year-round residents and "snowbirds," business owners, blue-collar workers from local industries, teachers and administrators from the public school system, and a growing number of children and youth. The congregation was predominately white, Anglo-European in origin. Historically this church experienced a steady increase in attendance and membership. In the early 1980's a pastor brought a more contemporary flavor to the worship service and built strong young adult, youth, and children's ministries. The membership and worship attendance soared from an average of 180 to 400 with two worship services. After six years of ministry and some turmoil from the more traditionally minded United Methodists, this pastor moved to another appointment. A new pastor came who was due to retire in two years. This pastor was traditional in every approach. The membership and worship attendance plummeted to a weekly average of 220. The early worship service was canceled. The membership slowly

declined into the next pastoral appointment which lasted only one and a half years. I came in a mid-year move because the congregation's leadership demanded a change in pastors due to several conflicts.

Many of the young families had left by the time my family and I arrived. But in the first six months after our arrival several families returned and new families began to attend and join the church. This congregation has amazing potential in the caliber of leadership, vision, and location, but they seem to be starving for spiritual food. There were several opportunities for service, but few opportunities for personal growth in discipleship.

### The Purpose

The purpose of the proposed research was to assess the degree of change in holiness of heart and life in congregants of this United Methodist Church as they were exposed to a four-month program of biblical narrative preaching. John Wesley called Christians toward an integration of saving faith in Jesus Christ and living out that faith in personal devotion in private and public life. He termed this integration "holiness of heart and life." A study of Wesley's sermons, letters, conversations, and tracts yielded seven areas of growth which I will be assessing;

- 1) Assurance that one's sins are forgiven and that he/she is a child of God and the love of God increasingly fills the heart. This also includes an increasing love for God from the heart.
- 2) An active and deepening prayer life.
- 3) Frequently attending upon the means of grace (The Lord's Supper), Scripture reading and reflection, and worship.

- 4) Participation in Christian conversation in some form, e.g. a small group Bible study, covenant discipleship group, prayer group, etc.
- 5) No outward sin. Not having left unrepented any transgression of a known law of God (the Ten Commandments).
- 6) Currently resisting temptation to sin inwardly. Anything in thought, word or deed that would violate the law of love.
- 7) Love of neighbor as oneself. Actively helping people in their need in practical ways and in emotional support.

### Methodology of the Study

To foster such growth I preached a series of seventeen biblical narrative sermons over a four month period of time dealing with the seven areas operationalized in holiness of heart and life. These sermons were divided into three series: The first series, titled “Amazing Grace,” looked at the first growth area, assurance. The second series, titled “Channels of Grace,” included “an active and deepening prayer life,” “frequently attending upon the means of grace,” and “participating in Christian conversation.” The third series, titled “Our Response to Grace,” included the growth areas “no outward sin,” “currently resisting temptation to sin inwardly,” and “loving your neighbor as yourself.”

During this series I offered three opportunities to foster and exercise Christian growth. The opportunities for response were a call to become prayer partners with someone else, join a thirty-day small group devotional experiment, and a commitment to a place of ministry in and through our church.

After the two sermons focusing on an active and deepening prayer life, I called for persons to respond by forming into prayer partnerships. At the close of the last sermon on participating in Christian conversation I challenged persons to respond by committing to a thirty-day experiment in small group accountability using the booklet by Sam E. Teague titled The John Wesley- Great Experiment!. This booklet called for persons commit to:

1. Meet once each week to pray together.
2. Give two hours time each week to God. (Self-surrender)
3. Give God 1/10th of earnings during this month. (Self-denial)
4. Spend thirty minutes each morning in prayer and meditation. (Self-control)
5. Witness for God their experience to others (8).

I suggested that those who have found a prayer partner find one or two other prayer partners to form a small group to meet with on a weekly basis. Those who did not respond to being prayer partners were formed into groups according to age, place in life, and personal choice.

The four-month series was designed to end on the Sunday before Thanksgiving which was our Pledge Sunday. We used John Ed Mathison's concept of fulfilling our United Methodist Church membership vows of upholding the local church by "your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service" (The United Methodist Hymnal 48), by providing a service ministry menu for each person in the congregation to fill out according to their experience, desires, and gifts in ministry (Every 5). We called this response to ministry "Every Christian In Ministry."

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

RQ#1: What is the level of holiness of heart and life of individual congregants prior to the series of biblical narrative sermons?

RQ#2: What changes in holiness of heart and life occurred between the pretest and the mid-test during the preaching series?

RQ#3: What changes in holiness of heart and life occurred between the mid-test and the post-test during the preaching series?

RQ#4: What elements of the sermon series seem to correlate with such change?

RQ#5: What variables, if any, affected the change?

## Definition of Terms

“Biblical narrative preaching” is the proclamation of a narrative text of Scripture through the unfolding of that narrative in a way that allows the congregation to participate in the plot, conflict, characters, and resulting call to action which arises from the meaning and intent of the text.

“Holiness of heart and life” is the term used by John Wesley to convey the holistic life of the Christian related to faith and the moral action as a response to and appropriation of the life of God in one’s soul. The term “Christian character” is used interchangeably.

## Research Design

The research design I used is a one-group pretest, mid-test, post-test design. The instrument used was researcher-designed to fit the study for measuring change in the seven specific areas of growth.



### Data Collection

I pursued this study by: 1) developing and distributing a researcher-designed pretest questionnaire to the subjects of the study, 2) developing and preaching over a four-month period seventeen biblical narrative sermons, 3) at mid-point of the sermon series distributing the same questionnaire, 4) at the end of the series sending out the same questionnaire to those who responded, collecting the data and evaluating the findings.

### Population and Sample

The population of this United Methodist Church consisted of active attendees in worship, which included members, regular attendees, and recent visitors. During the months when the public schools operate we had approximately 200 worshipers. During the months between November and April, when northerners came down for the winter months there were approximately 220 worshipers on average. This study began in August when we had approximately 200 worshipers.

The sample was taken from a list developed in cooperation with the membership secretary of the church of eighty to 100 worship attendees who represented as close as possible the statistical make up of the congregation. Because of the need for adult moral reasoning the subjects were sixteen years or older.

### Delimitation and Generalizability

This study was not limited to members of the First United Methodist Church of Auburndale, Florida. While it took place within the context of a United Methodist Church, most United Methodist churches were made up of persons from various denominational backgrounds. This study explored the integration of people's Christian

faith and lifestyle under the lordship of Christ, not their denominational rediscovery. This study could hold value for many other churches which have been shaped by the mandate to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and who see holiness of heart and life their primary call.

This research studied only those who had accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It was not the intent of this study to bring about the salvation of individuals. It was restricted to those who had a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and their growth in holiness of heart and life.

These findings are generalizable to other United Methodist congregations of similar size and socioeconomic factors. There could also be some degree of application to other Wesleyan denominations who struggle with the same general problems.

#### Biblical and Theological Foundation

John Wesley's call for all Christians to grow in holiness of heart and life did not originate with him. Rather, Wesley articulated a foundational biblical principle of what it means to have Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life. Holiness of heart celebrates the new birth of one who has by faith accepted the grace of God offered in Christ's atoning work on the cross. Paul states in Ephesians, "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). . ." (2:4-5). We who were unholy, an object of wrath, now have the very nature of Christ birthed and breathing in us. This holy nature in us allows us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. It also gives us the power to love our neighbor as ourselves not just in word, but in action.

Holiness of life is the continual work of God in us forming us into the image of Jesus Christ. This Christ-likeness calls us and empowers us to express godly moral behavior and loving action toward others. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, . . .” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Holiness of heart and life are not mere belief of orthodox doctrine nor a license for works righteousness. It is none other than the life of God in the soul of men and women.

The Apostle Paul states that those who have the Spirit of Christ in them have a new nature within. The old nature has passed away, behold the new nature is in us. It is Christ’s own nature transforming us, our identity into his. “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Paul later states, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). To grow in holiness of heart and life is to respond to the Spirit of Christ who lives in us. We nurture the new identity as God’s children, as Christians by allowing Christ to empower us. Holiness becomes the fruit of the Spirit growing in us and through us to others.

Biblical narratives feed the Spirit of Christ in us as fertilizer and water feed plants in parched soil. Biblical narrative preaching allows God’s Word to be experienced by persons who need its nutrients to survive and flourish. In Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture, the author indicates the power of the preaching of biblical narrative sermons as he states,

When we participate in the story [of Scripture] by imaginatively identifying with the characters and the plot, our own experience and our own histories are deepened and enlarged and the story

functions as a prism through which we find fresh meaning in our moments . . . . [The biblical narrative] can cause radically new perspectives on situations as stale as the air in the attic. (Wardlaw 39)

Donald Miller adds to this thought by saying that then, “You can’t live as you once did because you are no longer the person you once were” (108). This transformation or development of character can occur because “narrative preaching both reflects and impacts on the narrative quality of live as we live it” (Robinson, Journey 3).

### Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 anchors the study in the ongoing flow of related research and literature related to the development of holiness of heart and life in the Christian and the use of biblical narrative preaching as an effective means toward this end. Chapter 3 shows the design and method of the ensuing study. In Chapter 4 the findings of the study are reported and evaluated. Chapter 5 completes the study with a summary of the findings and their interpretation for life and ministry.

## CHAPTER 2

### A Review of Relevant Literature

#### PART 1:

#### **Perspectives on Christian Character or Holiness of Heart and Life**

Problems of Christian character have been with us for a long time. The contents of many New Testament epistles contain reactions to unchristian behavior and exhortations to maintain or manifest Christian character to congregations struggling with holiness of heart and life in the first century. Much of the Apostle Paul's writing is addressed to the needs, questions, and problems of fledgling Christian communities discovering what it means to live out the faith in pagan cultures (e.g. I Cor. 5:1-13, 7-8, Gal., Eph. 4;17-6:9, Col. 3:1-4:6, I Thess. 4:1-12). The epistle of James is devoted to the subject of Christian character as it spoke to Jewish Christians caught between the orthodox Jewish communities and pagan culture. Since biblical times a clarion call toward holiness of heart and life has been the main subject and struggle of Christian congregations worldwide.

“Each of us,” writes Sappington and Wilson in the Christian Education Journal “is on a spiritual journey” (*Toward an Assessment of Spiritual Maturity* 46). Christian character or holiness of heart and life is not an achievement but the product of that spiritual journey. Christian character is what happens along the way as persons who claim the risen Christ as Lord and Savior integrate his life and power into their own everyday lives.

This study focuses on the development and nurture of holiness of heart and life in Christians attending United Methodist congregations by the use of biblical narrative

preaching. The heart of this section of the investigation is to explore how holiness of heart and life (Christian character) is developed and nurtured in the lives of Christians. This study is not about drawing people into the Christian faith but about drawing those who claim the name of Christ deeper into his presence and power. We will investigate the use of biblical narrative preaching as a tool for growth and nurture of holiness of heart and life. I make this investigation with some trepidation as the words of John Wesley ring in my ears from a journal entry he made on a trip to Wales:

I was more convinced than ever, that the preaching like an Apostle without joining together those who are awakened, and training them up in the ways of God is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these 20 years all over Pembrookshire! But no regular Societies, no discipline; no order or connection; and the consequence is, that nine in ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever. (Works Vol. III 144)

Thus it is important to remember as I conduct this study that no one element of ministry is the answer. Rather a multifaceted ministry which draws people in on every level including; preaching, discipleship groups, mission projects, etc. This study examines only one of the tools that develop and nurture faith.

To address the issue at hand we must first examine the nature and development of character, namely faith and morality. As a jeweler examines a gem, I will approach this task by examining several facets of faith and moral development specifically; the anthropological and philosophical perspectives, the Wesleyan theological perspective, and the biblical use of narrative for character formation.

Surveying the vast amount of literature on moral development, faith development and Christian character, three names rose to the top: Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler,

and Craig Dykstra. Each of these men has looked at the subject from a different vantage point and each has valuable but different observations to make about a subject which is larger than any of these three systems.

Kohlberg has aided educational and religious circles with his study of moral development as it relates to physical and psycho-social growth. In his book The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages, Kohlberg asserts that moral development happens in stages as a natural result of cognitive development and social interaction (172). He refutes those of the relativistic school who claim there is no universal morality or concept of good (2). “Stages in moral development are cognitive-structural changes rather than what is asserted by the social learning theories on socialization” (197). The higher stages of moral and cognitive development take place in adulthood (172). It seems apparent from Kohlberg’s research in several cultures that he has discovered some universal principles about the way moral reasoning develops as well as proposing a theory of a universal good which pervades humanity which he articulates as justice. Yet his findings fail to allow for the ontological being, God, who has endowed humanity with the concept of a universal desire for justice. In a journal article entitled “Education, Moral Development and Faith,” Kohlberg states that justice is the good universal or natural principle which is “known to man by reason independent of specific religious revelation”(5). Kohlberg fails to see the God who wove into our world a general revelation of God’s nature and activity.

Fowler has added to Kohlberg’s work exploring faith development. A person’s faith, Fowler asserts, moves through stages which are largely tied to physical growth and

cognitive development. The stages begin with Primal Faith which occurs during infant development. The next stage is Mythic-Literal Faith in childhood and beyond. Individuative-Reflective Faith is observed in young adults. Conjunctive Faith is a stage developed in early mid-life and beyond. Finally (and hopefully) Universalizing Faith is developed in mid-life and beyond. For Fowler the Christians move successfully through these stages as they learn to trust, explore, reflect, synthesize, criticize, internalize and universalize their faith in God (18). Fowler provides understanding of the way cognitive development and faith respond to one another. Later we will reflect on his insights in relation to the use of narrative preaching to create and shape experience.

Kohlberg and Fowler contribute much to understanding the God-given stages of moral and faith development as they relate to physical and psycho-social development. But both of their theories seem to be inadequate in two areas. First, they both locate moral and faith maturity in the area of cognitive development, but Craig Dykstra critiques Kohlberg: “Contrary to Kohlberg one need not be a moral philosopher in order to be a moral person” (19). Christian character is more than cognitive and psycho-social development. Such an understanding seems to be limited to a one-dimensional concept of human faith and/or moral development.

Too often the Christian faith is misunderstood to be what we term belief: cognitive assent to the information of the gospels. Others misunderstand Christianity to be a set of religious practices, a set of virtues to be achieved, a list of do’s and don’ts. Yet Christian character implies an ongoing process of the integration of one’s life, thoughts, beliefs,



goals, and actions into the life and Spirit of Jesus Christ (Sappington & Wilson 47).

Stanley Hauerwas points out,

The Christian life cannot be specified by a set of virtues to be achieved apart from their arising as a response to Jesus Christ; nor can it be interpreted solely as a matter of rules to follow or good acts to do. It is first and foremost adherence to this man, Jesus Christ, as the bringer of God's order in his person and work. So understood the Gospel concerns not merely how we ought to understand ourselves but also how we ought to live and order our being. (183)

Such an integration is a developmental process, a spiritual journey. The journey is a process of relinquishing one's own right to make private decisions and, to place actions based on self interest into the hands of another authority, Jesus Christ. Fowler draws faith and moral behavior together in what he calls "vocation." "Vocation is the response one makes with one's total life to the call of God to partnership. In vocation all [the] aspects of our lives find orchestration and coherence as we grow in the devotion of our hearts in response to God"(120). We could attempt to translate vocation into Christian character but vocation is not something that develops as one comes into and grows in the faith. Fowler claims vocation is something one arrives at in the conjunctive faith stage.

Second, Kohlberg and Fowler do not seem to take the biblical concept of sin very seriously. Dykstra critiques Kohlberg here by stating that the cognitive approach to moral behavior (and faith);

pictures moral difficulties to be difficulties of thinking rationally, and suggests that moral progress is attainable by a combination of increased reasoning power plus sincerity or strength of will. But this, empirically, is not the case. People, as they strive to be moral, consistently find it impossible to think their way into goodness. Reasoning power plus will power does not translate directly into moral power. (45)

Dykstra offers a more biblical, dynamic, and holistic approach to faith and moral development that takes the issues of sin, repentance, revelation, and transformation seriously. Dykstra asserts that a person's morality, choices, beliefs, assessment of others, themselves, and God refer not just to cognitive development, but to "basic attitudes toward life and the underlying vision of reality that provide the foundation of those attitudes. A person's morality is an ongoing quality of life and not disjointed responses to isolated situations"(21). Dykstra says further,

Character is very much connected with vision. . . . What people see is an indication of what they care about and can care about. It is an indication of the depth and breadth of their compassion of the scope and quality of their loves and desires, and of the intensity with which they feel. Our emotions, evaluations, descriptions, predispositions, and desires are all brought to bear in our seeing. (51)

One thing veils our ability to see reality or truth clearly; sin. As Michael Foster puts forth in true Wesleyan fashion, "We have no clue how holiness could be obtained, and are dependent on revelation to show us the way"(71). For true moral development and faith to take place in any relation to holiness of heart and life the capacity for holiness must be activated in us by an external source, God. This comes only by repentance, says Dykstra. ". . .our release from sin and hence our release from our egocentricity and the immoral character of our relations with each other, depends on God and on faith in God"(49). Samuel Southand, in his book Conversion and Christian Character, calls this pilgrimage a shift in the habitual center of being, a movement of one's life force into a new channel finding its source in Christ (10). The shift has brought about language like "surrendering to Christ," "giving your life to Jesus Christ," accepting "Jesus as your *personal Lord and Savior*" (Italics mine). Each of these presuppose a conscious transfer

of the control of one's life from self to Christ as the authority for the development of one's character. As we will see later, Wesley's concept of holiness of heart and life cannot even begin until one enters the gateway of whole-hearted repentance. Without this gateway there can be no holiness of heart and life, no Christian character.

Stanley Hauerwas adds to the discussion on Christian character by bringing a holistic quality articulated as narrative or story (Vision and Virtue 74). We live our lives in narrative in story. Who we are, what we do, and what we believe come from who we have become and are becoming out of the culmination of specific experiences or narratives of our lives. One's moral behavior and faith arise from the narratives of one's life which have shaped the way we see ourselves, others, God, and the world around us.

Kohlberg and Fowler contributed to my overall understanding of faith and moral development by their exploration and articulation of the God-designed developmental processes. We are physical, moral, and cognitive beings who proceed through stages of development. One does not merely appear as an adult. There is a natural growth and maturation process or, as Sappington and Wilson remind us, a journey (46). But just because we are physical, moral, and cognitive beings does not mean that all human beings will journey toward strong faith and moral character merely because of cognitive and social development. Dykstra adds that with these developmental theories there must be an established mutual partnership between each human being and God for true moral and faith development to occur (74).

How does this speak to the development and nurture of holiness of heart and life?

.. Christian character is birthed at repentance and takes its life from transformation.

Transformation only occurs as new ways of seeing and experiencing reality are integrated into a person's life story. Transformation takes place by revelation (Dykstra 75), God's gift of grace. New ways of seeing open new vistas for growth in Christ. This offers broad implications for biblical narrative preaching which will be explored later.

### **John Wesley's Concept of Christian Character: Holiness of Heart and Life**

In eighteenth century England the Reverend John Wesley dealt with this problem as he preached and taught from pulpit to pasture. Wesley forged his ministry during the industrial revolution in England. He observed that the Anglican Church, which he loved, was stagnating. He saw no new life revitalizing the Church. It sorely neglected not only its people's spiritual development but also the poor and the working class who needed the life of Christ in their hearts. Wesley, from his early years at Oxford, gave a clarion call to the theme of holy living. Richard Heitzenrater, who successfully broke the code of John Wesley's diaries, stated in his book, The Elusive Mr. Wesley vol. 1:

Promoting holiness was the practical goal of his every endeavor, the implicit purpose of his every activity. . . . Theology was for him the handmaid of piety. The challenge was to put his learning into the employ of his vocation, so that the truths of the gospel might be understood and appropriated by the poor as well as the rich, the tin miner as well as the university student. (145)

John Wesley's own personal effort to integrate holiness of heart and life took shape as he pursued holy orders in the Church of England. His mother wrote to him at Oxford exhorting him to "enter upon a serious examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation. . ." (Heitzenrater 50). Reacting to this letter from his mother, John began a course of "self-examination that was designed to

promote holy living”(51). He began to record in a diary the daily and sometimes hourly state of his soul. Heitzenrater reports that John’s developing diary by 1733, “had become an exacting instrument for taking his spiritual pulse. Part of Wesley’s method of holy living was to test himself daily (and even hourly) by various sets of questions” (Heitzenrater 58).

For Wesley, Christian character was summed up in one word, “sanctification.” At other times he explained sanctification as holiness of heart and life, thus illustrating that it did not mean just right beliefs or opinions, nor did it mean being religious or doing good works. Sanctification is none other than the life of God in the heart of men and women. One moves in the progressive effort toward unity of a heart filled with the love of God and a life lived in constant intention to make Christ manifest in thought, word, and action.

Wesley points out in his sermon “Working Out Our Own Salvation,” that one enters the life process of sanctification through first being justified. “By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favor of God” (Works Vol. VI 509). This justification comes as a gift from God which is received by faith and trust in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Justification comes to the ones who recognize the sinful state of their soul, their own hopelessness apart from Christ, and with a whole heart turn from self as the authority to Christ Jesus. This is called repentance, throwing oneself on the mercy of Christ (Scripture Way of Salvation, Wesley’s Works, Vol. VI 46).

At the moment we are justified, put right with God, we are born again. This is the gateway to holiness Foster referred to earlier. In his sermon titled “The New Birth,” Wesley states, “Justification speaks of that great work which God does *for* us in forgiving

our sins. The new birth speaks of the great work which God does *in* us in renewing our fallen nature (“The New Birth” qdt in Oden 1).

Now comes the power, the ability to carry forth Christian character. For Wesley the joy of the new birth meant that the Christian receives God’s power to grow in righteousness and true holiness. His/her basic orientation is changed. Integration of the life of God in the soul of the man or woman begins. “In that moment we are justified. . . [t]he seed of every virtue is then sown in the soul. From that time the believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace. Yet sin remains in him; yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body” (“Late Conversations,” Wesley’s Works Vol. VIII 285). By sanctification we are “saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the [original] image of God” (“Working Out Our Own Salvation” 509). This, of course, does not mean that sin does not remain in the Christian. Sin remains but it does not have the power to reign over us. The power the Christian now has is the power to choose the way of God over the way of hell. In his sermon “Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley warns believers not to think that all sin is gone and thus be discouraged and lured back into their former lives.

How naturally do those who experience such a change imagine that all sin is gone; that it is utterly rooted out of their hearts and has no more place therein! But it is seldom long before they are undeceived, finding sin was only suspended, not destroyed. Temptations return, and sin revives; showing that it was but stunned before, not dead. (Wesley, Works Vol. III 45)

Dykstra gives insight here when he says that repentance, as a crucial movement in the Christian moral life is never completed. “It is a continuing discipline that we undertake

at increasingly deeper levels, bringing more and more of ourselves to God in humility and trust”(94).

In his sermon on “The New Birth,” Wesley gives a marvelous analogy from natural childbirth to convey the benefits of spiritual birth. He states that just as a child in the womb has the rudiments of the senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting but no ability to exercise them, so it is with the spiritual selves.

While we are in a mere natural state, before we are born of God, we have, a spiritual sense, the rudiments of eyes, but see nothing. We have ears, but we hear nothing; and we are most deaf precisely to that which we most need to hear. Our other spiritual senses are all locked up. As soon as one is born of God, there is a total change in all these ways. We “feel in our hearts,” . . . “the mighty working of the Spirit of God.” (“The New Birth” Wesley/Oden 10)

From the time of being born from the Spirit of God, the gradual work of sanctification begins in the heart and life of the Christian. The Christian is now called, by the enablement of the Holy Spirit, to turn away from the temptation to do what is contrary to God’s law to seek and embrace the life of Christ.

For Wesley there was no such thing as a Christian whose character was not constantly being shaped by Christ. Such persons, Wesley considered, deluded themselves into thinking themselves Christian. In his article, “A Further Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” Wesley describes his understanding of salvation.

By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and, by consequence, all holiness of conversation. (Works Vol. VIII 47)

Being a Christian for Wesley implies the necessity of Christian character as a product of growth in Christ. The process calls for integration of all we are into the person of Jesus Christ. Hauerwas observes, “It means he must search his soul to determine if all the facets of his character are consistent with his determination in Christ” (214).

Wesley, under scrutiny and suspicion by fellow clergy and some of the populace, authored a tract titled “The Character of a Methodist.” In this tract he articulated not only what a Methodist is, but what he understood to be Christian character. He laid down the basic beliefs held by Methodists, namely, what is found in the Apostle’s Creed and a firm belief in the “written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule of both Christian faith and practice” (Works Vol. VIII 340). Thus Wesley insists on a cogent, biblical faith grounded in Scripture. Wesley elsewhere insisted Scripture was to be directly applied to one’s life. The tools Wesley used for applying Scripture to life he termed experience (which he considered interchangeable with experimental faith), Christian antiquity (study of the models and scriptural interpretation of the early church up to the fourth century C.E.), and reason (Campbell 122).

Wesley insisted that Methodists are not to be distinguished by opinions of any sort, or specific customs or actions except what is laid down in Scripture. “What then is the mark? A Methodist is one who has ‘the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to him;’ and who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul” (341). Here Wesley calls for faith in Christ as the ground for access to right moral action.



Wesley goes on to set down attributes and actions consistent with the character of one who has the love of God shed abroad in his/her heart (Romans 5:5). These attributes include being happy in God, expressing a constant prayer life, looking for any and every way to do the will of God from the heart in loving obedience, striving to do good to all men and women, and resisting temptation to sin inwardly (thoughts, intentions) or outwardly. As he states in his sermon “Scripture Way of Salvation,”

It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous for good works. And these are so necessary, that if a man willingly neglects them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified; he cannot grow in grace, in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received. (Works Vol. VI 49)

On July 25, 1741, Wesley preached a sermon titled “The Almost Christian” at St. Mary’s Chapel before the University at Oxford. In this sermon he addressed many moral and religious people, articulating what is implied in being almost a Christian. An almost Christian maintains a form of godliness doing nothing the Gospel forbids. He/she holds a sincere principle of religion, thinking he/she is serving God. The actions of religion and morality are present, indicates Wesley, but the heart is not connected to God through faith. The helm of one’s life still lies in the hands of the individual.

To be altogether a Christian is to have the love of God engrossing one’s whole heart, filling up all one’s affections. Out of this love flows love for one’s neighbor, trust and confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ alone, and good works. John Wesley’s contentions seem to be with those who have not integrated the life of God into their thoughts and actions. Good deeds, for the “almost Christian,” flow out of guilt, obligation, or the effort to be good thus earning some merit with God. For Wesley this

approach to Christian character leaves out the integration of God's life into the person. This approach leaves out the power of God to enable one to resist sin and do righteousness. And most importantly the individual retains the authority for self-determination. Authority remains with the self and has not been transferred to Jesus Christ as the life and source of all actions and belief (Wesley's Works Vol. V 17).

The goal to which Wesley pointed was Christian perfection. "Christian perfection' was the keystone of his theology, the highest expression of the love of God in the soul of man," states Richard Heitzenrater (Elusive 151). "Scriptural perfection," Wesley records in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, is pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions" (Wesley's Works Vol. XI 401). The perfection Wesley speaks of is perfection of one's intention to love God with one's whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself. "This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love" (Wesley, Works Vol. III 395).

Christian perfection did not mean the absence of mistakes, flaws, or infirmities of the body or mind which are a part of mortal life. Wesley employed the full use of the Greek term *teleios* (perfection) which has to do with enjoying the full benefit, the end, goal, or outcome of God's work. "*Teleios* implies a sense of continuing growth or progress or purpose, toward completeness;. . ." (Tyson 165). It does not mean that a person will not involuntarily commit some sin against God. But it does imply that he/she will not intentionally transgress any known law of God because his/her heart is fully devoted to God (A Plain Account 396).

John Wesley's personal life, his theology, his preaching, and his practice of forming Methodist societies, classes and bands were all directed at helping people nurture and develop Christian character. He lived out such character, calling others to join him. His life's goal was to spread scriptural holiness across the land.

### **Precedents in the Old Testament for the use of Narrative in the Formation of Holiness of Heart and Life**

This section explores the value and priority God and the inspired writers of Scripture place on biblical narrative.

The Bible itself is a book of narratives. The entire Old Testament is constructed on a narrative framework from Eden to the return from exile. Foundational questions like, what is the meaning of life? who am I? where did I come from? what is my purpose in life? why is life so difficult? where did evil and sin come from?, are addressed in the first four chapters of the book of Genesis in narrative. The story of Adam and Eve addresses some of the most profound questions humans could ask. In other places God speaks, giving laws, ordinances, and commands. Yet these laws, ordinances, and commands receive meaning and reason through narrative. In Deuteronomy 6 Moses explains to the children of Israel,

When your sons ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your son, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. . .(Deuteronomy 6:20-21)

Even didactic material finds meaning in the form of narrative. Narrative explains the meaning behind what God commands. It gives credence, and calls for response.

Again, when God calls his people to bring sacrifices to offer on the altar a narrative is called for to make sense of what is being required.

Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. And you shall make response before the Lord your God; 'A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly. . . and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. . . (Deuteronomy 26:4-8)

Biblical narratives embody the identity of God's people, providing meaning to life and understanding of one's relationship to God, one's neighbor and the land on which Israel came to be a nation. They explain Israel's relationship to other nations. They connect God's community to the past and give hope for the future.

Each of the high holy days which God commanded of the children of Israel are biblical narratives acted out in the life of God's people. The Passover, the Feast of Booths, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, etc., are biblical narratives which God's people were (and are) to reenact so as to provide a means for them to live in and live out God's story. At Passover generations of Jews tasted the bitterness of slavery in the herb. They grieved over the little lamb which had become a household pet, as it was slain by the door-post as the price for their salvation. During the Feast of Booths God instructed his people to build booths and live in them during the week as a reminder of their ancestors' experience in the wilderness. They ate in flimsy shelters and felt the wind through the palm branch roofs connecting life experience to faith and moral action. Biblical narrative connects God's people to God's saving acts. It creates new ways of seeing life under God's lordship. Narratives continue to carry identity and concepts of

godly and ungodly character. They relay to us what a godly person is like, and what are the virtues that define such character (Bellah 153).

As Bellah reminds us, biblical narratives are painfully honest about the successes and failures of people's lives (Bellah 153). They call us to better character because of the inevitable outcome of the lives of biblical personages with poor character.

Nathan, the prophet, used narrative to convict King David of his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband. "And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. . .'" (2 Samuel 12:1). By the end of the narrative David had been transported from his own point of view to God's point of view over his actions. As a result King David convicted himself, feeling all the guilt and shame associated with his actions.

Narrative is used in Scripture to provide answers to specific questions. Isaiah's parable of the vineyard addressed the coming exile to Babylon and why God would allow such a devastation on God's people: "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry! Therefore my people go into exile for a want of knowledge" (Isaiah 5).

These are but a few of the precedents in the Old Testament for the use of narrative in the formation of holiness of heart and life. Other examples abound. Cowles reminds us in his article, "Cultivating the Fine Art of Story Preaching," that the Old Testament "is an inexhaustible library of stories" (16).

## **Precedents in the New Testament of the use of Narratives for the Formation of Holiness of Heart and Life**

In the Gospels narrative conveys the message of Jesus Christ. In Luke's prologue he records his reason for laying down the narrative of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. -so "that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (Luke 1:4). John's gospel gives his reason for writing near the end of the book. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). The purpose of narrative here seems to be to explain and to inspire belief as much as to record God's activity among God's people. Narrative was and is the vehicle for belief and action, faith and deeds, holiness of heart and life. Through narrative God speaks a fresh word to those who believe and to those who seek God.

Jesus used narrative in the form of parables exclusively when speaking to the multitudes of people who came to hear him preach. Most of Jesus' parables were not in the form of biblical narrative. The truth he conveyed to the common, simple folk of Galilee and Judea came from familiar images they could relate to, like farming, fishing, and building houses. Yet Matthew records a parable Jesus told which bears remarkable resemblance to Isaiah's parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-41). The results are the same for those who refused to obey God.

"When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death; and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." (Matthew 21:40-41)

Stephen, the first believer to die for the cause of Jesus Christ, preached the longest sermon in the New Testament as a biblical narrative ( Acts 7:1-53). The writer of Hebrews used biblical narratives to describe and inspire faith in those believers who were suffering persecution (Hebrews 11:1-31). Forefathers of the faith, Abel, Abraham, and Moses provided models of character, trust, and hope in God to a community of Hebrew Christians who were struggling, fearful and confused.

Wayne Robinson reminds us that the core of Christian Scripture has the same narrative character which constitutes us as the people of God; “. . . the narrative of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus whom we confess to be the Christ. [O]ur own faith pilgrimage has an echoing narrative quality about it as we move from baptism to death to resurrection with Jesus” (3).

Biblical narrative is the first language of Scripture. It is inductive in nature and has the ability to draw its listeners into the drama, passion, and power of God’s plan and purpose for God’s creation. Being drawn in we are confronted, changed, formed and made new.

## PART 2

### **The Use of Biblical Narrative Preaching and its Ability to Shape and Nurture Holiness of Heart and Life.**

In this part of the study I examine biblical narrative preaching and what makes it effective in the development of holiness of heart and life. People today need stories of collective history and exemplary individuals as models. Biblical narratives are those stories of the community of faith which tell Christians who we are, who God is, and what God calls the Christian community to be. The narratives contained in the Bible are the memories that constitute the Church's history and identity (Bellah 153). Fowler claims that "Narrative constitutes one of the first and most durable strategies human beings employ for the creation and shaping of experience. . . . Our senses of identity and identification, our horizons of personal and collective meaning, and the convictional bases of our faith arise in the telling of our religious and cultural stories. . ." (122& 7). These narratives, when presented in language and metaphors we understand and relate to, can stimulate moral growth as a result of "shocking or surprisingly wonderful experiences that shake up our patterns and perceptions and make the old ones henceforth untenable" (Dykstra 49).

The material studied for this section comes from text books on expository preaching, books on narrative and biblical narrative preaching, examples of effective biblical narrative sermons (written and on cassette tape), and workshops by and interviews with effective biblical narrative preachers. By studying well-known biblical narrative preachers I am allowing the term "effective" to be defined, not by my subjective judgments



but by the national Christian community which has acknowledged these men as effective preachers.

### **The Characteristics of Biblical Narrative Preaching**

“Every sermon which begins with a description of persons or a narrative of events is proceeding inductively for the time being. Or, more correctly, it ought to be using induction” (Davis 176). Effective narrative preaching unfolds biblical events, involving the preacher and congregation in the tension and conflict of the story without giving away the resolution to the conflict too soon. An effective biblical narrative sermon captures people’s imagination, swoops them up and carries them into the drama of the biblical scene, placing them in the sandals of the characters. However, drawing people into the narrative is not an end in itself. The purpose of the narrative form is transformation of the hearer(s). Biblical narrative preaching becomes the conduit to experiencing God personally.

### **Narrative Design**

There are several options for the movement of a narrative sermon. Robinson articulates three of these in his book, Journey Toward Narrative Preaching: (1) the nonbiblical as context, (2) the nonbiblical as conclusion, and (3) interweaving the biblical and nonbiblical. The nonbiblical as context uses a nonbiblical story to provide a context in which the biblical narrative can be heard with a sense of immediacy. The nonbiblical story’s function is to introduce the biblical narrative. The nonbiblical story must be closely related to the biblical one, but the two stories are maintained separately (15).

The nonbiblical as conclusion uses a nonbiblical story as a demonstrative conclusion to the biblical story. Here the conclusions of the biblical story are explored or tested in the crucible of a nonbiblical story. Such exploration using a nonbiblical conclusion would assume such questions as, “Under what human circumstances is the claim [assertion] true? Is it true for everyone? How does what is asserted actually play itself out in the daily lives of people like us?” (W. Robinson 17).

By interweaving the biblical and nonbiblical narrative, neither serves as prologue or as explorative conclusion. “Here the biblical and nonbiblical narratives are interwoven in such a way that they form one story from beginning to end” (W. Robinson 17). This type of sermon moves back and forth from text to context, using contemporary illustrations and images as servants to help the congregation relate to and orient themselves; “. . . between the world of the biblical story and the particular time, place, and people with whom he or she has to do, including oneself. This movement issues in the most effective sermons. . .” (Wardlaw 105).

A fourth narrative construct stays in the textual narrative. Contemporary metaphors are the only reference to contemporary life until the very end of the sermon. This kind of sermon is difficult to connect to the hearers unless much effort goes into the use of contemporary metaphors, skillful imagery, character development, and diction. In the final moments of the sermon some form of connection is made directly to the contemporary congregation for application. A magnificent example of this kind of sermon was preached by Peter Marshall and called, “Were You There?” It narrates the crucifixion of Jesus. At the end of the sermon he moved to the contemporary context with;

. . . they were all there that day on the top of the hill, his friends, the church people and the people who never went to church. The priests, the Pharisees. . . The pious people were there. Peter, John, James were there. . . “Were you there on that day? When we are honest with ourselves we know that we were there. And that we helped to put Christ there. Because every attitude present on that hilltop that day is present in our midst now. Every emotion that tugged at human hearts then tugs still. . . Every person was represented on Calvary. Every sin was there in the point of a spear or a nail. And pardon for them all was in the blood that was shed. 1900 years have come and gone but time and rain have not washed away the blood that flowed at Calvary. The footsteps of Jesus have not been blown away from the sands of Judea. And you and I erect the cross again and again and again every time we sin. The hammer blows are still echoing somewhere in the caverns of your heart and mine every time we deny him, every time we sin against him or fail to do what he commanded. He is being crucified again and again and again. Were you there when they crucified my Lord, I was. Let us pray. (Marshall tape #1564)

A first-person narrative sermon must begin in the narrative and stay there until the end.

It would confuse a congregation for a preacher to move back and forth from first to third person in order to make a contemporary allusion or illustration. H. Grady Davis speaks to this problem when he cites the inherent limitation of the narrative as a sermonic form.

The story conveys meaning indirectly, through its characters, their conversations, and their interactions. It speaks by suggestion rather than in direct and explicit statement. Consequently, it cannot rely on direct and definite assertion. A little too much “preaching” quickly destroys the inherent force of the narrative. (Davis 161)

In studying and outlining many biblical narrative sermons I found the weaving of text and context to be the most difficult to implement but the most effective for communication of the biblical narrative. It also gives the most accurate communication of the text. When one weaves text and context one is more likely to stay with the direction and intention of the text.

## Elements of a Biblical Narrative Sermon

Let us take a look at the elements of an effective biblical narrative and how they work together to foster growth in holiness of heart and life. Five elements make up effective biblical narrative preaching: 1) unity; 2) plot; 3) tension development; 4) and character development, and 5) delivery.

### 1) Unity

Unity is crucial in the biblical narrative sermon. “A sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, . . .” (Robinson 27). The narrative sermon usually has one main idea or point to communicate.

In all of Haddon Robinson’s biblical narrative sermons he works to develop a single statement which encapsulates the central idea of the sermon, a memorable key phrase (97). Throughout the sermon he restates the key phrase. In Robinson’s sermon, “Don’t Doubt God’s Goodness,” he retells the story of Eve’s struggle with temptation in the garden of Eden. His central statement was “When we deny God’s goodness, we reject his word. When we reject his word we do so to our own peril.” In “A Good Lesson from a Bad Example,” Robinson’s key phrase was “beware of covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist of the things he possesses.” In “The Case Study of a Mugging,” the key phrase was, “your neighbor is anyone whom God brings your way; whose need you are in a position to meet.” Haddon Robinson was the only example found of one who continued to repeat his key phrase, but all of the biblical preachers studied had a key idea which they were working to communicate. This does not necessarily mean that a narrative sermon is a

one-point sermon. There may be two or three insights or points of application within a narrative that contribute to and flow through the movement of the narrative. As Grant Osborne states,

Many practitioners of the “story sermon” argue strongly against the use of sermon “points” here (Buttrick renames them “moves”) on the grounds that this replaces the emotional power of the text with cognitive data. Yet this is disjunctive thinking. If there are two or three parts (or “moves”) of the story text, it would be natural to construct the sermon around them. (172)

Biblical narrative preaching has been likened to the painting of a picture. It is narrative art (Lowry 15). Out of the background of the picture an artist identifies some figure to take the focus. But there are also objects or characters important to the depth of the scene. The moves provide depth to the biblical scene. However, as stated previously, effective biblical narrative preaching has a single focus or point. Some biblical narrative preachers use a key phrase throughout the sermon; while many others bring the key focus to the congregation in an explicit way at the end of the sermon. Charles Rice asserts that narrative preaching should be done in such a way that “the story is the preaching itself,” that is open-ended, without explanation. We do not need to finish off our stories by saying, “The point of this story is. . .” (Wardlaw 145). Rice insists that the best way to end a narrative sermon is to leave it open-ended so the congregation completes the sermon for themselves. “The open-endedness of story preaching is inevitable for participation and involvement of the listener is the fundamental goal” (145). This does not mean that biblical narrative preaching does not call forth a response. Since a narrative sermon is very focused in its aim, the call to action is also focused. The application is left open to the hearer. The most effective biblical narrative sermons have, at the close of the sermon,

brought hearers into the context of the text in such a way that can respond out of the depths of the heart.

Grant Osborne reminds us in The Hermeneutical Spiral, “Narrative is not as direct as didactic material, but it does have a theological point and expects the [hearer] to interact with that message. . . . biblical narrative is in some ways even better than the teaching applied to similar situations in the lives of the people” (172). An excellent illustration of this appears in II Samuel 12:1-7. This is Nathan’s famous parable told to King David about his sin with Bathsheba. Through Nathan’s use of indirect communication David was drawn into the narrative and became a willing participant. David was so involved in the story that he provided the ending to the story. “He deserves to die!” David shouted. David pronounced judgment upon himself. “Participation is one of the foremost aims of story preaching. It ought to involve the hearer to such an extent that the hearer finishes the story”. . . (Jensen 137); applying the story to his/her own life by making the application a personal and transforming one (137).

## 2) The Development of Tension

One of the keys to an effective biblical narrative sermon is in the introduction. The key to the introduction is to set up tension or conflict in the first two to three minutes. This tension or conflict brings to light an issue or question arising from the text and from the lives of the hearers which catches the congregation’s attention. This answers the question “will he/she be interesting?” for the hearers. The tension in the introduction also surfaces a need which people in the congregation are struggling with. “Why do I need to listen to this?” When the tension is released, the sermon is over unless another tension or need is

raised. (Interview with Haddon Robinson, *Preaching Today* Tape # 14)... In the introduction the preacher connects the life of the text to the cognitive and emotive life of the congregation. Eugene Lowry calls this tension the “opening disequilibrium” of the plot (58). The opening sets up the characters and opens the plot. In the first two to three minutes the listener ought to know “the setting, the time and place of the story, and the conflict or problem to be resolved. This is necessary in order to invite the listener into immediate participation in the story” (Jensen 150).

In Peter Marshall’s narrative sermon, “Trial by Fire,” he engaged his congregation with the scene of the conflict between Elijah and the prophets of Baal by painting the picture using graphic, contemporary metaphors that grabbed the congregation; “It was a national emergency, A day of choice; a day of destiny.” In the introduction, he set up a graphic conflict that had to be resolved for not only the nation of Israel and Elijah, but for the United States and her people as well. He stated,

As long as the nation recognized God as supreme it could stand. But something had been happening in the national life. The faith and the vision of the founding fathers had faded. Moral decay had set in. There was confusion in the minds of the people. They had come to love things more than principles. All around them paganism flourished. (Marshall Trail tape #1955)

The introduction of this sermon mirrored the biblical scene with the same issue of moral decay and decision facing Peter Marshall’s congregation.

A good example of setting tension in a first-person sermon was preached by Donald Sunukjian, associate professor at Dallas Theological Seminary entitled, “A Night in Persia” from the book of Esther. He speaks of “a book in the Bible that does not

mention the name of God. . . but God is in it throughout” (Preaching tape # 36). He sets up who he is in the narrative, “Harbona,”

[Harbona] is on the palace staff. He is an attendant to the king. He’s on the inside and sees everything that is going on. How would this man, who never hears the name of God, and yet who sees everything that happens, how would he view it? What sense would he make of all of it? (Preaching tape #36)

His question sets up the tension which he answers at the end of the sermon.

The introduction which establishes tension or conflict may start within the narrative of the text or it may start with a contemporary illustration, image, or experience which immediately and appropriately connects the congregation to the narrative. The key is that the introduction serves the text and its focus rather than the text serving the ideas or stories of the preacher.

Kohlberg’s study has shown that moral growth is stimulated by what he calls cognitive conflict; “. . . the sense of uncertainty which arises when one’s easy judgments lead to contradiction or uncertainty when facing difficult decisions” (“Education” 9). More than just drawing people’s interest, the creation of tension within a narrative that addresses the conflict, questions, and assumptions in one’s life opens the door for moral growth. The tension or conflict to be resolved opens the way for identification, anticipation, and empathy from the struggles and conflicting narratives of one’s own life.

### 3) The Plot

The central organizing principle of a narrative sermon is the plot of the biblical narrative. “Instead of a ‘three-point’ sermon constructed logically around the main points of the text, this form of sermon follows the contours of the biblical story itself, retelling



the drama and helping the congregation to relive the drama and tension of the unfolding narrative” (Osborne 172). The biblical background information becomes a sermonic tool, drawing the audience into the original setting and thereby enabling them to experience anew its message (172).

Eugene Lowry outlines the movement of the homiletical plot as a process, “an event-in-time. . .” It is “the moving suspense of story, from disequilibrium to resolution (Doing Time 58).

The key to the main body of a biblical narrative sermon is to unfold the complexity of the narrative situation and the situations and personalities of the characters involved. Lowry calls this the unfolding of ambiguity. Lowry laments, “What is lacking [in the average sermon] is concrete perceptive insight into the multifaceted ambiguities of the human situation which, when revealed, make one reflect” (Lowry 38). Since we live inductively and narratively, it is here that we have the opportunity to engage the congregation and help them identify with the characters and situation in the text (Craddock, As One 60). But to do this we must creatively and contextually explore the lives and motives of the characters in the text.

Real people live with ambiguity. To explore the motives and questions that come to the average person is to affirm them and to invite participation which stimulates growth. Too often preachers are tempted to jump to the bottom line, the command, the moral of the story. Ambiguity is scary. There is uncertainty in the internal dialogue of mixed motives and complex circumstances of life in the real world. But in the exploration of ambiguity the preacher engages the congregation in an open dialogue. Kohlberg

articulates that another stimulus to moral development is found in such dialogue. He found that when students who were in different levels of moral reasoning engaged in moral dialogue and debate, such discussion and disagreement caused up to one-third of those students to move up a level in moral reasoning (“Education” 9).

Fowler adds to the discussion by articulating that persons in two of the adult stages of faith development, Individuative-Reflective Faith and Conjunctive Faith, are already engaged in this process of critical reflection and exploration of polarities of belief and faith. Exploring the ambiguities of a biblical narrative cultivates what Fowler calls a faith paradigm shift which marks a move from one stage of faith to the next.

When a paradigm shift occurs, [one’s] whole frame of reference changes. Fundamental assumptions undergo transformation, with consequent alternations of all rules and standards by which inquiry or conversation can occur. A new paradigm signals the emergence of a new worldview- new ways of seeing, interpreting, and making sense of the world and life. (19)

To address the real issues of life; doubt; confusion; cowardice, despair, etc.- in the ambiguity of biblical characters is to address the issues of shame and guilt people often feel at being unable to live up to what they see in personages who are bigger than life. Shame often comes from seeing the biblical personages as “better than me.” To see biblical personages as people who struggled with life, faith, and moral behavior is to foster hope that “I can do it if he could do it with all his difficult circumstances.”

#### 4) Character and Scene Development and the Congregation

##### A. Character and Scene Development

“Those who write plays and movie scripts know that the key to holding interest and making an impact upon an audience lies in the identification of the audience with

characters and critical events portrayed. They also know that persons are drawn into, not instructed or exhorted into, identification” (Craddock, Preaching 162). Fred Craddock speaks here of an important element in the development and preaching of a biblical narrative sermon; character and scene development. Effective, compelling biblical narrative preachers worked hard to bring to life the characters of Scripture, to unfold the context of their inner thoughts, motives, decisions, and actions.

The task in biblical narrative preaching is to let congregants see the biblical personages for who they really were in all of their complexities so we may see ourselves more clearly (Lowry 49). As Grant Osborne points out, the biblical writer was not limited to the constraints of the real world but provides “insiders” with perspective that the normal person cannot know. “Thus the reader is given a sense of the presence of God behind the story. . .” (157). This helps to understand why it is so important to re-examine the characters in the narrative; searching out their human points of view as a mirror for our reality.

Today’s brain research helps us understand the effects narrative has on involving the whole person in the preaching event. Biblical narrative preaching involves the whole brain. The left hemisphere “divides subjects and pictures into component parts and understands by analyzing and classifying information” (Lewis 37). Logic and verbal skills are located here. The right hemisphere of the brain processes images, action, art, intuition, and vision. Biblical narrative begins with the right side of the brain and moves toward the left (Lewis 38). Too often sermons begin with the left side of the brain, move briefly to the right side for a story or illustration, and then move back again to spend most of the

time with logic and analysis. Lewis points out that Jesus reached and changed the hearts and minds of his listeners predominantly with right brain preaching (85). Schaller points out in his book 21 Bridges to the 21st Century: The Future of Pastoral Ministry, “Men . . . can be found in larger proportions in those congregations in which a conscious and deliberate effort is made to design the sermon for right-brained adults in general and for men in particular” (78).

What do we hope to accomplish by character and scene development? Thomas Long lists two things: (1) by making the minister and members of the congregation identify with the characters so they can say, “Hey, I’m like that, that’s me.” (2) “To make a claim concerning the nature of life, a claim about which the reader must make a decision” (Literary 72). Value judgments upon the Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, and even the disciples are put on hold so as to see them in their contexts. This can be seen in Ronald Allen’s sermon, “When the Universe Has Two Centers,” which deals with the good Samaritan. Allen, in his sermon, examines the life context of the priest and the Levite in that parable so as to help the congregation explore their points of view and in an indirect manner find parts of themselves in those two characters. He then moves from the Samaritan to a black woman and suddenly, behold, we see ourselves in a new and unpleasant light which calls for a response (Wardlaw 44-56). Allen states, “When we participate in the story by imaginatively identifying with the characters and the plot, our own experience and our own histories are deepened and enlarged and the story functions as a prism through which we find fresh meaning. . .” (Wardlaw 39). This is when the world of the text begins to shape our world, our life’s narrative (Wardlaw 34). Fred

Craddock goes on to point out that narrative has the power to form and re-shape our perceptions and our character. He states,

Description provides images, and images are necessary for removing from the mind inadequate, erroneous, distorted attitudes and behavior. Along the hallways of the mind hang images, fixed and influential, hung there by experience, education, associations, stories heard or read, and by countless forces more subtle but no less effective. When the appropriate word is spoken, an image stands out vivid and clear; nun, minister, German, communist, messiah, African, schoolteacher, car salesperson, lawyer. If it is the case that certain images contradict the gospel and flaw the life of the one holding them, how can preaching make a difference? Ideas and concepts are of little effect against images, and scolding does even less. Images must be replaced, and this comes only gradually, by other images. In the ministry of preaching, much of this burden falls on description. (Preaching 202)

In a workshop recorded on the *Preaching Today* tape series, Fred Craddock spoke of the power of story to help people identify with narrative characters. He stated, “. . . in identification things long buried, known but not nourished, not dwelt on, not feeding the life, not doing its work, begins to do its work and things that have long been in the head, known, begin to move toward the heart. . . in the process of story- telling what we know gradually moves toward the heart and we become what we know” (*Storytelling* tape # 24).

The power of the resolution in a biblical narrative sermon comes from the amount of identification the congregation is able to have with the characters in the narrative. Fowler agrees with the reality of the power of narrative to form and shape our life and faith. The use of narrative is especially formative in what he terms Conjunctive Faith which happens at mid-life and beyond (113). Narrative. . . serves as the most primal and memorable means we have for ordering and communicating the experiences that shape

us”(123). Dykstra sees narrative as **the** vehicle for transformation in Christian character. In narrative one becomes caught up in the drama and ambiguity of another so that by the end one is open to receive revelation about himself/herself, others, and God (75). Dykstra suggests two movements in transformation and formation;

1) Discovery - a groping and struggling to know something rightly. Through an event new insights emerge, coming in the form of a new patterning of imagination.

2) Verification - analysis and interpretation connecting with other beliefs or convictions one holds. New patterns of seeing and feeling begin to emerge (87).

Christian character grows and holiness of heart and life is nurtured as one’s vision of the world is enlarged and focused more sharply upon the reality of God and God’s way of being and living.

#### B. Context of the Congregation

In the prologue to one of Haddon Robinson’s sermons, Marshall Shelly stated the three essentials of effective preaching. They are; “(1) The integrity of the speaker, (2) an understanding of God’s Word and (3) **a knowledge of the world in which we live**” (*Preaching* tape #35). The metaphors and images used need to resonate with the everyday lives of the congregation. When the congregation recognizes that the preacher is aware of the daily struggles and issues which confront them they listen more intently. Fred Craddock comments on two things in this regard. In his book, Preaching, Craddock speaks of the preacher’s need to mix the familiar (struggles, problems, current issues), with the new, that is, the biblical message for their context. The nod of recognition must precede the shock of recognition: “In fact, without the nod, that is, the sense of already

knowing and agreeing, the shock of recognition, that is, the sudden realization that I am the one called, the one addressed, the one guilty, the one responsible, the one commissioned, is not even possible” (160).

Second, identification with the characters in the biblical text takes place for the hearers when the preacher presents the human condition with genuine insight. This occurs when the preacher puts aside for the moment any judgment upon actions and probes human hearts and the ambiguities and complexities which beat there (Craddock Preaching 162). Thomas Troeger, in his book Imaging A Sermon, states that preachers must learn to see the world more accurately if we are ever to refine our visionary powers and imagination of another’s perspective (35). The power of Haddon Robinson’s sermon, “Don’t Doubt God’s Goodness,” was that he probed Eve’s dialogue with the serpent, looking at the nature of temptation. His exploration of the subtleties of temptation allowed me to say, “That is the way temptation comes to me and how I cognitively deal with it!” Which allows the shock of recognition to happen. He presented the human condition with genuine insight so that I found myself saying, “That is really the way it is!” Once this happened I was open to the conviction of the Scripture which called my response to temptation into question and gave me new insight into Satan’s real tactics.

Peter Marshall’s sermon “Trial by Fire” used familiar patriotic concepts and reflection of contemporary struggles. He used concepts and American history to make the familiar arise out of the biblical narrative. The words reflecting American history were all the more powerful since this sermon was preached in our nation’s capital (Trial tape #1955).

Fred Craddock demonstrates a technique for aiding a preacher in understanding the issues and struggles of a congregation, using what he terms “Empathetic Imagination.” Empathetic imagination is the practice of a pastor imagining himself/herself to be experiencing some life struggle. It is an exercise of taking a sheet of paper and writing at the top of it “What’s it like to be . . . and fill in the blank with a concrete facet of human experience. As Craddock says, “Examples might be “facing surgery,” “living alone,” fired from one’s position,”” (Preaching 97). Take a few minutes to describe feelings, thoughts, experiences, sounds, and smells which come to mind. This practice is not for the purpose of placing such experience directly into a sermon, but to help the pastor gain insight into where parishioners live and what they need in the way of God’s Word (Preaching 97.).

Empathy and understanding do not make the preacher “soft on sin” or lead to the loss of a person’s prophetic indignation. Rather, the understanding preacher has come to see who the real enemy is and where the real battle lines are to be drawn. The scalpel replaces the ax and surgery replaces bruising. (Preaching 98)

### 5) Delivery

One final observation of effective biblical narrative preachers is the use of voice and gestures. The tone of voice is conversational, the pace varies with the mood of the narrative. Haddon Robinson speaks of the use of the voice in an interview on *Preaching Today*. “. . . there are four, and only four ways that you can get emphasis: The change in pitch, volume, pause and progress, or pitch, pace, pause and punch” (Robinson tape # 14). Effective biblical narrative preachers are good communicators because they know how to use their voices and gestures to enhance the experience of the biblical narrative. “The physical properties of speech its rhythm, pitch, volume, and inflection are a kind of music



that makes the imagination dance” (Troeger 67). The use of diction when describing scenes and characters helps the congregation use all of their senses so that they actually experience the drama of the narrative. This is the power of narrative. Effective biblical narrative preachers do not perform their sermon. They live in the sermonic narrative. They are present in that narrative describing what they see, hear, taste and touch, allowing the congregation to see, hear, taste; and touch as well.

### **Observations**

The most important element in biblical narrative preaching is not telling an entertaining or even compelling story. It is allowing God to meet the preacher and the hearers in the narrative. Biblical narrative preaching may be compared to the Emmaus road experience for the two disciples of Jesus. “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). Effective biblical narrative preaching allows this burning within our hearts to happen as we meet Jesus along the road of our lives. Holiness of heart and life comes as a gift of God to those who respond to God’s love and power in Jesus Christ.

Passion for the preacher of such a sermon comes from the connection made by the Holy Spirit to the preacher’s own life experience, the text’s witness, and the congregational context. “At the deepest level of the life of the spirit, these connections are made by God. God has chosen these stories for a particular and distinctive role in God’s relationship with us. To explore our connections with these stories is to pay attention to the movement of God’s Spirit within us. . . .” (Boomershine 99).

An examination of the literature and preaching material shows that the critical elements of a biblical narrative sermon are unity, tension development, plot, character and scene development, the congregation, and delivery. Each of these elements strengthens the experience and impact of the biblical narrative sermon upon the hearers. These elements were the independent variables of this study.

This study measured the degree of changes, if any, in individual congregants in Christian character or holiness of heart and life over a period of four months during which time seventeen biblical narrative sermons were preached. Below is a visual model of the sermon series and the seven dependent variables of holiness of heart and life which were evaluated. I divided these sermons into smaller sermon series for the congregation so that they would not see themselves enduring one four-month-long sermon series. The first series was titled “Amazing Grace” and encompassed growth area I. The second series was titled “Channels of Grace,” encompassing growth areas II, III and IV. The final series was titled “Response to Grace,” dealing with growth areas V, VI and VII. Below each of the seven variables is listed one of the seventeen sermons. With each sermon is given the specific focus of the dependent variable, sermon title, and Scripture reference.

## Holiness of Heart and Life Sermon Series

| SUBJECT     | SERMON TITLE  | SCRIPTURE             |
|-------------|---|-----------------------|
| <b>I.</b>   | <b>Assurance that one's sins are forgiven and he/she is a child of God.</b> |                       |
|             | 1. Grace "It is Better to Receive than to Give"                             | Luke 5:1-11           |
|             | 2. Assurance "No Fear!"   | Matthew 14:22-33      |
|             | 3. Witness of the Spirit "Holding Hands"                                    | Acts 4:1-14           |
| <b>II.</b>  | <b>An Active and Deepening Prayer Life</b>                                  |                       |
|             | 4. Confession, Intimacy "Being real with God"                               | Luke 18:10-14         |
|             | 5. Praying with others "Surprised by God"                                   | Acts 12:1-17          |
|             | <b>(Call to become prayer partners)</b>                                     |                       |
| <b>III.</b> | <b>Frequently Attending upon the Means of Grace</b>                         |                       |
|             | 6. The Lord's Supper "Where Jesus is Known"                                 | Luke 24:13-33         |
|             | 7. Worship "The Power of Praise"  | Joshua 5:13-6:5       |
|             | 8. Scripture Reading. "Finding the Book"                                    | 2 Chronicles 34:14-21 |
| <b>IV.</b>  | <b>Participating in Christian Conversation</b>                              |                       |
|             | 9. Supportive Relationships "How to sing in prison"                         | Acts 16:16-34         |
|             | 10. Transforming Relationships "Transforming Relationships"                 | Acts 15:36-41         |
|             | <b>(Call to a thirty-day small group experiment)</b>                        |                       |
| <b>V.</b>   | <b>No Outward Sin</b>   |                       |
|             | 11. The law remains "Surprised by God's Law,"                               | Acts 5:1-11           |
|             | 12. The law brings us to grace "Caught in the Act"                          | John 8:1-11           |
| <b>VI.</b>  | <b>Currently Resisting Temptation to Sin Inwardly</b>                       |                       |
|             | 13. Temptation "The Purpose of Road Signs"                                  | 2 Samuel 11:1-5       |
|             | 14. Sin in thought, word or deed "Broken and Spilled Out"                   | Mark 14:3-9           |
|             | 15. Victory over inward sin "Achieving Victory,"                            | Galatians 2:11-13     |
| <b>VII.</b> | <b>Love of Neighbor as Self</b>   |                       |
|             | 16. Responding to Needs "Silent Lepers"                                     | Luke 5:12-15          |
|             | 17. Our gifts in ministry "Attitude of Gratitude"                           | Matthew 25:14-30      |
|             | <b>(PLEDGE SUNDAY - 'Every Christian in Ministry' menu)</b>                 |                       |

As this visual model shows, there were specific variables the study measured in an effort to assess change. The study aimed at developing habits of holiness as well as new ways to live out Christ's life and love which nurture receptivity to God's grace. The

development of prayer partners, the thirty-day small group experiment, and the “Every Christian In Ministry” ministry menu provided further opportunities to experience the transforming power of the habits of holiness so that these congregants could continue to grow in holiness of life and heart.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE RESEARCH PROCESS

#### Design of the Study

This study addresses the problem of the lack of Christian character, or more precisely, what John Wesley termed holiness of heart and life, in the United Methodist congregations I have served. Over the past several years in the pastorate, I have been dismayed by persons who claim to be Christian and yet live lives unrelated and even contrary to the principles and guidelines of Scripture. A review of related literature shows this to be a widespread problem within the United Methodist denomination. A spiritual memory loss seems to be plaguing our congregations. It strips Christians of the meaning and memory of who they are and are to become.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the use of biblical narrative preaching to stimulate and formulate personal growth in holiness of heart and life.

#### Statement of Research Questions

The following research and operational questions are addressed in this study.

#### Research Question #1

What is the level of holiness of heart and life of individual congregants prior to the series of biblical narrative sermons?

Operational Question 1. What is the level of holiness of heart of individual congregants as measured by the pre-test?

Operational Question 2. What is the level of holiness of life of individual congregants as measured by the pre-test?

Operational Question 3. Are there any significant relationships between these two findings as measured by the pre-test?

Research Question #2

What changes in holiness of heart and life occurred by the mid-point of the sermon series as measured by the mid-test?

Operational Question 1. What degree of change occurred in holiness of heart comparing the pre-test and the mid-test?

Operational Question 2. What degree of change occurred in holiness of life comparing the pre-test and the mid-test?

Operational Question 3. What, if any, are the correlations between the changes of holiness of heart and holiness of life comparing the pre-test and the mid-test?

Research Question #3

What changes in holiness of heart and life occurred between the mid-test and the post-test during the preaching series?

Operational Question 1. What degree of change occurred in holiness of heart in the subjects comparing the mid-test and the post-test?

Operational Question 2. What degree of change occurred in holiness of life in the subjects comparing the mid-test and the post-test?

Operational Question 3. What, if any, are the correlations between the changes of holiness of heart and holiness of life comparing the mid-test and the post-test?

Research Question #4

What elements of the sermon series seem to correlate with such growth?

### Research Question #5

What variables, if any, affected the outcome of growth?

### Population and Sample

The population of this United Methodist Church consisted of all active attendees in worship, which include members, regular attendees and recent visitors. During the months when the public schools are operating we have approximately 200 worshipers. During the months between November and April when northerners move down for the winter months there are approximately 220 worshipers on average. This study began the first week of August when we had approximately 166 worshipers.

The population of this study was primarily white Anglos, approximately sixty-five percent were women and thirty-five percent men. They came primarily from middle class socio-economic backgrounds. Congregants were a mixture of northern retirees, small business owners, and educators from the local public school system. Congregants represented an unequal distribution of ages with retirees presenting the largest number. About thirty percent of the congregation was between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five, many of whom had children or teenagers living at home. Subjects came primarily from a United Methodist background. Other backgrounds included Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, and Catholic.

The sample for this study was drawn from the population by the development of a list of members and regular attendees who represented as accurately as possible the statistical make-up of the Sunday worshipers in this congregation. In general, the Sunday morning make up of this congregation was approximately two-thirds members and one

third regular attenders. Therefore it was not possible to get an accurate representation by doing a random sample of the membership of the church. An alternative method of gathering subjects for the study would be to request volunteers from the pulpit. However, this method would not take into account the rival hypothesis. Those most likely to volunteer for the study would be those already active in church and supportive of the researcher. In order to obtain more objective data, which would better represent the statistical make-up of the worshipping congregation, the membership secretary and I developed a list of eighty to 100 people. Due to the necessity for subjects to have entered the adult stages of faith and moral development, each subject was required to be at least sixteen years of age.

This study was not limited to persons with a United Methodist background but to persons who understood themselves to be Christians. This study did not measure conversion but transformation and formation of those already professing the Christian faith.

### Instrumentation

The study used a one group pre-test self-administered questionnaire mailed to the subjects in my congregation followed by four months of biblical narrative preaching. At the mid-point of the sermon series I distributed and collected the same questionnaire to subjects. At the end of four months a post-test was given to the subjects.

In order to provide a comparison congregation from the subjects who would experience the treatment of biblical narrative sermons I asked the Pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church, a church of comparable demographics, to randomly select willing



participants to also fill out the questionnaires. I took the questionnaires to his office and he distributed them at the same time I sent out the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test questionnaires to my subjects. A 'T' was placed in the top left-hand corner of the questionnaire they received in order to designate the comparison.

The post-test questionnaire had additional questions which measured the impact of the sermons themselves based on the five elements explored in the research portion of this study; unity, tension development, plot, character and scene development, and delivery. These additional questions were also added to the questionnaire given to the subjects at Trinity United Methodist Church.

In tandem with the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test, three opportunities were given for the congregants of my congregation to participate in exercises for the development of Christian character. These included an invitation to form into prayer partners, a thirty-day small group experiment, and an opportunity to commit to some area of ministry within the life of the church using a ministry menu titled "Every Christian In Ministry."

The pre-test, mid-test, and post-test instrument used in this study was a researcher-designed, self-administered questionnaire. The literature review revealed several time-tested, reliable instruments available for measuring Christian faith and spirituality. Among those best known are G. Allport's Religiosity Orientation Inventory (ROI), C. Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) Scale and Spiritual Maturity Index (SMI), D. Smith's Christian Life Assessment Scale (CLAS), H.N. Malony's Religious Status Interview (RSI), and The Center for Human Development's Spiritual Orientation Profile (SOP) (Sappington & Wilson 46). After an examination of the descriptions, methods,

measurements, and uses of each of these instruments I decided not to use any of them, but to design my own instrument. The reason for this was that they measured faith development or spiritual well-being, whereas my study examined the development of faith and action using specific criteria developed from my study of Wesleyan theology. The seven categories were:

- 1) Assurance that one's sins are forgiven and that he/she is a child of God. This also includes an increasing love for God from the heart.
- 2) An active and deepening prayer life.
- 3) Frequently attending upon the means of grace (The Lord's Supper, worship, and Scripture reading.)
- 4) Participating in Christian conversation in some form, e.g. small group, covenant discipleship group, prayer group, etc.
- 5) No outward sin. Not having left unrepented any transgression of a known law of God (the Ten Commandments).
- 6) Currently resisting temptation to sin inwardly. Anything in thought, word or deed that would violate the law of love.
- 7) Love of neighbor as oneself. Helping people in their need in practical ways and in emotional support.

The researcher-designed instrument, Christian Character Profile (CCP), was sent out in order to measure first a pre-test baseline of the subjects using Wesley's two categories or scales, holiness of heart and holiness of life (see below, Table 3.1). The seven growth areas set forth in a review of Wesley's understanding of holiness of heart

and life became the grid for the development of the seventeen sermons and for the questions in the CCP. The CCP questions were closed-ended. Each of the seven growth areas contained responses some of which were worded positively and others were worded negatively for conceptual balance. Respondents rated each item on a five-point Likert scale. The negatively worded responses were reverse coded relative to the positively worded items and the sum of the two item types were computed for an overall scale score. A “Strongly Agree” response to a question received a score of five. When these same respondents respond with a “Strongly Disagree” on a negatively worded item they received a score of five.

A “Strongly Disagree” response to a negatively worded item on the assurance scale *implied* a sense of assurance that he/she is a child of God. A “Strongly Agree” response to a positively worded item on this scale *confirmed* the assurance experience. On the other hand, a “Strongly Agree” response to a negatively worded item on the assurance scale *denied* assurance. A “Strongly Disagree” response to such a positively worded item *confirmed* the denied experience. In the table below the questions used in the CCP questionnaire have been arranged in the seven growth areas under which each question falls.

## Seven Growth Area Scales

Table 3.1

| <b>Assurance Scale</b>   | <b>Prayer Scale</b>   |
|--|---|
| Most of the time I feel God loves me (#4).                         | Most of the time I feel God hears my prayers (#6).                                      |
| I am confident that Jesus has made his home in my heart (#5).      | I feel close to God all the time (#9).  |
| I am the same person I have always been (#8).                      | I often find myself talking to God or thinking about Him during the day (#15).          |
| Often I feel far away from God (#14).                              | I feel God is too busy to listen to my life and problems (#26).                         |
| I cannot believe God has forgiven certain things in my life (#16). | It often seems that God does not answer my prayers (#27).                               |
|  | Most of the time when someone prays publicly my heart and mind are on the prayer (#32). |
|  | I have set a time each day for prayer (#35).  |

| <b>Means of Grace Scale</b>   | <b>Christian Conversation Scale</b>   |
|---|---|
| I feel close to God when I take communion (#7).                                     | I feel encouraged in my faith when I talk with other Christians about personal faith (#10). |
| I often feel close to God when I attend worship (#11).                              | I feel that sharing personal prayer concerns with other Christians is not important (#18).  |
| I do not need frequent communion to strengthen my relationship with Christ (#12).   | It's not good to talk about one's personal faith (#19).                                     |
| I do not get much out of reading the Bible (#13).                                   | I meet regularly with other Christians to study the Bible and talk about God (#33).         |
| I often find the Sunday morning worship service boring (#28).                       |   |
| Coming to worship on Sunday morning is all I need to meet my spiritual needs (#30). |   |
| I often find myself reading the Bible (#34).  |   |
| I attend church as often as I can (#42).  |   |

| <b>No Outward Sin Scale</b>  | <b>Resisting Temptation Scale</b>   |
|--|---|
| I don't believe in feeling guilty about breaking one or more of the 10 commandments (#17). | When I am tempted to say or do something that would not please God I immediately seek God's help (#20). |
| There are things which I have done that I have not asked God to forgive (#24).             | Jesus is concerned about what I think, say and do (#21).  |
| At the present time I am not breaking any one of the 10 commandments (#25).                | What goes on in my life is my personal business not God's business (#22).                               |
| I am currently breaking one or more of the 10 commandments (#29).                          | I find myself regularly giving in to temptations that do not please God (#23).                          |
| The laws of God are to be obeyed (#38).  | Jesus wants me to resist every wrong temptation that comes to me (#31).                                 |
| I am completely forgiven of all my past wrong-doings (#40).                                |   |

| <b>Love of Neighbor Scale</b>   |
|---|
| I try to seek out and help other people in need (#36).  |
| I feel that I am extending the hands of Jesus as I help others (#37).                             |
| I feel that God does not want me to get involved in the needs and problems of other people (#39). |
| I do not often feel that God works through me (#41).  |
| I have found a meaningful place of service within the life of my Church (#43).                    |

As noted above, I divided the questions into two categories or scales, holiness of heart and holiness of life. This study examines the change, if any, in these two scales over time and the relationship between them. There is no clear-cut way to divide the questions between holiness of heart and holiness of life (faith and behavior). There is a dynamic relationship between them and the seven growth areas. But for the purposes of this study they must be divided. The problem which drives this study is the gap between the professed faith of Christians and their behavior or lifestyles. Therefore, the clearest way to divide holiness of heart from holiness of life is between cognitive faith and behavior or potential behavior. Potential behavior would include such questions as those dealing with giving into temptations, or breaking the 10 Commandments. Table 3.2 shows the two scales that will be compared in the pre-test, mid-test and post-test.

## Holiness of Heart and Life Scales

Table 3.2

| <b>Holiness of Heart</b>   | <b>Holiness of Life</b>   |
|--|---|
| Most of the time I feel that God loves me (#4).  | I do not need frequent communion to strengthen my relationship with Christ (#12).                       |
| I am confident that Jesus has made his home in my heart (#5).  | I do not get much out of reading the Bible (#13).   |
| Most of the time I feel God hears my prayers (#6).   | I often find myself talking to God or thinking about him during the day (#15).                          |
| I feel close to God when I take Communion (#7).  | I don't believe in feeling guilty about breaking one or more of the 10 commandments (#17).              |
| I am the same person I have always been (#8).  | I feel that sharing personal prayer concerns with other Christians is not important (#18).              |
| I feel close to God all the time (#9).   | It's not good to talk about one's personal faith (#19).   |
| I feel encouraged in my faith when I talk with other Christians about personal faith (#10).            | When I am tempted to say or do something that would not please God I immediately seek God's help (#20). |
| I often feel close to God when I attend worship (#11).   | Jesus is concerned about what I think, say, and do (#21).   |
| Often I feel far away from God (#14).  | What goes on in my life is my personal business not God's business (#22).                               |
| I cannot believe God has forgiven certain things in my life (#16).                                     | I find myself regularly giving into temptations that do not please God (#23).                           |
| There are things which I have done that I have not asked God to forgive (#24).                         | At the present time I am not breaking any of the 10 commandments (#25).                                 |
| I feel God is too busy to listen to my life and problems (#26).  | I am currently breaking one or more of the 10 commandments (#29).                                       |
| It often seems that God does not answer my prayers (#27).  | Coming to worship on Sunday morning is all I need to meet my spiritual needs (#30).                     |
| I often find the Sunday worship service boring (#28).  | I meet regularly with other Christians to study the Bible and talk about God (#33).                     |
| Jesus wants me to resist every wrong temptation that comes to me (#31).                                | I often find myself reading the Bible (#34).  |
| Most of the time when someone prays publicly my heart and mind is on what is being prayed about (#32). | I have a set time each day for prayer (#35).  |
| I feel that I am extending the hands of Jesus as I help others (#37).                                  | I try to seek out and help other people in need (#36).  |
| I am completely forgiven of all my past wrongdoings (#40).   | The laws of God are to be obeyed (#38).   |
| I do not often feel God works through me (#41).  | I feel that God does not want me to get involved in needs and problems of other people (#39).           |
|  | I attend church as often as I can (#42).  |
|  | I have found a meaningful place of service within the life of my Church (#43).                          |

## Biblical Narrative Sermons

Because this study used a particular style of preaching, I developed a set of questions which measured the effective use of the biblical narrative sermons themselves. These questions at the end of the CCP measured the subject's experience of the elements of the biblical narrative sermons themselves. They were placed on the post-test questionnaires only. They were also scored using a five-point Likert scale. Some of the questions were reverse coded. These scales measured how each of the five elements of a biblical narrative sermon were experienced in relation to the degree of change of holiness of heart and life. Table 3.3 displays the questions for each of the sermon scales.

### **Sermon Scales**

Table 3.3

| <b>Unity Scale</b>   | <b>Tension Development Scale</b>   |
|--|--|
| After each sermon I knew the point of the message (#47).   | The sermons looking at biblical characters were very interesting (#46).  |
| After the sermons I often felt confused as to what he was preaching about (#53).                                   | When the preacher told the stories of persons in the Bible I could not see how they related to my life today(#51). |
| After hearing the sermons I often thought, "I can do that!" (#54).   | The sermons grabbed and held my attention (#52).   |
| When the sermon was finished I often felt I wanted to apply what the Bible character learned to my own life (#55). | I often felt bored during the sermons (#61).   |

| <b>Plot Scale</b>  | <b>Scene and Character Development Scale</b>   |
|--|--|
| I felt the sermons often voiced and explored my own doubts, questions and thoughts about subjects the persons in the Bible dealt with (#49). | When hearing the stories of persons in the Bible I often felt I could identify with what they were thinking and feeling (#48). |
| The sermons have helped me want to draw closer to God (#62).   | When I heard the Bible character's situations and personalities I often felt, "That's just like me!" (#56).                    |
| I feel the Bible tells stories of people who did not struggle with the same problems normal people deal with today (#59).                    | These sermons have caused me to think more about the persons in the Bible in my everyday life (#57).                           |
| The people in the Bible were better than I could be (#60).   | After hearing the sermons I often thought, "This sermon does not relate to my life" (#58).                                     |

| <b>Delivery Scale</b>   |
|---|
| The way the minister preached made it hard for me to connect with what he said (#50). |
| The preacher's gestures often confused me as he spoke (#63).                          |
| I often felt the preacher was talking directly to me (#64).                           |
| The preacher's tone of voice helped me connect with what he was saying (#65).         |

There is no computed reliability or validity data which exists for the CCP. To increase effectiveness and reliability, a pilot test was arranged. On July 26, 1998 I piloted the questionnaire with the members of another local church of similar demographic and age spread to First United Methodist Church. During their Sunday evening gathering fifteen people filled out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by the last person in fifteen minutes. Their input brought minor changes which called for no second pilot test.

To the subjects of my congregation three opportunities of response were given in relation to variables II, IV, and VII. These opportunities allowed subjects ways of responding to the call for holiness of heart and life in a Wesleyan fashion. The changes, if any, were seen by comparing the pre-test, mid-test, and the post-test. After the second sermon on prayer a call to become prayer partners was given. Five weeks after the call to become prayer partners, in a response to the sermons on Christian conversation, I gave an invitation for people to form groups of three to six people to participate in the thirty-day small group experiment using the booklet by Sam E. Teague called The John Wesley Great Experiment!

The concluding sermon in the four-month preaching series addressed the love of one's neighbor. After this sermon, given on Thanksgiving (Pledge) Sunday, I gave the



challenge and opportunity for each person to exercise his/her gifts and experience in different areas of ministry using the ministry menu form “Every Christian In Ministry.” The “Every Christian In Ministry” menu was a researcher- and church leadership-designed form based on the concept and book by John Ed Mathison (5). This menu was tailored to our church’s ongoing and future ministries.

### Methodology

Since I used a self-administered pre-test, mid-test, and post-test, questionnaire, it was necessary to send a cover letter with the CCP explaining the purpose for the survey, the importance of the study and each respondent’s involvement. Complete anonymity was assured by each respondent creating a personal code to be used when responding to all three questionnaires. The respondent’s code started with the first initial of his or her mother’s maiden name followed by the last four digits of the respondent’s social security number. These codes were used to match the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test questionnaire of each respondent. The CCP questionnaire was sent with the cover letter ten days prior to the beginning of the treatment of biblical narrative sermons. I included a stamped, self-addressed envelope for easy return. On the first Sunday of the series I encouraged those respondents who had not already mailed in their questionnaires to do so as soon as possible.

On the Sunday I preached the second sermon on prayer I placed a prayer partner card in each church bulletin. At the end of the service I encouraged participants to place their prayer partner cards in baskets near the church exits. Participants were given the option of choosing their own prayer partner or having a partner chosen for them. This

exercise was self-initiated based on a call to respond from the sermon. At the end of the second sermon on Christian conversation I gave an invitation for persons to commit to a thirty-day small group experiment. At that time the booklets for this exercise were given out and persons were asked to find three to five other persons to meet with. A donation of \$2.50 was optional for those who would like to help defray the cost of the booklets.

At the mid-point of the sermon series, (after the last sermon on Christian Conversation, #10), I mailed out and collected the CCP questionnaire using the same mailing list as the pre-test. I also took the CCP to the Pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church.

Three weeks prior to pledge Sunday I sent out a letter to the entire congregation explaining how we were to involve people in ministry with the new ministry menu form. One week prior to pledge Sunday each congregant received a menu form and explanation letter in the mail. I asked them to begin prayerfully selecting their places of ministry.

On Saturday, one week before pledge Sunday, we held a ministry celebration dinner. Invitations went out to every person who regularly attended church. Along with a sumptuous, free meal, we set up displays of various ministries of our church. Several groups of our church provided entertainment. Each staff member articulated the ministry of their area which occurred in 1998 and spelled out their vision for future ministry. That night I explained again the ministry menu and gave them a preview of it. On Monday a ministry menu and cover letter was mailed out to every regular attender and member of the Church. Pledge Sunday the menus were collected. Following the final sermon in the series the "Every Christian In Ministry" menu forms were collected during the worship

service. These menu forms continued to be received for several weeks in the mail or in the offering plates

The CCP questionnaire contained questions that assessed the subjects' involvement in prayer, in small groups and in ministry in or through our church. I did not need to gather any other data than the mid-test and post-test for comparison with the pre-test .

Immediately after the completion of the four months of sermons I repeated the procedures of distribution of the CCP questionnaire for the post-test to my subjects and to the Pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church.

### Variables

The independent variable in this study consisted of the biblical narrative sermons preached in the worship services at First United Methodist Church. These independent variables were: unity, tension development, plot, character and scene development, and delivery. The dependent variables measured in this study consisted of the seven growth areas of holiness of heart and life. The individual variables are seen in this visual model of the sermon series.

## Holiness of Heart and Life Sermon Series

| SUBJECT  | SERMON TITLE                           | SCRIPTURE             |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| <b>I. Assurance that one's sins are forgiven and he/she is a child of God.</b> |  |                       |
| 1. Grace   | "It is Better to Receive than to Give" | Luke 5:1-11           |
| 2. Assurance   | "No Fear!"                             | Matthew 14:22-33      |
| 3. Witness of the Spirit   | "Holding Hands"                        | Acts 4:1-14           |
| <b>II. An Active and Deepening Prayer Life</b>                                 |  |                       |
| 4. Confession, Intimacy  | "Being real with God"                  | Luke 18:10-14         |
| 5. Praying with others   | "Surprised by God"                     | Acts 12:1-17          |
| <b>(Call to become prayer partners)</b>  |  |                       |
| <b>III. Frequently Attending upon the Means of Grace</b>                       |  |                       |
| 6. The Lord's Supper   | "Where Jesus is Known"                 | Luke 24:13-33         |
| 7. Worship   | "The Power of Praise"                  | Joshua 5:13-6:5       |
| 8. Scripture Reading.  | "Finding the Book"                     | 2 Chronicles 34:14-21 |
| <b>IV. Participating in Christian Conversation</b>                             |  |                       |
| 9. Supportive Relationships  | "How to sing in prison"                | Acts 16:16-34         |
| 10. Transforming Relationships   | "Transforming Relationships"           | Acts 15:36-41         |
| <b>(Call to a thirty-day small group experiment)</b>                           |  |                       |
| <b>V. No Outward Sin</b>   |  |                       |
| 11. The law remains  | "Surprised by God's Law,"              | Acts 5:1-11           |
| 12. The law brings us to grace   | "Caught in the Act"                    | John 8:1-11           |
| <b>VI. Currently Resisting Temptation to Sin Inwardly</b>                      |  |                       |
| 13. Temptation   | "The Purpose of Road Signs"            | 2 Samuel 11:1-5       |
| 14. Sin in thought, word or deed   | "Broken and Spilled Out"               | Mark 14:3-9           |
| 15. Victory over inward sin  | "Achieving Victory,"                   | Galatians 2:11-13     |
| <b>VII. Love of Neighbor as Self</b>   |  |                       |
| 16. Responding to Needs  | "Silent Lepers"                        | Luke 5:12-15          |
| 17. Our gifts in ministry  | "Attitude of Gratitude"                | Matthew 25:14-30      |
| <b>(PLEDGE SUNDAY - 'Every Christian in Ministry' menu)</b>                    |  |                       |

Intervening variables include age differences which affect the stages of moral development. Also, congregants of retirement age might have a stronger or more fixed moral base than those of younger generations.

### Control Issues

To control for the rival hypothesis and insure as much validity as possible with minimal error, several precautions were taken. First, to ensure adult moral reasoning capabilities only those congregants sixteen years and older participated. Second, in order to give enough time for maturation of congregants the preaching series lasted four months with a total of seventeen biblical narrative sermons. Data from respondents who missed eight or more worship services was disallowed. The selection of subjects from the worshipping population represented, as closely as possible, the statistical makeup of the congregation. Also, only those who were subjects in the pre-test and mid-test were given the post-test.

### Data Analysis

Analysis of pre-test, mid-test and post-test data was completed with the aid of computer software and the assistance of a mathematics and statistics professor at Florida Southern College. Results are given and explored in Chapter 4 of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings of the Study<sup>1</sup>

This chapter describes the findings of the study outlined in Chapter 3. Five research questions guided this study: What is the level of holiness of heart and life of individual congregants prior to the series of biblical narrative sermons? What changes in holiness of heart and life occurred between the pre-test and the mid-test during the preaching series? What changes in holiness of heart and life occurred between the mid-test and the post-test during the preaching series? What elements of the sermon series seem to correlate with such change? And what variables, if any, affected the change?

From a study of relevant literature I developed seven areas of growth from John Wesley's sermons and theology which guided the development of the biblical narrative sermon series and the researcher designed questionnaire. These seven growth areas were; assurance that one's sins are forgiven and that he/she is a child of God, an active and deepening prayer life, frequent attendance upon the means of grace, participation in Christian conversation, no outward sin, current resistance to temptation to sin inwardly, and love of neighbors as oneself. These growth areas were divided into two sub-scales, holiness of heart and holiness of life in order to answer the research questions.

#### Profile of Subjects

The pre-, mid-, and post-sermon series questionnaires were mailed to 100 adults of the First United Methodist Church of Auburndale, Florida who regularly attended Sunday morning worship services. The population of this study consisted of an average attendance of 166 people during the four-month sermon series. Of the 100 subjects,

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for Statistical Terminology

thirty-three (n=33) (33%) returned all three questionnaires; forty-nine subjects (n=49) (49%) returned the pre- and post-test questionnaires, but not the mid-point questionnaire. Subjects returning the pre-and post-questionnaires represented 29.5 percent of the average attending population. Of these forty-nine subjects, fifteen were male and thirty-four were female. A comparison between the scores of those who sent back all three questionnaires and those who sent back only the pre-and post-test questionnaires revealed no statistical difference between them. Therefore, there was no reason to do separate analysis on the two groups, (n=49). The ages of respondents ranged from thirty-five to eighty-seven years; the mean age was sixty-three. Subjects listed their denominational background as follows: twenty-six Methodist, seven Baptist, three Presbyterian, three Church of God, two Lutheran, one Roman Catholic, two Episcopal, four Congregational, and one registered no denominational background.

Respondents rated each questionnaire item on a five-point Likert scale. Negatively worded items were reverse scored to correspond with positively worded items.

I also asked the pastor of a nearby United Methodist Church to involve his congregants in this study as a comparison group. Trinity United Methodist Church is a congregation of similar demographic makeup and worship attendance. Questionnaires with self-addressed, stamped envelopes were given to the pastor to hand out at the same time I sent the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test questionnaires to my subjects. However, I received only two pre-test, and post-test questionnaires back from this group and only one mid-test questionnaire from a person who did not send me a pre- or post-test questionnaire. I later discovered that there is significant conflict between the pastor and

people of that congregation. With such pervasive conflict, congregants were not interested in participating in such a study. The pastor reported that one leader of their church thought he was trying to send this parishioner to my congregation. Therefore, with no significant data from the Trinity United Methodist Church, I was unable to use them as a comparison group.

### The Pre-Test Baseline

A statistical analysis was done using Stata statistical software. The pre-tests sent back by respondents gave a baseline for measuring the holiness of heart and life of congregants prior to the sermon series. Questions relating to holiness of heart dealt with issues of belief or faith, feelings and knowledge about one's relationship with God. Questions dealing with holiness of life dealt with behaviors and lifestyle as a result of faith in God. The Likert scale ranged from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree), moving from a negative experience or viewpoint to a positive experience or viewpoint.

Prior to the biblical narrative sermon series, the subjects scored a mean of 4.19 on the holiness of heart sub-scale. Subjects scored a mean of 4.05 on the holiness of life sub-scale. This baseline indicates that subjects feel positive and secure in their relationship with God. They also feel secure in their habits of holiness and the way they relate to others.

Other information obtained on an informal level provided additional feedback. One thirty-eight year old man, for example, commented that the questionnaire confronted him with how much he needed to grow. On one of the pre-test questionnaires returned a comment was written next to the statement "I am the same Christian I have always been," (#45) which said "Stuck! Better get going" (in capital letters). In the comments section



at the bottom of the questionnaire this person wrote "I expect this was designed to make us think---It did!"

The mid-test was sent out between sermon ten and eleven of the sermon series. I chose to send out the questionnaire here because it was a natural break in the series, moving from participating in Christian conversation to dealing with sin, temptation, and love of one's neighbor. The data gathered showed what kind of change occurred in subjects during the first half of the preaching series. Subjects scored a mean of 4.28 on the holiness of heart sub-scale and a mean of 4.17 on the holiness of life sub-scale. Subjects' mean score on the holiness of heart sub-scale (Table 4.1) changed with statistical significance between the pre-test and the mid-test at  $-3.44 (.11)$  ( $p \leq .002$ ). Changes in subjects mean score on the holiness of life sub-scale were also statistically significant at  $.013$  ( $p \leq .026$ ). Both of these scores reveal an overall increase in the feelings and behaviors related to subjects' relationship with God.

The post-test questionnaires were sent out the week after the last sermon in the series was preached. They show that the degree of change on the holiness of heart and life scale was not statistically significant. While there was no significant change in subject scores from mid-test to post-test it is important to note that the small degree of change is a decrease for both holiness of heart and holiness of life.

### Holiness of Heart and Life Scales (N=49)

Table 4.1

| Holiness Scale    | M        | SD  | M        | SD  | t       |
|-------------------|----------|-----|----------|-----|---------|
|                   | Pre-test |     | Mid-test |     |         |
| Holiness of Heart | 4.2      | .45 | 4.3      | .46 | -3.44*  |
| Holiness of Life  | 4.1      | .58 | 4.2      | .5  | -2.41** |

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .03$ .

| Holiness Scale    | Mid-test |     | Post-test |     | t    |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|------|
|                   | M        | SD  | M         | SD  |      |
| Holiness of Heart | 4.3      | .46 | 4.2       | .48 | 1.53 |
| Holiness of Life  | 4.2      | .5  | 4.1       | .55 | 1.68 |

#### Elements of the Sermon Series

Seven growth areas of holiness of heart and life guided the development of the sermon series and the development of the CCP questionnaire. These growth areas were derived from a study of John Wesley's sermons and theology. The growth areas were as follows: assurance that one's sins are forgiven and that he/she is a child of God, an active and deepening prayer life, frequent attendance upon the means of grace (worship, the Lord's supper, and Scripture reading), participation in Christian conversation, not currently committing outward sin (any of the known laws of God), current resistance to temptation to sin inwardly (thought, word, or deed), and love of neighbor as oneself. They incorporate saving faith and holy habits which nurture and sustain a lifestyle of faithful discipleship.

The mean scores of each of these seven growth areas were calculated to see if there was any change revealed between the pre-test, mid-test, and post-tests (Table 4.2). The pre-test baseline of mean scores on the growth area sub-scales shows that subjects see themselves in their Christian faith and life in a generally positive manner.

The mid-test scores on the seven growth areas reveal the most significant degree of change in the means of grace sub-scale from the pre-test scores. The degree of increase was .28 ( $p < .002$ ) (see Table 4.2). This change is statistically significant and relates directly to subject's feelings and habits of the worship experience. The degree of change in the other sub-scale scores was not statistically significant.

**Pre-Test to Mid-Test Growth Areas Scales (N=49)**  
Table 4.2

| Holiness Growth Area Scale | Pre-test |     | Mid-test |     | t      |
|----------------------------|----------|-----|----------|-----|--------|
|                            | M        | SD  | M        | SD  |        |
| Assurance                  | 4.1      | .63 | 4.2      | .71 | -1.64  |
| Prayer Life                | 4.3      | .45 | 4.3      | .43 | 0.0    |
| Means of Grace             | 4.1      | .6  | 4.3      | .46 | -4.92* |
| Christian Conversation     | 4        | .56 | 4.1      | .62 | -1.41  |
| No Outward Sin             | 4.1      | .52 | 4.2      | .47 | -.047  |
| Resisting Temptation       | 4.2      | .67 | 4.3      | .54 | -1.5   |
| Love of Neighbor           | 4.2      | .47 | 4.1      | .39 | .58    |

\* $p < .01$ .

The post-test questionnaires allowed me to compare data to the mid-test to see if there were significant changes in any of the seven growth areas during the later part of the sermon series. As Table 4.3 shows no significant change occurred in six of the growth areas. The change score in the means of grace sub-scale was an insignificant decrease of .11 ( $p \leq .09$ ), but when comparing the pre-test to the post-test, the degree of overall increase was .16 ( $p < .04$ ) which shows a statistically significant growth over the four-month period.

The change score between the mid-test and post-test on the no outward sin sub-scale scores showed a decrease of .22 ( $p \leq .03$ ), revealing a statistically significant decrease in subjects' thoughts and feelings about their standing before God.

From an examination of Table 4.3, one can observe a minimal decrease in five of the seven categories of holiness of heart and life (assurance, prayer, means of grace, Christian conversation, and resisting temptation). There is a statistically significant decrease in the no outward sin sub-scale.

**Mid-Test to Post-Test Growth Areas Scale**  
Table 4.3

| Holiness Growth Area Scale | Mid-test |     | Post-test |     | t     |
|----------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|-------|
|                            | M        | SD  | M         | SD  |       |
| Assurance                  | 4.2      | .71 | 4.1       | .71 | 1.26  |
| Prayer Life                | 4.3      | .43 | 4.2       | .45 | 1.0   |
| Means of Grace             | 4.3      | .46 | 4.2       | .58 | 1.94  |
| Christian Conversation     | 4.1      | .62 | 4         | .73 | 2.32  |
| No Outward Sin             | 4.3      | .47 | 4.1       | .41 | 3.08* |
| Resisting Temptation       | 4.3      | .54 | 4.2       | .59 | .72   |
| Love of Neighbor           | 4.1      | .39 | 4.2       | .47 | -1.4  |

\* $p < .03$ .

### Making Correlation

When comparing the change in mean scores in the holiness of heart and the holiness of life sub-scales over the pre-test, mid-test, and post-test and the degree of change in the seven growth areas over the same measures, there seems to be a correlation between them. Both sets of data indicate a generally positive pre-test baseline for growth areas and the holiness of heart and holiness of life sub-scales. They also both reveal mid-test scores that indicate a general increase over time even though most change is minimal.

Both growth areas and holiness of heart and life scales post-test scores show an insignificant decrease in mean scores from the mid-test. It is important to remember that the seven growth areas provided not only the content for the sermon series but also the agenda. The mid-test questionnaire was sent out immediately after the last sermon on Christian conversation. The sermons which followed dealt with the growth areas of personal sin, temptation, and loving one's neighbor as oneself. Thus the first elements of the sermon series- assurance, prayer, means of grace, and Christian conversation- correlate to scored growth seen between the pre-test and mid-test. The last elements of the series correlate to the mean scores of the mid-test to post-test.

#### Intervening Variables Affecting Growth

A person-by-person scoring was done to obtain mean scores for the areas of holiness of heart and holiness of life over the pre-, mid- and post-test to see what variables, if any, affected growth. The intervening variables were age, gender, denominational background, and number of sermons heard. The questionnaire was designed to eliminate any subject who missed eight sermons or more. Thus all remaining subjects heard at least ten of seventeen sermons. In a person-by-person examination there was no relation between mean score and number of sermons heard, age, gender, or one's denominational background.

#### Additional Response Data

In addition to the pre-, mid- and post-test questionnaires I provided opportunities for response for the entire population of First United Methodist Church during the four months of the preaching series. Following the concluding sermon on prayer, people in the

congregation were invited to become prayer partners as a way of deepening and enriching their prayer life. Those interested in becoming prayer partners simply filled out an insert in the Sunday morning worship bulletin and placed it in baskets near the church exit doors (see Appendix D). A total of fifty-four people signed up to be prayer partners, forty-two women and twelve men. Most of those who signed up to be a prayer partner chose to find their own. They later let me know with whom they had partnered. A few indicated that they wanted me to pair them with another willing congregant.

At the close of the second sermon on Christian conversation I invited the congregants to become involved in a small group experiment which would last for thirty days. The booklet by Sam E. Teague, The John Wesley Great Experiment, was used as a daily devotional guide and a guide for four weekly meetings between three to six people. Seventeen congregants signed our commitment sheet to participate in the thirty-day small group experience and purchased the booklet. Of the seventeen congregants who made the thirty-day commitment ten were women and seven were men. One couple later came to my office and purchased two additional booklets saying that the experience was so meaningful they wanted two friends to participate in another thirty day small group experience with them.

The third opportunity for response was the “Every Christian in Ministry” menu form (see Appendix E). On the last Sunday of the sermon series, following the sermon “Attitude of Gratitude,” I invited congregants to become involved in the ministry of the church by selecting an area or areas of ministry which corresponded to their individual gifts and calling. For several weeks I had been talking about this menu in the

announcement portion of the worship service, in work area meetings and before the administrative council. Several staff members and lay leaders worked with me to develop a ministry menu which reflected the on-going ministry of our congregation as well as the future ministries developed at our administrative council retreat. Three weeks prior to pledge Sunday I wrote a letter to every member of the congregation explaining the rationale and procedure for this new way of doing ministry in our church. We would pledge ourselves in ministry as well as our finances. One week before pledge Sunday we held a ministry celebration dinner on Saturday evening. At the dinner we celebrated our ministry in 1998 and cast a vision for our future. I also gave a preview of the ministry menu and explained its use once more.

On Monday, a ministry menu and cover letter was mailed out to every regular attender and member of the church. On pledge Sunday the menus were collected. The total number of respondents was eight-seven people; sixty-one women and twenty-six men. Of those who responded, fifteen people had never become involved in any volunteer area of our church ministry.

A general sense of excitement was felt by the congregation and reported to me by church staff members. My staff also became excited as they began to receive help in areas of ministry in which they had previously struggled to get volunteers.

### The Preaching Experience

I included twenty questions on the post-test questionnaire which measured the experience subjects had of the sermons themselves. The literature review showed five important elements to biblical narrative preaching (Table 4.4). These five were unity,

tension development, plot, character and scene development, and delivery. I developed four questions for each element using a five-point Likert scale. The post-test results showed a total mean score on elements as follows; unity 4.42, tension development 4.51, plot 4.09, character and scene development 4.25, and delivery 4.42. This reveals a significant positive response to the sermons themselves with tension development, unity, and delivery rating the highest scores.

**Post-Test Sermon Scales (N=49)**  
Table 4.4

| <b>Sermon Scales</b>      | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Unity                  | 4.4         | .7        |
| 2. Tension Development    | 4.5         | .76       |
| 3. Plot                   | 4.1         | 1.05      |
| 4. Character & Scene Dev. | 4.3         | .76       |
| 5. Delivery               | 4.4         | .89       |

These scores indicate that the use of biblical narrative preaching provided generally positive experiences for subjects.

#### Summary of Significant Findings

1. Significant and positive change was observed on the overall mean scores of the holiness of heart and holiness of life sub-scale between the pre-test and the mid-test.
2. Of the seven growth areas only the means of grace sub-scale showed a significant and positive change between the pre-test and the mid-test.
3. Of the seven growth areas measured in the mid-test to the post-test, the no outward sin sub-scale mean score decreased significantly over that period.



4. Correlation was observed between change in the holiness of heart and life scale mean score and the mean scores of the seven growth areas.

5. Intervening variables of age, gender, denominational background and number of sermons heard were non-factors in growth in holiness of heart and life.

6. The high scores on sermon scales (see Table 4.5) indicate that the use of biblical narrative preaching provided generally positive experiences for subjects.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Conclusions

This research project takes place in the larger story of Christian leaders who struggle to help disciples grow in the grace and image of Jesus Christ. The Apostles preached, performed miracles, and formed church communities for this to happen. Two of the twelve Apostles wrote Gospels to this end, while the Apostle Paul wrote epistles to this end from prisons and palaces. Hundreds of years later an Anglican priest named John Wesley, dismayed and frustrated with the almost-Christians filling England's churches, began preaching and forming societies, classes, and bands to the same end of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land.

This project was developed out of my own struggle to foster and nurture holiness of heart and life in those filling United Methodist churches. A type of spiritual memory loss pervades the pews of our churches. Many who attend church and profess Christian faith live lives unrelated to their confession. This study looked at the connection between the Christian creed we confess and the moral behaviors and lifestyles we live. It looked at the whole Christian person, beliefs, feelings and actions relating to God, worship, God's laws, temptations, other people. This research project explored one aspect of ministry which contributes to the whole-person approach to discipleship, preaching. The styles of preaching vary, each of value and benefit in calling and making disciples. I chose to explore the use of a particular style of preaching-biblical narrative- to nurture change in the holiness of heart and life of congregants. My desire to put this style of preaching to the test came from an encounter with Robert Bellah's book, Habits of the Heart. Bellah

(153) and Fowler (127) concluded that the most formative experience for moral character and faith development was what he called communities of memory or churches which engage their members in the biblical narratives which constitute their lives. This study engaged subjects in four months of biblical memories. An evaluation follows of data collected from this study.

### Major Findings

The results of this study show that significant and positive change was observed on the overall mean scores of the holiness of heart and holiness of life sub-scale between the pre-test and the mid-test. Correlating the seven growth areas with the holiness of heart and life scale, only the means of grace sub-scale showed a significant and positive change between the pre-test and the mid-test. Of the seven growth areas measured in the mid-test to the post-test, the no outward sin sub-scale mean score decreased significantly over that period. The high scores on sermon series scales indicate that the use of biblical narrative preaching provided generally positive experiences for subjects. Intervening variables of age, gender, denominational background, and number of sermons heard were non-factors in growth in holiness of heart and life. A positive relationship exists between the overall mean scores in holiness of heart and holiness of life and the sermon series.

### Holiness of Heart and Life

The statistically significant positive change observed in the mean scores of holiness of heart and holiness of life sub-scale from the pre-test to the mid-test supports my premise that biblical narrative preaching fosters Christian growth in congregants. While subjects began a pre-test baseline for both sub-scales with a positive mean score, a

statistically significant growth by the mid-test was registered. The holiness of heart sub-scale was the most significant growth at  $p \leq .002$ . Growth on the holiness of life sub-scale was also significant at  $p \leq .03$ . This growth did not continue from mid-test to post-test. The first two months of the sermon series heightened the subjects' beliefs and feelings about their relationship with God more than the last two months. Holiness of heart, which deals with inner assurance as a child of God, love for God, and worship, grew significantly. This gives some affirmation to the premise that the preaching series effected growth.

### Making Correlation

The evidence of growth being effected by the preaching series is strengthened when we draw correlation between the holiness of heart and life scale with the seven growth areas' mean sub-scale scores. The means of grace sub-scale score increased significantly at  $p \leq .002$ . The rise in this score brings the strongest evidence to the table that this preaching project effected growth. (Later we will discuss the connection between growth and the use of biblical narrative preaching). The means of grace growth area sermons (worship, communion, and Scripture reading) were preached between the pre-test and mid-test. Change regarding these items usually takes place while engaging in them or reflecting on their meaning and personal application.

Possibly the experience of filling out the questionnaires themselves sparked growth. However, it seems that the first experience of the pre-test, with challenging personal questions, would be the place for either lower mean scores because of guilt, or higher mean scores than the mid-test because of wanting to give a good impression to the

preacher. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show strong mean scores in holiness of heart and holiness of life on the pre-test and a statistically significant increased mean score on the mid-test.

There was a drop in the no outward sin sub-scale score at a significant level by  $p \leq .03$  as measured by the post-test. The sermons dealing with not leaving any outward sin unrepented were preached just after the mid-test was taken by subjects. Thus the effects of this sermon subject would be most accurately measured on the mid-test to post-test scores.

Is it possible that subjects became inspired to increase their sinful activity by the sermons? It is possible, but not probable. Is it possible that the sermons dealing with God's law increased awareness of the subjects' personal sin and thus increased feelings of guilt or shame? If this is the case, such a significant sub-score decrease may not necessarily indicate failure to produce growth over the long term.

The decrease in the no outward sin sub-scale mean score could represent an increase in guilt or shame and nothing more. Yet one of the motivating factors for this study was that Christians, even Christian leaders, were making moral choices which were contrary to the Scripture. These Christians saw no conflict between these choices and their personal faith. Hauerwas states that our moral behavior and faith arise from the narratives of our lives which have shaped the way we see ourselves, others, God, and the world around us (74). In order for faith and moral behavior to shift, our personal visions must be readjusted. The Scriptures call this readjustment of vision "repentance". Wesley and Dykstra remind us that repentance, as a crucial movement in Christian growth, is never complete. "[Repentance] is a continuing discipline that we undertake at increasingly

deeper levels, bringing more and more of ourselves to God in humility and trust” (94).

One of Wesley’s goals in preaching was to awaken sinners in a society which considered itself Christian by virtue of church attendance, orthodox opinion, or doing no harm to others. Sermons like “Original Sin,” “The Almost Christian,” “The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption,” and “Justification By Faith” were preached to produce a degree of guilt and shame in order to reveal the true state of their souls before God.

Before repentance can take place we must see ourselves and our thoughts, motives, and behavior from a more theocentric view. Thus guilt and shame hold a place and purpose in readjusting our visions. It is possible that the decrease in mean scores on the no outward sin sub-scale reflects such a cognitive conflict or awareness of the reality of sin by those who previously felt a false sense of security in their relationship with God. This could mean that such a drop in the mean score is not problematic but necessary for long-term growth in holiness of heart and life. This possibility is strengthened by the observation that none of the other growth area sub-scale mean scores, like assurance and prayer, decreased significantly.

### Contributing Data

In this investigation we must also take into account the three ways people responded to calls for nurturing holiness of heart and life. Fifty-four persons or 33.5 percent of the entire average attendance responded to becoming prayer partners after the second sermon on the subject of prayer. Seventeen persons signed up to participate in the thirty-day John Wesley experiment. This was a one-time call. No additional invitations came from the pulpit after the closing sermon on Christian conversation. Eighty-seven

persons (fifty-two percent of average attendance) responded to the call to be in ministry, eighteen of whom were new respondents.

### The Elements of Biblical Narrative Preaching

Biblical narrative preaching contains five elements; unity, tension development, plot, character and scene development, and delivery. When preparing the seventeen sermons in this preaching series, I worked to incorporate each of these sermon elements to enhance the subject's experience of the biblical narrative. I did not increase, decrease, or change these elements throughout the series in order to measure their effectiveness. Since my primary concern was the measurement of the degree of change in holiness of heart and life over time, I did not want to lessen the potential impact any one sermon would have on the hearers by varying the sermon elements. Therefore I did not place sermon element questions on the mid-test to compare with the post-test. I placed twenty questions in the post-test to measure the impact on subjects of each of the particular elements of biblical narrative preaching. With reference to delivery, I have preached away from the pulpit and without notes since before arriving at First United Methodist Church. Stacy Minger's study on stewardship and sermon delivery already demonstrated that a subject's experience of the message and the preacher is greatly enhanced by moving away from the pulpit and speaking without notes (123).

This study originally had an element of comparison of sermon styles built in to it by using another United Methodist congregation and preacher as a control group. However, no significant amount of data was returned to enable such a comparison. Therefore this study does not attempt to refute Jay Dudley's conclusion that sermon style is a non-factor

in listener participation (165). I concur with Dudley who concluded from his preaching experiment, “No method of sermon presentation can make exclusive claim to divine use” (165).

Yet the question remains, did the preaching elements create a community of memory experience which affected change or growth? The post-test sermon element mean sub-scale scores were favorable as reported in Table 4.5. High scores on the sermon scales indicate that the use of biblical narrative preaching provided generally positive experiences for subjects. The questions in the Character and Scene Development sub-scale (see Table 3.3) held a high mean score at 4.25. Questions in this category dealt with the visions we hold of ourselves and God and the readjustment of such personal visions. Question forty-eight, “When hearing the stories in the Bible I often felt I could identify with what they were thinking and feeling” received a combined mean score of 4.55 (see Appendix G). Question fifty-seven, “These sermons have caused me to think more about the persons in the Bible in my everyday life,” received a combined mean score of 4.06. Tension development drew the highest mean score of 4.51. Tension development is where what Kohlberg articulates as cognitive conflict is fostered. More than just drawing people’s interest, the creation of tension within narrative addresses conflicts, questions, and previous assumptions in people’s lives which open the door for moral growth.

Persons in my congregational reflection group spoke about how biblical images, which had been painted on the canvas of their minds, were still fresh and impacting as we discussed some of the sermons at least a month after they were preached. One woman related the detailed images of a sermon preached four weeks before. She told our group



how the sermon dealing with Mary anointing Jesus' feet touched her at a deep level (Mark 14:3-9). She found herself connecting with what Mary experienced which led her to do what Mary did, bring to Jesus those things of value which she has kept back for herself (see Appendix F, "Broken and Spilled Out").

Was the use of biblical narrative preaching a contributing factor in the change of subjects over the four-month period of time? From the data gathered I would say yes. I would also say that we cannot know how much of a factor it was in growth or change. Dudley brings one concluding factor to bear on this discussion by his own conviction that the personality of the preacher plays a role in the influence of subjects toward growth or change (167). This is a lesson I learned unwittingly from the United Methodist Church that was less than cooperative in this study. Their receptivity to this study (or the lack of it) via their own pastor's persuasion points to the factor of openness to the pastor's personality. Had the people valued and trusted their pastor they would have been more receptive to helping him by helping me. The factor of personality is most noted in the area of delivery. The highest sermon sub-scale score was in the category of delivery at 4.70.

A critical factor in this study was the independent variable, the seventeen biblical narrative sermons and the preacher's ability to develop and preach them. The degree of change in Christian character was affected, in part, by my ability to preach effectively. Reflecting on the literature review, my sermons, and the statistical bottom line I must ask the question, what could I have done differently to increase the effectiveness of the independent variable? As I examine my sermons I see that many of them could have been more sharply focused and could have provided more specific applications. On the first

issue, although narrative sermons are typically non-directive, it is still possible I could have structured the narrative more carefully to produce the results I was seeking.

On the second issue, the authorities consulted in the literature review insisted that narrative preaching, while needing to maintain unity, needs to be open-ended. They insist the narrative sermon needs to allow the congregation to make their own personal applications (Rice, Wardlaw, Lowry, Craddock). But the results of this study lead me to question that conclusion. It now appears to me that for such purposes as those I wished to achieve, even narrative sermons need to provide some assistance to congregants as they silently ask, “So what am I supposed to do?” or “How does this story affect my personal life?”

An example of this lack of application is seen in my sermon “Caught in the Act” (see appendix F). At the end of the sermon I make little, if any, application to the way we judge others. I spent much of the sermon helping people understand the character’s problems and acts of sin. I led the congregation up to the conclusion which should have connected the biblical world to the hearers’ world and stopped just prior to application. This made the sermon open-ended but may have left many confused as to how to respond to the message. Therefore, to the five elements of effective biblical narrative preaching operationalized in chapter two I would add a sixth, Practical Application.

### Unexpected Conclusions

At first it surprised me that there was no continued growth in holiness of heart and life from the mid-test to the post-test. This was heightened when I saw the significant decrease in the mean sub-scale score for no outward sin. Perhaps one can draw other

conclusions from the study and data gathered than have been offered. One definite conclusion I can draw from observing the scores from pre-test to post-test is that John Wesley's declaration is still valid,

I was more convinced than ever, that the preaching like an Apostle without joining together those who are awakened, and training them up in the ways of God is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these 20 years all over Pembrokehire! But no regular Societies, no discipline; no order or connection; and the consequence is, that nine in ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever. (Works Vol. III 144)

Preaching has the power to open the door to people's spiritual lives. It brings people to repentance, sparks conviction, fosters growth, and inspires action. Minger's study on stewardship demonstrates that preaching can foster such growth or change (123). However, such growth or change is temporary if not linked to some other form of ongoing disciple building habits. Minger inspired her subjects to the habit of stewardship. John Wesley involved people in many habits including covenant (class) meetings, stewardship, personal prayer, and Bible reading. This study has convinced me of the necessity for a balance of preaching *and* habit building approaches to disciple building which include above all else a strong small group ministry. I have in the past put a higher priority on sermons and their preparation than on the development of other discipleship ministries. Preaching may inspire growth but only other areas of ministry and discipleship will sustain and continue growth in holiness of heart and life. This conclusion is not unexpected but has become a fresh reality for me and my future ministry. It is a reminder to make sure I develop a balanced ministry of discipleship.

### Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research

In various ways this study could have been strengthened. For those who would wish to further this research I make the following observations. The first set of observations concern the CCP questionnaire. Had I been able to perform a validity/reliability test on this questionnaire the findings would carry more weight. The only statistician available to me was a mathematics and statistics professor at a local college. Her particular field and computer software did not have the background or ability to run such a test since mathematics statistics do not need to test for reliability. A behavioral science statistician would be a better guide for such a study.

Another weakness of the CCP was indicated by the high pre-test baseline scores. There was little room left for growth or change. Taking out the “neither disagree nor agree” category in the five-point Likert scale would have provided stronger forced choices leading to stronger results.

An alternative to using the CCP would be to use the Spiritual Well-Being Inventory for assessing holiness of heart in congregants in conjunction with a set of questions assessing behavioral changes. The SWB questionnaire has a long history of reliability and many of the questions on this inventory are similar to the holiness of heart section of the CCP.

Second, a strong comparison congregation would have added to this study. Another way of approaching this study would be to heed Dudley’s recommendation to utilize two sermon styles involving the highest degree of contrast, “perhaps the topical and

narrative styles-- to see if stylistic extremities would correlate with shifts in respondent experience” (168).

It is possible that certain styles or kinds of preaching effect different changes in people (cognitive, affective, behavioral). Thomas Artmann’s dissertation Doctrinal Preaching in an Emerging Post-Modern Age assessed the growth in the spiritual well-being of congregants in a similar type of study. Artmann’s style of preaching was naturally aimed at developing cognitive change or an increased knowledge of doctrines of the Christian faith, which it seemed to accomplish. His study did not seek to measure behavioral changes in congregants. This speculation is left to be proven or not by future research.

Third, I come back to Sappington and Wilson’s comment stated at the beginning of Chapter 2: “Each of us is on a spiritual journey” (46). A limitation of this four-month test period is that it was a small segment in the spiritual journeys of subjects at First United Methodist Church. A more longitudinal design should be considered by anyone wishing to study homiletical process and impact (Minger 125).

This study began as an effort to determine the value of preaching for making Christian disciples. The conclusions may have been unexpected, but they were important to my ministry. This study has affirmed the need for solid, biblical preaching while adding a sense of urgency to wed such preaching with other discipleship opportunities for long-term growth in holiness of heart and life.

## **Appendix A**

### **Cover letter for Pre-test Sermon Series Questionnaire**



# *First United Methodist Church*

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AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA 33823

CHURCH

316 Ariana Blvd. (P.O. Box 636)  
(941) 967-1262

PARSONAGE

406 Ariana Blvd.  
(941) 967-1088

July 28, 1998

Dear,

In an effort to improve my ability to preach and to communicate in a more helpful manner I am beginning a four month preaching project in August. This study will complete the doctoral research I have been working on for four years. The study evaluates personal Christian faith and habits.

I need your help in this study. I am asking several people in the congregation like you to participate in this study by filling out three questionnaires. During the next four months I will send you three questionnaires. **Enclosed is the first questionnaire.** In mid-September, I will send you another one, and one at the end of November. The responses will remain completely anonymous. Not even I will know the individual responses of any questionnaire. On this first questionnaire you will make up your own personal (secret) code. No names will be used. You will use that same code for all three questionnaires.

As you fill out this questionnaire I urge you to be as honest with yourself as possible, anything less will product false results. Remember, you and your answers on this questionnaire will remain completely anonymous.

I value your cooperation. It will help me to become a better preacher and possibly make worship a better growth experience for everyone. Please complete the questionnaire and drop it in the mail by **Saturday, August 1st.** Thank you for your help.

In Jesus' Joy,

Marshall MacClellan

## Christian Faith and Lifestyle Questionnaire

In order to assure complete anonymity, please fill in the following boxes to create your own personal code:

The first initial of your Mother's Maiden Name \_\_\_

The last four digits of your Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please check one box for each of the following questions.

1. Gender:                    \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female

2. Your Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What Church or Denomination were you raised in: \_\_\_\_\_

### Personal Faith Experience

Please respond to the following statements out of your own experience and honest feelings.

Please circle one number to the right of each statement which most closely corresponds to your view.

|   | Strongly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Neither<br>Agree or<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 4. Most of the time I feel that God loves me.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 5. I am confident that Jesus has made his home in my heart.                               | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 6. Most of the time I feel God hears my prayers.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 7. I feel close to God when I take Communion.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 8. I am the same person I have always been.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 9. I feel close to God all the time.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 10. I feel encouraged in my faith when I talk with other Christians about personal faith. | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 11. I often feel close to God when I attend worship.                                      | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 12. I do not need frequent communion to strengthen my relationship with Christ.           | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 13. I do not get much out of reading the Bible.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 14. Often I feel far away from God.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 15. I often find myself talking to God or thinking about him during the day.              | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 16. I cannot believe God has forgiven certain things in my life.                          | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |



|  | Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 17. I don't believe in feeling guilty about breaking one or more of the 10 commandments.               | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 18. I feel that sharing personal prayer concerns with other Christians is not important.               | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 19. It's not good to talk about one's personal faith.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 20. When I am tempted to say or do something that would not please God I immediately seek God's help.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 21. Jesus is concerned about what I think, say, and do.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 22. What goes on in my life is my personal business not God's business.                                | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 23. I find myself regularly giving in to temptations that do not please God.                           | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 24. There are things which I have done that I have not asked God to forgive.                           | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 25. At the present time I am not breaking any of the 10 Commandments.                                  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 26. I feel God is too busy to listen to my life and problems.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 27. It often seems that God does not answer my prayers.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 28. I often find the Sunday worship service boring.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 29. I am currently breaking one or more of the 10 Commandments.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 30. Coming to worship on Sunday morning is all I need to meet my spiritual needs.                      | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 31. Jesus wants me to resist every wrong temptation that comes to me.                                  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 32. Most of the time when someone prays publically my heart and mind is on what is being prayed about. | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 33. I meet regularly with other Christians to study the Bible and talk about God.                      | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 34. I often find myself reading the Bible.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 35. I have a set time each day for prayer.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 36. I try to seek out and help other people in need.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 37. I feel that I am extending the hands of Jesus as I help others.                                    | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |

|   | Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 38. The laws of God are to be obeyed.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 39. I feel that God does not want me to get involved in needs and problems of other people. | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 40. I am completely forgiven for all my past wrong-doings.                                  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 41. I do not often feel God works through me.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 42. I attend church as often as I can.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 43. I have found a meaningful place of service within the life of my Church                 | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |

44. When thinking about the Christian faith I would describe myself as;  
(Circle one)

- A. Not a Christian
- B. An interested Observer
- C. I am the same Christian I have been for years.
- D. I am thriving and growing in my relationship with God.

45. How many times in the last 3 months have you missed Sunday morning worship Services?  
(Circle one)

- A. None
- B. 1-2
- C. 3-4
- D. 5-7
- E. 8-more

If there are thoughts, feelings, or reflections you would like to share as a participant in this study, please do so here.

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**Thank you for taking the time to respond.  
Please return in the self-addressed stamped envelope.**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **The Mid-Test**



*First United Methodist Church*

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AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA 33823

**CHURCH**

316 Ariana Blvd. (P.O. Box 636)  
(941) 967-1262

**PARSONAGE**

406 Ariana Blvd  
(941) 967-1081

October 5, 1998

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation project. There are 17 sermons in the series in the project. I have now reached the mid-point of those sermons. As I asked in my first letter to you I am now sending to you the mid-point questionnaire. I am so appreciative of how you have helped me so far and am grateful for this opportunity to have you continue to participate in this study. As you already know your identity will remain completely unknown to me or anyone else. Here is how you can help:

1. Complete the enclosed questionnaire. It will take no more than 18 minutes to complete. Notice that this is the exact same questionnaire except that there are a few additional questions this time.
2. Place your completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.
3. Place the envelope in the mail by **Saturday, October 10th.**

I am deeply grateful for your help and need your input so don't delay. God bless you.

In Jesus' Joy,

Rev. Marshall MacClellan

**APPENDIX C**  
**THE POST-TEST**



# First United Methodist Church

AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA 33823

**CHURCH**

316 Ariana Blvd. (P.O. Box 636)  
(941) 967-1262

**PARSONAGE**

406 Ariana Blvd.  
(941) 967-1081

November 23, 1998

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation project. There are 17 sermons in the series in the project. I have now reached the end of these sermons. As I asked in my first letter to you I am now sending to you the last questionnaire. You will notice that this questionnaire has several more questions than the last two. These questions will help me review my own preaching abilities for improvement.

I am so appreciative of how you have helped me so far and am grateful for this opportunity to have you help me in this study. As you already know your identity will remain completely unknown to me or anyone else. Here is how you can help:

1. Complete the enclosed questionnaire. It will take no more than 20 minutes to complete. Notice that this is the exact same questionnaire except that there are a few additional questions this time.
2. Place your completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.
3. Place the envelope in the mail by **Saturday, October 28th.**

I am deeply grateful for your help and need your input so don't delay. God bless you.

In Jesus' Joy,

Rev. Marshall MacClellan

## Christian Faith and Lifestyle Questionnaire

In order to assure complete anonymity, please fill in the following boxes to create your own personal code:

The first initial of your Mother's Maiden Name

The last four digits of your Social Security Number

Please check one box for each of the following questions.

1. Gender:  Male  Female

2. Your Age:

3. What Church or Denomination were you raised in:

### Personal Faith Experience

Please respond to the following statements out of your own experience and honest feelings.

Please circle one number to the right of each statement which most closely corresponds to your view.

|   | Strongly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Neither<br>Agree or<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 4. Most of the time I feel that God loves me.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 5. I am confident that Jesus has made his home in my heart.                               | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 6. Most of the time I feel God hears my prayers.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 7. I feel close to God when I take Communion.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 8. I am the same person I have always been.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 9. I feel close to God all the time.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 10. I feel encouraged in my faith when I talk with other Christians about personal faith. | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 11. I often feel close to God when I attend worship.                                      | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 12. I do not need frequent communion to strengthen my relationship with Christ.           | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 13. I do not get much out of reading the Bible.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 14. Often I feel far away from God.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 15. I often find myself talking to God or thinking about him during the day.              | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 16. I cannot believe God has forgiven certain things in my life.                          | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |

|  | Strongly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Neither<br>Agree or<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 17. I don't believe in feeling guilty about breaking one or more of the 10 commandments.               | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 18. I feel that sharing personal prayer concerns with other Christians is not important.               | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 19. It's not good to talk about one's personal faith.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 20. When I am tempted to say or do something that would not please God I immediately seek God's help.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 21. Jesus is concerned about what I think, say, and do.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 22. What goes on in my life is my personal business not God's business.                                | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 23. I find myself regularly giving in to temptations that do not please God.                           | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 24. There are things which I have done that I have not asked God to forgive.                           | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 25. At the present time I am not breaking any of the 10 Commandments.                                  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 26. I feel God is too busy to listen to my life and problems.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 27. It often seems that God does not answer my prayers.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 28. I often find the Sunday worship service boring.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 29. I am currently breaking one or more of the 10 Commandments.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 30. Coming to worship on Sunday morning is all I need to meet my spiritual needs.                      | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 31. Jesus wants me to resist every wrong temptation that comes to me.                                  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 32. Most of the time when someone prays publically my heart and mind is on what is being prayed about. | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 33. I meet regularly with other Christians to study the Bible and talk about God.                      | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 34. I often find myself reading the Bible.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 35. I have a set time each day for prayer.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 36. I try to seek out and help other people in need.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 37. I feel that I am extending the hands of Jesus as I help others.                                    | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |



|   | Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 38. The laws of God are to be obeyed.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 39. I feel that God does not want me to get involved in needs and problems of other people. | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 40. I am completely forgiven for all my past wrong-doings.                                  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 41. I do not often feel God works through me.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 42. I attend church as often as I can.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 43. I have found a meaningful place of service within the life of my Church                 | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |

44. When thinking about the Christian faith I would describe myself as;  
(Circle one)

- A. Not a Christian
- B. An interested Observer
- C. I am the same Christian I have been for years.
- D. I am thriving and growing in my relationship with God.

45. How many times in the last 3 months have you missed Sunday morning worship Services?  
(Circle one)

- A. None
- B. 1-2
- C. 3-4
- D. 5-7
- E. 8-more

#### The Sermon Series

Please respond to the following statements with the sermons over the past eight weeks in mind. Please circle one number to the right of each statement which most closely corresponds to your view.

|  | Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Moderately Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 46. The sermons looking at Biblical characters were very interesting.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 47. After each sermon I knew the point of the message.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 48. When hearing the stories of persons in the Bible I often felt I could identify with what they were thinking and feeling.               | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 49. I felt the sermons often voiced and explored my own doubts, questions and thoughts about subjects the persons in the Bible dealt with. | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 50. The way the minister preached made it hard for me to connect with what he said.  | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 51. When the preacher told the stories of persons in the Bible I could not see how they related to my life today.                          | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 52. The sermons grabbed and held my attention.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |
| 53. After the sermons I often felt confused as to what he was preaching about.   | 5              | 4                | 3                         | 2                   | 1                 |

CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE

|  | Strongly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Neither<br>Agree or<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 54 After hearing the sermons I often thought, "I can do that!"   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 55 When the sermon was finished I often felt I wanted to apply what the Bible characters learned to my own life.           | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 56 When I heard the Bible character's situations and personalities I often felt, "That's just like me!"                    | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 57 These sermons have caused me to think more about the persons in the Bible in my everyday life.                          | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 58 After hearing the sermon I often thought, "This sermon does not relate to my life."                                     | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 59 I feel the Bible tells the stories of people who did not struggle with the same problems normal people deal with today. | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 60 The people in the Bible were better than I could be.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 61 I often felt bored during the sermons.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 62 These sermons have helped me want to draw closer to God.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 63 The preacher's gestures often confused me as he spoke.  | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 64 I often felt the preacher was talking directly to me.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |
| 65 The preacher's tone of voice helped me connect with what he was saying.   | 5                 | 4                   | 3                               | 2                      | 1                    |

**APPENDIX D**  
**PRAYER PARTNERS**

Jesus said "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven.. For where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them".  
(Matthew 18:19-20)

*Yes, I would like to be a prayer partner.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Number: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *I choose my own prayer partner.*

*Their name is \_\_\_\_\_*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Please link me up with a prayer partner*

*(men will be linked with other men and women with other women)*

### **What Am I Committing To?**

- 1) I will speak with them during the week in person or on the phone about any prayer needs and will seek to learn about their prayer needs.
  
- 2) I will pray daily for my prayer partner and what he/she has shared with me.



# First United Methodist Church

AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA 33823

**CHURCH**

316 Ariana Blvd. (P.O. Box 636)  
(941) 967-1262

**PARSONAGE**

406 Ariana Blvd  
(941) 967-1081

September 10, 1998

Dear,

Thank you for making the commitment to become a prayer partner with another person. Your prayer partner is \_\_\_\_\_, I guarantee you will find your faith strengthened, your prayer life deepened and more satisfying, and you will see more evidence of God's answers to your prayers. You will also discover a deeper and more enriching friendship with your prayer partner than you may have yet experienced.

I now encourage you to follow through weekly with your commitment to:

- 1) Speak with him/her during the week in person or on the phone about any prayer needs (and prayer reports), and will seek to learn their prayer needs, and,
- 2) Pray daily for your prayer partner and about what he/she has shared with you.

You will see things begin to happen. Anticipate God's movement, look for His hand and receive God's Blessing.

In Jesus' Love and Joy,

Marshall MacClellan

**APPENDIX E**  
**MINISTRY MENU**



# First United Methodist Church

AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA 33823

**CHURCH**

316 Ariana Blvd. (P.O. Box 636)  
(941) 967-1262

**PARSONAGE**

406 Ariana Blvd  
(941) 967-1081

November 5, 1998

Dear ,

We are entering a season of thanksgiving and celebration. In years past we have had a campaign calling God's people to financially support the ministries of First United Methodist Church. This year we are doing something radically different. We are inviting you, along with every person in the Church, to become involved in the ministry of our Church, not just financially but in actual ministry service. To facilitate this we will be developing and sending out to you an **Every Christian in Ministry menu form**. This form invites you to be in ministry in three areas:

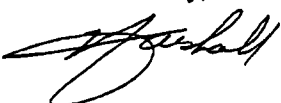
**First, in your Service.** Jesus said "I came not to be served but to serve." He then said "I gave you an example which you are to follow." The Bible also says that God designed each church to be like a body where every person is like a member or limb of the body. The body (church) functions in a healthy, dynamic way **only** when all are exercising their God-given gifts and talents in and through His church. The ministry menu form is specifically designed for our Church which will list over 50 ministry options for you to choose from. There are areas of service for everyone and every age.

**Second, Financially.** I ask you to prayerfully consider your estimate of financial giving for the upcoming year of 1999. There are many reasons to make a financial commitment to your Church but the most important are these: First, you contribute to the vital ministry of Jesus Christ through First UMC which will be taking place in 1999. I am convinced that God is going to do great things through His First Church family this next year and you will want to be a part of it. Second, making a personal financial commitment is an exercise in faith that has no substitute. There is a part of our relationship with Christ that only is nurtured as we commit ourselves financially to His Church.

**Third, Prayerfully.** There will also be a place for you to make a commitment to pray for your Church, our people and leadership.

**Sunday, November 22, will be Every Christian in Ministry Celebration.** This day, we as God's people, will bring our completed Ministry Menu forms to the altar and commit them and ourselves to the Lord's service for the upcoming year (1999). Soon you will be receiving the menu form. Begin praying now for how God wants to work in you in 1999.

In Jesus' Joy,



November 17, 1998

Dear Friend,

Here is the Ministry menu you have heard about. This menu is a tool which will help us move toward God's vision for our Church in 1999. I am convinced from Scripture, my own experience and the experience of many others that we are most fulfilled when we are using our God-given gifts, experience and talents for others. We become the very hands and feet of Jesus reaching out to others. I am asking you to do three things:

**First**, go to God in prayer about where He is calling you to serve in the life and ministry of First Church. As you pray, consider the following questions may be helpful:

- A. Where is God working (church, community, etc...) and where does He want me to join Him in ministry?
- B. What is my heart (passion) for ministry?
- C. What kind of personality did God give me and in what ministry (s) would that best be used?
- D. What spiritual gifts did God give me?

**Second**, fill out the questionnaire, one for each person.

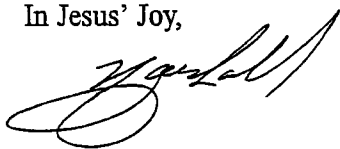
The financial part could be filled out for each family. Just leave it blank if one of you have already filled this part out for the family.

**Third**, bring your completed Ministry menu form to church on November 22, Thanksgiving Sunday; we will take these up as a special point in the service.

Here are some things to keep in mind. 1) You are valuable to our Church, your ministry, no matter what it is, allows Jesus to work in a unique way. 2) Your commitment is for one year only, beginning in January 1999. If you want to sign up again next year for the same ministry, great, but you are not locking yourself in to an indefinite commitment. 3) You may select more than one area of ministry, but don't over do it. 4) You will be contacted. Your completed form will be passed on to the appropriate ministry coordinator. If training is needed we will train you for your ministry. 5) Don't limit yourself to what we have listed. If God is laying a ministry on your heart that you do not see, then the ( ) other is for you. 6) If no one signs up for a particular ministry we will not do it. We will only do ministry out of the willingness, and calling of God's people of First Church. God Bless You.

Don't forget to pray for your Church leadership as we implement this exciting Biblical way of doing ministry.

In Jesus' Joy,

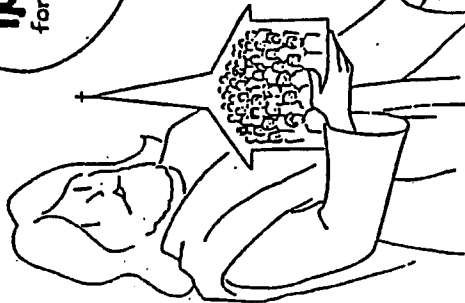




# Every Christian In Joyful Service

**WHY**  
is it  
**IMPORTANT**  
for me to be active  
in my church  
?

**BECAUSE YOU ARE  
THE CHURCH!**  
The church is more than  
the building you worship  
in. The church is people  
— the combined life of  
all who believe that  
Jesus Christ is Savior.



**BECAUSE THE CHURCH  
NEEDS YOU!**

As a follower of Christ,  
you are called to let your  
faith and your good  
works bring light to the  
world.

First United Methodist Church  
P. O. Box 636  
Auburndale, FL 33823  
941-967-1262

## WHAT IF . . .

What would you do  
if the Lord  
took your contribution  
each Sunday  
and multiplied it by ten—  
and made that your income  
for the week?  
Would you be satisfied with  
your salary?

If you gave one dollar,  
and He gave you ten—  
if you gave five dollars,  
and He gave you fifty—

Would you be able to live on that  
for a week?

If the Lord prospered you  
as you give,  
as you have been prospered,  
how would you fare?

The Lord does not do this . . .  
He leaves it up to you .  
But what if . . . ?

## FOLLOWING IN HIS STEPS

"Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food  
in my house; and thereby put me to the test, said the Lord of  
Hosts, if I will not open the windows of Heaven for you and pour  
down for you an overflowing blessing." Malachi 3:10

"Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with  
purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the Heavens that  
does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.  
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Luke  
12:33-34

"Truly I tell you this poor widow has put in more than all of them;  
for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of  
her poverty put in all the living she had." Luke 21:1-4

### STATEMENT OF MISSION

First United Methodist Church exists to:

Draw unchurched people into a relationship  
with Jesus Christ,  
Deepen each Disciple's walk with Christ,  
Develop accepting, supportive relationships  
between people, and  
Deploy every Disciple to use their God given  
gifts to do caring acts of service for  
people in our community.

We will accomplish our mission through:

- \* Providing vibrant, friendly, joy-filled  
Worship Services.
- \* Development of a strong Small Group  
Ministry, that has the four elements of:  
Disciple-making, Nurture,  
Evangelism and Mission.
- \* Lay visitation team who will welcome  
visitors and who will reach out to  
members of the Body of Christ with  
love and compassion.
- \* Inspire and equip each Disciple to use  
their God given gift and talents for  
service in and through our Church.
- \* Serving human needs in our community  
in Christ's love, and
- \* Building ministries and bridges of love  
for all ages with an emphasis on families,  
children and youth.

**First United Methodist Service Sheet 1999**

The various ministries which are vital to the life and work of First United Methodist Church are listed on this sheet. PLEASE INDICATE WHERE YOU WISH TO SERVE EVEN IF YOU WANT TO WORK IN THE SAME AREA (S) AS YOU HAVE IN THE PAST. Thank you.

MacClellan 118

In God's Love, I, \_\_\_\_\_, will commit myself to serving Jesus Christ through:  
(choose one or more of the following areas)

**Administrative Ministry**

( ) Help church secretary with bulletins, newsletters, etc.

**AGE LEVEL MINISTRIES**

**Children's Ministries**

- ( ) Help in Nursery (once a quarter)
- ( ) Teach Sunday School
- ( ) On-Call Substitute for Sunday School
- ( ) Teach Children's Church (once a month)
- Serve at Summer Vacation Bible School in the following capacity:**
  - ( ) Teach
  - ( ) Teacher's Helper
  - ( ) Crafts
  - ( ) Activities/Recreation
  - ( ) Snacks
- ( ) Help with Easter Event for children
- ( ) Teach Wonderful Wednesday Kid's Class
- ( ) Substitute for WW Kids Class
- ( ) Help lead a craft at Advent Festival
- ( ) Drive for special trips
- ( ) Help lead Children's Summer Week of Music Camp (during summer)
- ( ) Assist with costumes/sets for children's musicals.

**Youth Ministry**

- ( ) Teach Youth Sunday School
- ( ) Assist Youth Sunday School
- ( ) Serve as a Youth Counselor
- ( ) Transportation on call
- ( ) Mentor for Confirmands
- ( ) Lead a small group youth Bible Study
- ( ) First Friday Volunteers
- ( ) Chaperone special trips (Leesburg, concerts, etc.)
- ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Adult Ministries**

- ( ) Help contact/Visit Sick & Shut-ins
- ( ) Help contact First Time Guests
- ( ) Prepare food for families in need
- ( ) Teach Adult Sunday School
- ( ) Substitute Sunday School
- ( ) Help plan and organize Senior Adult Activities, trips, meals.
- ( ) Leader in United Methodist Women
- ( ) Leader in United Methodist Men
- ( ) Lead a Small Home Bible Study
- ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Ministries**

- ( ) Help plan & prepare Wonderful Wed. Dinners
- ( ) Help plan & carry-out Church Family activities
- ( ) Help set-up & oversee coffee & donuts before worship
- ( ) Make treats for Special Occasions
- ( ) Assist with Family Resource Center (Library)
- ( ) Take photos at special events
- ( ) Video special events
- ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Missions & Community Outreach**

- ( ) Special Olympics Game Day Volunteer
- ( ) Helper on Local Mission Work Team
- ( ) Foreign mission work team
- ( ) Auburndale Relief - Help sort food for Christmas Dinners for needy
- ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Worship**

- ( ) Greeter for Worship (2 times/year)
- ( ) Usher for Worship (2 times/year)
- ( ) Sing in Chancel Choir
- ( ) Bell Choir
- ( ) Provide Music for Worship Instrument \_\_\_\_\_
- ( ) Help prepare Sanctuary for seasons (Altar Guild)
- ( ) Communion Stewards
- ( ) Sound System ministry
- ( ) Banner makers for Worship
- ( ) Help robing children for acolytes/children's choir
- ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**The Body of Christ, Serving, Living, Helping, Making a Difference.**

**Family Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Estimate of Financial Giving**

(This section can be filled out for entire family)

After prayerful consideration I/We acknowledge our commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church by:

1. Prayer for the ministry of Fellowship regularly \_\_\_\_\_
2. Estimating the following financial commitment for 1999, (choose):  
\_\_\_\_\_ Per week or \_\_\_\_\_ Per month, \_\_\_\_\_ Other

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Biblical Narrative Sermon Series**

For the sake of brevity all of the seventeen sermons are in outline form. For the sake of example I have included four sermons in full manuscript. These four were selected because they are the best examples of the preaching project. The question I struggled with here is how does one outline a narrative sermon? They are taken directly from the single, four by six inch note card which I took to the pulpit for each sermon. I added a few words or sentences to make these notes more intelligible to the reader. The sermons are outlined with a few standard characteristics. First, there is an introduction which focuses the sermon subject or develops the tension. The heading “Develop Scene” tries to encapsulate how I opened and developed the narrative. “Today” marks the place where I reflected on how our own situations might be mirrored in the narrative. At times I used a name or phrase to help the reader of the outline to see a transition or to understand who was being focused on in the biblical story at that moment. The brackets [ ] are used where illustrations take place that explore or illuminate something within the narrative.

#### **Sermon # 1**

It is Better to Receive than to Give  
Luke 5:1-11

Introduction - “It is better to give than to receive” they saying goes. It is true when we speak of giving gifts, helping others above self, in marriage relationships... But there are times when you’ve given all you have to give and it is still not enough.

Examples of work, marriage...

Describe Scene - We meet a man to day that is like the examples. He's at the end of his rope, or net. The Galilean lakeside morning with two fishing boats on shore. Simon and Andrew, James and John exhausted, begin working with nets] Jesus comes to seaside teaching. Crowds gather, young, old, curious, sick. Peter recognizes Jesus, goes back to washing nets. He has no time for preachers or prophets. He needs to deal with more important 'real world' things, next meal, boat payment, addition for mother-in-law, children...

Today - We struggle with those real world issues. Talk about today's problems and choices with regard to children taking care of parents and own children, finances, payments...

Simon Peter - Simon's given all he has and it is not enough. Crowds push in Jesus gets into Simon's boat. Jesus asks Simon to go out into the deep. Simon sees Jesus as well intentioned but ignorant preacher. Thinks to humor the preacher.

Big Catch- Suddenly realizes Jesus knows Peter's life and thoughts.

Peter like us - Sinners in needs of God's grace. We play games with Jesus like Peter. Yet, Jesus knows us inside and out. Jesus' response, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

What do we have to give Jesus? - Sin and Self only. Give your all to him today.

## Sermon # 2

No Fear!  
Matthew 14:22-33

Introduction - "No Fear!" slogan on T-shirts, hats, cars... But teens and adults live in a terribly frightening world (examples of fears).

Describe Scene - 12 Disciples frightened as they fight for their lives, confused alone, out of control. It started out as a beautiful day of miracles (feeding of 5000). Disciples set sail as Jesus dismissed the crowd. Fearful storm drove them out to sea. Where's Jesus?

Today - Fear is natural, but it can either be like cancer to trust or a catalyst to greater trust.

Notice Disciples - Their reaction to their condition. Just experienced great miracle.

Are they recounting miracle and boldly singing hymns? No! Fear became cancer.

Where is Jesus? Where is God? I don't see Him? Is He too busy for me? Yet from Jesus' mountain top prayer he could see them struggling and came to them walking on the sea, getting wet, blown and storm tossed.

Today - Jesus came into storm of our world because he could see us, struggling, alone, fearful and tired. Peter teaches us how fear can be a catalyst to greater trust by: Speaking to Jesus. He faces his fears head on. Does not beg Jesus but speaks confidently.

Peter fixes his eyes on Jesus and gets out of the boat moving toward Jesus.

Peter does a "Tim Allen" (TV situation comedy) demonstrates what not to do.

Don't take your eyes off Jesus! Peter becomes storm tossed and wet. Jesus hard to see in the diving troughs and rising swells. But even when sinking fast Peter still called out to Jesus who saved him. We can truly say, as Christians, "No Fear !"

### Sermon # 3

#### Growing from the Inside Out Acts 4:1-14

Introduction - [When I was a child measuring my growth by marks on grandma's wall]

Peter and John needed to be sure of their growth in Christ. They faced the greatest danger of their lives.

Describe Scene - A few hours ago healed beggar now in dark prison, sleepless night, death was most likely at hand.

[Civil War soldiers who would pin own names to jackets before battle]

Peter always first to follow...and first to fall on his face and sink when danger came.

Describe Scene - Being taken down long marbled hall to supreme court of Israel and before Sanhedrin. They tried and sent Jesus to the cross only months before.

[Like me in principal's office in third grade]

It was only weeks before that Peter had been questioned like this in courtyard. come on, lie, deny, make false promises. Jesus knows your real heart. What you do does not matter. What matters is what you believe, right?

[65% of American Christians agree with this in a recent poll. Only 35% believe faith and lifestyle go together -cheap grace]

Peter - Yet, something in Peter urged him not to betray his Master. Something in him that was not of him. A new spirit breathing within him. Fresh boldness - Holy Spirit.

Us - Being born again gives Spiritual senses, notice Peter's humility, kindness - attributes of Jesus. This is the evidence, fruit of God's indwelling Spirit. Assurance. Growth on the inside.

#### **Sermon # 4**

#### **Being Real with God Luke 18:10-14**

Introduction - Last week spoke of the Holy Spirit which lives within the Christian.

How do we feed the Spirit of God in us? Prayer. Jesus tells us a story about prayer.

Describe Scene - Temple, early afternoon.

Pharisee enters - attends worship often, knows creeds, prayers, takes Scripture seriously, praises God. He would make a good next door neighbor, describe.

Tax Collector - we like to see selves here because we know this story. But his life characterized by selfish ambition, illustrate Tax Collector's business and cruelty. Jesus' conclusion of parable is confusing. What's wrong with the Pharisee? Only one thing; Pharisee was not being real ( honest) with God. "I'm not like other men."

[My discovery as a prison chaplain, I was no different than inmates]

Today - We look for people to compare ourselves to in a subtle way. TV, newspaper crimes. "At least I'm not that bad." In times of difficulty and illness we say "Why me?" This is the question of a Pharisee. Why not you? Why not me? We are

really saying repay me for being good with blessing, comfort, health. This is not grace.

Tax Collector's only redeeming value was his honesty. He was real with God. Saw reality of deep cavern of sin between him and God and he knew he needed God's mercy and grace and so must we.

[Saint Frances' Prayer]

### **Sermon # 5**

Where Two or Three are Gathered in My Name  
Acts 12:1-5

Introduction - I'm going to say a word and I want you to picture a scene. Worry.

Do you see it? I see a man sitting at his desk late in the evening. Not enough money to pay bills. credit card maxed out, silent desperation. Another scene- wife over divorce. What do we do with worry, fear, confusion, the deep sense of loneliness that covers us like a dark cloud? This question rippled through the fledgling community of Christians as they considered the looming danger.

Describe Scene - The first shock wave of tragedy in the newly formed Church in Jerusalem when James was seized in the Temple courts by Herod's soldiers. James beheaded. Herod a popular king. Crowds approved of his action. Peter arrested. Fear, uncertainty, small group alone against entire Jewish political and religious power. Struggling Church gathered in Mary's house for prayer.

Today - Our first response is to do all we know to do in a situation and then say "Well, all I can do is pray." As if prayer is the last resort, the least help.

Peter's escape - came to Mary's house. They couldn't believe he was free.



Principle of prayer - Where 2 or 3 are gathered in Jesus' name

Examples - Jesus never sent out disciples alone always 2 by 2

In Acts Christians mostly prayed together

James - If any among you is sick call for elders

Yet We act as Lone Ranger Christians. Also the time we feel our prayers most unanswered.

Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemene needed disciples to pray for him in his darkest hours.

How much more we need prayer partners.

(Invitation for people to form prayer partners)

### **Sermon # 6**

Where Jesus is Known

Luke 24:13-33

Introduction - Describe Scene. Two men in deep disappointment on road to Emmaus.

All started with quick trip to Jerusalem. Jesus' triumphal entry & Temple cleansing sparked the birth of these 2 disciples into followers. Now hopes, dreams of freedom, justice against Roman vultures.

[Story of Pilate & soldiers raid on Temple and killing of Galileans]

Now expectations were high. Jesus could do anything, miracles.

Today - We as believers expect miracles and see or hear of them. Example:

[Two year old who swallowed bleach - healed, miracle]

Yet, disappointment comes when we have difficulty and tragedy and when our prayers seemingly go unanswered.

Cleopas' wife at crucifixion (John's gospel records). They know Jesus is dead. So are hopes and dreams of God's intervention in cruelty of world.

Stranger joins them (Jesus) walks, listens asks questions, teaches.

Today - What was it about breaking the bread that opened their eyes? What prevented them from seeing and recognizing Jesus?

Two realities we see in breaking of the bread:

1) God identifies with our senseless suffering and pain.

2) Bread and juice are physical reminders in a physical world about spiritual realities. We need such reminders to feed our spirits.

(Invitation to the Lord's Supper)

### **Sermon # 7**

#### **The Power of Worship**

**Isaiah 6:1-5**

Introduction - [story of person who was going to have peanut butter sandwich when someone was making steak and potatoes for them] - We often settle for peanut butter faith, prayers and worship when we could feast on steak and potatoes.

Biblical Scene - It was a time of national crisis in the halls of leadership. King Uzziah had died. Tell of his powerful, successful reign. Yet he sinned, suffered and died a leper. The scene is of the Temple courtyard during the afternoon sacrifice and worship. Describe worship, people's expressions, feelings, far of thoughts.

Depression. Focus on a young Isaiah. Suddenly a veil lifted from Isaiah's eyes to see the King of the Universe. Awe of Holy God.

[Asbury revival - the sensed presence of the Holy Spirit]

Many have caught a glimpse of God; List them. They all saw God in the presence of others who did not see Him. What was it about them that lifted the veil? Jesus said he would be in our midst. He is here. How can we catch a glimpse of the Master?

The Key to worship - Passion. personal intense desire to experience God.

Observe:

First, Worship became very personal - Isaiah was no longer one of crowd. "I saw the Lord." He cleansed "me," "I" was commissioned.

Then, Worship put life into sharp focus - True leader (God) still on throne. Holy, eternal and worthy of trust, worship and praise.

To praise God is to put the omnipotent, eternal King of the Universe up against my little problems. Hope is not in humans but in God.

When the passionate person worships, or prays foundations are shaken, Spirit descends, chains fall off, prison walls collapse.

### **Sermon # 8**

Finding the Book  
II Kings 22:1-5,8-13

Introduction - [movie Dante's Peak]

Scene - some sense of looming, explosive drama in the year of 640BC. King Josiah came to throne of Judah. After coronation he walked stone halls of palace and Temple contemplating God. Seeking God with whole heart. Reflected on Grandfather Hezekiah, Manassah's reign;

Beliefs of Hezekiah viewed by Manassah as strict, puritanical, morally narrow.

Manassah traveled, exposed to other cultures, religious values. Whose to say

dad was right. They have more fun. Manasseh's reform to Baal, Asherah - divine blessing of sexual freedom, idols became the beanie baby rage. Only a few stuffed shirt, narrow minded prophets protested; Jeremiah, Zephaniah etc..

Josiah continues to reflect - a new spirituality became all the rage in Jerusalem; spirit mediums (guides), psychic advisers, astrological deities from Babylon, Molech sacrifice. Josiah knew deep down something wrong. Began to repair Temple.

Book discovered; Deuteronomy. A warm nostalgia turned to cold shock. Illustrate reality over feelings

[Washing my car with windows down. I thought they were up. What I thought to be true did not change reality]

Today - We enter volcanic ground when we assume we are pleasing God while leaving His book on the shelf. Example of modern Christians who read astrological signs, dabble with psychic advisors, [Reimagining Conference - similar to worship of Asherah]

Jesus said, "If you love me keep my commandments. Name two? Is your life conforming to God's will? How do you know?"

Josiah rediscovered the Book and so must we. Conclusion of Josiah's life and hope for ours.

## Sermon # 9

### How to Sing in Prison Acts 16:16-25

Introduction - There are days it is hard to be a Christian, a provider for the family. Hard to be a man or woman in today's world with demands, schedules, roles. How do we keep the faith?

Biblical Scene - For Paul and Silas it was their darkest hour, yet they sang and prayed with a deep sense of joy. How? Describe Philippi as a cultural center where Paul and Silas began a new church. Then...

Roman slave owners grab and discredit them with lies.

Beaten with rods.

Handed over to Roman Jailer - cruel retired soldier.

Stocks designed for pain - not joy.

Prison dark, stunk, smell of fear, loneliness...

But around midnight.. Singing, Joy, Praise. What was it that gave them the ability to sing in prison? Answer - they were Together. Yes, they had God with them just as we do in difficult times. But in those times we need to be reminded by a Jesus with skin on.

Today- [My jogging at 6:00am - needed a friend to keep me going]

Another example; Weight watchers. Yet we often think like the farmer who didn't think he needed to go to church with others.

[Story - Farmer and Preacher - blazing coals turn to smoldering embers when isolated]

[Story - Stu Webber - Ranger training\* - together]

How about you? Whom can you count on in difficult times?....

\*Webber, Stu Locking Arms. God's Design for Masculine Friendships. No state given: Multnomah Books. 1995, pp 13-14

## **Sermon # 10**

### **Transforming Relationships**

**Acts 13:4-5, 13**

Introduction - Reflect on last week's sermon dealing with relationships; "Do you desire the kind of relationships the disciples had; deep, supportive in good and bad times?"

Describe Scene - Young teenage John Mark joins Barnabas and Paul sailing to Cyprus.

Reflect - Reflect on John Mark being from Church in Jerusalem. His family intimately involved. Meetings in his home (Mary's house), Peter escaping from prison came there. Now Mark going on grand missionary journey. Parents proud, youth group excited. He has grand vision of adventure.

Yet journey difficult, rejected in places. Fear, intimidation, home sick. J.Mark leaves for home. He feels defeated, a failure to mom, dad, elders, youth group, self, God.

Today - "Have you ever felt as Mark did?"

Illustration of a time I felt a failure, defeated

[The starting and closing of Fellowship United Methodist Church]

Maybe for you the adventure was college, a career, sports - failure.

Maybe the echo of demanding parents “you’re a failure!” This is often why we do not go deeper in relationships. “If they really knew me they would not like me.”

John Mark - 2-3 years of silence. Barnabas wants to give Mark a 2nd chance. Paul unwilling. Yet Barnabas (Bar nebba - son of encouragement) believes in John Mark. It’s harder to believe in someone. Easier to find fault. We need encouragement.

[Illustration of 45 mile trail hike with a youth who had very low self esteem and wanted to give up the first mile up a mountain.]

Paul & Barnabas - They split and go on different missions.

20 years later Paul’s letter to Colossians - “Mark is with me.”

John Mark traveled with Peter and writes “Gospel of Mark” because he had a person who believed in him, who partnered with him through thick and thin.

Many of us are Marks needing a Barnabas to come along side us. Many of us can be a Barnabas. What about you?

(Invitation to join a 30 day John Wesley Experiment small group)

## Sermon # 11

Surprised by God's Law  
Acts 4:32-5:5

Introduction - [TV movie "A Christmas Carol" from misery to joy]

Same joy and celebration in first Christians in Jerusalem. God's grace, guilt free.

Describe Scene - Joseph (Barnabas) traveled to Jerusalem from Cyprus. Raised strict Jew. 613 laws and Rabbi's interpretation. Which had he violated today? As Joseph wandered into the Temple to buy a lamb he knew it wouldn't work (sacrifice for forgiveness). He still held onto that property near Jerusalem. Levites were forbidden by God to own property. He felt trapped between obeying God and security in the "real world."

Today - Like the Scrooge in us ghosts of Christmas past and present point their bony finger at us... Guilty! How many of us struggle with violations of God's commands?

Joseph - He lived with such guilt as entered Solomon's Colonnade. Peter preaching Jesus Christ. Joseph accepted forgiveness. Suddenly began to feel the birthing of a new and dynamic spirit in him. Given power to resist sin. Transformation began to take place.

Today - [Illustration of a time I needed to forgive a friend and yet did not want to. Prayed to God for power to do what I knew I could not do on my own. Forgave with joy]

Joseph - He met with Christians saw needs began to feel freedom to find security in Christ not self. Fully free. Feelings of joy.



Ananias and Sapphira - Describe what happened. A believing couple who saw freedom in Christ meant exemption from God's law. Thought God would indulge their sin. Their tragic death was a warning to all Christians rippling out throughout generations the inevitable results of such thinking and living.

[Illustration of my childhood when my step-father whipped me for directly disobeying him. I only needed it one time to learn the consequences of such behavior, rippling out though the rest of my years.]

Sapphira - She had the chance to repent, but went to the grave denying that she was guiltless. Grace is never an exemption nor God's indulgence. Don't take the chance. If there is a known law of God you are currently breaking. Do not leave this sanctuary without leaving that sin at God's altar.

## **Sermon # 12**

### **Caught in the Act John 8:1-5**

Introduction - Have you ever been caught in the act? Blue lights of a police car?

Sneaking that forbidden cookie from mom's cookie jar?

Describe Scene - Temple courts, Jesus teaching the crowds. Scribes and Pharisees

drag a woman caught in adultery into the crowd and accuse her before Jesus.

"According to the Law of Moses we must stone her." This was a deliberately planned adultery. Jesus looks at her. They are right about the law. Jesus writes, Leviticus 20:10?

Jesus looks intently into woman's eyes, past the sin and shame to her own brokenness and tragic story. (Adultery is a symptom of a deeper brokenness).

Today - Many people with a brokenness. Examples: alcoholic parents have alcoholic children. Abusive parents have abusive children. etc...

Still, the Law is right and good. It lays out God's design for best life and wholesome moral behavior. This woman did not follow God's best way (Law). And honestly neither do we. Even though God's law is good it has no power to change us or heal past brokenness that gives us inclinations to sin.

Jesus - He says "He who is without sin may cast the first stone at her." then writes again. These sins he writes are more familiar. The woman is you and me. Crowds leave. Is Jesus going to forgive her? What good would that do? He does not forgive her. He withholds judgment, for now. At judgment day she again will stand before him. He gives her a second chance knowing the ultimate forgiveness and power to be transformed is soon coming in his death and resurrection. At least Jewish leaders brought woman to the right judge. So must we. We have the tendency to put ourselves on the judgment seat against others (too judgmental), and against ourselves (too lenient). At times we put others on the judgment seat and live with guilt when the real Judge has pronounced "not guilty!"

[Illustration of drawing of little boy. Caption underneath reads, "Be patient with me. God is not finished with me yet."]

### Sermon # 13

#### The Hidden Cost II Samuel 11:1-5

Introduction - [Story of my shopping for a pre-owned car] So many hidden problems and costs, like temptation.

Describe King David's early reign - leader, godly in first half of reign, but second half fraught with hidden costs from seemingly hidden sins.

Describe Scene - It was in the spring when kings go forth into battle... David stayed home. Mid-life confusion, frustration, search for meaning and goals. David saw Bathsheba. He gazed... He inquired... Tempted. He could have stopped the hidden cost right here.

Bathsheba - She was not innocent either. She was tempted long before. She wife of a warrior not a tender attentive husband. Lived in lower rent district. Husband a Hittite and thus put down in society. She was alone, wanting a better life. They obviously lived in the shadow of wealth if the King could see her. She wanted more and set out to get it.

Define Temptation - The enticement to do wrong with the reward of immediate pleasure. We may not be at the point of acting on any such temptation but may find ourselves gazing and inquiring. It might be mental images of the opposite sex, pornography, a lie, envy of another's possessions (TV commercials feed this), cheat on a test, steal even the smallest item at work or school.

Christ died to free us from power of sin. God's own Spirit lives in us.

[Illustration of how we do out of habit not realizing our freedom

a covey of quail freed from a rope still walk in a circle as if tied]

Sin in thought, word or deed quenches God's Spirit. This is Satan's strategy.

[sin is like being addicted to crack cocaine. pleasure, more fool ourselves.]

David and Bathsheba - gave into temptation. Became pregnant, Uriah murdered.

Fantasy is never like reality. David's children's problems after this affair.

David speaks from the grave of the hidden costs of giving into temptation:

- \* Don't put yourself in an environment of possible temptation. Flee
- \* Put yourself in godly environment. Why was David not at Temple praying for his troops. If Jesus had to pray in the garden all the more we need to seek godly environment.
- \* Remind yourself that final pain will erase momentary pleasure.

### **Sermon # 14**

#### **Anatomy of Temptation Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-8**

Introduction - [Scene from Candid Camera TV show] Behind the scenes

There's more going on behind the scenes of Eve's discussion with the snake than meets the eye. Do I believe it's true? Yes. This same scenario happens with every temptation. Watch the conversation.

Describe Scene - Eve gathering food. Serpent was noiseless, unseen, fascinating, slick and beautiful. Devil not in red suite, horns and tail. Not Stephen King grotesque, but naturally camouflaged in surroundings, engaging, interesting, disarming using questions to disarm us.

Our temptations - They come in the same way. Watch Eve.

Eve - She responds to Serpent's question with God's command "Thou shalt not.." She doesn't seem to know why, but knows consequences.

[Our personal examples. We know commands but...]

Serpent - "You will not die...God knows.." - you can't trust God. He has hidden reasons to keep you from enjoying, a slice of life...

Today - Every time we are tempted we come to this question, "Is God really out for my good or is He keeping me from something I would benefit from." "His commands block me from enriching experience. I can't trust God." Look at your latest temptation. I'm sure it is a delight to the eye.

Serpent - "You will not die." No consequences.

Today - Living together is seen as a benefit, no consequences. National statistics of relational and marriage failure from living together. Sexual freedom - STDs, AIDS...

Every temptation begins and ends with questions of trust in God. Trust in God is exactly what God has spent human history restoring. Finally Jesus in another garden and at another tree suffered and died for us to finally trust God. As Jesus appears in the upper room God asks, "Do you trust me now?"

## Sermon # 15

### Broken and Spilled Out Mark 14:3-8

Introduction - [Book "How to Become a Bishop without being Religious] (spoke of pretending to be sincere as a Christian leader)

Describe Woman - A beauty, young, social connections, wealthy family, expensive perfumes. "She's got it made." Everyone thought. Yet deep inside emptiness, alone. Tried to fill void with events, relationships, money, things, religion. Yet still alone. Well known preacher came to town, dinner party. Sat at Jesus feet while her sister fussed in the kitchen.

Jesus - When she met Jesus he saw into the depths of her need. divine love. We all need that love. Tonight we see here again. Do you recognize her? Mary, Martha's sister. But she had never given her all to Jesus. She had held back that protected part of herself that kept her closed to Gods grace. Now she is ready to give her all to the Master. That perfume which symbolized her pride and her need for attention, love, admiration from others. It's value.

Today - We are self-sufficient packages (flasks) trying to meet our own needs for love, attention, etc.. Mary broke the flask and poured on Jesus. What is it in you that needs to be broken and spilled out on Jesus.

[Getting a Flue Shot]

(Illustrates how many have just enough religion to become immunized from a full-blown case of Jesus) What in you needs to be broken and spilled out for Him to be fully alive in you.

(Alter call for persons to accept Christ or rededicate their lives to Him)

**Sermon # 16**

Silent Lepers  
Luke 5:12-15

Introduction - There are lepers in our midst like the man we meet today.

Describe Leper as he travels to city- Physical features. His memory of being declared unclean by priests.

Reflect on his thoughts; His aching for human comfort, family. Feelings of shame, loneliness.

Clank of cow bell - brings his thoughts back to present move into city as he looks for Jesus. Describe reaction of people in city, fear, anger etc...

Today - There are lepers in our city. Describe modern lepers(silent lepers):

These lepers are hurting people. Feel alone, guilt, abused, neglected.

These lepers are lonely people. Caves of despair, isolation, outcasts.

These lepers are hungry people. warmth of human touch, love acceptance of people and God. They are single adults, elderly, shut-ins, alcoholics, divorced, troubled youth, neglected children.

Biblical Scene - Unlike today's lepers that leper knew where healing was. Jesus.

Describe leper's sighting of and run to Jesus, crowd's reaction. Disciple's reaction. Jesus heals the leper.

Today - There are silent lepers in our midst. Jesus wants to heal them. But we are like disciples, unsure.

[Illustration of my wife's effort to touch silent lepers]

There are lepers in our midst. You can touch a leper. Tell about the Every Member in Ministry menu as a way of participating in touching lepers.

### **Sermon # 17**

Attitude of Gratitude  
Matthew 25:14-30

Introduction - Context of parable is Jesus departure and second coming to his disciples. (Read Scripture here)

Three employees entrusted with various talents. At first I feel sorry for the one talent man. He didn't embezzle it, start a drug ring with it... He just didn't do anything with it. Let's take a closer look.

Describe Scene - Boss late in the evening at desk. Three employee files on desk. Going on a lone business trip. Wants to enrich, involve, empower his employees. He wants to give them ownership in the firm. But he doesn't want to over-burden each so as to bring failure from the start. Calls each and gives out; 5, 2, & 1.

Notice attitude of first two employees. "Immediately" feel trusted, excited, valued, empowered. Upon bosses return rewarded according to effort not volume of return.

One talent man's attitude most evident in response to boss. "I knew you were hard..." Saw master as cruel, selfish, taking advantage of overtaxed employees.

Today - What is the point for today? This very same set of perceptions go on when we talk about every member in ministry in the Church. Depending on how one views God will depend on how one approaches the idea of ministry. Today we offer not a program but a revolution. Full value of every person's ministry.



[Illustrate by my protest when God called me into the ministry] (Lay people touch more unchurched people's lives than clergy)

Others see only burden. "I did my duty at the last church. Let someone else do the job." You are being offered a revolution which started at Pentecost.

Acts...when Stephen and 6 other table waiters consecrated ministers.

Martin Luther...priesthood of all believers...

John Wesley...lay preachers...lay class leaders...

Us today...

(Invitation to fill out Every Member In Ministry menu form)

### **Biblical Narrative Sermon Manuscripts**

The following four sermons are examples of the biblical narrative sermons preached during the four months.

#### **Sermon # 2**

No Fear!  
Matthew 14:22-33

No Fear! It is a slogan popular with today's teenagers. You might see it printed on tee-shirts, bumper-stickers or baseball caps. On the surface it looks like a slogan from a tough, fearless generation. But if you probe beneath the surface of the lives of teenagers today you will find it is a slogan which tries to psyche up teens not to be afraid in a terribly frightening world. Where dangers lurk around every corner like, AIDS, drugs, gangs, and guns in schools. It's a frightening world for today's young people and the phrase "No Fear" is like whistling in the dark.

But you don't have to be a teenager to experience fear. Fear grips the heart of a seventy year old man whose wife is dying of cancer. Fear is the icy terror felt by a widow who lives alone in a neighborhood with high crime. Fear is what grips the heart of a young couple when they are told their child needs surgery. Fear enshrouds a youth going to a new school. We are afraid to drive, afraid to fly, afraid to live alone, afraid to walk our streets, afraid of getting a terminal illness, afraid of living one more day in that marriage. This morning I want share Jesus' words to us about fear.

[Read Scripture Here]

The twelve disciples were in a battle for their lives. They were exhausted, confused and fearful. Life was out of control. It had started out as a simple voyage in Peter's fishing boat. The day had been glorious. Jesus fed 5000 men and their families on the grassy slopes of Galilee with only five flat cakes of bread and two sardines. Later Jesus urged his twelve to go ahead of him to the other side of the sea. He needed to spend some time alone in the hills with his Heavenly Father. As Andrew, James and John helped the others get into the boat Peter prepared to shove off. They could see Jesus' hands in outstretched blessing as he dismissed the crowds. The disciples were beginning to realize who Jesus was and they were excited to be a part of his mission.

As the little boat launched out into the smooth water a furious blast of wind swept over and down the hills from the East setting the sea in motion. The sky grew dark with rain soaked clouds. The sea surged upward and heaved down again. The wind came around and blew the little craft, driving it out into deep, dark water. Soon seasoned fishermen became frightened. Waves, one after another, crashed against the hull sending

cold sprays splashing in the faces of all on board. Peter dropped the sail as they fought the furious head-wind. James, John and Andrew grabbed the long oars and locked them into place. Several other disciples struggled to benches joining their strength to the rowing. Straining with all their might they were barely able to maintain a straight course as Peter manned the rudder. For over nine hours the disciples battled their way through the storm, exhausted, cold and soaked to the bone. They were frightened, lost, and feeling very alone.

There are times in our lives when we are cast headlong into fearful storms of uncertainty. When you find yourself feeling overwhelmed and out of control. Fears begin to grip our hearts and control our thoughts. We suddenly do not know how events are going to turn out and naturally we don't want to experience grief, pain and trauma. When fear comes we often feel alone, confused, isolated. We wonder, "Where is God? I can't see him, and this storm seems more real than God does."

The disciples must have had the same feelings. They had been in rough weather before, but only one other time had the sea opened up like this to swallow them. Jesus happened to be in the boat with them then. He had awakened and calmed the storm. But where is he now? Jesus is no where in sight. Jesus has ascended to the mountain to be with the Father. "While Jesus is on the mountain top we are all alone fighting for our lives!"

Fear is natural. It comes to all of us at different times and varying degrees. But fear will either be a deadly cancer to trust in God, or a catalyst to greater trust. Fear will either cut us off from Christ or serve as a more powerful connector to his presence.

Because when we are frightened by something, in the moment of our fears, all past blessings from God tend to evaporate from our memory. There were times when, because of events that happened to us, we knew Jesus was near, helping us. But in the moment of fear all those memories fade. Notice the disciples. They had just experienced one of the greatest miracles of their lives. But are they in the boat encouraging one another with confidence as they recount the miracle of loaves and fishes? No. Are they singing hymns as the ride over the waves like, My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name? Or, A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing? No. They are cowering in fear. And so afraid that when they do see Jesus they are frightened even more. Fear has taken over and begun to eat away their trust like a cancer.

But, "In the fourth watch of the night Jesus came to them walking on the sea." At about three in the morning Jesus came to them. What the disciples did not know was that from Jesus' position on the mountain overlooking the sea he could see his struggling disciples. He knew they were tired and cold. He could see the strain and weariness as they battled the storm. From his position he was better able to see their need and situation. And so he came to them walking on the water. He didn't come to show off his power or prove a point. He came to comfort them and calm the storm.

Often we do not realize what it took for Jesus to come to his disciples. Mentally we see Jesus gliding smoothly over three foot swells. But Jesus walked on the violent sea. He left the smooth, firm ground to walk the rising white-caps and deep troughs. He was

soaked by the rain, pounded by the waves, and his tunic was torn by the raging winds. All just to get to twelve frightened disciples.

Many times, as fear grips our hearts, we think, “I don’t see God. He must be busy or not available. He doesn’t care about me or my situation.” Like the disciples, we don’t realize that his loving eyes are watching us too. Jesus came into this world in the storms of hunger, suffering, rejection, and fear to be nailed to a cross for you and me. He said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Jesus spoke to his disciples and he speaks to you and me, “Take courage. Do not be afraid. It is I.” We don’t have to let fear grip us and eat away trust. At Jesus’ word and in his presence we have the super-natural power to conquer fear: To let fear be the catalyst to greater trust in him.

Peter so much wanted to conquer his fear that he decided to take a bold step. His steps are the key for us to allow fear to be the catalyst to greater trust in Jesus. Watch Peter. He spoke directly to Jesus. Not begging Jesus to come to him and change his circumstances but asking Jesus to help him face his own fears. “If it’s really you command me to come to you.”

How often we beg Jesus to take away the circumstances that cause our fears, “Don’t let me go through this. Don’t make me live in this situation. Take my illness away.” But Jesus’ words come to us in the midst of the storms calling out to us to take courage. Why take courage? Jesus is with us, coming to us as he calls us to greater trust.

Peter faces his fears by moving toward Jesus. He looks away from his circumstances, the raging sea, and with his heart still beating wildly he walks toward Jesus,

trusting that Jesus' word is sufficient for him to be able to make it. The wind and waves serving as his stepping stones to greater trust.

Peter is also a marvelous example because he shows us what happens when we take our eyes off of Jesus. Peter, in this instance, reminds me of Tim Allen, the star of the TV program "Home Improvements." Tim Allen plays an expert authority on how to make improvements to your home. He and his partner Al give examples of repairing toilets, roofs, sinks and so on. Tim also gives warnings of what not to do when near electric cables, gas lines, etc. His greatest and most humorous examples are when he actually touches those electric wires helping the audience see the tragic result of not following the right steps.

Peter, in the moment of facing his fears, does a "Tim Allen." He shows us what not to do by doing it himself. He takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to focus on his fearful circumstances. I can understand that. His circumstances seem overwhelming. They are getting him all wet and making it hard to stand as the waves rise and fall. It is hard to keep his eyes on the Master as Jesus rises and falls behind whitecaps. It's hard to keep our eyes on Jesus when the check book is empty and the bills are rising high. When the doctor's prognosis is not good. When there seems no hope for your marriage. It takes a conscious and constant effort to resist the temptation to focus on dark sea of circumstances, to face our fears, looking to Jesus with trust and love. But Jesus calls out to you and me. "No Fear! It is I."

For people today the slogan "No Fear!" may be whistling in the dark, **unless** you happen to be a believer. Then we can truly say with confidence, "No Fear! No Fear!"

Transforming Relationships  
Acts 13:13

Last week we looked at the value of strong Christian relationships. But it occurred to me that the kind of deep, supportive relationships we often long for and hope for are not easy to find. We become discouraged, afraid to risk the possibility of not being liked. There was a young teenager named John Mark who knew exactly how you feel.

We meet John Mark on a bright spring day as he Barnabas and Paul board a cargo ship bound for the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean sea. John Mark is a teenager full of adventure, grand visions of bringing the message of Jesus to eager, hungry people. He was raised in the birthplace of the Christian Church, Jerusalem. It was his parent's home, that spare guest room upstairs that Jesus ate the last supper. His room had been used to store cloaks of eager disciples of the newly forming Church. When John Mark chose to join his cousin Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey everyone was excited, his parents were proud, youth leaders threw him a party. With great fanfare he was sent out as their man of the gospel.

At first, when they step off the creaking barge and began to teach in the synagogue things went well. Some people responded and some did not, but miracles happened before their eyes. Some weeks later the time came to set sail for foreign lands. Why did Paul choose Perga in the county of Pamphilia? Why not some place more familiar? When their ship made land fall they sailed seven miles up river to the ancient town of Perga. As Perga came into view a knot must have formed in John Mark's stomach. The Asian capital was a fortress town with high, gleaming walls and armed towers. The huge acropolis with its

marble market and government buildings spanned over 1000 yards in length. Large Corinthian columns lined the roadways giving a feeling of imperial power. Fear and intimidation were understatement. With little success they trio looked for opportunities to preach the gospel. Then something happened. Some scholars speculate that Paul came down with malaria. The surrounding countryside of Perga was full of coastal marshes that bred malaria carrying mosquitoes. To this teenager life was falling apart. This was not the victorious adventure Mark envisioned. It was difficult, lonely and dangerous. Soon he ached for the security of the Jerusalem Church community. Mom's home cooking beckoned. And so, without much to say, Mark left. He went home, defeated, a failure. The voyage home must have been the longest weeks of his life. What were his parents to think, the elders, his friends, those who took so much pride in him? There is a deep loneliness that goes with the feelings of failure. "I was inadequate. I was the problem. I couldn't handle the work. It was my fault. No one understands. I failed others and I failed God."

Have you ever failed? Went away to college, started a new job, set out to develop a grand career, a marriage, a life, only to come to the place of defeat? I know that feeling.

Three years ago I was asked by the United Methodist denomination to start a brand new church. I was appointed to a piece of land, an empty rental house and three interested people and was told, "Go build a congregation. For six months I worked to prepare for an opening worship service. At our second worship service he had 49 people as we met in the cafeteria of a middle school. Our little forming congregation worked hard, trying every evangelism outreach, every children's program and youth event we



could find to grow that group into a self-supporting congregation. At the end of two years of putting every thing I had into this new church effort we averaged 49 people in worship. The denomination voted to close that little mission congregation exactly one and a half years after it opened. I felt like a failure; to the United Methodist Church, my family, the community and especially a failure to Jesus Christ.

Our deepest sense of loneliness and how we seen ourselves can come from such feelings of failure. Often this is the very reason why many of us do not develop relationships that go below the surface of acquaintances. We see the problems, failures, doubts and flaws within ourselves and feel, "If he/she really knew me for who I am they wouldn't like me." It may be the voice of a parent or relative ringing in your ears saying, "You will never amount to anything. You are no good."

Somewhere deep down many of us know what John Mark must have been feeling on that long voyage home. The words on John Mark go silent for a couple of chapters signaling two to three years of loneliness. He went home more quiet than before, less responsive.

We hear of Paul and Barnabas' return to the growing congregation in Antioch. But again Paul felt the urge of the Holy Spirit to back out to those congregations established on their first missionary journey. A few letters had come in from Philippi, and it was obvious they needed guidance. Barnabas suggested that John Mark beg given a second chance. He's older, more mature. Paul's eyes blazed. His words were biting. "He deserted us Barnabas. He's unreliable. I can't count on him when the chips are down." I

wonder if John Mark was in the room or listening through the door during this conversation. Paul obviously voiced all that Mark felt about himself.

But there was something about Barnabas that was true to his name “Son of encouragement.” He looked deep into John Mark and knew there was strength of character longing to come out. There was persistence, strength and tenacity needing to be sculptured. All it would take is encouragement. Believe in Mark so that he could believe in himself. He believed that God could take any chunk of coal and make a diamond. Fault finding is easy. You need to dig for diamonds, to find the gold nuggets of attributes buried underneath the dirt and crud of discouragement. To dig into the deep part of someone and find what is right, good and beautiful in someone is God’s work. When I think of John Mark I can’t help but remember Matt. Matt was an eleven year old, overweight outcast who began coming to our youth group at Fellowship United Methodist Church. His father had died years before. His mother worked most of the time and drank on her off hours. Matt was the responsible one who took care of his little six year old sister. Matt felt like a failure, a loser. But Matt went with several other of our youth on a 45 mile wilderness trail hike in the Virginia mountains. I knew we were in trouble the first mile when Matt collapsed saying he couldn’t make it and wanted to go home. But the group rallied around him, encouraging him every few yards. There were several problems with Matt along the way, but each night he made it into camp and everyone cheered. One day we all coordinated with each other to stay back and let Matt be the first one into camp that night. He was so proud of himself. When we finished the trail

everyone lined the last few yards stringing toilet paper across the trail as Matt ran through arms raised, his smile broad and his self confidence high.

This is one of the keys to God's people. Grab a person believe in him/her and lift them before God. With this same determination Barnabas took John Mark with him as they sailed for Cyprus on their own missionary tour. Paul chose another partner, Silas, and sailed back to the fledgling churches.

Twenty years came and went and we hear nothing of John Mark. Was Paul right? Did Barnabas waste his time and effort? Listen to the comments of a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the closing years of his ministry. He's Roman chains, under prison guard as he writes. Mark is with me and might come to you soon. John Mark the failure and coward is now keeping Paul company...in prison? Mark, whom we later find out had become a traveling companion of Peter. John Mark, the teenage failure, the one who was disillusioned with himself as ever making any contribution to the cause of Christ became a valuable partner with Paul and Peter and....wrote from Peter's remembrances a book we call today the Gospel of Mark.

Are you a Barnabas? And is there a Mark around you that needs your encouragement? Believe in them. Look for the diamonds. Are you a Mark, hurting deeply from your own sense of failure and inadequacy, thinking, "God could never use me!" Look out. God has a Barnabas for you in this congregation. I would like to invite you to be a part of a small group experience. A thirty day experiment in being a Barnabas and a Mark. These groups are about deepening your faith and friendships. On a table in

the lobby is the booklet we will use. I encourage you to sign up to be in one of these groups for thirty days. It will enrich your life. And you will be encouraged.

## **Sermon #12**

### **Caught In The Act**

**John 8:1-11**

Have you ever been caught in the act? Have you seen the flashing of those blue police lights in your rear-view mirror? “Sir, do you know why I stopped you?” Yes, you saw that pesky speed sign, but it didn’t understand that you were late. Or... “Wasn’t that light still yellow officer?” Have you ever been caught with your hand in mom’s cookie jar? Today we are going to meet another person who was caught in the act.

There was a cool morning breeze blowing across the courtyard as the sun began its appointed upward journey. Long shadows began to shrink along Solomon’s colonnade as a bold, deep voice rang out. The crowds pouring into the Temple courts for the morning sacrifice and the last day of the feast of Booths were drawn to Jesus’ teaching. He sat on the stone steps as he told parables and explained Scripture. But all at once the crowd’s attention was distracted. A commotion of confused, angry voices shouted in the back as they pushed forward to Jesus. People parted as religious leaders brought forward a woman scantily and hastily dressed with her hands clutching her wet, tear-streaked face. Her dark hair hung down like sea weed shaking with her sobs. Her appearance was in stark contrast to the dignified robes and maroon striped prayer shawls of the Scribes and Pharisees.

“Teacher,” the self chosen ring leader spat, “This woman was caught in the very act of adultery.” The crowd surrounding Jesus broke out into a clamor of gasps and jeers.

In their minds they counted back the hours. Where was the man? Had he been seen slinking out of the bedroom window by a neighbor. Had there been a chase through the pilgrim packed streets of Jerusalem only to loose him in the holiday crowd? This is early morning. Was her husband away on a trip or did he leave early for morning devotions? Either way this was no moment of unanticipated passion. Jewish culture gave no opportunity for unexpected, unplanned adultery. It was deliberate and planned. An act which took lying, deceiving and secret conversations to arrange. She was guilty all right! People in the crowd began to look for a good size stone to throw. "According to our laws given to Moses," the leader continued, "we are commanded to stone her."

Jesus looked intently into the woman's eyes as she began to curl her fingers from her face. Jesus knew the religious leaders were right. The laws of Moses were quite clear on this situation. She had committed adultery. Jesus stooped down and began writing in the sand. What was it? Ah, Yes...Leviticus 20:10. "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death." As Jesus finished tracing these Hebrew characters he paused.

Let's also pause for a moment. What are we going to do with this woman? She has sinned against a known law of God. She as deliberately broken faith with her husband. She has shamed her children. Some of us think we know what Jesus is going to do. You may say, "He's going to forgive her." But what good would that do? She can't go home to her husband, her community. Perhaps she would shack up with the adulterer or live on the streets. She certainly would not turn her life around on her own. If she could have done that she would have avoided this shameful act. Also, if Jesus, speaking

God's word, pronounces her not guilty this would prove a lethal sanction of or absolution for her sin.

You may notice a notation in your Bibles about this passage. It has been left out of some early manuscripts. St. Augustine said that this event was most probably left out of early manuscripts precisely because of the fear that it would provide license for lethal doses of adultery in the Christian community. So, what is Jesus to do with this woman? What are we going to do with this woman?

As Jesus looked intently into her eyes he saw something back there deep in her soul. There was something behind the tears, behind the passion and shame of the moment. There was a deep pain. Some tragic story, and somehow the religious leaders and the crowd were seeing only the symptoms of a life of deep pain. Jesus knew something of human behavior that we have only discovered in our century of professional counseling. People do not have a problem because they commit adultery. They commit adultery as a symptom of a deeper problem. We now know that often people who physically or emotionally abuse their children were themselves broken by abuse as children. Those who struggle as alcoholics, many times, had an alcoholic parent. Statistics show us that over 75% of women who engage in prostitution were sexually abused as children. What was in this woman's past? What hard story could she tell about her marriage? Jesus saw all of this. But the law is right. What could be done?

Let's look at the Bible for help. Paul says in Romans that the law is from the Spirit. The law is good. It provides God's safe-guards and moral perimeters for a full, healthy, happy life before God. These commands and punishments were designed to keep

evil behavior to a minimum. But the law did not work for this woman. She knew what she was supposed to do, but she sinned none-the-less. Knowing God's law did not keep her from breaking it, nor does it keep us from breaking God's laws and commands. Speed limit signs do not keep us from speeding and mom's warning about the cookie jar does not keep our fingers out. Laws and commands are good, but they have no power to change our sinful hearts. They have no power to heal the deep brokenness in our lives.

Jesus stood amidst the crowd scanning their faces as he said, "He who is without sin cast the first stone." Then Jesus knelt again. The new letters are sins that are more familiar to us. They knock at our door, they step on our toes and speak our dark secrets. They are our sins. We know how God wants us to live. We are aware of those things you and I do which hurt God and others. Is the fear of punishment going to keep us from acting? Will the fear of the speeding ticket keep us from speeding? We now discover that we stand in that temple crowd not on the perimeter nor behind the religious leaders, but next to them clutching a rock that must fall from our hand. As the Apostle Paul penned in his letter to the Romans, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Jesus' words prompt stones to drop and people to walk away until only he and this woman are left. The question is no longer, "What are we going to do with this woman?" but "What is Jesus going to do with us?"

Notice how Jesus handled this woman and us. "Does no one condemn you." Looking up and seeing an empty courtyard she says, "No one, Lord." Jesus, looking intently into her soul, declares, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." No blanket fairy dust of cheap grace. No, "Forget it, it doesn't matter." But real

transforming, “Go and sin no more.” Jesus does not forgive her and send her on her way. He withholds judgment until a later day. Jesus gave her a second chance because he knew that very soon the day would come when the power of God would be given to those who believe in Jesus. The power of God’s Spirit in our hearts to bring healing of our pains, and our brokenness. The power of sin would be shattered by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Paul wrote. “What the law was powerless to do by itself, because it lacked power to make the old nature cooperate, God did by sending his own Son as a human with a nature like ours. The law could only motivate by reward and punishment. But God’s grace in Jesus transforms our lives, heals our brokenness, and makes us new.

Jesus postponed judgment because knew that another day of judgment will come when this woman, and you, and I will stand before Jesus again. When I think about this I remember the drawing I saw last year of a little kid in cowboy hat and boots. Under this little Dennis the Menace type boy the caption says, “Be patient with me God isn’t finished yet.” Jesus withholds judgment and so must we.

### **Sermon # 16**

Silent Lepers  
Luke 5:12-15

There are lepers in our midst. People who walk the streets of our neighborhoods and communities; who shop in Publix and Winn Dixie, who walk the halls of our work places and night spots. They are like the man whom we meet today as he moves toward the edge of a town on the Galilean hill side.

Can you picture with me this man? Or is he a man? It’s hard to see his face through the black, stringy hair which is matted down on his forehead. His nose and mouth



are covered with a dingy, brown cheese cloth. His eyes are squinting, strained with pain. His body is covered by a robe made of sack cloth. The garment is torn to represent the mourning and death of his own life. His arms, hands and feet, or what is left of them, are wrapped in cloth stained from running sores. He walks with a limp and hangs his head low. Yet his movement is sure and deliberate. Sweat begins to soak his bandages as the noon-day sun glares down. There, just over that hill is the gate to the city, its sand stone walls rising out of the sandy earth. His pace quickens. In his mind he remembers back to those words, those horrible, stabbing words spoken by the priest in the Temple, "By the command of God and the Law of Moses I declare that you are a leper. You are unclean." The words were like a death sentence pronounced by a Judge. "You are a leper. You are unclean."

Those words were spoke Oh so long ago when he had but a spot of leprosy. Now his whole body is covered with the disease. The words of the priest still ring in his hears like a hammer blow. From the moment he was declared unclean he was driven out of the Temple courts by the spear point of a Temple guard; Down the stone steps, out the dung gate and into the rocky Kidron Valley. He was driven out away from all human contact into the rocks and caves of the Judean hillside. He could not go home to his waiting family He could not greet his friends and neighbors. He must dwell alone in shame, despised and even hated by people and despised and hating himself.

Somewhere there was a mother and father who said good-bye to their son as he went on an errand to the Temple. He never returned. It is possible that somewhere there was a loving wife and a son or daughter who kissed their daddy good-bye as he went to

see the priest at the Temple. He never returned. Rumors sent back the heart breaking news, "He cannot return. He is a leper." He longs to see the smile of his mother, to hear the voice of his father. His arms ache to hold his wife and snuggle his children. But he must live alone to protect them and the community. By religious law he cannot go anywhere near a place of population. He has lived off of scraps gleaned from the garbage heaps of other people; leftovers thrown to the poor lepers who have no hope. He feels cursed by God, punished for some unknown sin. The pain of loneliness, guilt and shame are agonies which go way beyond the physical pains of leprosy.

The clanking of the cow bell tied to his waist brings the leper's thoughts back to the present. With every step the clank of that bell warns people that an unclean leper is near. The bell clanks in his mind even when he closes his eyes. "I am unclean. I am a leper" His pace quickens. He is near the city gate now. A woman scoops her child up in her arms and runs into the city. A group of young men standing in the arch way of the ancient stone gate begin to shout at him, taunting him, cursing at him and pointing to his bandages. But still he comes. They shout at him. Yet with a determined pace and pain in his eyes he pushes on. The boys scatter as he almost falls more than walks through the city gate. To the left a woman's scream pierces the air. Shop venders along narrow streets drop their awnings protecting them from the fowl leper. Shoppers move into door ways and alley ways to keep distance. A leper has entered the city.

There are lepers in our city. The lepers in our midst do not wear tattered clothing. They are not wrapped in bandages. They do not walk with a limp or shout, "Unclean."

They do not dwell in caves and walk with the clank of a bell. Rather the lepers in our midst are lepers on the inside. They are silent lepers.

These lepers are hurting people. They wear modern cloths but do not feel attractive. They look in the mirror and see a person they do not like. The bandages that wrap around these modern lepers hide the sores of childhood abuse, neglect. Guilt, shame and loneliness are the ulcers that eat away their lives. These lepers do not cry, "Unclean" but they feel it deep inside.

These lepers are lonely people. They dwell in the caves of despair and isolation. They feel like outcasts, disliked by others.

These lepers are hungry people. They are hungry for the warmth of human touch, love and acceptance. They are starving for the love and touch of God. They struggle with the feelings of shame and guilt before a holy God.

Who are these silent lepers in our midst? Some are single adults looking for friendships, a place to belong in a sea of couples, single parents stretched to the breaking point with commitments, responsibilities, playing mom and dad to children and youth at difficult ages. Some are elderly sick or shut-ins who often go unnoticed and unvisited. They remind us too much of our mortality, our own future. These silent lepers are couples putting a nice face on for the crowd but who are on the edge. They are wrapped in bandages of guilt, pain and frustration. Some are parents who have experienced the devastating death of a child and who live in the black cave of despair.

Some silent lepers are youth who have been pulled and ripped by a broken home and the pressures in the school hallways and locker rooms. You see no bandages or nubs

for hands but in the privacy of their thoughts they are tortured by alcohol or drug abuse. Their clanking cow bell may be the all black clothes they wear or pierced body parts as symbols of the tortured feelings they have deep inside. Tattoos are vivid pictures of their souls

Some silent lepers are children. They are lonely and afraid. These lepers think that God must really hate them because of the difficult situations they are in.

But unlike many silent lepers who do not realize that Jesus is the only one who can make them whole, this leper knew where to go for healing. He had heard the stories, see the results and would find Jesus at all cost. He must find Jesus. He knows that Jesus is in this city. As he moves further into the city, crowds gather. Shouting to one another "Get out of the way. A leper is coming." He breaks into a hobbled run. The crowds begin to pick up stones and throw them at him not daring to go near him to force him from the city. A stone penetrates his raised arms cutting his head. Still he moves on. There is mass confusion. Women screaming, men cursing, children running, rocks flying. Finally he sees a man in front of him. This man does not run or back away. There is a peace about this man. A divine serenity. He stands facing the leper as if beckoning him to come. The man's arms are not raised in hate but out-stretched in welcome. Quickly the leper leaps and stumbles toward Jesus. He casts himself, face first, into the dust at Jesus feet. All along the city street the crowds press against the walls of buildings. A hush moves through the crowd encircling the leper. They all cover their faces with veils and head dresses. The dust begins to settle. In a huddled mass, face in the dirt, the leper pleads with Jesus, "Lord, If you want to, you have the power to make me clean." Several in the

crowd shift. Everyone knows what the Rabbis say, "It's as hard to heal a leper as it is to raise the dead."

There are four men standing behind Jesus who have been freshly called as disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John. They stand several paces back from Jesus. There is doubt and fear in their faces as they consider who they have chosen to follow. As disciples they have committed their lives to follow in their Master's foot steps. What he does they must also someday do. These brave men have seen Jesus heal many people. They have learned much in the way of his teaching. But this seems a bit too much. This is an unclean leper.

But Jesus' eyes are fixed on the leper. It is as if he is the only person on the street. The crowd's attention moves from the leper to Jesus. His eyes are warm and penetrating. His smile is tender and compassionate. Jesus bends down toward the man. Gently and naturally he stretches out his carpenter's hands and lifts the chin of the leper. The two men lock eyes. The leper feels the love and acceptance of God in those eyes. Jesus' voice is deep and choked with compassion as he says, "I want to. Be clean."

Suddenly a rush of warmth streams through the leper's body. His arms, his hands his feet all begin to tingle. His eyes brim with tears as Jesus helps him to his feet. He begins to feel fresh and new, clean and healed. Slowly, not daring to move too quickly, he peaks under his shirt looking for the familiar sores. All he finds is tender, pink flesh, clean and new like a babies skin. He is clean, alive, and joy floods his soul.

There are silent lepers in our midst and Jesus wants to heal them. Like Peter, Andrew, James and John we are Jesus' disciples. We stand behind him perplexed and

uncertain. When we see the lepers in our midst we draw back, standing more with the crowd than with Jesus. Yet we know that we have been called by him. We bear his name. We carry his message. We are his hands, his feet, his voice to a broken world where silent lepers live. We know, "Lord you have the power, you who hung the night sky and spoke the dawn into existence. You raise the dead and healed the lame. You have the power. Are you willing? Are you willing that I should stretch out your hand. That I should reach out across sin and sorrow, agony and alienation to allow you -through me- to touch a silent leper?"

My wife Christy has spent her life letting Jesus touch lepers through her. I first saw her in action while I was in seminary. This young lady walked up to a local nursing home looking for a elderly person, a silent leper, to befriend. Willie Boone was an elderly woman at a local nursing home. She was 84, crusty and had no family left. Willie had trouble getting around and was very lonely. Christy would spend hours talking with her and would even scrub her scaly feet because Willie could no longer do it for herself.

Robert was a teenage leper. He was in the youth group I led while pastoring in St. Petersburg. Underneath all of those leper bandages Robert had a heart of love for people. He so desperately wanted to be loved by someone and liked by the kids in the youth group. Many in the church considered him to be a street kid. Robert had a very troubled family life. The only income, other than a government check, they had came from Robert. He worked full-time at a restaurant as a dish washer in order to support the family. But Robert just wanted to be like the other kids in the youth group. But Robert was a leper. All of the kids in the youth group made fun of him. "He smells" they said. "He acts

weird” they said. He wore all black cloths to show his feelings about himself. Even the youth counselors and parents were afraid of him. But all of his acting weird and black cloths were his leper’s bell reminding him, “unclean.”

Christy and I decided to touch this young leper with the love of Jesus. We knew that Jesus wanted this young man to be cleansed and restored so we focused our attention on him. Robert even came to live with us for a time. We began to realize at that moment that lepers are not easy to touch. They are not easy to love. But while he was with us Jesus began to cleanse and heal him.

There are lepers in our midst. All around us. Jesus has the power to heal them and we know that he wants to heal them. Our task as his disciples is to look around and find the lepers in our midst and begin to touch them in Jesus’ name. I invite you to look around today. There is a leper who needs the cleansing touch of Jesus. Extend the hand of Jesus and begin to let Jesus touch that person through you. Our Every Member In Ministry menu is a tool we are using to allow each of you to find a meaningful place of ministry. A place where you, like Peter, Andrew, James and John can be in contact with those who need the love and touch of Jesus through you.

## APPENDIX G

### Glossary of Statistical Terminology

The definitions presented in this glossary are from Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences, by W. Paul Vogt.

**Correlation.** “The extent to which two or more things are related (‘co-related’) to one another. This is usually expressed as a correlation coefficient” (48).

**Mean** “The average. To get the mean, you add up the values for each case and divide the total by the number of cases” (137).

**n** “Number” The number of subjects being evaluated in a given population (149).

**p** “Probability value, or *p* value. Usually found in an expression such as  $p \leq .05$ . This expression means: ‘The probability (*p*) that this result could have been produced by chance (or random error) is less than (<) five percent (.05).’ Thus, the smaller the number, the greater the likelihood that the result expressed was not merely due to chance. For example,  $p < .001$  means that the odds are a thousand to one (one tenth of 1%) against the result being a fluke. What is being reported (.05, .001, and so on) is an alpha level or significant level. The *p* value is the actual probability associated with an obtained statistical result; this is then compared with the alpha level to see whether that value is (statistically) significant” (163).

**Reliability** “The consistency or stability of a measure or test from one use to the next. When repeated measurements of the same thing give identical or very similar results, the measurement instrument is said to be reliable” (195).

**SD, Standard Deviation** “A statistic that shows the spread or dispersion of scores in a distribution of scores; in other words, a measure of dispersion. The more widely the scores are spread out, the larger the standard deviation” (217-218).

**Statistical Significance** “Said of a value or measure of a variable when it is (“significantly”) larger or smaller than would be expected by chance alone” (221).



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