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A Rhetorical Analysis of the Preaching of Robert Lee Russell

Ben F. Pennington

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A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
PREACHING OF ROBERT LEE RUSSELL

(TITLE)

BY

Ben F. Pennington

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1991

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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Abstract

Robert Lee Russell's pulpit oratory is analyzed through a review of the literature, personal interviews and critical study of three specific sermons. The consistency of idea content and effectiveness of the preaching is evaluated according to the concepts of rhetorical analysis delineated in Nilsen's (1957) Interpretive Function of the Critic. Robert Russell's concepts of man [existence], ideas [knowledge], and society [values] is examined through analysis of his sermons. The results of the analysis are compared to the literature on preaching, statements from interviews with him, and comments by leaders of his congregation. It is concluded that Russell is an effective preacher and the idea content of his sermons is consistent to the literature, his own philosophy and the expectations of his church.

CHAPTER I

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Introduction

My concern for personal improvement and further training in public speaking led me to begin studies at the graduate level at Eastern Illinois University in August 1989. Having served on the mission field in Africa for thirteen years, I had an earnest desire to gain more knowledge in the field of rhetoric and related studies in order to improve my own effectiveness as a public speaker. A component of the graduate study program included writing a thesis.

In searching for a thesis topic my attention turned to finding effective preachers in American history. The names of Dwight Moody and Billy Graham were foremost in my thinking, however, the public speaking of these men has been thoroughly researched. I was encouraged to seek out a less investigated speaker.

The Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky has experienced phenomenal growth in the last twenty-five years. I was reared in Louisville and am familiar with the founding of the Southeast Christian Church. My personal interest in the growth of the congregation motivated me to study the rhetorical skill

of Pastor Robert Lee Russell.

The Church and Its Minister

An announcement was made to the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, on November 25, 1990. It stated that the long-range planning committee of the congregation had two recommendations. First, the committee proposed that the congregation increase its mission giving to one million dollars annually within the next three years. The second proposal was that "Southeast Christian Church be relocated as a complete unit with a goal of occupying a new facility in five years" (The Southeast Outlook, 1990). On December 30, 1990 a special fifth Sunday offering of \$303,847.35 was collected during the worship services of the congregation (The Southeast Outlook, 1991).

The significance of these events hinges on the fact that Southeast Christian Church has only been in its present 7.5 million dollar facility for three and one-half years (Murphy, 1990, in press). In 1962 the congregation averaged ninety-six participants in its weekly worship services. The 1989 weekly average was five thousand thirty (The Southeast Outlook, 1990).

Its worship services now attract about eight

thousand people each week, and membership is approaching six thousand. Southeast's general-fund offerings for 1989 totaled \$2,895,000; the final weekly offering of the year, an amazing \$169,559.35, enabled the church--which maintains a staff of nineteen full-time ministers--to eliminate all of its short-term debt. (Filiatreau, 1990, p. 36)

The man leading this congregation almost since its inception has been Robert Lee Russell.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Mr. Russell, who prefers the informal Bob instead of Robert, was called to the pulpit of the Southeast Christian Church in June of 1966 (personal communication, December 7, 1990). The Southeast Christian Church was founded in July 1962. Russell is the second minister to serve there arriving only four years after the congregation was formed. Russell came to the church with limited experience, having only served as a full-time minister for one year in an Ohio church (personal communication, December 7, 1990). The phenomenal growth and outreach of the Southeast Christian Church since 1966

indicates how the leadership potential of Bob Russell has found expression. While Russell would probably not agree that his influence alone has caused the growth of the Southeast Christian Church, the results of his ministry indicate the impact of his leadership and preaching.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze and evaluate three selected sermons by Robert Russell delivered before the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky during the year 1990.

Hypothesis

It is essential to develop a hypothesis to give direction to the research. "A hypothesis is a proposition...providing a tentative answer to a question about the nature of the possible relationship between two or more variables" (Auer, 1959, p. 73).

It is hypothesized that the idea content of Robert Russell's sermons is consistent and effective as shown by:

1. An analysis of the idea content by applying the Nilsen methodology.
2. A comparison of the idea content with standards of effective preaching.

3. A comparison of the idea content with personal interviews with Robert Russell.
4. A comparison of the idea content with letters from leaders of Robert Russell's congregation.

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature is essential in thesis research. Once I focused on Robert Russell's preaching as the subject of this study, I began my review of the literature at Booth Library at Eastern Illinois University. A thorough review of Matlon's (1987) Index to Journals in Communication Studies through 1985 indicated numerous homiletical studies have been published in the literature of communication and duplicated what is found in the following journals: Communication Monographs (Abernathy, 1943), The Southern Speech Communication Journal (Gruner & Lampton, 1972), The Quarterly Journal of Speech (Lantz, 1943; Caplan & King, 1950; McGee, 1970; Reid, 1982; Graves, 1983; Snow, 1985), Communication Quarterly (Noble, 1957; Bachman, 1959; Clark, 1961; Callaghan, 1964; Holland, 1964; Tauber, 1969), The Journal of Communication (Buell, 1954; Freshley, 1959; Dance, 1969; Kato, 1974), Central States Speech Journal (Crocker, 1959; Marshman, 1961; Makay, 1980), and Western Journal of Speech Communication

(Lantz, 1955; Phillips, 1962).

No articles by or about Robert Russell have been published in the listed journals.

Further investigations were conducted. A search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) data base using the descriptor "clergy" found 56 records. None of these records provided information on Robert Russell. An electronic search of Booth Library and other Illinois libraries through the computerized ILLINET Online network revealed that no publications were available on Robert Russell or Southeast Christian Church. A letter was written to Mr. Russell's secretary inquiring as to whether any other research had previously been done on Mr. Russell. The response to that letter was negative.

From my investigations I have concluded that no formal research has been done on the preaching of Robert L. Russell. Although Mr. Russell has published three books and has had fourteen articles printed in The Christian Standard, no formal academic research has been conducted on his speaking. The three sermons selected for rhetorical analysis were publicly delivered to the Southeast Christian Church but are unpublished.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was personal, rhetorical, and historical.

Personal Significance of the Study

Research into the rise of Robert Russell to prominence as a public speaker is significant to me as I have personally known him for twenty-four years.

Mish (1989) provides a definition for graduate research.

Research is studious inquiry or examination, especially investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws. (p. 1002)

Academic study of the preaching of Robert Russell will give me insight into the philosophy of his ministry. It will also provide me with a more thorough knowledge of the preaching skill of a very successful public speaker. This insight will provide me with considerable personal benefit in the field of public speaking.

Auer (1959) points out that "research is a means of improving our understanding and way of doing things,

through additions to, or adaptations of, present knowledge" (p. 26). Analysis of the speaking of a prominent and successful speaker could assist in improving the reader's understanding of preaching. Auer (1959) also points out the personal importance of research for the university student.

Academic exercises such as seminar papers, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations, provide an opportunity for the evaluation of a student's ability to apply scientific principles and procedures in the intensive investigation of a single problem in his area of specialization. In the process it is presumed that the student will increase his awareness of the scope of his field, broaden his knowledge of its literature, and heighten his appreciation for sound scholarship. In sum, research is intensive and critical study with a purpose. (p. 27)

He notes that the purpose of research may increase the researcher's awareness, broaden knowledge, and heighten personal appreciation for scholarship.

Thonssen and Baird (1948) report that "criticism

serves to bridge the gap between external stimulus and internal compulsion to belief and action" (p. 5). Public speaking has a purpose. "Men use speech, not simply to hear themselves talk, but to achieve certain responses from hearers" (p. 5). Critical analysis of the speaker and speech in order to understand how the hearer is moved to respond is a sound rhetorical purpose in research. They also indicate another purpose is the realization of truth. "He (the critic) is guided by lofty aspirations since the ultimate goal of his efforts is the realization of truth" (p. 23). The search for and realization of truth is essential for both personal improvement and critical understanding.

Historical Significance of the Study

Auer (1959) defines and explains the purpose of historical research.

Defined formally, historical research is the study of a period, person, or phenomena in human development, in order to record discovered facts in an accurate, coherent, and critical narrative that posits causations and probabilities. When this method is applied in speech research studies it may not only create a record of what has gone before,

but also serve as a guide to future developments. (p. 28)

Another indication of the significance of historical research is found in a statement from A. Craig Baird.

[Historical studies of public address will] give us deeper insight into all that comprises our evolving civilization...enable us better to frame criteria of effectiveness [for the use of speeches in forming political-social judgments], and so to apply such tests to present and future platform speakers...[and] prove applicable to our own training and performances [through] a clearer view of the principles in practice and a more mature awareness of our own rhetorical problems and practices. (Baird, 1956, pp. 1-2)

Dow (1961) supports the theme of both Baird and Auer in the importance and significance of historical research.

From our study of history we learn where we have been and how we got where we are. Through our study of the past we learn to

understand the present more fully.

Perspective, understanding, tolerance--all are products of historical study. Through it we gain perspective on what we are doing, whether in public address, theatre, speech education, radio and television, or speech correction. (p. 72)

It is interesting and challenging to observe how the church and Russell's ministry have grown in the past twenty-five years. This has historical significance for the Christian churches in general and for anyone who is involved in church growth research. A rhetorical analysis of Robert Russell's preaching should provide insight into what effective preaching is and why Russell is considered to be effective at it. This study should benefit individuals interested in the growth and effectiveness of religious rhetoric.

There are still other questions that bear on the historical significance of such a study. Reid (1988) asks the question as to why one should study historical-rhetorical discourse. "The study of past rhetorical discourses aids: (a) the understanding of history, (b) the development of rhetorical theory, and (c) the development of rhetorical skills" (p. 7). Marie Hochmuth

Nichols (1963, p. 20) in a reference to Cicero indicates that even the ancient orators stressed that failing to know what took place historically destines the orator to remain immature and ignorant. Knowledge of history and the effort of the rhetorical critic to record history is essential to rhetorical theory.

Social and aesthetic contributions are also a part of the historical continuum. Wrage (1947) comments on the purpose of public address. The study of rhetorical discourse benefits the researcher educationally and broadens one's historical perspective.

A speech is an agency of its time, one whose surviving record provides a repository of themes and their elaborations from which we may gain insight into the life of an era as well as into the mind of a man...Seen against a broad and organized body of materials in intellectual and social history, the study of speeches both gives and takes on meaning in ways which contribute substantially to educational experience. (pp. 455-457)

The concept of social responsibility is of significance in this study. Awareness of democratic

principles and ethical use of the public forum are matters of importance to any student of speech or the rhetorical critic. Gray and Braden (1963) report "As students of speech...your concern should be not only with the improvement of your capabilities for public utterance but also with the uses to which you intend to put that ability" (p. 56). It is important to remember that the study is not just an academic exercise in research. The discovery and exposition of truth and democratic principles are a substantive portion of this research effort.

An aesthetic appreciation of the creative ability of a speaker is also an important matter. "At its best, criticism leads us to a fuller and richer understanding of a particular work as it exists within the context of human endeavor" (Andrews, 1990, p. 3).

Rhetorical Significance of the Study

This study will be significant to those interested in rhetorical criticism, public address, and interpersonal communication.

A prime function of rhetoric is to interpret and make meaningful what is in the process of happening. The reality of one's world at any given moment is the reality as it is

perceived. Speeches afford concrete evidence of how actors living through history perceive what is going on and how they try to shape the perceptions of others. (Andrews, 1990, p. 9)

Rhetorical criticism helps to interpret the function of oral communication in society. It serves as an effective link between the theory of public address and the outside world. Devoted largely as it is to a determination of the effect or outcome of a speech, it reveals the nature of the process by which a communicative intent finally implements, or fails to implement, social action. A study of theory alone cannot reveal the complete process since it is concerned largely with methodology. But criticism traces the major steps in oral communication straight through to the effect, immediate or delayed, of the spoken discourse upon society. (Thonssen & Baird, 1948, p. 21)

Careful analysis of the preaching of Robert Russell

makes it possible to discover his artistic creativity as a speaker. While it is important to improve intellectual acuity, it is also necessary to appreciate the creativity of the speaker as he expresses his talents and abilities at the podium. This analysis takes into consideration the writer's personal perspective, the historical significance of the speaker and his congregation, and the rhetorical value of Russell's sermons.

Limitations of the Study

Given the broad scope of such an undertaking, some limits needed to be established for the research.

Thonssen and Baird (1948) make this point.

The Rhetorical critic...accepts as one of the limitations of his task the conclusion that he cannot get all facts necessary for complete reconstruction of the social setting in which a speech occurred...In order to appreciate the design of a fabric, it is not necessary to examine every thread. (p. 318)

Russell has been the Senior Minister at Southeast Christian Church for twenty-five years. No other research has been conducted on Robert Russell's pulpit oratory as far as can be determined. This study is limited by the inavailability of previously researched

material on the subject.

It was physically impossible to review all the sermons he has preached within that time frame. Three representative sermons were selected from his 1990 preaching schedule for analysis. The authenticity of the sermons is not questioned as photocopies of the originals were obtained from Russell's secretary. Audience analysis, although important, was limited to a brief survey of the elders of the congregation and brief comments on attendance and general audience make-up on the days the selected sermons were delivered.

Method and Criteria

Understanding the purpose of critical analysis is essential when applying the concepts of rhetorical analysis as delineated by Nilsen (1957). The rhetorical critic has an interpretive function to fulfill.

A vital function of speech criticism should be to interpret the meaning of speeches, not in the sense of clarifying what the speaker directly intends but in the sense of what the speech indirectly implies, for man and the society in which he lives. (p. 87)

Nilsen (1957) relates this discovery of meaning by

implication to the ultimate goal of the speaker. In this framework, the ultimate goal of the speaker is to "move men to acts that fulfill men" (Nilsen, 1957, p. 87). Further, Nilsen (1957) elaborates on that point by saying,

Man fulfills himself only in a social context, through his interactions, direct and indirect with other men...We do not conceive of a set of relationships as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end, the end being the fulfillment of man. (p 93)

While much time could have been spent in identifying the rhetorical methods used by Russell, the discovery of his meaning is more important. Andrews (1990) points out that, "To respond critically to a message...is to be able to distinguish between what is relevant and what is irrelevant...It is to know what the speaker was trying to do, what (he) said, and what (he) meant" (p. 4). This study aims to discover meaning in Mr. Russell's sermons rather than the mechanical aspects of his preaching.

The purpose of the sermon analysis is to discover what Bob Russell believes about man's existence or metaphysics, ideas or epistemology, and the values or axiology of society.

Nilsen (1957) makes this observation.

The end or effect of primary concern to the speech critic is the pattern of attitudes and thought processes induced by the speech, particularly in relation to the terminal action it seeks to elicit. (p. 88)

In other words, what results follow the speech? What is it that Russell ultimately aims for when he preaches? Russell clearly states "I am looking for...change and growth in the lives of people" (personal communication, December 18, 1990). Given this clear goal statement, it is not necessary to search for the method Russell uses to accomplish this aim. More essential is to discover why this is his goal. Discovering what he believes by critical analysis of his sermons provides the answer to that question.

Nilsen (1957) asserts,
Evaluating how well the speaker uses rhetorical techniques to accomplish his purpose is certainly an important task of the critic, but no less important--more so, no doubt--is an evaluation of the pattern of thought and action fostered by the speech.

The latter, usually indirectly communicated, stems from the sense of values the speech embodies, the values it attaches to man himself, to his ideas, to his relationships with other men. And this gives us a cue to the critical analyses of speeches. The rhetorical techniques, the means of persuasion, are the speaker's response to the rhetorical needs of a particular situation, but as such they are also a reflection of the speaker's concept of ideas, in what he presents and the manner in which he develops it; his concept of society, in what he implies about the relationship of man to man. These are the things of enduring significance about a speech which the critic must reveal if the meaning of the speech is to be made plain, if we are to be put in any real sense in "possession" of the speech. (p. 89)

Discovery of the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the speaker is essential if the critic is to fully grasp the intent and content of the speech. An understanding of the terms belief, attitude and value is an indispensable step in building the structure of critical

analysis.

Beliefs are ideas about what is true or false in the "real world." They arise from firsthand experience, evidence read or heard, authorities who have told us what is true, or even blind faith...Attitudes may be defined as tendencies to respond positively or negatively to people, objects, or ideas. Attitudes express individual preferences or feelings...Values are the basic components for organizing one's view of life. They are habitual ways of looking at the world or responding to problems. Values often are the foundation for beliefs and attitudes that cluster around them...Values, then, are an individual's habitualized reasons for holding particular attitudes and beliefs. (Gronbeck, McKerrow, Ehninger, & Monroe, 1990, pp. 94-101)

In order to discover the beliefs, attitudes, and values in the preaching of Robert Russell the methodology described by Nilsen (1957) will be used.

Concept of Man

Nilsen (1957) mentions that the speaker may not be fully aware of that concept and it is the critic's function to identify and reveal it.

The speaker's concept of man is reflected in the manner in which he speaks, the language he employs, the information he presents or fails to present, the issues he chooses, the questions he raises, the faiths he generates, the doubts he implies, the feelings he appeals to, the process of choice he inspires. (p. 90)

Nilsen (1957) suggests the following questions be asked in order to discover the speaker's concept of man.

1. Does the speech reveal an image of man as being of intrinsic worth, or of one whose worth as a personality derives from possession, characteristics or creed?
2. Is the image of man that of a being with a capacity for wisdom and rational choice, the exercise of whose rationality in the light of growing wisdom it is the speaker's obligation to encourage?
3. Does the speech deal honestly with men?
4. Does the speech realistically relate them to the problems they face or does it raise spurious alarm or

spurious complacency?

5. Does the speech imply that men must grow in understanding of themselves and the world about them or that they should forsake the dangers of thought for the safety of convention?

6. Does the speech falsely flatter men to their immediate gratification but long term peril?

7. Does the speech encourage respect for the spirit of free men?

Concept of Ideas

The next step in Nilsen's critical method is to discover the speaker's concept of ideas. "The speaker's concept of ideas is, of course, inseparable from his concept of man. How he uses ideas will depend upon how he believes men should choose and act" (Nilsen, 1957, p. 91). He indicates that ideas can be either manipulated or used in a creative way. If ideas are used creatively, or instrumentally, the hearer is given the opportunity to make his own decisions. If ideas are used manipulatively, the speaker uses them as tools to manipulate the hearer.

In order to determine Russell's concept of ideas and his use of knowledge, Nilsen (1957) provides specific

questions to determine either manipulation or instrumentality.

1. If ideas are being used instrumentally, does the speech present ideas so that they take on added meaning?
2. Does the speech present ideas so that they relate to other significant ideas?
3. Does the speech present ideas so that the listener can see the world a little more as a whole?
4. Does the speech cause the listener to use his own intelligence more effectively than before?

On the other hand, if the ideas are being used manipulatively, these questions will be answered affirmatively.

1. Does the speech perpetuate narrow meanings?
2. Does the speech isolate ideas?
3. Does the speech avoid critical appraisal?
4. Does the speech use ideas as pushbuttons to trigger off preselected responses?

Concept of Society

The final step in the Nilsen methodology is to determine the speaker's concept of society. The essence of this portion of the investigation is to discover Russell's beliefs, attitudes, and values with regard to a fundamental value system. While Nilsen (1957) presents

his method of inquiry in a secular framework with specific emphasis on democracy, he offers insight that can be applied to the religious frame of reference.

As pointed out previously, Nilsen (1957) states that "man fulfills himself only in a social context, through his interactions, direct and indirect, with other men" (p. 93). He also asserts that the end aim of these social relationships is the fulfillment of man. Although these statements express a one dimensional view of man, the framework for critical evaluation of even sacred rhetoric exists. Nilsen (1957) clearly asserts, "The speaker's concept of society must be seen in the values the speech embodies and the social processes it promotes" (p. 93).

This framework for evaluating the speaker's concept of society assists in the analysis of the speaker's concept of democracy. "The critic's inquiry into the concept of society is fundamentally an inquiry into what the speech implies about the democratic values we have assumed essential to man's most adequate fulfillment of himself" (Nilsen, 1957, p. 93). Democracy, according to Nilsen (1957) can be seen as being either substantive or procedural. Substantive values compare to moral

principles. Procedural values compare to social conventions. Nilsen (1957) points out that "these views are not mutually exclusive" (p. 94). The secular perspective would possibly prefer to keep the substantive from affecting the procedural. The sacred perspective would more likely encourage the substantive in affecting the procedural. Using further questions devised by Nilsen, Russell's concept of democratic values and society are investigated.

1. What does the speech imply about rationality, tolerance, and the moral autonomy of the individual?
2. What does the speech imply about the expression of opinions, deliberation, persuasion, free inquiry, free criticism, and free choice?
3. What does the speech imply about discussion and debate, the use of information, the interchange of ideas, the function of opposition, and attitudes toward what is orthodox and unorthodox in thought and action? Nilsen's questions may not all be applied categorically, but observations will be made wherever the criteria pertain.

Comparative Analysis

In order to further discover the effectiveness and consistency of Russell's preaching, the results of the Nilsen analysis are compared with other research

material. A review of the literature on preaching is found in Chapter II where concepts of effective preaching are identified. Two interviews with Russell provide more information for the comparative analysis. Leaders of the Southeast Christian Church responded to questionnaires concerning Russell's preaching. The following questions are used to compare the findings of the Nilsen analysis to the additional research.

1. In what ways did the speaker's concepts of man, ideas, and society discovered in the sermons compare with standards of effective preaching?
2. In what ways did the speaker's concepts of man, ideas, and society discovered in the sermons compare with the content of the personal interviews?
3. In what ways did the speaker's concepts of man, ideas, and society discovered in the sermons compare with opinions expressed by leaders of Russell's congregation?

This analysis will provide a panoramic assessment as shown by both sectarian and secular sources.

Procedure

The rhetorical analysis was conducted using the following procedure.

1. Each of the three sermons was read, annotated in the

margins, and summarized.

2. Concepts of man, ideas, and society were carefully noted in each sermon. The criteria questions that pertained were answered.

3. The concepts of man, ideas, and society discovered in each sermon were compared with the standards of effective preaching.

4. The concepts of man, ideas and society discovered in each sermon were compared with the content of personal interviews with the speaker.

5. The concepts of man, ideas, and society discovered in each sermon were compared with opinions expressed by leaders of Robert Russell's congregation.

Materials of the Study

The sermons chosen for study and dates of delivery are (1) The Flood of Doubt, January 7, 1990, (2) Focus on Your Giftedness, July 1, 1990, and (3) Keep Calm Under Pressure, September 9, 1990. Copies of these sermons and a statement of authenticity are found in Appendix A. Video and audio cassette tape recordings of the sermons do exist, however these are not used in the analysis for the following reasons. The study is limited to the written transcripts of the sermons. Nilsen's (1957) methodology does not provide for analysis of electronic

reproductions of the speech event.

Two personal interviews were conducted with Bob Russell in his office at the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky on December 7 and 18, 1990. Transcripts of these interviews are found in Appendix B.

A questionnaire was sent out to each of the twenty Elders of the Southeast Christian Church. The questionnaire asked three questions: (1) From your own perspective, what is your view of Bob Russell's preaching ministry?, (2) Please define your idea of the word "effective," and (3) Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective preacher? If yes, why? If not, why not? Eight of the twenty questionnaires were returned. Copies of these may be found in Appendix C.

A substantial body of literature relating to the subject of preaching was reviewed. This material, as noted in the reference list, was used to build a framework for evaluating effective preaching.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into four chapters, each with a specific purpose or purposes.

Chapter I gives an introduction to the nature and purpose of the research study. Attention is given to (1)

the rhetorical situation, (2) the purpose of the study, (3) the hypothesis, (4) a review of the literature, (5) significance of the study, (6) limitation of the study, (7) methods and criteria of the study, (8) procedure, (9) materials, and (10) organization of the study.

Chapter II presents a broad historical and philosophical context of preaching. This serves as a framework for analyzing the effectiveness of the selected sermons of Robert Russell. Russell's ministry was placed in the context of the Southeast Christian Church which was, in turn, placed in the historical perspective of the Restoration Movement within the United States.

Biographical material relevant to Mr. Russell is found in Chapter II.

Chapter III presents the rhetorical analysis of the selected sermons of Robert Russell according to the methodology described in Thomas R. Nilsen's The Interpretive Function of the Critic (1957). Chapter III also furnishes the comparative analysis of Robert Russell's preaching as found in (1) the personal interviews, (2) the results of the questionnaire and, (3) the literature on effective preaching.

Chapter IV provides a summary of the thesis and conclusions relating to the findings of this study.

Three appendices and a reference list follow Chapter IV. Appendix A supplies copies of the three sermons that were analyzed. Appendix B provides transcripts of the two interviews with Mr. Russell. Appendix C furnishes copies of the questionnaire sent to the Elders of the Southeast Christian Church. The reference list contains all the relevant information regarding the books, articles, and other source material used in this study.

CHAPTER II

PREACHING, THE CHURCHES AND THE SPEAKER

The Introduction

Douglas (1978) claims that, "From the earliest times, preaching played a basic part in the religious life of the Old Testament" (p. 479). Preaching is not a new rhetorical form. It is a major rhetorical form and possibly the most often practiced form in the world. First, a foundation must be laid in order to understand its significance. Then the effectiveness Robert Russell's preaching can be evaluated.

Three areas are investigated in this chapter. The literature on preaching is reviewed to establish criteria for evaluating the consistency and effectiveness of Russell's preaching. A brief denominational history of the Christian Church is provided to place Russell's preaching in an historical context. Specific information regarding the Southeast Christian Church is also given.

This chapter furnishes a rhetorical biography of Robert Russell. Particular attention is given to his life experiences, his training, and other influences that pertain to his ability as a public speaker.

Preaching

Gronbeck, McKerrow, Ehninger, & Monroe (1990) list the roles of speechmaking in society as:

(1) group self-definition, (2) the spread of information through a community, (3) the public debate of values, facts, and community policy, and (4) to bring about individual and group change. (pp. 4-5)

Preaching fulfills these roles for both the religious community and society.

Preaching has played a significant role in American history and society. Oliver (1965) notes that, "With the exception of school teaching, the most frequent and perhaps the most influential public speaking in America has been the pulpit" (p. 358). According to Oliver (1965, p. 9), beginning with the initial efforts to establish European culture in America the sermon was the most typical and influential culture-shaping institution in colonial America. Bosley (1953) comments on the importance of preaching in the early stages of America's development.

Some historians have been inclined to debate the importance of a religious motive in the founding of the colonies in this country.

Yet the records of the colonies as planted and in operation leave no doubt as to the reality and power of such a motive. That preaching was one of the most powerful factors in this experience of emigration and settlement is an uncontested historical fact.

(p. 26)

While preaching has had a tremendous impact on both American history and culture, Bosley (1953) suggests looking further back in history to observe the origin of preaching in order to understand why it has impacted America so greatly.

Any appraisal of the phenomenon of preaching in the history of American churches must begin by relating it to the role of preaching in the Christian tradition. Preaching, in the American experience, while exhibiting a freedom, flexibility, and effectiveness unsurpassed by any other country or continent in Christendom, is not peculiar to our experience. It is, in fact, one of the oldest forms of witnessing in the history of the Hebrew-Christian tradition, and

throughout the ages preachers have adjusted their messages to contemporary needs and problems. (p. 17)

Pattison (1909, p. 1) states that Christian preaching has roots in the Old Testament. Douglas (1978) points out that "Moses, Joshua, and Elijah all appealed by the spoken word to the listening congregation" (p. 479). Preaching could possibly be traced back to the lecture that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Preaching was a significant element in the public ministry of Jesus Christ. The major theme in the New Testament book of Acts is the effect and result of preaching the Christian message in the initial stages of growth of the Christian Church. Stott (1982) inculcates the necessity of preaching for Christianity. "Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost" (p. 15). There is a significant body of literature regarding the growth and maturation of Christian preaching (Douglas, 1978; Hastings, 1951). However, the study of the growth of preaching is not the focus of this paper.

It is necessary to first define preaching in order to establish criteria for evaluating its effectiveness.

Hastings (1951) says, "The word 'preach' is derived from the Latin 'praedico' and Greek 'profami' and means to foretell or to announce in public" (p. 220). Generally speaking, the term conveys the idea of making a proclamation on behalf of God. Chilcote (1954) looks at further definitions.

Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth...preaching is the bringing of truth through personality...the truth must come really through the person. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him. (p. 24)

This definition of preaching as truth through personality is echoed in Baxter (1950) and Stott (1982). Thonnsen and Baird (1948) reinforce this position by

stating, "the force of the speaker's personality or character is instrumental in facilitating the acceptance of belief" (p. 383). A clearly supported definition of preaching is speaking the truth of God through the instrument of the personality of the speaker.

Marsh (1967, pp.1-10) lists the forms of public discourse as dialectic, exposition, argumentation, poetic, and persuasion. While preaching may include all of these elements of discourse, modern evangelical preaching favors the expository method. He claims that, "Expository discourse attempts to teach those who do not know or believe what the speaker knows or believes" (p. 5). There are various forms of preaching, such as textual, topical, and expository. Evangelical preachers tend to utilize the expository method more than the others; some with great determination. Stott (1982) asserts, "It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching" (p. 125). Stott (1982), with regard to the Scriptures, says,

Our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. (p. 126)

While all preachers may not agree with Stott's limiting all true preaching to exposition, his indication of the expositor's responsibility gives a foundation upon which one can build a criteria for effective preaching.

Killinger (1985) provides insight into effective preaching by observing the life of the preacher. Three significant points are made. The preacher must possess character, intellect, and balance to be effective.

There are few vocations in which the character and inner life of the persons are as important as they are in the ministry. To preach well Sunday after Sunday preachers must be in touch with the deepest resources of their beings...Good preaching is a matter of overflow--of having one's mood and spirit so primed with reading and experience that they simply rise up in weekly rhythm.... Ministers who aspire to preaching truly helpful and instructive sermons for their people cannot neglect the constant feeding of their intellects....The Gospel we preach is about redemption and wholeness....It is very important...for the preacher to be as healthy

and joyous as possible. Anything less impedes his or her message about the life-giving community of God. (pp. 187-198)

A balanced life, noble character, and a well fed intellect are basic to effective preaching. Baxter (1950) supports the concept of character as essential to effectiveness.

The foremost qualification of the preacher is character...before he can reveal God to men he must know God himself...he must know God intimately...personal piety must precede preaching. His life must be lived on so high a plane that his sermons will not be marred in the minds of the congregation by thoughts of inconsistency between his preaching and his practice. Immoral ministers cannot preach morality. The man of God must show, in his life, the path that men should follow. Closely akin to character is sincerity. Earnestness is the preacher's evidence of his sincerity. (pp. 51-52)

Baxter (1950, p. 30) isolates a prime attribute of effectiveness when he discusses consistency of character. Pearson (1959) supports this noting, "The indispensable

condition of effective preaching is that the pulpit be occupied by a sound, consistent human being" (p. 70).

Dabney (1979) summarizes the effectiveness of good character by saying, "Eloquence may dazzle and please; holiness of life convinces" (p. 263).

Killinger (1969) adds other points relevant to effectiveness and preaching. Identification with people, the times, and their problems is essential. "His words therefore must reveal a genuine intimacy with the brokenness of the times" (p. 22).

Killinger (1969) explains effective or "authentic" preaching as "artistic discovery." The preacher, in the process of creating the sermon, becomes so involved with his creation that he actually discovers something. This artistic discovery or experience is expressed in the preaching of the man. Killinger (1969) describes this "discovery" or "effective" preaching in the following terms.

Their preaching galvanizes men--upends them, probes them, haunts them, follows them into their most remote hiding places and smokes them out, drives them out coughing and sputtering and crying into the open light of

new grace and new freedom and new love. The
withered are made whole, the lame leap for
joy, the dumb find articulation, the confused
discover direction, the harried find
resources for slowing down--in short, there
is an apocalypticism about such preaching, an
immediate grasp of what is yet distant and
still to come, a taste of what is promised.

(p. 24)

The essence of Killinger's description of effective
preaching is the idea of exciting and life-changing
discourse. Killinger (1969) states further that
preaching is fulfilling to both the preacher and the
listener. "There is nothing like preaching, when it is
imaginatively conceived and faithfully executed, to bring
order and meaning into a man's entire ministry" (p. 27).
Effective preaching flows from a life consistently lived
in the midst of a people in need. Sleeth (1956)
substantiates this point saying, "No preacher can expect
to exert much influence for good on his people if he shows
a lack of understanding of people...he cannot preach in a
vacuum apart from what he really is as a person" (p. 25).

According to Broadus (1944) effective preaching
follows the example of Christ in that it is central to

the ministry of the preacher. Effective preaching is purposeful because it is the "appointed means of spreading the good tidings of salvation through Christ" (p. 3). His requisites for effective preaching include (a) piety, or moral earnestness, (b) natural gifts of clarity of thought, conviction, imagination, and expression, (c) knowledge both general and specific, and (d) skill in the use of collection, choice, and arrangement of material.

The matter of purposefulness in preaching is stipulated in the writings of other scholars. Behrends (1890), Garrison (1954), and Pearson (1959) stress that effective preaching must be purposeful. That purpose, according to Dabney (1979) is that of "Forming the image of Christ upon the souls of men" (p. 37). Pearson (1959, pp. 15-20) describes purposefulness as proclamation, demonstration, and implantation. Purposeful preaching communicates Christ to people through preaching of the Gospel, living the example of Christ, and teaching the words of Christ to people. As with any endeavor, there must be a purpose (an aim) or the experience becomes an exercise in futility. Effective preaching is purposeful.

Accompanying purposefulness comes the need to be

practical. An effective preacher shows his listeners how to practically apply the message to their lives. Oliver (1965) states that a major characteristic of Puritan preaching in early New England was its practicality.

The content of the sermons was theological, yet it was theology with an immediately practical application. The Word of God was for the people their guide, constitution, and rule-book for everyday life, as well as their map to salvation. (p. 9)

Baxter (1950) notes that the effective preacher will possess a keen intellect, thorough understanding of the Scriptures, and a willingness to study "all the established areas of learning" (p. 69). He also reiterates the preacher's need for moral stamina (courage), imagination, originality, and vigor.

Chilcote (1954, pp. 39-42) suggests that the effective preacher will possess the following characteristics: personal purity, gravity, and courage.

Pattison (1909) reveals that effective preachers are human. "The greatest preachers have been the most thoroughly human, men of like passions with their hearers" (p. 2). By that he means that the preacher does not hold himself aloof from his people. The preacher

lives among, suffers with, and experiences life as his parishioners do. The preacher may then identify more clearly the needs of the people and address his remarks to those deficiencies.

Sleeth (1956) points out that the effective minister will be a spiritual man having a personal relationship with God.

One of the most persuasive factors in a sermon is the character of the preacher....To be effective the preacher must have experienced some deep spiritual relationship with God. The minister's prayer life, devotions, and Bible study are all important in his preaching. Without strong commitment and a consecrated spirit he can hardly expect to be an effective preacher. (p. 22)

Sleeth (1956) also states that the preacher's attitude affects his persuasiveness and thus his effectiveness.

The attitude...the preacher radiates from the pulpit is an indication of his adequateness....The preacher who has a healthy attitude toward himself and others,

providing he also has a message, is the preacher who is persuasive. (p. 32)

Baxter (1950) points to the importance of the preacher's attitude and its relationship to his effectiveness.

Within the area of the preacher's attitude toward himself the greatest dangers lie in too great a consciousness of self. This over-awareness of self results in one of two extremes. Either the person becomes conceited or he becomes discouraged, and either attitude is disastrous to the success of his work. The preacher's goal is to avoid these two extremes, and to think of himself sanely and soberly....In order to persuade men, the (preacher)...must have a genuine love for them, a love characterized by understanding and sympathy....Not only must the preacher have a proper attitude toward himself and toward the people whom he serves, but he must also be...convinced that the work of preaching is the earth's noblest calling....The most effective work will be

done by the minister who holds his profession in high honor, who is driven by pure motives, who gives his full time to the work, and who thoroughly enjoys the work. (pp. 124-125).

Stott (1982) echoes the other writers by stating that an effective preacher must be sincere, earnest, courageous, and humble. He has a broad philosophy of preaching worthy of consideration. Stott (1982) offers the metaphor of bridge building to describe effective communication.

Now a bridge is a means of communication between two places which would otherwise be cut off from one another by a river or ravine. It makes possible a flow of traffic which without it would be impossible. What, then, does the gorge or chasm represent? And what is the bridge which spans it? The chasm is the deep rift between the biblical world and the modern world....It is across this broad and deep divide of two thousand years of changing culture...that Christian communicators have to throw bridges. Our task is to enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of

the men and women of today. (p. 137)

According to Stott (1982) the fundamental task of preaching is building bridges between the revealed Word and the contemporary world. Such preaching will express biblical principles authoritatively, but will be sensitive when applying them to the relevant issues at hand. Stott (1982) observes that it is difficult to maintain the kind of balance required of preaching that still leaves people free to make up their own minds. His recommendation to the preacher is to hold on to integrity by assisting the listener to develop a Christian mind.

But it seems to me...the only way...to handle the Word of God with integrity [declaring what is plain, but not pretending that everything is plain when it is not]...[is] to lead the people of God into maturity [by encouraging them to develop a Christian mind, and use it]. (p 178)

The criteria for effective preaching found in the literature are listed as follows.

1. Effective preaching is Biblical.
2. An effective preacher possesses noble character, intellect, and a balanced life.

3. Effective preaching affects and changes the lives of the listeners.
4. Effective preaching identifies the problems people contend with.
5. An effective preacher personally identifies with his audience.
6. Effective preaching is purposful, practical, and intelligent.
7. An effective preacher is spiritual and reflects mature attitudes.
8. Effective preaching bridges the gap between the secular and sacred worlds.

Given these requisites for effective preaching, one question comes to mind. Who, then, considering these high standards for preaching, could ever be effective?

First, this paper identifies standards for defining effectiveness in preaching. Second, it uses the ministry of Robert Russell to show that these standards can be met. When these standards and a determined Christian preacher meet and interact, there is effective preaching.

The Churches

The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in the United States trace their roots back to the time of the Great Awakening in colonial America. Religious revivals

in America have occurred in cycles over the years. The Great Awakening of 1720 to 1750 was America's first great revival. Goetz (1989, p. 7) notes that this movement revitalized the religious experience of the American colonies.

Given the frontier nature of early America, its independent spirit and moral neglect, the rise of dynamic religious personalities in the colonies opened the door to revival. Parrington (1954, p. 163) recounts the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield as a dynamic influence hastening the advent of the Great Awakening.

Sweet (1942, p. 317) indicates that the Great Awakening yielded numerous by-products. The establishment of the Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians as powerful religious influences in the colonies was but one. Attitudes towards salvation and freedom of religion changed dramatically during the Great Awakening. According to Goetz (1989), expansion of religion in the colonies and establishment of new churches and denominations were also results of the first great revival.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century

another revival, known as the Second Great Awakening (c. 1795-1835), began in the United States. During this revival, meetings were held in small towns and the large cities throughout the country and the unique frontier institution known as the camp meeting began. The Second Great Awakening produced a great increase in church membership, made soul winning the primary function of the ministry, and stimulated several moral and philanthropic reforms, including temperance, emancipation of women, and foreign missions. (p. 9)

Boles (1972, p. 23) dates the Great Revival from 1787 to 1805. Murch (1962, pp. 19-34) intimates that the tide of revival rose and fell at various times and in different places throughout the young United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. According to Murch (1962, pp. 35, 53, 83, & 97), in the midst of the Second Great Awakening, Presbyterians Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone and Walter Scott independently and later collectively laid the foundations for what was to become the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in the United States.

Perhaps a growing disenchantment with the strictures of organized denominational religion assisted in the eventual formulation of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in America. It appears that the idea of independence influenced the religious as well as the political nature of the American frontier. The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ did not come into existence through the dynamism of one specific individual. The churches were rather a movement within and without the established religious communities in early nineteenth century America. Murch (1962) describes this phenomenon, later identified as the Restoration Movement.

In a marvelous way, God had raised up a people to His name in many places throughout America prior to 1830. Without consultation with or prior knowledge of each other, men had been led by the Holy Spirit to abandon human dogmas and traditions and turn to the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice. A remarkable similarity in the views of these people was evident, and usually when they confronted one another,

they came into common ground and gladly worked together to further the kingdom of God....Among the groups that now began to coalesce into one body were Free Will Baptists, Scotch Baptists, Regular Baptists, German Baptists, Separate Baptists, Republican Methodists, Christians, and Reformers or Disciples....At this time, the two major groups of New Testament Christians were the Reformers or Disciples, under the leadership of the Campbells and Scott, and the Christians, under Stone. It is variously estimated that each group numbered from eight to ten thousand members. The center of numerical strength was in Kentucky. (pp. 109-110)

The general time frame for this coalescence of the various independent movements was the late 1820's. In the years following, the Restoration Movement grew as the frontier expanded across the continent.

Although no binding statement of beliefs, creed, or denominational dogma ever came into existence, identification of the doctrinal position of the churches can be made. Douglas (1978) makes this observation.

They follow a congregational pattern of church polity which they regard as being in accordance with New Testament teaching. Indeed, to align all church practice and belief with the Scriptures is a major goal of the Churches of Christ. Nothing is to be accepted as an article of faith or as a condition of communion but "what is expressly taught and enjoined in the Word of God" which is "the perfect constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church." The Bible is the best source of information about God, far better than creeds or statements of dogma. The Churches of Christ affirm their belief in the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the vicarious atonement, the necessity of spiritual rebirth, and the need for believer's baptism by immersion. (p. 227)

McLean (1989) presents a clear summary of the beliefs and practices of the Christian Churches. The statement is not a binding article of faith. Rather, it is an observation of what the churches believe and

practice in reality. Given the autonomous nature of the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, no one has the right to produce a binding statement of belief for the other congregations.

Members of Christian Churches and Churches of Christ believe in the deity and Lordship of Jesus Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, and the autonomy of local congregations.

Following the basic principles of the "Restoration Movement," they accept and teach believers' baptism (immersion) into Christ for the forgiveness of sins; they assemble for worship on the first day of the week, making the observance of the Lord's supper a focal point in such worship. They seek the unity of all believers on the basis of faith in and obedience to Christ as the divine Son of God and the acceptance of the New Testament as their all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. (p. F-11)

The Independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, not including the Disciples of Christ denomination and non-instrumental (no mechanical music permitted in worship) Churches of Christ which both share

the same historical roots in the Restoration Movement, have grown substantially as a non-denominational religious movement since the days of the Second Great Awakening. McLean (1989) gives the following statistics indicate the growth of the movement.

Insert Table 1 about here

The statistics given by McLean (1989) were those the he obtain from organizations that chose to be listed. There is the possibility than other programs and ministries exist and go uncounted.

It is within this historical context that the Southeast Christian Church arose. The early strength of the Restoration Movement, as previously mentioned, was in Kentucky. It is no surprise that Louisville, the largest city in Kentucky, should become a seat of influence for the Christian Churches. McLean (1989, p. 110) lists twenty Christian Church congregations in the city itself. The Southeast Christian Church was founded in July 1962 with fifty members from the South Louisville Christian

Church. The South Louisville congregation has also established four other congregations in the city. The Southeast congregation had humble beginnings. The group first met in members' homes, then at Goldsmith Lane Elementary School, and finally at the church building they constructed at 2601 Hikes Lane in Louisville. This information was taken from A Brief History of Southeast Christian Church, an unpublished and undated information sheet provided by Mr. Russell's secretary.

Filiatreau (1990) makes these observations on the growth of the Southeast Christian Church.

Russell became Southeast's pastor that same year (1966) at the...age of 22. By then the church had a four-year track record of steady but moderate growth, and was drawing about 250 people to its worship services each Sunday. The rate of growth stayed about the same until the early 1980s, when some critical mass apparently was reached. Since the beginning of 1980, Southeast's membership has mushroomed from about 1,100 to the present 6,000-plus, and annual general-fund offerings have increased from about \$385,000 to today's astonishing total of nearly \$2.9

million. In 1987 the congregation moved a few blocks east on Hikes Lane, into a 22-acre, \$9.5-million complex of strikingly contemporary buildings. (p. 37)

Murphy (1990, in press) indicates that a November 1990 decision was made by the leadership of the congregation to move and build a new facility which can cope with the expected future growth of the congregation. He also identifies the Southeast Christian Church as the largest church in the state of Kentucky. Given the magnitude of this particular congregation, its phenomenal growth, and its future plans, the study of its senior minister's preaching takes on certain significance.

The Speaker

Robert Lee Russell was born on October 4, 1943 in Meadville, Pennsylvania. He is the son of Katherine Pratt and Charles E. Russell.

Charles Russell was the seventeenth child in a family of eighteen. His mother died when he was three and he had a hard childhood. Charles became a Christian shortly after his marriage to Katherine on December 3, 1937. Charles and Katherine Russell had four daughters and two sons. Robert was the third born child in the

family.

The Russell family moved to Meadville, Pennsylvania in the late 1930's. Charles Russell worked for 35 years at Talon Zipper Company in Meadville. The family owned a small farm near Conneautville, Pennsylvania.

The Russell family has a history of personal involvement with the church. "The family attended church every time the door was open" at the First Christian Church in Meadville (Russell, personal communication, December 7, 1990). While Robert was in the sixth grade, his family and other families started the Conneautville Christian Church.

Robert Russell was reared in a traditional American family. School and church were the focus of life. The work ethic was important in his upbringing as he had farm chores to do. These early church, school, and work experiences would have continuing influence on Russell's life and ministry.

Bob Russell became a Christian when he was eight years old. "I just grew up in the church and I knew at eight years of age that I had sinned and that I needed Christ," (Russell, personal communication, December 7, 1990). He was normally involved in all Sunday School activities, youth activities, and went to church camp

every summer.

Robert Russell graduated from Conneaut Valley High School in 1961. He went straight from high school to Bible college graduating from Cincinnati Bible Seminary in 1965 with an A.B. degree.

During high school and college, Russell was involved in numerous activities. He played basketball, football, and baseball in high school. He played basketball for four years while at seminary. He was an officer in the Ambassadors Club, a preaching interest club which he helped to start while at Cincinnati Bible Seminary. The purpose of the club was to invite outstanding preachers to the college to preach. After the session the students would have a dialogue with the speaker to gain insight into his experience. The sessions served as inspiration to young men who wanted to preach and was a possible influence on the preaching of Russell himself.

He was ordained to the Christian ministry in June 1965 at the Conneautville Church of Christ. Gerald Comp was the presiding minister.

Russell met his wife during his seminary training. He married Judy Thomas, daughter of Virgil and Edna Thomas of Rushville, Indiana on May 28, 1965. They were

married at Monterey Christian Church, near Batavia, Ohio, where Bob was serving as minister. John Richardson, professor and basketball coach at Cincinnati Bible Seminary, performed the wedding.

The Russell's first son, Robert L. Russell, Jr., was born in June 1, 1967. A second son, Philip, was born July 15, 1971. Both children were born in Louisville. Robert, Jr. is now a preacher in Spartansburg, South Carolina. Philip is a student at the University of Louisville.

Russell's ministerial experience has been limited to three congregations. While in seminary, he served as a student youth minister at Bridgetown Church of Christ in Cincinnati, Ohio for two years. He later held a weekend ministry at Monterey Christian Church in Batavia, Ohio for one year and then served there full-time for one year. He was called to Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky in June 1966. He will celebrate twenty-five years with that congregation in June 1991.

Russell has indicated the following as honors and community service opportunities he has received as follows. He was listed in "Outstanding Young Men in America." He has served as president of Louisville Evangelizing Association and president of The Greater

Louisville Ministerial Association. He has been on the 120 member committee and the Executive Committee of North American Christian Convention. He has served on the board of The Christian Television Mission, served ten years as a trustee of the Cincinnati Bible Seminary, and was President of Ambassadors for the Word. He has recently removed himself from all boards except for Ambassadors for Word. He did this in order to focus his attention on his ministry at Southeast Christian Church. Russell has taught in the in Master's of Ministry program at Kentucky Christian College in Grayson, Kentucky for the last five years.

Mr. Russell is a published writer with numerous articles in The Christian Standard to his credit. He has also written three books. He is in constant demand as a speaker and was the keynote speaker at the North American Christian Convention in 1989. He has spoken for high school and college graduations, the Farm Bureau Association in Atlanta, Georgia and countless church functions throughout the United States.

During the interviews with Mr. Russell, he avoided any efforts to promote himself. He appears to be an extremely humble and down-to-earth person who does not

look for opportunities for self-promotion. His personal philosophical outlook can be observed in a statement made during the first interview.

I think it is important that a person, especially a minister, keep priorities in order. He must first be a person of integrity. If my relationship with the Lord is dishonest, then everything breaks down. That is true in every area of life and it is especially true in ministry. I've got to make sure that my family comes before the church. If my life's right with God, the most important people in my life are my wife and my children, in that order. My wife is more important than my children. If she is not convinced that she is the number one person in my life, then she is going to be unhappy....I've made a lot of mistakes in ministry, but neglect of the family isn't one of them. And then, I need to put the church ahead of everything else underneath that. I enjoy playing golf and I enjoy playing basketball and enjoy some things outside, but I can't let those hobbies take precedent over

my ministry to people....I have a work ethic that hasn't changed....I'll probably work 60 hours a week...my personal slogan would be 'press on'. (Russell, personal communication, December 7, 1990)

Robert L. Russell is a unique public speaker. His speaking situation is not ordinary considering the magnitude of his congregation, its plans for the future, and its potential. One thing apparent in Mr. Russell is his earnest desire to preach. The rhetorical analysis of his preaching found in chapter III gives further insight into the man and his philosophical framework.

CHAPTER III

Analysis of the Sermons

This chapter reports results of the analysis as shown by a categorical application of the criteria that pertain.

Sermon 1: The Flood of Doubt

The sermon was delivered by Robert Russell to a predominately adult audience of 5,530 people at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky on January 7, 1990.

Russell's Concept of Man and Existence

In The Flood of Doubt, Russell points out that man is capable of suffering life destroying doubt. He discusses this problem realistically and relates it to man's questions of existence.

The first metaphysical problem Russell identifies is the origin of man. Is man the result of a cosmic accident or the creation of an omniscient and omnipotent God? If man is only the result of aeons of evolutionary change, then existence is meaningless. Using the Genesis record, Russell emphasizes his belief that man is the highest of God's creation. God created man personally

and purposefully. This gives man metaphysical value. Doubt erodes this personal value; therefore doubt is a problem of existence that must be resolved. By identifying man as God's creation and supporting this contention by argument from Scripture, Russell responds to the dilemma of doubt and metaphysical problem of origin.

Second, can man exist apart from God? Russell contrasts the effects of the creation versus evolution argument on man's view of being. Creationism argues that man is the product of the creative action of an omnipotent God. Man exists in relation to that God. Russell comments about evolution as atheism. "At its base, the evolutionary theory is atheistic in viewpoint...it is an attempt to prove existing matter apart from God" (Russell, 1990, The Flood of Doubt). Russell points out that the theory of evolution has problems with its evidence and proof. He believes that certain unnamed geologists, geneticists, and chemists are beginning to question the correctness of evolution. He names Colin Patterson, a British paleontologist, as one who questions the validity of the evolutionary theory.

If evolution is incapable of providing man with sufficient reason for existence, then man's creation by

an omnipotent God must. Russell suggests that doubt can be remedied when man realizes that he cannot live apart from God, who created him.

The third metaphysical problem Russell identifies is life is meaningful because of its source. If life becomes meaningless for man, it is because man has doubted or denied God as the source of life.

Without faith your life is without meaning.

Without faith you have no explanation for beginning. Without faith you have no anticipation for the future. Without faith you have no intention for the present.

(Russell, 1990, The Flood of Doubt)

A life based on informed and intelligent faith in God is meaningful when lived in personal relationship with God. Life based on evolution has no real meaning because it has an irrational beginning, no hope beyond the grave, and no purpose other than survival. Doubt flourishes in such an atmosphere. Faith provides meaning which dispels doubt.

Russell suggests that doubt can be prevented or minimized by development of (a) a personal faith founded upon Jesus Christ, (b) increased knowledge of the Bible,

(c) a willingness to believe Biblical truth, and (d) understanding that faith brings meaning to life.

Russell deals honestly with man's persistent problems of doubt. His solutions to doubt are based on the Bible and the Christian faith. The sermon encourages listeners to better understand themselves and their world by choosing to study, believe, and follow the teaching of the Bible. Because man has the capacity for wisdom and rational choice, the listener is given the opportunity to answer the call to faith and commitment. "No human has the capacity to give you a sense of identity, hope of eternity, and a meaning for every day as does Jesus" (Russell, 1990, The Flood of Doubt). This indicates that Russell views man as being of intrinsic worth. Man is of value to God and finds personal meaning for life only in the framework of the Christian faith.

Russell's Concept of Ideas and Knowledge

Russell suggests that a major cause of doubt is the perceived dichotomy between science and Scripture. Taking a biblical literalist perspective, Russell defends the validity of the Bible narrative of creation as contrasted to the theory of evolution. He defends the omniscience of God and contrasts it with the man's limited knowledge.

Russell suggests that the theory of evolution is not truly scientific. Quoting paleontologist Colin Patterson, he points out that Patterson believes in evolution but thinks it must be accepted by faith because of the many gaps that the theory cannot bridge. "Scientific" evolution then becomes a religion rather than a true science.

Science offers a diminished view of the meaning of life as compared to that offered by the Christian faith. He suggests that some unspecified scientists were abandoning the evolutionary theory for the belief that life originated on other planets and was brought here by intergalactic travelers. Russell then reports that the revealed word of God is more believable than pseudoscientific theories and biased scientific representations about man's origin.

In dealing with the matter of doubt, Russell identifies three epistemological problems. First, uncertainty about one's source of knowledge causes doubt.

As soon as we read the first section of Genesis, our minds are flooded with questions of uncertainty. Do we accept the Genesis record as actual or mythical? Is it factual

or just figurative? (Russell, 1990 The Flood of Doubt)

If a person accepts the Genesis account of creation as literal, Russell states that a person will have no problems accepting other supernatural actions recorded in the Bible. If there is doubt regarding the Genesis record, then that doubt will pervade the person's mind and the whole Bible will be problematic. Acceptance of the Bible as a source of true knowledge is a solution to the problem of doubt.

Second, Russell states that a lack of knowledge causes doubt. Although man is finite, man can observe truth and come to knowledge through reason.

The Bible does not define God or give a description of creation or set a date when it happened. It assumes that thinking people will understand there is a supreme being who by His power created the universe. There are some truths so obvious they don't need to be stated, they can be observed. (Russell, 1990, The Flood of Doubt)

By taking Biblical evidence and the using the power of observation, a person can make a comparison of what is revealed to what exists in natural systems. The patterns

that exists indicates a higher intelligence, design, and order. This observation confirms God and revelation as a source of knowledge.

Third, man's skeptical nature is a problem relating to man's view of knowledge. Russell suggests that man, in general, suffers from intellectual and moral doubt fueled by pride. Western man tends to doubt anything supernatural. Evolution has become a prominent and well promoted answer to the question of man's origin. To admit the validity of the Biblical position is considered unsophisticated by some. Doubt becomes an excuse rather than a sound argument. Russell identifies this as a spiritual problem that man could resolve if the Bible was considered a source of scientific knowledge as well as spiritual knowledge.

Russell suggests that when dealing with doubt people should (a) admit their ignorance (that they don't have all the answers), (b) expose themselves to Biblical truth, (c) study the alternatives to faith to see if they are logical or reasonable, and (d) build upon the faith they already possess.

The matter of authority is the key issue here. Knowledge is the ultimate source of authority. The

question of who has authority in a person's life is the salient but unstated question. If God is the ultimate authority, then God's word must become the basis of man's epistemology. If science is the ultimate authority, then a different perspective on knowledge must be considered. The end result of adopting either system must be studied and choices made accordingly.

Russell's Concept of Society and Values

Nilsen (1957) believes man finds fulfillment in his social context. Russell's social context is the church as defined in the Scriptures.

Whatever the source, doubt reveals uncertainty about knowledge and causes instability in the life of the individual. A life based upon Biblical moral teaching lived within the value system of the church is a life that can overcome doubt and find fulfillment. This is possible when a person or group of persons make Jesus Christ the focus of life.

Russell identifies a specific problem that relates doubt to axiology. He presents the argument that origin will determine values. If man doubts his divine origin, the alternative is evolution. If man evolved from lower life forms, then there is no basis for moral values. He says, "Life without God is a hopeless end, with Him, it

is an endless hope" (Russell, 1990, The Flood of Doubt).

As a solution to doubt that undermines God as man's source of values, Russell suggests the following. Belief in the resurrected Christ, following His teaching and depending upon the mutual support of fellow Christians, makes it possible for the individual to manage the destructive effects of doubt. This is clearly a substantive view of society based on the concept that the Bible is the foundation for knowledge and should be the principle authority over the life of man.

Comparative Analysis

Comparison of the Sermon to the Literature. The literature on preaching (Killinger, 1969) indicates that effective preaching identifies a problem faced by man and offers a solution. Russell recognizes doubt as such a problem and offers personal application of Biblical knowledge as the solution.

Effective preaching is also practical. Russell provides his listeners with practical ways to deal with their doubts in the sermon.

Purposefulness is essential for effectiveness. Russell's purpose in the sermon is to offer spiritual help to those troubled by doubt. Stott (1982, p.178)

indicated that effective preaching encourages the development and use of a Christian mind. Russell does that by urging the audience to study the Scriptures for ways to deal with doubt from a Christian perspective.

Comparison of the Sermon to the Interviews. Nilsen (1957) states that the speaker should view man as having intrinsic worth. Russell (personal communication, December 18, 1990) expressed concern and high regard for mankind in the interviews.

I think that man is of value because he is the highest of all of God's creations. He has the unique capacities to think, and feel, and to have free will. His ultimate value is found in his relationship to Jesus Christ.

Given Russell's view of man, his preaching purpose fits that belief. Russell clearly states that, "the purpose of preaching is to save the lost and edify the saved" (personal communication, December 18, 1990). He also stresses that there must be an urgency in preaching because of the confusion man experiences through doubt and a general decline in the morals of society.

Russell expresses a mature view of preaching. While some preachers may look for immediate reactions to their sermons, he prefers long-term responses. His goal is to

see "change and growth in the lives of people" (personal communication, December 18, 1990).

Killinger (1969, p. 22) reveals that effective preachers identify with their congregations and their problems. Russell (personal communication, December 18, 1990) expresses a serious concern over that matter.

I have a fear that my preaching would become irrelevant, that I would lose touch. I think one of the reasons that I have experienced some degree of effectiveness is that I understand where people are. And I have a fear that as the church gets bigger and I get more and more isolated that I will lose touch with where people are and that will make it more difficult for me to relate the Scripture.

Russell remains consistent in his view of man as being of intrinsic value. This is expressed both in his preaching and in his personal attitudes. Concurrent to that is his concern for the future of man in society. Russell expresses concern that society's convictions about absolutes are suffering serious erosion. The problems of the sanctity of life and the family are

relevant issues that need to be addressed through preaching. Russell expresses concern that the philosophy of humanism is impacting secular society and that influence is undermining long held moral standards in society.

Comparison of the Sermon to the Church Leaders' Opinions. The church leaders believe that Bob Russell is bold, unashamed of the gospel, and knowledgeable enough to approach the controversy between evolution and creation. The debate concerning the origin of man has engendered doubt in the minds of many people. Thus, it is a relevant topic for a concerned pastor to address.

The church leaders' statements reveal their belief that the preaching of Robert Russell meets the criteria for effective preaching. Russell lives a noble, consistent and balanced life according to the Elders. His sermons are well prepared, practical, and purposive. Russell does have personal identification with both his people and their problems; doubt troubles many Christians. It is conceivable that some Christians would choose to conceal this problem. Russell shows compassion and insight in providing biblical solutions to the problem of doubt.

Summary of The Analysis

Russell's concept of man and existence. Russell views man as being of intrinsic worth, of value to God and finding personal meaning for life only in the framework of the Christian faith. Man, troubled by doubt, has the capacity for wisdom and rational choice. Man can overcome doubt through faith and Bible study.

Russell's concept of ideas and knowledge. A dichotomy exists between science and Scripture. Biblical creation is more believable than evolution. God is omniscient and man is finite in knowledge. Doubt stems from ignorance or uncertainty about the source of true knowledge. Pursuit of Biblical truth leads to knowledge. God is the ultimate authority and basis of knowledge.

Russell's concept of society and values. Man finds fulfillment in the church context. Doubt caused by man-centered values disturbs man's stability. Participation in the work of the church helps man recover God-centered values to defeat doubt.

Comparison of the sermon to the literature. Effective preaching identifies problems faced by man, offers solutions, is practical, purposeful and Scriptural. Russell meets these criteria in speaking about doubt.

Comparison of the sermon to the interviews. During the interviews, Russell expresses a concern for the dilemmas faced by modern man. Russell offers God's Word as the source of knowledge that will dispel doubt.

Comparison of the Sermon to Church Leaders' opinions. The leaders believe that Russell is an effective preacher based on (a) his consistent and balanced life, (b) well prepared, practical and purposeful sermons, and (c) personal identification with people and their problems.

The sermon on "doubt" particularly confirms the opinions of church leaders concerning Russell's sensitivity to problems faced by the audience.

Sermon 2: Focus on Your Giftedness

The sermon was delivered to an audience of 5,446 people at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky on July 1, 1990.

Russell's Concept of Man and Existence

In Focus on Your Giftedness, Russell indicates that man's perspective on existence has a direct effect on his self-esteem.

Russell identifies three problems that touch on man's view of himself. First, he states that low self-esteem results from a diminished view of what it means to be a human being in general and a Christian in particular. Low self-esteem results in a lack of confidence, self-pity, and a devaluation of personal potential.

In the Christian context, the solution to the problem of low self-esteem is to realize that all Christians are given spiritual gifts by God. "A spiritual gift is a God-given ability that enables the individual to perform a function in the body of Christ with ease and success" (Russell, 1990, Focus on Your Giftedness). Russell supports his argument with references from scripture (The Holy Bible, New International Version, 1984, Romans 12 and I Corinthians

12). The secular world offers materialism as a source of self-esteem. In contrast, Christianity stresses the need to use spiritual gifts in service to God and man as the source of self-esteem. This ties man's identity and reason for being to God and one's fellow Christians.

Second, man may be subject to feelings of inferiority. Such feelings may result from a subjective evaluation of spiritual gifts. If a person suffers from low self-esteem, subjective self-analysis of one's gifts will possibly bring negative results, further lowering self-esteem and causing feelings of inferiority.

Russell states that God as creator is the source of man's giftedness. Since God assigns man's natural talent, then awareness of what God says about spiritual gifts is essential.

Russell believes man tends to compare himself with other people, rather than objectively evaluating giftedness from a biblical perspective. He illustrates this point by recounting the story of Kathy Rigby and her bid for an Olympic gold medal. In failure she compared herself to the other contestants. Russell states, "If you objectively evaluate your gift, you can reach the point where you quit comparing. Your self-worth comes

from doing your best not being the best" (Russell, 1990, Focus on Your Giftedness). Russell's answer to feelings of inferiority is to reiterate the importance of anchoring ones concept of being in God and service to Him.

Third, Russell claims that failure to identify and utilize one's spiritual gifts prevents a person from attaining full potential, especially in the Christian context.

Russell suggests this solution so that man can avoid the frustration that stems from feelings of unfulfillment. Discovering one's spiritual gifts does more than just improve self-esteem. The use of a God-given spiritual gift helps to confirm the Christian's relationship to God and the church. As the church provides means for gift identification and utilization, man can find personal fulfillment within the church through purposeful service.

Russell uses the scriptural analogy of the church as a body with complementary parts to illustrate the point of the importance of individual parts to the whole. Within the church man finds self-definition in biblical terms. This not only maximizes self-esteem, but also assists man in understanding himself as the subject of an

infinite sovereign and a fellow citizen in an eternal community.

Russell asserts that man is unique, valuable to and loved by God. Fundamental to Russell's view of man is the belief that humility, sensitivity and compassion are essential for man's spiritual fulfillment. He promotes a biblical view of self-worth. "When we lose ourselves in His service, He [God] gives us an increasing sense of value and self-worth" (Russell, 1990, Focus on Your Giftedness). Russell confirms the essential value of man. He stresses the need to reassure mankind of that value by encouraging people to develop greater self-esteem through use of their abilities.

By asserting that lack of self-esteem is a problem many people face, Russell attempts to honestly assess the needs of his audience. While man is created in the image of God, man is also a fallen creature. Willful sin robbed mankind of self-esteem. God provides a means of gaining back a portion of that self-worth through spiritual gifts. Russell realistically relates the effects of sin on mankind. He challenges his audience to grow in understanding of themselves and discover the spiritual gifts God has given them.

Being is tied distinctly to one's relationship to God from Russell's perspective. Restoring man to the original relationship with God through Christ is essential to Russell. Confirming this affiliation through scripture and spiritual gifts is a matter of utmost importance. Russell's preaching supports his contention that man's metaphysical identity is tied exclusively to God.

Russell's Concept of Ideas and Knowledge

Russell believes that the epistemological framework for developing self-esteem is found in the Bible. He makes these observations, (a) the secular and sacred view of self-esteem are in contrast to each other, (b) man must undergo self-analysis to discover, measure, and look for a way to use his talents, (c) this process must take place in a Biblical framework and, (d) objective observation by associates may assist in determining one's abilities.

Russell implies that a secular conception of epistemology focuses on subjective feelings. A person may base his self-concept on popular opinion, current material trends, or intuition. Russell believes what one feels on the basis of what one experiences in the social context is a poor basis for knowledge.

Man's greatest source of knowledge about man, Russell affirms, is the Bible. Using numerous scripture quotations mixed with illustrations from life experiences, he states that self-esteem must be based on what God has said rather than what society claims. Throughout the sermon he contrasts Christian knowledge with the secular.

Russell states the secular view promotes man comparing himself with other men to determine self-worth. Russell clearly refers the audience to the Bible as the source of knowledge for self-evaluation. The common experience of man is to measure the self in competition with other men. Russell stresses the biblical admonition to build up the church through the use of spiritual gifts.

Russell suggests that the church can help identify the particular gift one may have, but the source of the ability is God. The essence of Russell's position is that knowledge of God and the Bible is the primary source of man's knowledge about himself.

Russell's Concept of Society and Values

Russell reports that when man suffers from poor self-esteem, serious implications for society exist.

These implications include personal feelings of inferiority, jealousy, a critical attitude, and competitiveness.

A humanistic, man-centered value system of the secular world is in conflict with the God-centered axiology of the church. The material emphasis of the secular sphere neglects the spiritual nature of man. Self-worth based on a material philosophy is short-sighted.

Russell believes abilities [gifts] should be exercised primarily in the church and secondarily in the world. He lists various biblical personalities and enumerates some of the gifts they possessed: carpentry, music, teaching, encouraging, evangelistic ability, public speaking, and writing. He makes it clear that these are not the only spiritual gifts available to man.

Adequate utilization of gifts furnishes purpose to the individual, builds self-esteem, and furthers the mission of the church. Self-worth stems from using one's gifts within the church in order to build up the church. "The church provides the opportunity for them to utilize their gifts" (Russell, 1990, Focus on Your Giftedness).

There is a Biblical foundation for tasking in the church. Each person is of value and each has a gift to

facilitate the purpose of society [church]. Fulfilling this purpose builds self-esteem. The voluntary cooperation and coordination of gift use in the church body is scriptural and practical for the church. Otherwise, the body suffers and fulfillment is not attained. The failure to discover and use one's talents harms the individual and the church.

Comparative Analysis

Comparison of the Sermon to the Literature. The literature (Behrends, 1890; Garrison, 1954; Pearson, 1959) notes that effective preaching is purposeful. The purpose of this sermon is to build self-esteem by encouraging the discovery and use of one's abilities in the context of the church. Effective preaching is the communication of truth through personality. In Focus on Your Giftedness, Russell uses numerous personal examples to indicate how God has led him to use his speaking ability to help build-up the church. He identifies lack of self-worth as a problem affecting many people. The literature indicates that competent preachers identify with their audiences and their problems.

Sleeth (1956, p. 22) stresses that the spiritual character of the preacher is a persuasive factor in his

preaching. Russell displays his spiritual nature (his relationship with God) by urging spiritual solutions for man's problems. He seeks to bridge the gap between the sacred and the secular by offering Biblical answers to the problems faced by people who exist in a secular world.

The content of the sermon is consistent with the literature on effective preaching.

Comparison of the Sermon to the Interviews. Russell (personal communication, December 18, 1990) indicates in the second interview that man's knowledge of God helps man to know himself better.

Knowledge is of value when it enhances the quality of life that man has. Real knowledge and valuable knowledge is when a person comes to understand the world from God's vantage point....When it is combined with the wisdom of God in which we come to see ourselves as God sees us. When that knowledge is combined with God's wisdom, then it is of supreme value because we come to know Christ.

Knowledge of one's self requires introspection. Russell urges that this self-study be done in conjunction with Bible study.

Russell states that he receives personal joy when he observes the audience becoming aware of the vitality of the Bible. This is consistent with Russell's view of man's intrinsic value.

A firm commitment to Biblical preaching can be observed in Russell. He states that preaching which provides a sound epistemological framework must be Biblical. This is consistent with the literature on effective preaching (Baxter, 1950; Sleeth, 1956) and is evident in the sermon. He (personal communication, December 18, 1990) states his position in the interview.

I think that the person who comes to church expects to hear the Bible. He is not going to be turned off by the Bible if it is made applicable to everyday life. I am concerned that even in conservative Bible believing churches that we are going to back away from teaching the Scripture. And that is where our power is. I think that is where our strength lies....You're not going to turn them off and it brings God's word to bear on the life of the person who is listening. And when that happens, the Holy Spirit does the

rest.

Russell uses substantial amounts of scripture references in his preaching.

The interviews reveal Russell's desire to use his preaching talent for the benefit of his listeners. In the sermon he offers an appraisal of his own abilities. He is straightforward and admits his strong and weak points. He also stresses his desire to be known as a preacher who lives what he preaches. This reflects a conformity to Baxter's (1950, p. 51) qualification of consistency between preaching and practice as a mark of effective preaching.

Russell claims self-worth comes from doing one's best; this implies a work ethic. This is confirmed by information gathered during the interviews. Russell was reared in a working-class family where work was a routine part of life. He played sports in high school and college. The competitive nature of sports encourages one to make serious efforts to "do one's best." Russell's urging his listeners to do their best is consistent with his personal life experience.

Comparison of the Sermon to Church Leaders' Opinions. Killinger (1969, p. 24) describes effective preaching as a life changing event. The leaders of

Southeast Christian Church indicate that Russell's preaching changes lives. They also describe him as a role model, which is consistent with the literature on effective preaching.

J. Coffee (personal communication, 1990), an Elder at Southeast Christian Church, says that Russell's preaching is interesting and biblically correct. He also mentions that Russell's life is consistent with his preaching.

R. Summay, G. Hedgspeth, and B. Neutz (personal communications, 1990) assert that Russell is a gifted speaker. They each comment on his humility, sensitivity, and spiritual attitude. These observations reveal further consistency of Russell's preaching and personal life to the literature on effective preaching.

Summary of The Analysis

Russell's concept of man and existence. Man is unique, valuable to and loved by God. All people have God-given abilities and when discovered they provide self-esteem and purpose.

Russell's concept of ideas and knowledge. The Bible provides man's epistemological framework. Man must set high standards and strive for them. That implies a work

ethic.

Russell's concept of society and values. Man's poor self-image impacts society through unsatisfactory behavior. Use of spiritual gifts gives man purpose and builds self-esteem. The church provides a framework for the use of abilities.

Comparison of the sermon to the literature. Effective preaching is purposeful and communicates truth through personality. The effective preacher must be spiritual and provide Biblical solutions to man's problems. Russell's preaching meets the criteria.

Comparison of the sermon to the interviews. Russell believes that knowledge of God helps man to know himself. Knowledge of self requires introspection and Bible study. Russell's commitment to Biblical preaching assists his auditors in better understanding themselves. Russell believes in consistently living what he preaches.

Comparison of the sermon to church leader's opinions. The consensus of the church leaders is that effective preaching changes lives, is interesting, and is Biblically correct. Effective preaching must be lived out consistently before the congregation. The leaders agree that Russell fulfills these criteria in his preaching.

Sermon 3: Keep Calm Under Pressure

The sermon was delivered to an audience of 6,395 people at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky on September 9, 1990.

Russell's Concept of Man and Existence

The sermon accentuates the fact that all people have problems which must be addressed. Those difficulties can be resolved through, (a) understanding the nature of the problem, (b) knowing a methodology for confronting problems, and (c) taking action to resolve the problem.

The particular dilemma this sermon speaks to is stress. Man is vulnerable to disease, accidents, problem relationships, and death. Such situations produce stress and anxiety. God is the source of man's being. Because of the destructive effects of stress on man's relationship with God, Russell believes that stress must be understood, managed and overcome.

In identifying the reality of stress in man's existence, Russell concludes that mankind suffers from intrinsic affliction and trouble.

Accept them [trials] as inevitable.

Anticipate them as normal. Trouble is not an elective. It is a required course. All of

your life you are going to be under pressure of one kind or another. (Russell, 1990, Keep Calm Under Pressure)

In identifying causes for such stress, Russell lists the following as possibilities. First is man's sinful condition: the proclivity for sin and suffering its consequences. Persecution was a major source of stress for the church in the first century and remains so today. General circumstances beyond man's control include (a) natural disasters, (b) financial crisis, and (c) medical emergencies also create stress.

Russell exposes the effects of stress on mankind because he believes in man's worth and capacity to make rational choices. He deals honestly with the predicament man living in a technological society. He encourages his audience to gain a better understanding of themselves and their particular situations. Russell suggests a method of stress management based on Biblical principles. The decision to employ the Scriptural method is left to the individual to exercise a choice based on free will.

Russell points out that pressure and stress will come to everyone at some time in life. How that person will cope with that strain depends upon the individual's experience and philosophic framework.

Russell's Concept of Ideas and Knowledge

Russell is instrumental in his use of ideas and information. He encourages the listeners to decide for themselves what to do on the basis of the data provided. He indicates that knowledge of the Bible and its application to daily life can help people expect, confront, endure, and overcome problems. This position specifies an epistemology based on revelation.

The sermon provides a precise statement of Russell's concept of knowledge.

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts.

Wisdom is the ability to make practical application of truth to life. Knowledge is horizontal, it has to do with this world.

Wisdom is vertical, it has to do with spiritual discernment. Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective.

(Russell, Keep Calm under Pressure, 1990)

Russell indicates that man's problems will not be resolved successfully when mere humanistic methods are applied to the situation. Knowledge of facts alone is insufficient. Insight into the nature of man from the Christian [God's] perspective is essential in solving

problems and managing stress. If man is to deal with the stressful complications of human life, the spiritual dimension of life must be investigated. The Biblical principles presented by Russell in his preaching must be accepted and followed by the listener. Application of this philosophical framework is up to the individual to accept on the basis of free will.

Russell's Concept of Society and Values

"We are living in a pressure packed society," (Russell, 1990, Keep Calm Under Pressure). Russell identifies society as a stress-filled, pressure-cooker experience. Unless stress is understood and managed, man will not be capable of surviving social pressure, much less reach personal fulfillment.

Nilsen (1957, p. 87) stresses that the ultimate goal of the speaker is to move the listener to fulfillment. Problems and the ensuing stress may appear, on the surface, to hinder man from becoming fulfilled. Russell states that all social groups must face the inevitable complexities and problems of values.

Troubles, however, can have positive social value. Difficulty can encourage mental and spiritual maturation. Perseverance in adversity can produce noble character.

To illustrate this point, Russell lists some the

adversities [accidents, injuries, and disappointments with fellow workers] that he has personally experienced. He relates the effects of hardship on his own spiritual growth through personal testimony. He supports this with quotes from the biblical books of James and I Peter.

Russell suggests that secular and sectarian society approach the matter of stress from different perspectives. The secular stance promotes a humanistic, man-centered methodology of problem resolution. The church proposes a theological or spiritual means of solving problems.

A key statement in the sermon manifesting Russell's concept of society is this. "God is much more concerned about developing your character than He is in protecting your comfort" (Russell, Keep Calm under Pressure, 1990). Russell believes man is an eternal being so the development of Christian character in the context of the church is essential to man's fulfillment.

Russell believes the church provides the infrastructure for assisting people in trouble. Yet, the problem may be of such magnitude that it cannot be resolved; terminal illness, for example. The person facing such a dilemma may find the comfort of friendship,

prayer, spiritual guidance, and personal encouragement in the fellowship of the church.

Russell makes it clear that access to the aid and assistance of the church society is based upon the individual's personal choice. The individual that freely chooses to accept Jesus Christ as a personal savior, obeys Bible doctrine, and voluntarily identifies with the church benefits from that decision. Personal fulfillment and development of character in stressful circumstances may be realized in the context of the church.

Comparative Analysis

Comparison of the Sermon to the Literature. The literature on preaching (Killinger, 1969; Behrends, 1890; Garrison, 1954; Pearson, 1959; Oliver, 1965) supports the notion that effective preaching must be purposeful, practical and identify problems the audience faces. In Keep Calm under Pressure, Russell recognizes stress as problem common to man. Citing stressful situations he has faced, he offers practical methods of dealing with stress.

Baxter (1950, pp. 124-125) insists that effective preaching reflects a mature attitude on the part of the preacher. Russell openly recognizes the fact that stressful problems exist and must be dealt with rather

than ignored or concealed. He offers a step-by-step methodology in preparing for, dealing with, and managing stressful situations.

He bridges the gap between the secular and sacred spheres by pointing out that a secular material based philosophy neglects the spiritual nature of man. The sermon encourages the development and use of the Christian mind, which Stott (1982, p. 178) requires for effective preaching.

Russell is consistent with the literature on effective preaching in his sermon Keep Calm under Pressure.

Comparison of the Sermon to the Interviews. Firm belief in absolute standards for society is evident in Robert Russell's preaching. He claims that the ideal value system for society should be based on the doctrine of Christ as found in the "Sermon on the Mount" in the Gospel of St. Matthew. However, since all people are not Christian, a more fundamental value system can be found in the Ten Commandments. Russell consistently bases his axiology on Scripture.

The sermon, Keep Calm under Pressure, maintains that there is a secular versus sacred dichotomy in society.

Russell holds that the responsibility of the church is to affect secular society by offering spiritual answers to man's problems. This results in building up the church; a major issue found in the interviews. This theme is consistent with Russell's view of society.

He believes that preaching can change lives. He suggests that preaching is a means by which Biblical based moral standards can be communicated to the church and the community. This provides the individual and community with the opportunity to compare society with an ideal moral structure. Changes may then be made if they are needed and desired. Preaching is a means of encouraging such change for the benefit of man and society.

Russell says, "Even people who are not Christian know that there is something drastically wrong with our society and they are searching for solutions" (personal communication, December 18, 1990). Here he contends that anxiety is a prominent feature of modern society. He believes that preaching offers the opportunity to introduce people to the solutions provided by the Bible.

Russell (personal communication, December 18, 1990) states, "There is a real erosion in our society of the conviction that there is anything absolute." He

carefully reiterates the dangers for a society that has no absolutes. He remains consistent in his view that man is of extreme value and needs the fraternity of the church to maintain a balanced and fulfilled life.

Robert Russell declares that his audience has specific rights regarding his preaching and ministry (personal communication, December 18, 1990). Those rights include expectations of (1) his integrity, (2) a work ethic, (3) moral courage in truthful preaching, (4) a sincere personal transparency, and (5) to reveal God's word. He indicates his high valuation of man, his dedication to the truth of the Bible as man's essential epistemological foundation, and a commitment to a social structure established on a biblical value system as discovered in the church by expressing these rights to his listeners.

This position is consistent with the literature (Baxter, 1950; Sleeth, 1956; Chilcote, 1954) on preaching and Russell's concepts of man, ideas, and society as observed in his preaching.

Comparison of the Sermon to Church Leaders' Opinions. A summary of church leaders' opinions relevant to the sermon, Keep Calm under Pressure, indicates that Russell's sermon is practical. His preaching meets the

needs of people by offering a means for stability in life. His call for involvement in the church is relevant and timely. His preaching is personable and easily identified with by the audience. He bridges the gap between the sacred and secular by preaching on relevant issues and moving people to action. He is honest in his preaching.

Summary of The Analysis

Russell's concept of man and existence. Man is an eternal being made in the image of God. Man in a sinful condition faces many problems. Stress is a particular dilemma. Stress must be understood, managed and overcome. Using a biblical methodology, man can make rational decisions in managing stress.

Russell's concept of ideas and knowledge. Russell's epistemology is based on biblical revelation. He is convinced that the humanistic framework can not resolve man's problems. Awareness of man's spiritual foundation of knowledge makes application of biblical principles possible and effective.

Russell's concept of society and values. Russell believes that all people face problems of some type. These problems are based primarily on conflicts between

man-centered and God-centered values. Troubles have positive social value when they produce maturity and character in the resolution process. There is a conflict between the sacred and secular perspectives on answers to problems. The secular view is to avoid or eliminate the problem. The sacred belief is that problems develop character. The church exists to assist the troubled through a clarification of values based on the Bible.

Comparison of the sermon to the literature. The literature (Killinger, 1969; Behrends, 1890; Garrison, 1954; Pearson, 1959; Oliver, 1965) agrees that effective preaching is purposeful, practical, and identifies problems. The effective preacher holds mature attitudes and bridges the gap between the sacred and secular in his preaching. The sermon fulfills the requirements of the criteria since it deals with the timely and relevant subject of stress and its affect on man.

Comparison of the sermon to the interviews. Russell believes in absolute standards for society based on the axiology found in the Bible. He states this clearly in the interview (Russell, 1990, personal communication).

I think that God gave the ten commandments as a system of values for a world where people were sinful. And there has to be some

absolute standards by which the society can live even though there are some of them who have not committed their lives to Christ.

It is a responsibility of the church to bridge the gap between the sacred and secular through preaching. Anxiety is a problem common to religious and non-religious people which can be addressed through preaching. The church must continue to inculcate absolutes as found in Scripture. Russell believes that a congregation has the right to require the minister to be consistent to his profession.

Comparison of the sermon to the church leader's opinions. Russell is honest, practical, and personable in his preaching. By discussing the problem of stress, he identifies a problem his parishioners face. Further, he identifies with them in their distress by enumerating his own personal experiences.

Robert L. Ott (1990, personal communication), in reference to Russell says, "He is just like the average man. He understands people's needs. He knows what is going on in the world and society today." The comments of the church leaders support the contention that Russell is consistent in his concepts of man, ideas and society.

CHAPTER IV

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

Purpose and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study was to analyze and evaluate three selected sermons by Robert Russell.

It was hypothesized that the preaching of Robert Russell was consistent and effective.

Method and Criteria

The selected sermons were subjected to four levels of analysis. First, criteria derived from Nilsen's three categories: (1) concepts of man and existence, (2) concepts of ideas and knowledge, and (3) concepts of society and values, were applied. Second, the content of the sermons was compared with the literature on effective preaching. Third, interviews with Mr. Russell were compared with the idea content of the sermons. Fourth, statements about Mr. Russell's preaching made by leaders of the church were compared with the sermon content.

Summary of the Analysis

Russell's Concept of Man and Existence. Russell views man as being of intrinsic worth, of value to God and finding personal meaning for life only in the framework

of the Christian faith.

Man is in a sinful condition and faces many problems. Stress and doubt are particular dilemmas. Stress must be understood, managed and overcome by using a biblical methodology. Man is viewed as able to make rational decisions in managing stress and doubt. Having the capacity for wisdom and rational choice, man can overcome adversity through faith and Bible study.

Man is an eternal being made in the image of God. Man is also unique, valuable to God, and is loved by Him. All people have God-given abilities. When these are discovered and practically applied within the framework of the church, they provide self-esteem and purpose.

Russell's Concept of Ideas and Knowledge. The Bible provides man's epistemological framework. A dichotomy exists between science and Scripture. Russell is convinced that biblical creation is more believable than evolution.

God is omniscient and man is finite in knowledge. Doubt stems from ignorance. Pursuit of Biblical truth leads to knowledge. God is the ultimate authority and basis of knowledge.

Since Russell's epistemology is based on biblical revelation, he is convinced that the humanistic framework

cannot resolve man's problems. Man's spiritual nature requires application of biblical principles to man's human situation.

Russell's Concept of Society and Values. Russell believes that all people face problems of some type. Troubles have positive social value when they produce maturity and character during the process of resolution.

There is a conflict between the sacred and secular perspective regarding adversity. The secular view is to avoid or eliminate the problem. The sacred belief is that when problems are worked through, they develop character.

The church exists to assist the troubled. Man finds fulfillment in the church context. Man is plagued by a poor self-image. This impacts society through unsatisfactory behavior. Participation in the work of the church helps man defeat or manage adversity and develop self-esteem.

Comparison of the Sermons to the Literature. The literature on preaching (Killinger, 1985; Baxter, 1950; Dabney, 1979; Killinger, 1969; Broadus, 1944; Oliver, 1965; Chilcote, 1954; Sleeth, 1956; Stott, 1982; Behrends, 1890; Garrison, 1954; Pearson, 1959) indicates

the following attributes for effective pulpit oratory. Effective preaching is purposeful and communicates truth through personality. The competent preacher must be spiritual. Effective preaching identifies problems faced by man, offers biblical solutions, and is practical and purposeful. The capable preacher holds mature spiritual attitudes and bridges the gap between the sacred and secular in his preaching. The preaching of Robert Russell was evaluated against these standards.

Comparison of the Sermons to the Interviews.

Russell expresses a manifest concern for man who, although in a sinful state, is still the highest of God's creation. He believes in absolute standards for society based on the axiology found in the Bible. It is the responsibility of the church to bridge the gap between the sacred and secular. Preaching is a means to this end. Problems common to religious and non-religious people can be addressed through preaching.

Robert Russell believes that knowledge of God helps man to know himself. Knowledge of self requires introspection and Bible study. Russell's commitment to Biblical preaching assists his auditors in better understanding themselves. Russell believes in consistently living what he preaches. He believes that a

congregation has the right to require the minister to be consistent to his profession.

Comparison of the Sermons to Church Leader's Opinions. The consensus of opinion among the church leaders is that effective preaching changes lives, is interesting and is biblically correct. They believe that effective preaching must be lived out consistently before the congregation.

The church leadership also believes that Russell is an effective preacher based on (a) his consistent and balanced life, (b) well prepared, practical and purposeful sermons, and (c) personal identification with people and their problems.

Their comments support the contention that Russell is consistent in his concepts of man, ideas, and society, the literature on preaching, and the expectations of the church leadership.

Conclusions

The Hypothesis and Method

The analysis justified the hypothesis that the preaching of Robert Russell was consistent and effective.

The fourfold analysis provided a complete picture of Robert Russell's preaching. The Nilsen methodology, although secular in focus, fulfilled the need of an analytical tool because questions about ideas, knowledge, and values also apply to sectarian rhetoric.

The Man and His Preaching

A review of the interviews in Appendix B indicates that Robert Russell functions within an extremely narrow framework. He has been reared in the church and remains consistent in adhering to its principles. His frame of reference includes dedication to God, family, church, and a life lived according to biblical ethics. Within that framework he has been extremely competent, consistent, and effective as a pulpit orator.

He leads a flourishing church, has a sound marriage, a son in the ministry and the respect of his peers. His success and influence as a minister exceeds his original career expectations. It is reasonable to believe that Russell's success and effectiveness result from consistency to his Christian philosophical framework.

His primary ministry is to preach four times each Sunday to the Southeast Christian Church congregation. While he is in high demand as a speaker, he appears to have no other designs than to serve his congregation and serve it to the best of his ability. It seems reasonable to state that even when he is not speaking from the pulpit, his life and example continue to speak. Key words describing Mr. Russell's ministry are "effectiveness" and "consistency."

Robert Russell uses a substantial amount of personal exemplary material in his sermons. He relates to people through common experiences. Russell's personality is intertwined with his sermons. He is his sermon in the sense that it flows through his life and experience to the people. He lives his preaching and preaches in the manner it is lived. This is consistent with his own definition of preaching as "truth through a committed personality" (personal communication, December 18, 1990).

An examination of Russell's preaching reveals further insights. He speaks topically to the needs of the popular audience. He is bound by exacting time constraints due to the number of services held at Southeast Christian Church on Sunday morning. The sermon

content is directed towards a modern audience suffering from the perplexities and complexities of urban living in the 1990's. That being the case, the more profound doctrines of the church appear to be passed over in preference to attempting to meet the more urgent needs of the people.

Specific conclusions regarding Robert Russell's preaching can be drawn in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology.

1. Russell believes that man is the highest of all of God's creations and has a responsibility to recognize Him and obey Him.
2. Man has a God-given free will with which he may choose his own destiny, bearing the responsibility for the results of his choices.
3. Finite man may only reach full potential through a personal spiritual relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.
4. The primary sources of knowledge are God's revelation through His spoken word, the Bible, the historic physical manifestation of Christ, and creation.
5. The real value of knowledge is the spiritual enhancement of the quality of man's life when it

draws man into a personal relationship with God.

6. Russell believes in the absolute standards of morality found in the Bible, especially the Ten Commandments.
7. Christ must be Lord of the Christian's life including all matters--spiritual, physical, intellectual, and cultural.

Suggestions for Further Study

The prominence of Mr. Russell as a public speaker and the magnitude of his congregation is resulting in a substantial quantity of researchable material becoming available to the academic community. It is appropriate to consider the need for further research into the public speaking of Robert Russell in the future. The areas of further investigation may be as follows.

1. An extended rhetorical analysis of the preaching of Robert Russell.
2. A field study of the impact of Robert Russell's preaching.
3. A study of the language used by Robert Russell in his preaching.
4. An analysis of themes found in the sermons of Robert Russell.

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Table 1

The Christian Churches in the United States

Number of congregations	5,579
Estimated total membership	1,070,616
Persons employed by the churches and affiliated church agencies	14,393
Missionaries supported	1,052
Christian Colleges	32
Liberal arts colleges	1
Graduate schools	6
Published periodicals	17
Radio programs	5
Television programs	5
Benevolent institutions (nursing homes, children's homes, health care facilities)	92
Youth camps	84
Pre-schools and other education facilities	210
Evangelistic para-church and miscellaneous ministries	400+

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Robert Lee Russell



APPENDIX A



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March 18, 1991

To Whom It May Concern:

The following sermons were messages I preached at Southeast Christian Church in 1990. They were transcribed from tapes:

"Focus on Your Giftedness"
"The Flood of Doubt"
"Keep Calm Under Pressure"

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob Russell".

Bob Russell

BR/bjd

THE FLOOD OF DOUBT

Genesis 1:1-10

I am beginning a series today entitled, "When the Flood Waters Rise." While studying through the book of Psalms, I recently read these words in Psalm 32:6, "Surely when the might waters rise, they will not reach him." A similar passage is Isaiah 43:2, "When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you." We're going to look at various times water is mentioned in the Old Testament and consider how often water represents a threat (or a test) to the believer.

There are floodwaters of doubt, evil, despair, fear, discontent, discipline that would engulf us. But God promises to protect us from them altogether or to keep our heads above water when we go through them. These "mighty waters" threaten everyone of us at one time or another and its imperative that we make advance preparation for flood prevention.

Jesus told a parable of two men who built houses near a river. One built his house on solid rock the other built on sand. The rains came, the streams rose, the wind blew. The house on rock did not fall. But the house on sand collapsed in the storm and was swept downstream. Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise man." Max Lucado, in Six Hours One Friday says, "Stability in the storm comes not from seeking a new message, but from understanding an old one. The most reliable anchor points are not recent discoveries, but are time-tested truths that have held their ground against the winds of change. Attach your soul to these boulders and no wave is big enough to wash you under."

Our goal is to build our lives on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ so that when the mighty waters rise in our lives they will not wash us under (engulf us).

We begin today with the very first mention of water in Scripture, the water of creation. Genesis 1:2 says, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Water is a primary element of creation. This passage also

presents us with the first threat to a stable life; doubt. As soon as we read the first section of Genesis, our minds are flooded with questions of uncertainty. Do we accept the Genesis record as actual or mythical? Is it factual or just figurative? The answer to those questions are crucial to our understanding of God's word and pivotal to future survival. I really think that Genesis 1:1 is the second most important verse in the Bible for us to believe. If we accept the creation story as literal, we shouldn't have any trouble with other miracles in the Bible. If God is great enough to create this universe, He is capable of doing anything else mentioned in Scripture. But if we doubt Genesis 1, we are going to struggle with any hint of the supernatural revealed in God's Word. Let's look at the creation story today and respond with faith.

First, the magnificent creation of God. Read carefully the first ten verses of Genesis and see the magnificent creation of God. When the Voyager spacecraft took close-up pictures of Neptune, scientists reported that they were seeking to unlock the secrets of the origin of the universe. Genesis 1:1 reveals the secrets of the universe. Psalm 19:7 says, "The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." Here are truths that are above the intelligence of man, beyond the grasp of human investigation. Here are the very first truths which God would have us know. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Bible does not define God or give a description of creation or set a date when it happened. It assumes that thinking people will understand there is a supreme being who by His power created the universe. There are some truths so obvious they don't need to be stated, they can be observed.

Let's imagine that you are isolated in the middle of the desert. As you stumble across the sand, you see a watch at your feet. You pick it up and it is still running. What would you conclude? You would conclude that a human being had preceded you in that spot. And since the watch was running, it hadn't been too long. You wouldn't need a long letter proving that. Not one of you would spend time debating whether a person had made and left that watch or whether a whirlwind had just accidentally assembled the watch.

Psalm 14:1, say, "The fool says in his heart, there

is no God." Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep." That word "was formless" is translated in other Old Testament passages as "became". Some students of creation suggest that the earth was in existence a long time before man was created. The earth was created by God and it sometime later was disrupted by some cataclysmic event, like the rebellion of Lucifer, the devil. It then became barren and empty. The King James translates it, "without form and void." If there was a period of time between the creation of the earth and its reconstruction for the inhabitation of man, then the geologists who insist the earth is millions of years old could be correct. The six days of creation then give an account of a new beginning of the earth and the supposed conflict between Genesis and geology is eliminated.

"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The word for hovering means brooded, like a mother hen broods over her little chicks. Henry Morris in The Genesis Record says this idea seems to be mainly that of a rapid back and forth motion. In modern terminology, the best translation would be "vibrated." If the universe is to be energized, there must be an energizer. If it is to be set in motion, there must be a prime mover. The Holy Spirit comes into the chaos and energizes it.

"And God said, 'let there be light and there was light.'" Ten times in this chapter we read God saying, "Let there be" and His creation responded to His command. Someone has called these the ten commandments of creation. The first recorded words of God in Scripture are "Let there be light" and there was light.

When I speak, often nothing happens. I say to my sons, "Clean up your room." Nothing happens. I say to my wife, "I'd like mashed potatoes." Nothing happens. I say to the church, "Come back on Sunday night." Nothing happens. I say to Dave Stone, "Use some Bible in your sermons." Nothing happens. These are still jokes, but God speaks and through His power, it came to pass.

"God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from darkness...God called the light 'day' and the darkness he called 'night' and there was evening and morning, the first day." The same terminology is used for the evening and morning were the first day all through the six days of creation. Some try to suggest these six days are ages of time, maybe millions of years, but that doesn't seem consistent with the text. If they were prolonged periods of time, how would the plant life survive thousands of years of darkness as well as prolonged periods of light. I take this as six literal twenty-four days when God was setting up the natural cycle of nature.

"And God said, 'Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.'" Notice this was a perpendicular separation: let there be air space between the waters. "So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it, and it was so." Some scientists have suggested that the original atmosphere was significantly different from the one we know today. They propose that the world before Noah's flood was covered with a dense canopy of water. This thick water vapor surrounded the earth and blocked out harmful rays of the sun, created uniform temperature and humidity and made possible lush vegetation and eliminated polar regions. They suggest one of the reasons people before Noah's day lived so much longer was that the earth's atmosphere was healthier.

Genesis 2:5 reads after creation was complete, "The Lord God had not sent rain on the earth...but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground." The King James renders that "a mist from the earth watered the ground." Proverbs 8:23 states that God "established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep." I think underground caves were at one time underground water reservoirs that would water the earth by pressurized water vapor. When the world was flooded in Noah's day, it rained for the first time.

Genesis 7:11 describes the beginning of the flood, "On that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the flood-gates of the heavens were opened, and rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights." As soon as the flood is over and the sun shines again, a

rainbow appears for the first time. That may suggest a different atmospheric condition prior to that time.

God called the expanse "sky" and there was evening and there was morning - the second day. And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear, and it was so." When God spoke, the power of His spoken word energized creation and tremendous chemical reactions got underway. As the mass cooled and formed a vast complex of minerals and rocks that make up the earth. At this point great earth movements began to take place and mountains and the crust of the earth began to appear as the water cascaded off the rising continents. There is at this point a horizontal division of the water in great basins and oceans. "God called the dry ground land and the gathered waters He called seas...And God saw that it was good."

A friend of mine said he stood on the banks of the Mississippi River when it was at flood stage. As he watched all the debris floating down the river, he thought of how the ocean must be polluted with thousands of years of junk that has been poured into it. Then he remembered the ocean is salt water. Salt eats away at debris. Even the Titanic is rapidly corroding away. God has a recycling process and a purifying system in the ocean.

Ecclesiastes 1:76 says, "All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again." Water flows into the ocean when it is evaporated by the sun and taken up into the clouds. It is dumped on land in the form of rain, freed of salt and pollution. It refreshes and cleanses the land. Then it flows down Beargrass Creek to the Ohio River, to the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico to repeat the process again. The never ending recycling of the water system alone reveals the wisdom, omniscience of God.

Secondly, there is the perplexing skepticism of man. In spite of God's magnificent creation, man is still surprisingly skeptical about this opening statement of the Bible. The question of our origin provokes more controversy, disagreement, and ridiculous theories than any other.

Some time ago the State Board of Education in California voted to include the biblical "theory" of creation in science books. Dr. Ralph Girard, a professor of biology and Dean of the Graduate School at The University of California at Davis, is reported by the press to have made the comment that the "Theory of Creation" makes about as much sense as teaching about the stork. He asked if a scientific course on reproduction should also mention the stork theory. That reveals a very antagonistic attitude toward the biblical account of creation.

Why do we doubt the accuracy of the biblical account of creation? I can think of three sources of doubt. The first is intellectual doubt. It is just human nature to be skeptical of that which you have never seen or experienced. We think it is ignorant and childish to believe in fairy tales and Santa Claus and anything supernatural.

We are like the boy who was asked by his dad what he learned in Sunday School. He said, "I learned the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt." "How did it go?" the father asked. "Well, Moses and his army were trapped by the Egyptians at the Red Sea. So Moses called his engineers and they built a pontoon bridge across the sea and the next morning the Israelites marched across the bridge. They looked and Pharaoh's armies were pursuing them across the bridge, so Moses got on his radio and called for an air strike. The Israeli pilots blew the bridge out of the water with laser rockets and the Egyptians all drowned and the Israelites were free." The father said, "Son is that the way you heard the story?" He said, "No, Dad, But if I told it the way the teacher told it, you wouldn't believe a word of it."

It is human nature to reject the supernatural which we've not seen and seek a logical explanation which we can understand. If you have an inquisitive mind, you want to understand why and how things occur. It is difficult to accept supernatural explanations without evidence.

In the movie "Back To The Future Part II," young people in the future are skating around on hover boards. These boards produce a magnetic field and don't touch the ground. I remarked, "That's impossible, that's

ridiculous, that will never happen." Yet, I understand the technology for that to happen is now very real. So many things that were intellectually impossible twenty five years ago are commonplace today because of increased knowledge. Isaiah 40:13 says, "Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor?"

A second, more common source of skepticism is moral doubt. Men rebel against God's will for their lives and feel alienated from Him. Rather than admit their transgressions and repent of their behavior, they express doubt about the reality of God and the validity of the Bible. Doubt becomes a convenience. It is much easier to be cynical than it is to change. In Numbers 14, God instructed the Israelites to go into and to possess Canaan. Most of the Hebrews were afraid because the enemy seemed so formidable. Since they didn't want to obey God, they began to doubt He was leading them or that He even existed. In Numbers 14:11, the Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" When we want to disobey God's commands, we can rationalize, "I'm not sure all this Bible stuff is true anyway." It is a matter of convenience.

The third source of doubt is the primary source; pride. We all like to flaunt our intelligence. We are like the lady who came up to a politician after a speech. She said, "My, that was a wonderful talk. It was just superfluous." He didn't want to embarrass her for using the wrong word, so he said, "Thank you." "Yes," she said, "That was superfluous. You ought to put that speech in print." "Well," he said, "I was thinking of doing it posthumously." "Oh, wonderful," said the woman, "I can't wait." In our pride we want to appear more intelligent than we really are.

To accept the Bible account of creation is not an acceptable position to hold in intellectual circles today. To accept the biblical account of creation means we have no more sophisticated answers than an average child or a backwoods people of two hundred years ago. That is an affront to our pride. Psalm 10:4 says, "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." If a man rejects the biblical account of creation, he has to replace it with

some other explanation. That alternative is the theory of evolution. In our scientific age, it is unbelievable that educated people have accepted such an unscientific theory as evolution. The reason they have accepted it is that the whole matter is really a spiritual issue. At its base, the evolutionary theory is atheistic in viewpoint...it is an attempt to prove existing matter apart from God (Theodore Epp).

Man contends he is not here by divine creation, he is here by incredible coincidences. Billions of years ago there was a cataclysmic event in space. Matter combined with electricity and produced life. The theory of evolution is speculation, it is contradictory, it is unscientific, it is unprovable. But it is widely taught and believed because it is the only alternative to divine creation and that is rejected.

A survey of 343 high school biology teachers in Texas, California, and New York showed that 51.6% of them believed that evolution was a scientific explanation of our origin, 11.4% believed in creation. The other one third were undecided or believed in some combination of the two.

Scientists contradict each other. People that suggest the Bible has contradictions should listen to scientists. Geologists who have studied fossil evidence insist that man is millions of years old. An article in U.S.A. TODAY on October 5, 1989, entitled, "All About Eve," reported that pioneering genetic researchers have studied genetic evolution and concluded that the first humans appear to have lived only 140,000 years ago. That is several million less years than the geologists need for evolution of man. The scientists are in disagreement with each other on the age and the evolution of man.

If you hold to the theory of evolution as being the intelligent accepted view of scientists, you haven't been doing much reading in the last five years. In 1984 three former evolutionists with doctorates in chemistry, materials science, and geochemistry, wrote the first comprehensive critique of chemical evolution, "The Mystery of Life's Origins - Reassessing Current Theories." With pages of mathematical equations and chemical formulas, it dealt serious blows to the theory that life started by chance. Many of the world's leading

evolutionists are praising the work.

Colin Patterson, Senior, a paleontologist with the British Museum of Natural History stated, "For the past eighteen months or so I've been kicking around non-evolutionary or even anti-evolutionary ideas. For over twenty years I had thought I was working on evolution in some way. One morning I woke up and something had happened in the night and it struck me that I had been working on this stuff for more than twenty years, and there was not one thing I knew about it. It is quite a shock to learn that one can be misled for so long. For the last few weeks, I've tried putting a simple question to various people and groups; 'Can you tell me anything you know about evolution? Any one thing...that is true?'" When he asked that question of the members of the Evolutionary Morphology Seminar in the University of Chicago, a very prestigious body of evolutionists and all "I got there was silence for a long time and eventually one person said, 'I do know one thing, - it ought not to be taught in high school.'" Patterson still believes evolution is true, he just admits it must be accepted by faith. They admit there are gaps the evolutionary theory can't bridge. The gap between nothing and something, the gap between matter and life, the gap between life and a human being with free will.

Some are now abandoning the theory of evolution and suggesting that life on this planet originated from a visit from another planet or some cataclysm in the universe that carried life cells here and implanted them.

I'm reminded of the Greek child who approached his mother, "Mom, you said Atlas is holding up the earth. What is Atlas standing on?" His mother said, "Atlas is standing on a huge elephant. You can't imagine the size of the elephant Atlas is standing on." That satisfied the boy for a while, but in a few minutes he returned, "Mom, if Atlas is standing on an elephant and holding up the earth, what is the elephant standing on?"

"That elephant is standing on a huge turtle - you can't imagine the size of the turtle Atlas is standing on." "But mom, what is that turtle standing on?" "It is standing on an even bigger turtle. It is twice the size of the first turtle you imagined." "But what is that turtle standing on?" In exasperation the mother replied,

"Son, there are turtles all the way down." "But down to what?"

Evolutionists suggest evolution all the way back - to what? It is so much easier to put faith in scripture, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But that means we must swallow pride and come humbly to the God who has authority over us.

Thirdly, the unashamed faith of the believer. A Christian is one who unashamedly accepts the biblical account of creation as factual. Faith in God as creator is absolutely essential to salvation. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible...v. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him to just believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Faith is putting our confidence in testimony of another. I was not present to witness the beginning of the universe and no man was an eyewitness. It cannot be proved, it cannot be disproved. We must, after examining the testimony, make a choice and believe. The Christian believes that God created the world, the humanist believes that it evolved accidentally. Without faith your life is without meaning. Without faith you have no explanation for beginning. Without faith you have no anticipation for the future. Without faith you have no intention for the present.

Imagine a tightrope walker about to walk between the Sears Towers in Chicago. Just before he takes that first precarious step, someone informs him, "I'm not sure the cable is fastened well at the other end." And, "Oh, yes, by the way, it is not very secure at this end either, but I hope all goes well." He'd be an idiot to take one uncertain step. Yet, we are telling our young people, "We don't know where you've come from, we're not really certain where you're going when you die, but have a safe trip! Don't use drugs, don't have promiscuous sex, don't drink and drive." No wonder they disregard our counsel. With no sense of identity, no sense of destiny, the only meaning to life is immediate self-gratification. Without faith it is impossible to please God and without faith it

is impossible to have a meaningful life.

"Life without God is a hopeless end, with Him, it is an endless hope." If you struggle with doubt, let me suggest some things you can do to reinforce faith.

Mark 9 records a story of a man who brought his son to Jesus to be healed. The man pleaded with Jesus to help his boy. He said, "My son is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of his speech. He goes into seizures and gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him." Jesus said, "Bring him to me." When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. "How long has he been like this," Jesus asked. "From childhood," the father answered. "Jesus, he even tries to kill himself by throwing himself into fire or water, but if you can do anything, take pity on him and help us." (When your child hurts, parents hurt). "Help us." "If you can?" said Jesus, "Everything is possible for him who believes." "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief."

I meet a lot of people like that father. They believe in God but their belief is not 100%. Their faith is polluted with some degree of doubt. They would like to believe more strongly, but they don't know how.

J. Wallace Hamilton had a chapter in one of his books entitled, "If a Man Doesn't Believe, Is He to Blame?" If you don't have faith, how can you get it? Do you just close your eyes and pretend? No. Faith doesn't come by pretending. Here are four things you can do to increase your faith.

First, admit your ignorance. This takes humility. Admit there is so much you do not know. Admit you don't have all the answers and there are times when you have been wrong.

The superintendent of schools sat down unannounced by a little kindergarten girl in the library. She was looking at a pre-primer, which consisted of single items on a page. He asked the little girl to identify the items. She responded with, "That is a boy, that is a girl, that is a house, that is a car, that is a top."

When she came to a picture of a hatchet, she said, "That is a hammer." The superintendent said noting. She turned the page and there was a hammer. She turned back and looked again at the hatchet then back to the hammer. She quickly closed the book and sweetly smiling said, "We are in the library and we really shouldn't be talking."

It is so hard to admit you don't have all the answers, but the first step in faith is humility. Albert Einstein said he knew one tenth on one percent of what there was to know. He probably vastly overestimated his knowledge.

Swallow your pride and admit that you don't have all the answers. That makes you teachable, ready to receive. I Peter 5:5 says, "God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble."

Second, expose yourself to the light. After Jesus had risen from the dead, He appeared to His disciples in the upper room. But Thomas, one of the twelve, was absent. Thomas doubted the testimony of the others. He said, "I won't believe it until I see him and touch Him for myself." Thomas is a forerunner of the absentee - the people who live in a moral fog because they remove themselves from the place where the light is shining. If you want to believe, you need to expose yourself to the teaching of the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ." If a person says, "I'm not sure I believe." But, they never study the Bible, never go to church, never fellowship with Christian people, then doubt is self-imposed. Most of us don't have faith because there was some dramatic moment when the light knocked us down, but we were exposed to it over a period of years. Slowly, gradually, the exposure to the gospel reinforced faith and erased doubt. If you are only ingesting information from the media and novels and talk shows, how can you expect to believe? It takes years of study and experience to become an effective surgeon, engineer, executive. How can we naively assume that we can become effective believers when we don't spend any time examining evidence?

Thomas said, "I won't believe it until I see it for myself." The next Sunday, when the disciples met, He was there...waiting. Wanting to believe. Then Jesus appeared

and do you remember what he said to Thomas? He didn't say, "Thomas, you skeptic, you don't deserve to be a follower of mine since you didn't believe reliable testimony." He was very patient with the doubter who was willing to examine the evidence. He said, "Thomas, come touch me and believe." Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." Jesus said in John 20:29, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." If you want to believe, you have to stand where the light is shining.

Thirdly, consider the alternatives. If you reject the story of creation, you have to have an alternative. All other alternatives are unreasonable, illogical, and just plain stupid. A famous definition of evolution, which Herbert Spencer gave was, "Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent, homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity, and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation." You can believe that, or you can believe, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

I sometimes wish the Lord hadn't told us to be kind to our adversaries. When I talk with someone who says, "I think maybe we evolved from one cell that accidentally was initiated from an electrical shock, that over billions of years became increasingly complex," I'd like to say, "That is really stupid! You are a pawn of a pseudo-intellectual system that has led you astray like an ignorant sheep. If you don't repent and believe, you're going to hell. Amen." But we don't win people like that. The Lord was much more patient than that. So we have to be nice and say, "I understand, would you study the Bible. Consider the alternative. If you reject the biblical, you have a lot of complex questions with no logical answers."

The fourth way to increase your faith is to respond to the faith you have. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." One of the rewards of a seeking faith is more faith. When we act on the faith we have, God increases our faith and decreases our doubts. Matthew 17:29 says, "If you have faith as small as a

mustard seed...nothing will be impossible for you."
Plant the seed and it grows. Put the faith to work, and
it increases.

Billy Graham said, "When I began to preach, I had doubts about this book (Bible). One day in 1949, I opened up the Bible and said, 'Oh God, I do not understand everything in this book. But from this day on, I'm going to accept this book by faith as the authority for my life and ministry.' My ministry changed overnight."

I have read that a bridge across the Niagara River was originally begun simply by flying a kite across the river. The kite string was then attached to a larger twine and pulled across. The twine pulled a stronger rope and then a single cable, and eventually a sturdy bridge was built that carried heavy vehicles. But it began with a small string. Respond to the faith you have and God will increase it.

The most important way to increase your faith is to focus on Jesus Christ. I said earlier that Genesis 1:1 was the second most important verse to believe in all the Bible. The most important verse is John 11:25. "Jesus Said, 'I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies.'" The number one question of your life is, "Did Jesus Christ come out of that tomb after three days?" If he didn't, then our faith is futile, and we are in our sins, according to I Corinthians 15:17. If He did, then the Bible is true and we have hope for eternity, cleansing of sin, and meaning to live, and answers to our questions about creation.

Mark 10:6 states that Jesus said, "At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female." If Jesus came back from the grave, He is far superior to us and we'd best listen to His word.

Only Jesus Christ deserves to be trusted completely. No man has ever loved you enough to die for your sins. No man has ever been powerful enough to come back from the grave. No human has the capacity to give you a sense of identity, hope of eternity, and a meaning for every day as does Jesus.

When God took nothing and made something, that was creation. When He takes something and makes it nothing, that is redemption. He promises when you bring him your sin, as sordid as your past may be. He will wash it clean, wipe it away, eliminate it, make it non-existent. That is redemption. That is what He offers to you right now.

FOCUS ON YOUR GIFTEDNESS

Romans 12:3-8

Rodney Dangerfield complained to his father, "Everybody despises me, nobody likes me." His dad angrily said, "I don't ever want to hear you say that again, not everybody knows you."

Rodney Dangerfield is a patron saint for us when we suffer from low self-esteem. We worry that nobody likes us, we feel inadequate and complain that we don't get much respect. There is very little joy in the life of a person with a poor self image. We are lonely and self-conscious, convinced that if others really knew us they wouldn't like us. Since we lack confidence in ourselves, we tend to wallow in self-pity and negate our potential.

I want to talk again today about how to really feel good about yourself. The world insists we can feel good if we are attractive, accumulate wealth, gain influence or just follow our feelings. But those things only bring temporary satisfaction. It's not long before the thrill wears off and there is an insatiable hunger for more.

Romans 12 goes on to give us added instruction about proper self-esteem. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." (Romans 12:3) There is to be a balance in the Christian life between humility and confidence. God doesn't want us to be arrogant, but neither are we to be victims of an inferiority complex, either. Today we're going to talk about really feeling good about yourself--that is focusing on your giftedness.

That means to first objectively evaluate your gifts. If we're to have a proper self-image, it is imperative that we understand spiritual gifts. I Corinthians 12:1 says, "Now about spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant." A spiritual gift is a God-given ability that enables the individual to perform a function in the body of Christ with ease and success. We have all been given at least one talent by God. It may be something obvious like the ability to sing, or teach. It may be something unnoticed like an ability to encourage

the depressed, or show mercy to the hurting. Maybe you have the one gift that everyone wishes they had, the ability to make money. But we all have at least one talent.

Think of the different gifts that Bible characters had. Noah was a carpenter, David was a song writer, Solomon was a brilliant intellect, Jacob was a financier, Nehemiah was an engineer and construction supervisor, Ezra was a Bible teacher, Amos a farmer, Barnabas an encourager, Philip an evangelist, Stephen an orator, Paul a brilliant writer. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, Jesus said the master gave one talent to one man, two to another, and five to another. Some have a multiplicity of gifts. When Sammy Davis Jr. died several weeks ago, Bob Hope paid tribute to him by saying he did so many things well. He was a singer, dancer, actor, humorist, conversationalist, talk show host. He was multi-talented.

Romans 12:3 says that God distributes His gifts disproportionately. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." The Lord does not give the same measure of faith to all. He gives a greater measure of talent to some than He does to others.

Some people, like Larnelle Harris and Sandy Patty, sing so well they thrill us. Some sing so well they bless us with solos. Some sing well enough to sing in trios and quartets. Some sing well enough to sing in choirs. Some sing well enough to sing when the congregation sings. Then there are some who bless us by not singing. It has little to do with training. Almost everything has to do with talent.

Some people teach and we learn. Others teach and our hearts burn within us and we don't want them to stop. Why? It is the same truth, but the gifted-teacher has an additional measure of a gift. You need to know not only what your gift is, but you need to know how to measure that gift.

If you have a gift to sing solos that thrill people, but you don't use that gift, it is faithless. If you are a choir singer and you force yourself to be a soloist and

make people uncomfortable, that is egotistical. If you have a gift of leadership to lead a small group and you think you should be board chairman, that is trouble. It is imperative to know your gift, but also to evaluate it in accordance with the measure of faith God has given.

If you have no idea what your spiritual gifts are, we offer a Gifts Discovery Class to help you. It is three lessons long and will be offered every month starting in September. You will be informed about various gifts, take a test that will accurately assess your talents and be given personal counsel, if needed. I took that test this past week. It showed my strongest gift is teaching, then preaching, and wisdom. I'm weak in mercy and administration. You ought to be able to say, "This is what my gifts are," perhaps even in order of priority. If you know where you are gifted, but you are uncertain about the degree, ask two friends to be honest with you. Say, "Please tell me the truth. Do you think I should try out for the choir? Do you think I am a gifted enough teacher that I should try teaching an adult class or not? If you have a friend who asks you, be honest. I know you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but you aren't doing them or the church a favor if you sugar coat it and encourage them in a field where they are not very gifted.

One young man in seminary was determined to be a preacher, but he was a horrible speaker. After he got finished with his sermon in homiletics class, there would be a long silence and the professor would tactfully try to discourage him. Each time the boy would say, "but professor, I have the gift of prophesying, I'm gifted to preach." Finally the professor said, "You may have the gift of preaching, but nobody has the gift of listening to you."

You can be tactful, but tell the truth. If you ask a friend to help you, then you listen carefully to what they say. If they say, "You do pretty well singing. You hit almost every note right on it, but I personally think you are more gifted with your hands," then don't force singing solos anymore. And don't get angry at them for not being more of an encourager.

Ralph Mettson said, "We cannot be anything we want to be. We must be what God created us to be." The

Scripture says, "Don't think more highly than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." If you objectively evaluate your gifts, there will be two immediate benefits. First, if you are extremely gifted in an area, you will avoid arrogance.

I saw college boys parking cars at an Indianapolis hotel a few years ago. They loved getting in a Mercedes or Jaguar and driving it around the block. But when they got in a Chevette or Honda Civic, they didn't feel nearly as important. But it was silly, because those cars didn't belong to them. They were just driving them temporarily. God owns all things. Even our bodies and our gifts belong to Him. He just loans them to us temporarily. If He has loaned us a talented one, we ought to be grateful, but not proud. People who are gifted to make money can have a condescending spirit. People who are gifted intellectually can sneer at those whose minds are not as keen. Our abilities need developing and sharpening, but they are gifts from God. When we understand that, it keeps us humble.

The second benefit of objectively evaluating ourselves is that if we are not as gifted, we avoid feelings of inferiority. I attended a conference of eleven ministers of mega-churches. We met at Lake Geneva in Wisconsin. It was hosted by Bill Hybels, the minister of the Willowcreek Community Church in Chicago. Bill is about six years younger than I am. He is much better looking, has a brilliant mind, has written four books, and his church has grown to 14,000 people. He is often quoted in the national media. I don't like him much.

As soon as I say that, you identify with how I feel. Whatever your focus, you feel inferior to those who are more gifted. If you are not careful, you become jealous, critical, and suffer from a poor self-image. You feel so inadequate around gifted people that you don't utilize your own talents. Once you understand where and how God has gifted you, you are not nearly as vulnerable to inferiority. We are not in competition with each other. We are very different people in different circumstances. God is going to measure me by what Bill Hybels does in Chicago. God is going to judge me by what Bob Russell does in Louisville compared to what he was capable of doing.

In the parable of the talents, the five-talent man who doubled his talents to ten and the two-talent man who doubled his talents to four, received the exact same commendation from the owner. The owner didn't say to the five-talent man, "That is terrific, you took your five and earned five more. You're my favorite!" And then say to the two-talent man, "You earned two more, that's pretty good, too." He said to both, "Well done good and faithful servant." The exact same wording of praise.

Dr. Seus wrote a poem, "Happy Birthday to Me," that stresses the uniqueness and the self worth of every person. "If you'd never been born, well then what would you be? You might be a fish, or a toad on a tree! You might be a doorknob, or three baked potatoes, you might be a bag full of hard green tomatoes!..or worse than all that...why you might be a wasn't, a wasn't has no fun at all, no, he doesn't. A wasn't just isn't, he just isn't present, but you...you are you! And now isn't that pleasant? Today, you are you, that's truer than true! There's no one alive who is you-er than you! Shout out loud, I am lucky to be what I am. Thank goodness I'm not just a clam or a ham or a dusty old jar of sour gooseberry jam. I am what I am, that's a great thing to be! If I say so myself, Happy Birthday to Me."

Kathy Rigby trained for the Olympics. It was her dream to win a gold medal in figure skating in Munich in 1974. She was nervous, but performed well. When the awards were announced, she didn't win a gold medal, silver, medal, or even a bronze medal. She fought back tears and went and sat in the stands by her parents. She said, "Mom, I did my best." Her mother said, "Kathy, I know that, you dad knows that, and I know God knows that." Then her mother spoke ten words that Kathy said boosted her spirits and she's never forgotten. She said, "Remember, doing your best is more important than being the best."

If you objectively evaluate your gift, you can reach the point where you quit comparing. Your self-worth comes from doing your best not being the best.

Once you really own that concept for yourself, if you have truly surrendered yourself to God, you can rejoice with the gifts of others and employ yours to the

fullest without comparing.

Secondly, focus the majority of your energy in the area of your primary giftedness. This is an important principle for those of you who do several things well. When you spend most of your efforts in the area of your primary gifts, there is a sense of reward and a rush of additional energy. But when you spend most of your time in areas where we are least gifted, there is an emotional drain that leaves us exhausted and feeling inadequate; filled with self-doubt.

Bill Hybels confessed that last Christmas he hit an emotional wall. He nearly burned out to ministry and he began analyzing himself as to what went wrong. He was still reading the Bible and praying. He was still keeping in shape physically. He determined there were two reasons why. First, he had poor balance in his life. He was hitting ministry so hard that he didn't take time for anything mundane. He needed rest. Secondly, he had spent the majority of his efforts in teaching, which was not his primary gift. His first gift is leadership. He is challenged by small group settings that are struggling to solve problems. His second gift is evangelism. He really gets turned on by trying to lead a non-Christian to Christ. Teaching is his third best gift. But as the church grew, he found himself teaching three times on weekends and twice in the middle of the week. The rest of his time was spent in studying for those messages. He was spending his primary energy in an area that wasn't his passion and greatest gift. So he has made adjustments for more team teaching in his church so he can give attention to leadership and evangelism.

It is important for you to understand that in your area, too, you can have incredible energy in the area you are gifted in and be so successful that you get promoted. But you may be advanced to a position that requires using secondary skills all the time. You may get the job done, but there is not the sense of fulfillment, the spirit of joy you had in the previous position.

I know of a public school teacher who was so good in the classroom, it wasn't long before he was promoted to an administrative post. He realized he wasn't as comfortable in that field, and thinking it was lack of education, he went back to school and got his doctorate in

administration. But he still was exhausted and unfulfilled. He made the tough decision and went back into the classroom, where his primary gifts are. That was a difficult decision not only from a prestige point of view, but from a financial perspective. He made a lot more as principal. But he correctly evaluated his gifts and decided to spend his energy in the area where is most talented.

There are good salesmen who make themselves miserable as sales managers. There are good preachers who make themselves miserable as counselors. It is really important that we focus the majority of our energy in the area of primary giftedness.

Not everybody can afford to change jobs, but the church provides the opportunity for them to utilize their gifts. I know of a woman who has strong teaching gifts. She works in a factory, but she regards the factory work as an opportunity to pay her way and a source of illustrations for the lessons she teaches at surrounding churches and seminars. She utilizes her gift of teaching in the church, the job is just a means of paying her way so she can teach for free, or a meager honorarium. Maybe you are out of your niche at work, but you can't quit. The church may be an opportunity for you to teach crafts, or work in media, or coach a ball team.

That is what Paul is saying here in Romans 12:6-8. Read it with me. Verse six says, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith." Prophesying usually means the gift of preaching. If a man is gifted as a preacher, let him preach more and longer. One little girl told a preacher friend of mine, "Gene, some people say you preach too long. You don't really preach too long, it just seems like it." John Stott says that when we preach it ought to seem like twenty minutes. For some that means ten minutes, for other it means an hour, but it shouldn't seem long.

"If serving, let him serve." Some people love to do behind-the-scenes ministries that support the program, but they don't desire any recognition. They get their energy from serving in little ways, but hate to be in the spotlight. They don't want their name mentioned. They will fill communion cups, scrub floors, assist at the

baptismal changing room, file music and be content. I know a girl that has a gift as a hairdresser. She volunteers to cut hair for people in prison, the homeless, people in nursing homes, and uses the opportunity to witness for Christ.

If your gift is teaching, then teach. If your gift is encouraging (lifting up those who are down), then encourage. If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously. I attended the minister's conference free of charge. I stayed in a nice lodge, ate good food, along with ten other ministers. It was all paid for by a Christian linebacker for the Chicago bears who has made money but is cheerfully generous with it.

Paul says, if a man has the ability to make money and he wants to give it away, don't restrain him. Let him give generously. I don't want to quench the Spirit in that regard! If a person is gifted to show mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Some have the talent to empathize with hurting people and to comfort them. They can counsel people in marital problems or grieving people and comfort them. If you have a gift of mercy, you focus your attention on that gift, but do so cheerfully. Don't go around complaining that no one appreciates you, you don't get enough credit. Don't be jealous of those with leadership gifts. Just focus on your giftedness and rejoice with what God has called you to do.

My primary gift is teaching and preaching. Way down the line is administration. I don't enjoy it, although I can do enough to get by. I have been asked on two occasions to serve as president of the North American Christian Convention, which is our brotherhood convention. It requires all kinds of activity, which I neither enjoy nor am gifted to do: meet strangers, plan programs, raise money, preside over meetings. I could do an adequate job because I would delegate those responsibilities to people who are administrators. But I would accept that role for only one of two reasons. First, a sense of obligation. I'm doing my duty. Secondly, ego. I would be in front. There are others who do it better and who would enjoy it. Let them do it. I'm going to stay in the area of my giftedness. If I choose not to be president of the N.A.C.C., then I better not be very critical of those who are. If a man is gifted as a leader, and exerts energy in that cause, he

merits my support and my service. The exercising of his gift frees me up to use mine.

Our elders have been perceptive enough to recognize that and we have employed Mike Graham, who previously was an administrator in business and is now the administrator of the church. When he was first hired, I said, "Mike, I want you to gobble up everything you see, when you go too far, I'll tell you." A couple of times I've had to say, "Mike, that's too far, you need to check with me before doing that." But he's been a tremendous blessing to the church and to me. That can only happen when you are comfortable with your gifts.

That's why I'm not dreading preaching four times. When I preach, it is a physical drain, but I get energy, reward from teaching Biblical principles. It would destroy some people, but it is my area of giftedness. If you made me counsel more or administrate more, I'd just make reservations for Our Lady of Peace. When we focus on our gifts we are energized. When we digress, we are exhausted.

Thirdly, receive your self-worth from building up God's kingdom, not yourself. The Scripture says, "Just as each of us has one body, with many members, and those members don't have all the same function, so in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

The human body, as the Bible says in Psalm 139:14 is, "Fearfully and wonderfully made." When the distinctive units of the body function together, we enjoy good health. The hand, eye, kidney, heart, nose, ear, liver all must function for us to perform properly. Each part is very different, but all are essential. If any one part of the body becomes independent of the others, we have trouble. If we can't control the hand, we probably had a stroke. If the glands start disobeying and secrete too much fluid, we are not balanced. If cells start growing independently, we have cancer. Only when each distinctive part performs according to its function, are we healthy.

You were given a specific gift in the body for the building up of others in the church. If you use that skill cooperatively, others are benefited and you are

built up. But it is possible for you to use your gifts only for selfish purposes. If you use your gift to teach or preach for ego gratification, it is not long before the church suffers and you feel inadequate. If you have a gift to make money, but you only hoard for yourself, the church suffers, and you don't feel right. You have a gift for leadership, but you only use it to railroad your own will, you get your way but you don't feel good about yourself. Even the gift of serving can be used selfishly.

There is the story of American soldiers stationed in Korea who hired a Korean houseboy to care for their apartment and cook their meals. Even though he was an excellent servant, they abused him terribly. They nailed his shoes to the floor, they put a bucket of water over the door and doused him when he walked in. They greased the doorknobs. But he smiled and took it graciously to the point that they felt guilty. They apologized and promised not to abuse him any more. He said, "You mean, no more water over the door? No more sticky on knobs?" "No, we won't do that anymore either." "No more nail shoes to floor?" "No." "O.K.," he smiled, "No more spitty in soup."

Whatever gift you've been given can be used for selfish purposes. When you use your gift only to gratify self, just the opposite occurs. You feel cheapened, and others are hurt. But when you use your gifts for the up-building of others, then there is an incredible sense of self-esteem that results.

Matthew 16:25 says, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." In my senior year of high school it was my goal to win the state basketball tournament and to be the leading scorer in the county. The top ten county scorers were listed each week in the paper, and toward the end of the season, I was in the top three. But one of my competitors for that honor was a teammate. When we were winning by thirty points, I found myself hoping he would miss shots so I would score more than he. But when we got into the state tournament and the games were crucial and close, I would plead for every shot he took to go in. The outcome of the game was more important than the individual honor.

If you are jealous of others contribution in the church, it is because the stroking of your ego is more important than the advancing of the Lord's kingdom. When you begin to understand the crucial nature of the spiritual battle, you begin to be supportive of and encourage one another. The Scripture says, in verse 5, "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." When you get lost in using your gift for the benefit of the team and you are encouraging others to do the same, you feel fulfilled and gratified.

I've shared the understudy minister concept with other preachers. I've talked about how Dave Stone has blessed this church and how it has been of benefit to me not to preach every Sunday. It has helped to get the focus off me and onto Christ. The congregation is strengthened knowing that if I went down in a plane tomorrow, it would continue to thrive.

The first reaction of a number of preachers has been, "Yes, but what if he gets a following and undermines you? What if there are those in the church who want him to preach more and you less?" Those are legitimate questions, I guess, but if my first love is the church of Jesus Christ and not myself, if I really want this congregation to grow to maturity more than anything else in life, then I must be willing to rejoice in the use of others gifts for that end. Self-esteem comes as a by-product of losing self in a cause greater than the individual.

The Christian life is a strange paradox. We die to live, we give to receive, and we lose self to find self. Self-esteem is not found in personal accomplishment. It is found in service to Jesus Christ.

"It makes no difference who sang the song,
 If only the song were sung.
 It makes no difference who did the deed,
 Be they old in years or young.
 If the song was sweet and helped a soul
 What matters the singers name?
 The worth was in the song itself,
 And not in the world's acclaim.
 The song and the deed are one,
 If each be done for Love.

Love of the work, Not love of self,
And the score is kept above.

Lastly, the most important factor in determining the worth of any item is what it offered for it. You can list your house for \$100,000, but if the highest offer is \$75,000 that is all it is worth. Think of what God has offered and has been willing to pay for you.

I Peter 1:18-19 says, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." I Corinthians 6:20-21 says, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price, therefore honor God with your body." Our self worth does not come from who we are, but from what God has paid for our redemption.

Tuesday morning I looked out my office window and watched an exciting drama unfold on our front yard. One of our ladies had stopped her car and was watching a mother duck lead seven tiny baby ducklings down the driveway. The mother duck hopped up the curb and started across the grass. Only one of the little ones made it. The others seemed hopelessly trapped by the curb. So the mother kept walking down the side toward the street, trying to persuade the little ones to hop over the curb, but they couldn't do it.

This lady could see that the baby ducks were heading right for the busy street. They were going to get run over. She quickly got into her car, exited on the entrance and pulled her car across the exit to prevent disaster. Then she got out of the car to assist the ducklings. But by this time, one of the little ones fell through the grate into the sewer. She lifted all the others up and headed them toward the anxious mother about eight feet away. The mother took off with little ones hurrying behind.

But now one was down in the sewer. This lady peered down into the sewer, but could not possibly reach the panicky little duck. She started sadly for her car, then turned back and looked down again. She started to leave, but just couldn't bring herself to leave that little duck to die down in the sewer. She was helpless. Just then I

saw three men coming down the walk. I knew what was going to happen. I had foreknowledge. She saw them and called them over and soon one of them lifted off the grate, climbed down into the sewer and disappeared. Moments later he handed up a little duckling and climbed out of the sewer. The woman thanked the as they walked away. Now she was standing there with a baby duck in her hands and the mother had long since disappeared. The last I saw, she took the baby duck in the car and started out looking for the mother.

When I saw that event, I thought of that verse of Scripture that says, "consider the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" If we can't bear to see a little bird lost in a sewer and we go to the trouble of rescuing them, how much more valuable are human beings who are lost and alienated from God?

He stepped down into the sewer of this world, reached out and picked us up and lifted us to safety. That rescue effort cost the life of Jesus Christ on the cross. That is how valuable we are to Him. When we lose ourselves in His service, He gives us an increasing sense of value and self-worth.

I John 3:1 says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!" We are not worthwhile just because we are unique. We are worthwhile because He redeemed us. If you have not responded to His love, if you have not been adopted into His family, the opportunity is yours today. Come forward and give you life to Him today.

"KEEP CALM UNDER PRESSURE"

James 1:1-12

Someone sent me an article last week entitled "Congregations Have to Realize Pastor's Stress." It related that, aside from maternity benefits, the greatest portion of the 64.2 million dollars paid in medical claims during 1989 by the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, was for stress related illnesses. Most of the medicines ordered through the prescription drug program were for stress related problems, such as high blood pressure and ulcers. The number one diagnosis in terms of cost of hospital claims was psychosis.

We are living in a pressure packed society. Stress is not limited to preachers or Baptists. It is a nationwide problem. This is a highly stressful era and many Christians are having trouble coping with their problems. It is not just the people of the world who are gulping Valium, taking Tagamet, tipping the bottle, undergoing therapy, and committing suicide. Many of us who are followers of Christ and leaders in the church are buckling under the pressure of our lives.

Just before He died, Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not let it be afraid." We all want that peace that Jesus referred to. But it seems so elusive. How do we get it? How does it differ from that which the world has? Let's look at the first section of the book of James. I love this small letter of James because it focuses on how Christians are supposed to live. This letter is so needed by Christians today because there is a serious gap between our faith and our deeds.

James begins his letter by saying, "James, a servant of Jesus Christ." The word servant is *doulos*, meaning slave. Jesus is Master. He dictates behavior. James could have identified himself as the leader of the Jerusalem church or the half brother of Jesus. He knew Jesus more intimately than any other writer. But He calls himself Jesus' slave and urges us to do more than just believe in Christ but to behave in accordance to Jesus' commands.

He focuses first on the need to maintain our composure in the face of severe pressure. He writes to the Christians scattered among the nations. The first century Christians were being persecuted for believing in Christ. Some had been beheaded, others imprisoned, some lost their jobs. They were all threatened, ridiculed, and intimidated. Endangered by impending persecution, they had dispersed and scattered throughout the world like refugees fleeing Kuwait. They were experiencing incredible pressure. No jobs, no security, no familiar surroundings. They must have wondered why God was allowing them to experience these awesome problems.

So James began, "Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds." That was a message they needed to hear. It is one we need to hear because we are called upon to be a people of peace in a pressure cooker world.

Firstly, James counsels us first that if we are going to keep calm under pressure, we need to understand that some trouble is inevitable. Anticipate it. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." It doesn't say "if," but whenever. It is inevitable.

I heard about a nurse who came into the fathers' waiting room and told an expectant father, "Your wife just gave birth to twins." "Wonderful," he said, "But that's ironic. I play baseball for the Minnesota Twins." A few minutes later the nurse reappeared and told a second father, "Your wife just gave birth to triplets." He said, "That's incredible. I work for the 3-M Company." A third father grew pale and bolted from the room. The nurse said, "Sir, where are you going? Your wife is in labor right now." "I know," he said. "But I drive a truck for 7 Up."

Sometimes you can see trouble coming. James states matter-of-factly that when you have troubles, here is how you should react. He doesn't even qualify it with an "if you have trials." He makes it clear that trials are an inevitable part of living in this world. WHEN you have trials.

We parents make a big mistake by cultivating a very naive view of life. We protect our children against as many hurts as possible. We don't let them play little

league baseball as there is too much pressure when they fail or lose. We don't flunk them when they don't do any studying in grade school. That would devastate their self-esteem and scar them for life. We don't deny them anything they want because we don't want them to be disappointed. We don't spank them when they disobey. That hurts and they need love and protection. They grow up naively thinking that life is supposed to be nearly perfect. When it is not ideal, they feel cheated.

They then say things like this. "This class is boring, I'm not going." "This marriage is unsatisfying, I deserve better." "This job is hard, I quit." "This church is demanding, I am going to complain." "This life is unpleasant, I'm bailing out." Ask people why they are so uptight or unhappy and most will fix the blame on difficult circumstances that they just never anticipated would happen to them.

Here is the first step in learning to cope with trials. Accept them as inevitable. Anticipate them as normal. Trouble is not an elective. It is a required course. All your life you are going to be under pressure of one kind or another. If you are parents for many years, your children will disappoint you. If you live very long, one day your parents are going to die. If you live a normal life, one day you are going to get sick or have an operation.

James points out that troubles come in various kinds. The word "various" is the word from which we get the term "polka dot." Some get hit harder than others. Some have "fender-bender" troubles while others have head-on collisions. One person may lose his wallet while another loses his business. One may suffer a blister and another a coronary. One may see his plans for tomorrow ruined by rain and another's hopes are lost for a lifetime by disease.

Trials come in various sizes and in various ways. It may be through a teenage tantrum or a doctor's diagnosis. It may come through friction at the office, pettiness of a friend, or the thoughtlessness of a husband or wife. It may come through the death of a loved one or injury suffered at the hands of a complete stranger. But trouble is inevitable and we need to anticipate it.

There was an article by Bobby Jones in Golf Magazine some time ago. He was discussing hitting shots out of sand traps. He pointed out that few players ever practice that part of the game. People practice putting, chipping, and driving, but not sand shots. Bobby Jones suggested that even the best players find their way into the bunkers at least once every round. The average player should realize the importance of able recovery work and be prepared for it. He closed by saying, "From the beginning, the golfer may as well be convinced that he can never learn to stay out of difficult situations. He will have to learn to get out."

In the "Sermon On the Mount" Jesus said, "Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." He did not say, "Don't worry about tomorrow because nothing bad is going to happen." In Acts 14:22 Paul warned the new converts in Asia, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." John Blanchard, in his book Truth For Life wrote, "Anyone who suggests that once a person becomes a Christian his troubles are over is speaking from an empty head and a closed Bible."

James says, "When you face trials" here is how to behave. There are two immediate benefits of accepting trials as inevitable. It helps you to appreciate the normal days. People who have been through severe trials learn to overlook minor irritations. If you know someday your parents are going to die, you appreciate the normal visit. If you anticipate that one day you are going to be real sick, you aren't devastated by a sinus infection. If you realize that one day your children will be hurt, you are more patient with their minor mistakes. When you realize that life can deal some severe blows, you learn to appreciate things like good health, loving people, and paying jobs. Even though they are not absolutely perfect. This is not paranoia. It is realism. Learn to say with the psalmist, "This is the day the Lord has made and I will rejoice and be glad in it."

When you learn to accept trials as inevitable, it eliminates worry. This may sound contradictory, but the best way to cure worry is to accept the fact that there are going to be serious setbacks in your life. The golfer who never practices sand shots is terribly nervous

when hitting to a green surrounded by sand traps. But the golfer who has practiced hitting out of sand and can do so effectively is much calmer and probably more efficient.

In John 16:33, Jesus had just warned the disciples that a time of persecution was coming. "I have told you these things so that you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world."

You will have trouble in this world, but don't worry about it in advance. Don't panic when it comes. I'll be there with you to help you get out. So take heart. Be peaceful. Keep calm under pressure and enjoy the normal days of life.

I Peter 4:12-13 says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

Secondly, most trouble expedites maturity. Rejoice in it. I say most trouble accelerates growth because it doesn't always happen that way. Jesus warned that some seed would fall on shallow soil and when the heat of persecution came the plant would wither and die. Some shallow Christians can't take the heat and they give up. We've all known people who became bitter because of difficulty. They didn't get better. Trials are a test to prove the genuineness and the depth of our faith.

Most trouble expedites the maturing process in us. We grow faster through adversity than we do in prosperity. James 1:3-4 says, "Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything."

Coaches have an often repeated slogan. "No pain, no gain." When an athlete punishes his body through exercise, the pain of that experience produces stronger muscles. J.C. Penney said that there were two great motivators in his life, Jesus Christ and adversity. In II Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul discussed the adversity that motivated maturity in him. "To keep me

from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for when I am weak then I am strong."

Paul said, God permitted that thorn so that I would mature and not regress into arrogance. Every life has thorns. For some of you the thorn is a physical ailment. For some of you the thorn has a first and last name.

My life has been fairly easy. I have not had a number of severe problems or trials. But the ones I have gone through have matured me. I can look back and see how God used each one. When I was a senior in high school, it was a devastating blow that our basketball team was defeated in the state tournament. Since the ninth grade we had been talking about winning the state tournament. That was my prime goal in life. We got beat on a last-second shot and my life was shattered. In the depression that followed, my sister invited me to visit her at Cincinnati Bible College, just to get away. That visit forced me to think about ministry for the first time in my life. I realize now, had we not gotten beat, I wouldn't have gone into the ministry. God's hand was in that defeat. I haven't told my teammates to this day that we didn't lose because Paul Heaster missed a lay-up with six seconds left. We lost because Bob Russell had missed his calling.

When I was a senior in college, I got a disturbing note from my mother. She was being operated on to remove a tumor. They didn't think it was malignant, but even if it were, they caught it early. I waited all day long by the phone. My sister called, "bad news. It is malignant. The cancer had spread. They were shocked it had happened so fast. They don't know if they got it all...radiation treatment for a month." I was devastated. I asked God why? Why weren't prayers answered? But through that experience I learned about daily prayer. I learned how precious relationships are and how fragile life is. I matured.

This church has had very few serious problems. But when I was about thirty I had a critical disagreement with our youth minister. He had been one of my best friends in college, but there were differences in philosophy and tension developed. Then he pressed the differences with the elders. He refused the Elders' request to resign. He wrote a letter to the congregation misquoting me and misrepresenting me as an ogre. About twenty-five of his friends sat in one section of pews near the front of the church and scowled at me when I preached. They wondered how I could be so cruel as to ask a friend to resign. But the church survived and I learned to be very cautious in hiring a friend. I learned to confront disagreements. I learned to be courageous. I learned to stand up and function when I was unpopular. I grew more in that six months of ministry than during any period of my life. I never want to grow that fast again.

The Bible says that the testing of one's faith develops perseverance. God is much more concerned about developing our character than He is in protecting our comfort.

Several years ago my family and I were involved in an automobile accident. My wife was seriously injured and hospitalized for several weeks. I learned how suddenly accidents can happen. I learned not to say, "It will never happen to me." I learned to wear seatbelts and to say, "If the Lord wills that we live, we will do thus and so." I learned to love my wife more deeply.

One Saturday night some years ago, I awakened with a terrible pain. It wouldn't go away. I had a kidney stone. I went to the hospital. I was a patient for the first time since I was five years old and had my tonsils removed. I learned something about morphine, pain, people, privacy, and understanding.

A little over a year ago our music minister resigned. I was disappointed. I didn't understand why he was leaving. But I wasn't devastated. Experience does bring about some degree of maturity. I had come to see so many times that God uses and works through troubles. I knew He would work through this one, too. I anticipated that a replacement would be easy. God would

drop the right person in our laps. One door closed after another until we found the man we knew would be right. A talented musician out of California. Then he called and said, "No." I didn't exactly count it all joy and say, "Wonderful, I am so happy you've said no." But to be honest, I wasn't devastated, either. I somehow knew it was God's will and it would work out for the best. Looking back, I realize that he wasn't the right man. He used liturgical dance in worship. But there was pressure.

I had a sense that God was working all things in His time. Sure enough, at just the right time, Greg Allen accepted the role and the transition has been smooth and he is so effective in that position. It has worked out for the best. Through that pressure, I didn't rejoice, but I didn't panic either. Slowly, I've grown and am learning that God's ways are not always my ways. His thoughts are not my thoughts.

The principle is true in every life. Problems provide the opportunity for us to grow at a rapid rate. That doesn't mean that when we have pressure we glibly say, "Oh, I'm so happy my car blew a transmission. Now I can grow." That is phony. But there can be an underlying spirit of joy in knowing that God can use the adversity for a positive purpose. We can keep calm under pressure because the Bible and experience have taught us that pressure expedites growth.

1 Peter 1:6 and 7 say, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Remember, God is much more concerned about developing your character than he is in protecting your comfort. He is more concerned about the future than the present and in maturity than possessions.

Thirdly, understanding trouble requires wisdom. Pray for it. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

When you experience severe pressure, you need an additional measure of wisdom. There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts. Wisdom is the ability to make practical application of truth to life. Knowledge is horizontal, it has to do with this world. Wisdom is vertical, it has to do with spiritual discernment. Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective. While a knowledgeable person may have the facts straight, a wise person is able to make common sense judgments about people and events. When you are under pressure, you need more than knowledge. You need wisdom.

The manager of a boat dock checked his watch, looked out over the lake with binoculars and then called out over his megaphone. "Boat number 99, please return to the dock." Ten minutes later he returned to the lake's edge and called out, "Boat 99, please return to the dock." His assistant came up and said, "Sir, we only have 75 boats. There is no boat 99." The manager squinted through his binoculars and called out, "Boat number 66, are you in trouble?" In our upside-down world, we need more than knowledge. We need insight.

When we are under pressure, we can lose perspective and panic. We need wisdom to see life from God's vantage point and to understand how God may be working to react appropriately.

You and your mate have just had a serious argument. You stormed out in a huff. You don't need facts. You don't need a friend quoting you statistics about divorce or how many mates have affairs. You need wisdom about the proper course of action. You need a perspective about how to restore the relationship. You don't need a degree in psychology. You need an understanding of human nature.

Emotional stress of any kind plays havoc with our judgment. Lawyers are told to never defend themselves. No matter how brilliant they are, their emotions distort their perspective. Widows are always counseled not to make any immediate decisions because under stress they lose common sense. We have a policy in our church that a divorced person must have been divorced for over a year before we will consider remarriage. Because emotional stress distorts judgment.

James instructs us to pray for wisdom. You can get knowledge from books and educational institutions, but the primary source of wisdom is God. When Solomon was crowned successor to his father, King David, he had a dream in which he heard the Lord say, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Listen to Solomon's answer in I Kings 3:7-9. "O, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, but I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

God was very pleased that Solomon didn't ask for wealth, long life, or the death of his enemies. So God gave him wisdom beyond anyone else and also riches and honor. Solomon later wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes that wisdom is better than strength, better than weapons of war, and is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.

If we pray for wisdom when we are under pressure, God promises He will grant it in two ways. He will grant it generously. There is no rationing of His wisdom. He will give it without finding fault. I like that promise.

As a trustee of Cincinnati Bible College, I had to raise as much as \$30,000 in a month for the college. I got on the phone and started to call friends of the school. Even the school's finest alumni usually had one of two reactions. First they would find fault. They would point out some policy of the school with which they disagreed. Secondly, they would complain or brag about how recently they had given a generous amount. Most gave reluctantly and critically.

But God promises He won't do that if we ask for wisdom. He won't say, "I've already given to you so many things and now you want more? Aren't you ever satisfied?" He gives generously. He won't say, "You have the gall to ask me for wisdom not that you're in trouble? I heard you swear in traffic just last week. I saw you lusting last night. You cheated on your income tax last year." He gives without finding fault. The

heavenly Father is pleased when we ask for wisdom and He promises to grant it.

But there is a qualifier. We must ask believing. In verses 6 and 7, "He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (In other words, bobbing around like a cork in the water.) That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord, he is double-minded, unstable in all he does." We are to pray in faith in God as a source of wisdom. We are to pray with stability. We are not to be double-minded, wanting the best of both worlds. The New English Bible translates the unstable man as one who can't "keep a steady course."

A double-minded man is not certain what he wants. He wants to succeed in his career, but wants to take it easy. He wants to have a quiet time with God, but likes to sleep late. He wants to lose weight, but also wants pie and ice cream. He wants the Lord to use him, but wants to be carefree and without responsibility. Before God is going to answer our prayer for wisdom, we have to make a choice of what we want the most and make a commitment to that desire.

Fourthly, financial trouble threatens perspective. In verses 9-10, James illustrates his theme by a reference to financial pressures. "The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a flower."

Financial pressures are one of the most common form of trials. The love of money is the most frequent source of double-mindedness which holds us back from God's gifts and true stability. The magnetism of riches is powerful and insistent. We constantly need the wisdom of God to see through the facade. James seems to imply that both extremes, poverty and wealth are a trial. When we are poor, we think that there is no pressure like struggling to make ends meet. We lie in bed at night worrying how to pay the bills. We dream of the day when we can have enough to do as we please. We envy those who are able to take elaborate vacations and do as they please. But the Bible and experience make it clear that riches produce more stress than poverty.

Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:24).

President Bush called up the reserves because of the crises in the Persian Gulf. Jay Leno pointed out that when the reserves are called up, their government loans are reduced from 12% to 6% while they are on active duty. He understood that Donald Trump just enlisted. The more a person has, the more can go wrong. The greater the pressure is.

James says it can pass away like a wild flower in verse 11. "For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business."

A Readers Digest article followed a number of people who had won big in the state lottery. Most of them experienced miserable results. Friends tried to exploit them. They were harassed by salesmen. Families and children fought over how to spend it. People resented the most of the big winners were miserable. Yet, so many of us spend our time plotting how we can get more. We wallow in self-pity and are envious of those who have more. We feel intimidated around them.

I overheard someone say they had dropped out of a particular Sunday School Class because that was the yuppie class. The person said, "If you don't drive a B.M.W., you don't belong in that group!" Really? Who is noticing? Are the rich flaunting it? They are wrong. Are those who have less envious of it? They are wrong, too. "The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position."

When you face financial stress, maintain your values. If you are poor, take pride in your high position. Allow God's wisdom to penetrate through the facade of wealth. Don't wallow in self-pity and envy. Take heart in your riches in Christ. You are the child of a king. If you have health and family and friends, realize how spiritually blessed you are. There are rich people who would give millions to be in your shoes right now.

If you are rich, take pride in your "low position," James says. Don't think you are superior because you live in a half-million dollar house and have impressive things. Take pride in your low position. Your friends may not think your responsibilities at church are very prestigious. They may downplay your spiritual concerns, but that is where your priorities are.

King David was extremely wealthy, but in Psalm 84:10 he said, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."

Lastly, overcoming trouble produces a reward. Focus on that. Verse 12 says, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised those who love him." When you face difficulty, focus on the goal.

Walter Peyton, the all-pro running back for the Chicago Bears gained a record nine miles in his career. Just think, every 4.6 yards, someone was knocking him down. But he persevered and succeeded because he kept moving toward the goal line. The man or woman working out in the gym look beyond the sit-ups and weight-lifting to the well-toned body. The medical student studying late at night when others are dating looks beyond the immediate pleasure and focuses on the goal of being a successful surgeon.

The Christian going through difficulty can endure if they focus, not on the immediate pain, but the ultimate reward. That reward is both eternal and earthly. God has promised an eternal reward for those who have suffered for His sake. But the crown referred to here is not just eternal, it is received on earth too.

In John 10:10 Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it to the full." James says, "When we have stood the test," when the trial is over, we will receive the crown God promises. James said, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." That word "blessed" means happy.

He began the discussion by saying, "Count it all joy

when you experience trials." When we learn to look at pressure from God's perspective and to develop a positive spirit toward it, that is the moment our life begins to open up and we begin to live victoriously.

Stop and observe who is happy. Some of the happiest people are survivors of severe trials. Some of the most unhappy people don't have any major problems. They are looking for something to blame. It is all a matter of attitude. If you are not happy, most of the time it is your fault.

Dr. John Maxwell tells that his wife Marge was conducting a workshop for pastors' wives. One of the women asked, "Does your husband make you happy?" Margaret immediately replied, "No, he doesn't." The woman's mouth dropped open, like she couldn't believe it. She had met John Maxwell and listened to him speak and thought anyone would be happy living with him. Then Maxwell's wife added, "My husband doesn't make me happy. I learned something the first six months of our marriage. John nor anyone else can make me happy. Only I can make myself happy. And when I choose to be happy myself, then every person who comes into my arena will just make me happier."

When you leave today, you can choose to be a blessed person, or you can choose to be unhappy. You can focus on all your problems and feel sorry for yourself, or you can focus on your goal and be joyful. The choice is yours. If you remember nothing else from this sermon, remember this, "Suffering is inevitable, but misery is optional."

Beverly Sills, the opera singer, had every reason to be bitter. Max Lucado, in his new book The Applause of Heaven, points out that though talented, Sills went unrecognized for years. Prestigious opera circles closed their ranks when she tried to enter. American critics ignored her compelling voice. She was repeatedly rejected for parts for which she easily qualified. It was only after she went to Europe and won the hearts of tough-to-please European audiences that State-side leaders acknowledged her talent. Not only has her professional life been a battle, her personal life has been marked by challenge. She is the mother of two handicapped children. One of them is severely retarded.

Years ago, in order to escape the pace of New York City, she purchased a home on Martha's Vineyard. It burned to the ground two days before she was to move in.

Personal rejection. Personal setbacks. Perfect soil for the seeds of bitterness. A receptive field for the roots of resentment. But in this case anger found no home. Her friends don't call her bitter, they call her "Bubbles." Beverly Sills, internationally acclaimed opera singer. Retired director of the New York City Opera. Her phrases are sugared with laughter. Her face is softened with serenity. Upon interviewing her, Mike Wallace stated that she "is one of the most impressive, if not the most impressive, ladies I have ever interviewed."

How can a person handle such professional rejection and personal trauma and still be known as "Bubbles?" "I choose to be cheerful," she says. "Years ago I knew I had little or no choice about success, circumstances, or even happiness. But I knew I could choose to be cheerful."

That is remaining calm under pressure. That is the peace that passes understanding. That is considering it all joy when you face trials of many kinds.

Yet, there was one who did it even more effectively. Jesus was under severe stress. He was about to be executed and his friends were caving in all around him. Yet in the midst of the turmoil, He was calm. He opened not His mouth. Just minutes before He went to the cross, Jesus said, "My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, I give it to you." That is maturity. That is what He offers to you today. The peace that comes from knowing that your sins are forgiven, your life has ultimate meaning and He is preparing you for eternal life with Him. If you haven't received His offer, why not come today and surrender to the Prince of Peace?

APPENDIX B

FIRST INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT LEE RUSSELL

This interview with Robert Russell was conducted on December 7, 1990, at his office at the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Punctuation has been added in this transcription of the taped interview.

PENNINGTON: Please provide your date and place of birth.

RUSSELL: I was born on October 4, 1943 in Meadville, Pennsylvania.

PENNINGTON: From reading some of the your articles published in The Christian Standard, I see that you grew up in a Christian home. Please give me some background on your parents, siblings, and your home life as a child.

RUSSELL: My mother's name was Katherine Pratt. My father's name is Charles E. Russell, the seventeenth child in a family of eighteen. His mother died when he was three and he had a hard upbringing. Charles became a Christian shortly after his marriage. Catherine and Charles were married on December 3, 1937. I have four sisters and one brother. I am the third child in the family.

My parents moved to Meadville, Pennsylvania in late 1930's. My father worked for 35 years at Talon Zipper Company in Meadville. Our family owned a small farm in Conneautville, Pennsylvania.

The family attended church regularly, every time the door was open, at the First Christian Church in Meadville. There was a balance in our home of the fundamental truths with a spirit of compassion. The whole family continues to be involved in church.

While in the sixth grade, my family and other families started the Conneautville Christian Church, which was the home community. My parents and family were a traditional American family. We were involved in school and church as the focus of life. The work ethic was important in my

upbringing. I had farm chores to do.

PENNINGTON: Please list the schools you attended, years attended, and graduation dates.

RUSSELL: I graduated from Conneaut Valley High School in 1961. I went straight from high school to Bible College and graduated from Cincinnati Bible Seminary in 1965 with an A.B. degree.

PENNINGTON: What activities and clubs were you involved in during high school and college?

RUSSELL: I played basketball, football, and baseball in high school. I played basketball for four years while at CBS. I was an officer in the Ambassadors Club, a club which I helped start which encouraged preaching. The purpose was to invite outstanding preachers to the college to preach. After the session the students would have a dialogue with the speaker to gain insight into his experience. The sessions served as inspiration to young men who wanted to preach.

PENNINGTON: When did you become a Christian and describe your involvement in church from childhood to college age.

RUSSELL: I became a Christian when I was eight years old. I just grew up in the church and I knew at eight years of age that I had sinned and that I needed Christ.

I was involved in all Sunday School activities, youth activities, and went to church camp every summer.

PENNINGTON: When and why did you decide to enter the ministry?

RUSSELL: I never thought I that I wanted to preach. And there are several reasons for that. My commitment to the Lord wasn't as strong as it should be. But the primary reason that I didn't think that I wanted to preach was that I was so interested in sports and I hated to get up in front of people. When I was called upon to read in school, I would get so nervous I would hyper-ventilate, my voice would crack, and I would have to stop, I would get so nervous. I hated, from the time I was in 8th grade...to get up in front of people. I was just so shy.

I had the blessing of playing on a really good basketball team for a school of that size. I had two or three scholarship offers from small schools...the one that showed the most interest in me was...Clarion State Teachers College...in Pennsylvania. So in April of my senior year my dad and I took a trip to Clarion, which was where I was probably going to go to school. Every thing went wrong on that trip. Before we went up there my sister had me down to CBS for three or four days to visit...I went to Clarion to visit and there was such a contrast between Clarion and CBS. They had the beer bottles in the hall...and everything was bad about it. I didn't like the gym I would be playing in. The baseball coach that was supposed to meet me...brushed me off...on the way home I was so troubled, I just couldn't see myself going to school there. Suddenly I just looked and my dad and said, "I'm not supposed to go to school there. I'm going to go to Cincinnati and become a preacher." I think my mother and sister had been praying for that.

PENNINGTON: So your decision to become a preacher was just a normal progression of circumstances?

RUSSELL: I would say so...it just happened.

PENNINGTON: Your were ordained when, where, and by whom?

RUSSELL: I was ordained in June 1965 by the Conneautville Church of Christ. Gerald Comp was the minister.

PENNINGTON: When and where did you meet Judy? Where is Judy from and who are her parents? When and where were you married with details of the wedding (Who performed the ceremony?) What information about your courtship will you share? (Length of courtship, shared goals and plans, attitudes about marriage).

RUSSELL: I met my wife in Bible college. I married Judy Thomas, the daughter of Virgil and Edna Thomas of Rushville, Indiana on May 28, 1965. We were married at Monterey Christian Church, near Batavia, Ohio, where I was serving as minister. John Richardson, professor and basketball coach at CBS, performed the wedding.

PENNINGTON: What can you tell me about your present

family? When and where were the children born? Their present status and plans for the future?

RUSSELL: Robert L. Russell, Jr., or Rusty, was born on June 1, 1967 and Philip was born July 15, 1971. Both were born in Louisville. Rusty is now a preacher in Spartansburg, South Carolina and Phil is taking classes at the University of Louisville.

PENNINGTON: What churches have you ministered to? What was the length of your ministry at each one?

RUSSELL: I had a student youth ministry at Bridgetown Church of Christ in Cincinnati for two years while in CBS. Then I had a weekend ministry at Monterey Church in Batavia, Ohio for one year, and then full-time for one year. I came to Southeast Christian Church in June 1966. I will celebrate my 25th year here in June 1991.

PENNINGTON: When you started with Southeast Christian Church, did you ever imagine that it would become what it is today?

RUSSELL: When I started here, I really had thoughts when I went in the ministry that I would probably go back to Pennsylvania where our movement is really weak and I would wind up in a place like Erie and try to build a church of 150 people. I always wanted to be in a church that would grow. I always thought that was the purpose of the church and I have always been interested in evangelism. When I received the call here, it was so obvious it was the right thing to do. I thought I would be here for five years. I've never had a lot of goals and objectives. I've never had an agenda. The agenda is I want to be faithful in preaching and I want to see the church grow. It was not my goal to be the preacher of a mega-church. I've enjoyed it and I would not want to be any place else, but that is not what I set out to do.

PENNINGTON: So, it just happened?

RUSSELL: It just happened.

PENNINGTON: What awards, citations, and honors have you received over the years?

RUSSELL: I was listed in "Outstanding Young Men in

America" for a couple of years.

PENNINGTON: What boards and committees have you served on in your capacity as a Christian minister?

RUSSELL: I was president of the Louisville Evangelizing Association, President of the Greater Louisville Ministerial Association. I have served on the 120 man committee of the North American Christian Convention. I have been on the Executive Committee of the North American. I've been on the board of Christian Television Mission. I have served ten years as a trustee of Cincinnati Bible Seminary, was president of Ambassadors for the Word. I've recently gotten off of all boards except Ambassadors for Word in order to focus my attention on the church here. I have taught in the Master's of Ministry program at Kentucky Christian College for the last five years.

PENNINGTON: What specific prestigious opportunities have you had as a speaker and preacher?

I spoke at the North American Christian Convention in 1989. I have spoken for high school and college graduations, some secular gatherings like the Farm Bureau Association in Atlanta.

PENNINGTON: As a Christian minister, husband, and father, if you were given the opportunity to make a statement about your personal philosophy of life, what would that statement be?

RUSSELL: I think it is important that a person, especially a minister, keep priorities in order. We must first be a person of integrity. If my relationship with the Lord is dishonest, then everything breaks down. That's true in every area of life and it is especially true in ministry. I've got to make sure that my family comes before the church. If my life's right with God, the most important people in my life are my wife and my children, in that order. My wife is more important than my children. If she is not convinced that she is the number one person in my life, then she is going to be unhappy...I've made a lot of mistakes in ministry, but neglect of the family isn't one of them. And then, I need to put the church ahead of everything else underneath that. I enjoy playing golf and I enjoy playing

basketball and enjoy some things outside, but I can't let those hobbies take precedent over my ministry to people...I have a work ethic that hasn't changed...I'll probably work 60 hours a week...my personal slogan would be "press on."

I've also got to know how to take time off and play. I do that pretty good too...I don't think I get out of balance a whole lot.

PENNINGTON: So the key word is balance, then?

RUSSELL: It really is. I have people say to me is, "one of the things I really respect about your life is that you're balanced." What they mean about that is that they don't see me as only a one dimensional person...that I can only preach.

PENNINGTON: Please describe your call to minister at Southeast Christian Church and summarize your accomplishments as its minister.

RUSSELL: When I went to the church in Ohio (Monterey Christian Church), I made a verbal commitment to them that I would stay a year. I would be the first full-time minister in the 100 year history of the congregation...In November, at the Conference on Evangelism, Butch Dabney, the pulpit committee (for Southeast) chairman, said "I want to speak to you." "I want to tell you about this church in Louisville, Kentucky." And he gave me a glowing report about the opportunities here and the people here. And I said to him, "It really sounds great, but I can't come." "I've made a commitment to this church to stay a year, and I've only been here four months...and I can't break that commitment...I made a promise and you wouldn't want me to break a promise...I wouldn't be the right guy." In February, four or five months later, I looked out in my little church and saw three people I didn't recognize. I met them afterwards and they said they were from Louisville, Kentucky. A week or so later I got a phone call from Butch Dabney and he said, "we've been looking for a preacher for almost a year, now. And we thought we wanted an older who could take this thing, but the doors have all shut. So we decided to look for a younger guy, so that is why we came to you, but we've still not found anybody. And we've had

a meeting and we really like you, and its February. And you've got four more months on you commitment up there. If you're willing to wait four months, we might be willing to wait for you. Would you come down and look us over." Well, now, you don't say no. So I came down, and I was scared as the dickens. I'm from the country, and here you're not only in the city, you're in suburbia. I've got an A.B. degree, minimal education, plopped in the middle of guys that have Ph. D's, engineers, doctors, highly educated people. I'm 22 years old and here is a church that has every opportunity in the world. But I came, and I preached, and I was so nervous, but I said if they have 95%, then I'll come. They called back and said 100% is what you got. So I just never looked back, because I knew it was God's will...I didn't know for how long, or to what degree.

What contribution? I am happy that the Lord has used me for numerical growth. I hope it is for spiritual growth, too, I believe it is. I think the phenomenal numerical growth has been one of the ways that He has used me. I would tie my contribution directly to teaching the Bible. Trying to make it as practical as I can for people's lives. That is what I have committed to do after about six or seven years of ministry. I would just preach through a book of the Bible. I would like to feel that if people sit under my preaching that they will learn the Bible and that they will learn how it applies to every day life. John Stott has a book called Between Two Worlds. And that is what I want to do, to build that bridge between the biblical world and the modern world so that when a person walks out the door on a Sunday they can say, "God's Word speaks to me and how I'm supposed to live it every day."

PENNINGTON: So you feel that your major contribution is that you can preach the Word.

RUSSELL: Without question. That is what I'm called to do. It is as simple as that.

PENNINGTON: What is your vision for the Southeast Christian Church in the future?

RUSSELL: The vision is to be faithful to God's word. Now, that sounds pious, but that is it. Right now we

have had a long range planning committee trying to toy with the idea of what to do with the facilities. Two weeks ago we made an announcement to the church that we were going to put this building up for sale and have a long range plan to relocate in five years. But that is a by-product of preaching the word...the by-product of a year's time of prayer about what we are supposed to do...so I cannot say that my goal is that we are going to have 10,000 people, or my goal is that we are going to have a \$2,000,000 missions budget, or that we are going to have a ministry to the homeless downtown. I think all those things will open up if we are faithful to God's will. And the first part of that is to continue to preach and teach the Word...what the church does is tied to our mission statement of why we exist...To evangelize the lost, edify the saved, minister to the needy, and be the conscience of the community.

PENNINGTON: And that is your continued vision?

RUSSELL: Yes, and in that order...and if we do that, the other things will take care of themselves.

PENNINGTON: How would you describe an effective preacher?

RUSSELL: I teach a class on preaching at Kentucky Christian College. I tell them that there are two ingredients to preaching: content and delivery. But there is a presupposition and that is it is backed up by a life of integrity. You can be an effective spokesman, and you can tell the truth, but if people don't believe in you, it is for nought. An effective preacher has to first live a credible life and he has to speak the truth. To speak the truth in love and somehow make it applicable to people's everyday life...but preaching for the most part, is a gift from God...so if a person is gifted to preach, I don't think he ever ought to say, "look what I've done"...the same God who gave you that gift...can take it away if you aren't faithful.

PENNINGTON: Well, our time is up. Thanks so much for sharing with me during this hour. I'm looking forward to our next session.

SECOND INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT LEE RUSSELL

This interview with Robert Russell was held on December 18, 1990 at his office at the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

PENNINGTON: What is your philosophical view (concept) of the value of man?

RUSSELL: I think that man is of value because he is the highest of all of God's creations. He has the unique capacities to think, and feel, and to have free will. His ultimate value is found in his relationship to Jesus Christ, that Jesus said "I am the vine and you are the branches, and without me you are nothing." And there is the sense that since we are all mortal that we are nothing unless we are attached to Jesus Christ. But he is the his the highest of all God's creation. Our full potential is found in Jesus Christ.

PENNINGTON: What is your philosophical view of knowledge (ability to create ideas)?

RUSSELL: Knowledge in itself is of little value. I think knowledge can be used....both negatively or positively. Knowledge is of value when it is enhances the quality of life that man has. Real knowledge and valuable knowledge is when a person comes to understand the world from God's vantage point. Not just a horizontal understanding, but a vertical understanding. When it is combined with the wisdom of God in which we come to see ourselves as God sees us. When that knowledge is combined with God's wisdom, then it is of supreme value because we come to know Christ.

PENNINGTON: What is your concept of the ideal system of values for society?

RUSSELL: I had two thoughts about that question. I think the ideal system of values for society would be if everyone were Christian and we could live by the Sermon on the Mount and the values of Christ. But that is not realistic. I think that God gave the Ten Commandments as a system of values for a world where people were sinful.

And there has to be some absolute standards by which the society can live even though there are some of them who have not committed their lives to Christ. So, in a realistic society I would say the Ten Commandments are the ideal system for operating a society.

PENNINGTON: What do you think is the role of the preacher in society?

RUSSELL: First of all, the primary role of the preacher is to build the church. And when the church is built to be the body of Christ, the individual members of that church then become the salt and light that penetrates society. I still think the preacher best impacts society by helping to lead the church. The preacher himself I think should be God's representative to the world and as every Christian should be. But there is a special way in which the preacher is the spokesman as he brings God's word to bear on the lives of everybody, not just the people of the church, but society as a whole.

The preacher's specific task is to build the church, to edify those Christian people so that they make an impact on society. A tremendous impact can be made on our culture if Christian people mature and if Christian people see themselves as salt and light. So we are certainly God's ambassadors to society and our task is to evangelize society, but I think the primary task of the preacher, from my perspective, is to build the church.

PENNINGTON: How can preaching, in general, help society?

RUSSELL: If we believe that God's word can change lives, preaching transforms people for the better, it solidifies families. Families are the foundation of society. The preaching of the Gospel gives people a moral standard by which to live. The strength of any society is the moral fiber of that society. Preaching also gives people compassion for those in need. There is an outreach to help those who are downtrodden. If the preaching is the preaching of God's word, it changes lives, changes hearts, and those people individually become the very foundation of society and the arm of compassion in society.

PENNINGTON: Do you believe that preaching is the greatest method of transformation where society is concerned?

RUSSELL: Yeah, I really do. There are a lot of people who down-grade preaching today. And say the lecture method is the least efficient means of learning and we ought to abandon it for a more modern means of communication. I think all of those arguments are valid and they miss one single factor and that is preaching is God's method of bringing His word to bear on the lives of people. I think that there is a sense in which the Holy Spirit works in a very active way through preaching. The Bible says that "it pleases God through the foolishness of preaching." Of course it is talking about the preaching of the cross to save those who believe. So I think God chooses those things the world considers to be weak to shame the strong. I believe down to the core of my being in preaching and its value.

I believe in the power of the pulpit. J. Wallace Hamilton has a segment in one of his books on preaching that changed the world and preaching that changed society. And how many things were altered because someone was touched by a sermon. It is not the only way that God works, but I think it is a prime that God works to convict the lost and stimulate and convict Christian people to grow and improve the society in which they exist.

PENNINGTON: What do you think your role is as a preacher within the Restoration Movement?

RUSSELL: I didn't use to see my role as anything other than a preacher in a local church, but as this church has expanded I have had to reevaluate that. I think that there are two or three things I can do for the Restoration Movement to a degree. I think that I have had some impact on the preaching of younger men. I was one of the first in our movement who really was fully committed to preaching through a book of the Bible and preaching expository kinds of sermons that were applicable, not just teaching, but tried to make them applicable. I think I have helped younger preachers to return to the Biblical basis of preaching. Another thing I think I have done has been more directly as a result of what has happened to the church more than it has been me personally. I think a result or by-product of this church

growing is that it has expanded the vision of some other people in our movement to say, "Hey, if that church can grow to be 2000, we can grow to be 2000, or if they can relocate we can relocate, too." There is something about somebody leading the point, being on the cutting edge that makes it easier for the next group to follow. So I think I have had a role to play in a visionary way in our movement. And I hope I say it without sounding like I am bragging about it. But I think that is the role that God has placed us in. A third role that I see that I have had within the Restoration Movement is I think I have helped to break down some of the sectarian spirit that has existed in our movement. I grew up in a time when we were almost exclusive in our attitude of who we were. I think I have been helpful in breaking down some barriers and having fellowship with believers from other groups.

PENNINGTON: Do you see yourself as moving into a role of preacher-consultant in the Restoration Movement?

RUSSELL: Well, I have more and more younger guys coming to me and ask for counsel for this and that. And I feel uncomfortable with that to a degree because someone said that "we are all apprentices at an art where no one becomes a master." And I have a lot to learn about preaching. But I love to talk about it and I like to analyze what we are doing and why. And I do have a number of guys coming to me and asking how I feel about this. The week I teach down at Kentucky Christian College the theme is preaching and it has been good for me to have to try to draw thoughts together and verbalize the things I have tried to learn over the years.

PENNINGTON: What is preaching (define)?

PENNINGTON: That is one of those things that everyone has tried to define. I like the definition that preaching is truth through personality. And I would add one more word that preaching is truth through a convinced personality. I think that there has to be that personal conviction. If it is just all truth, and there is not your personality into it, then it comes up short. If it is all personality and no truth, then it really comes up short. But if there is truth through your personality and you are convinced that this is God's truth, that is the basis of preaching.

PENNINGTON: What is the ultimate purpose of preaching?

RUSSELL: I guess that succinctly I would say that preaching is bringing God's word to bear on the lives of the listener. The purpose of preaching is to save the lost and edify the saved.

PENNINGTON: What do you believe is the preacher's primary task?

RUSSELL: I think my primary task is that I have to be true to God's word. I've got to tell the truth as I understand it as clearly as I can. Now it has to be couched in love and it needs to be as understandable and listenable and all those things it can be. But I just feel a real burden to tell the truth from God's word.

PENNINGTON: With regard to urgency in preaching, what do you believe?

RUSSELL: I think this is an exciting era in which to preach, because people acknowledge there is an urgency about it. Even people who are not Christian know that there is something is drastically wrong with our society and they are searching for solutions. They may not believe that the Bible has the answers and they certainly don't believe that the church has the answers, but at least they realize that something is wrong. And that if something doesn't change this world is headed for disaster. They see the world collapsing. I think there is a sense of urgency because we don't have much time. Like the farmer steps up his pace when he is haying and hears the thunder in the background, he knows he doesn't have much time....I just feel an incredible sense of urgency for where we are in the world. People have always felt like the second coming of the Lord is near and all those things. I am just really convicted of that and I don't see how the world could have much time, so every week is crucial.

PENNINGTON: What results or effects do you look for in your preaching? What do you seek to achieve? What response are you looking for?

RUSSELL: This may sound shallow, but the first thing I would look for is that I've got to have attention. If nobody is listening to me, I'm not going to accomplish anything. We had an actor here who would read and

memorize Scripture and do a performance before people. I saw him in several different services give the same performance. And there were parts of it that were humorous, but the audience didn't always laugh as quickly or as loudly at each service. I asked Richard if it bothered him that he didn't get the same reaction in laughter. He said, "No, I had a teacher that told me not to listen for the laughter, listen for the silence." I thought that was really good. When I am preaching I want to hear the silence. I want to say people are listening. If there is a lot of shuffling going on, or if people are coughing, if people are glancing around and making a lot of noise, it really disturbs me. I think the first thing I've got to do is command their attention. I think that really is more difficult for the preacher today because people are so accustomed to entertainment and 30 second commercials and a lot of flash and strobe lights. So we have to adjust preaching to give little bits and pieces and use more illustrations and humor to keep their attention. If I don't command their attention then I am not going to effect any change. So that is why I want them to listen. That would be the first thing I would look for. And then after that I would want to begin to see that there is a sense in which I am sensing that they are understanding and applying this truth to their lives.

The long range goal is to see some change in some individual's lives...I sat here today with a guy that talked about two years ago he gave his life to Christ and how much happier he is. He said that he made a commitment two months ago that he is not drinking anymore. He said, "I've just kept backing off and backing off, and it is not because anyone crammed it down my throat, but I just don't need it anymore. I have more friends and I want to be with my Christian friends. I know I need to be with my worldly friends that I used to enjoy being with, but I don't enjoy being with them as much anymore." When you see those people excited, and when you see them giving up old habits, and when you see them deepening and studying the word, that is a real gratifying thing for me. I get more satisfaction over seeing Christians grow than I do initially responding to Christ. Now, I don't know if that is true of all preachers, but I see myself more as a cultivator, maybe than I do as an evangelist.

PENNINGTON: So you are looking more for long term

response and not immediate response?

RUSSELL: Without question. I know preachers that get depressed if they preach a message and no one responds to it. They feel like they are a failure. I have had too many people come to me and say, "I'll tell you the sermon that convicted me was six weeks ago" or "I've thought that over and I can't get that out of my mind and I've got to come." I don't think we can measure effectiveness by immediate response at all. That is one of the benefits of a long ministry. The immediate response I am looking for is attention. The long range goal that I am looking for is to see change and growth in the lives of people.

PENNINGTON: What do you enjoy the most about preaching?

RUSSELL: The most enjoyable moment for me, when I am preaching, is if I'm explaining a Bible story, if I can sense that those people listening are allowing that Bible story to come alive in their lives.

They're seeing for the first time, or they're seeing it afresh. If I'm telling a familiar story and they can see the human side of it. That is the rewarding or gratifying thing for me. Or if I'm explaining a passage and they are applying it to themselves automatically, then I really get a thrill out of that. The most recent example is last Sunday when I was talking about Joseph, the husband of Mary. And can you imagine how Joseph must have been embarrassed walking with Mary when she was seven months pregnant. He had only being married only two or three months. He was saying, "Hey, an angel told us about this, this is the Messiah born in her." And I told it in such a way that the people laughed. Not an irreverent laugh, but they were thinking about how hard that would be for Joseph. And that maybe they hadn't thought about that before.

People get involved in that story and they can see those characters as real people as opposed to just (a story)...when I feel like the Bible is coming alive for them. Those people in the Scripture are real people. I kind of think so many times when we read those Bible stories and we almost got them as a myth back there or they're stained-glass characters in a window. When they

can see those Bible people's characters encounters with God are very similar to their experiences, then I think that in those moments God becomes real to those people. That is satisfying to me.

PENNINGTON: Do you have any fears concerning preaching? Perhaps that it will become overwhelmed by other ministry activities or programs?

RUSSELL: I have a fear that my preaching would become irrelevant, that I would lose touch. I think one of the reasons that I have experienced some degree of effectiveness is that I understand where people are. And I have a fear that as the church gets bigger and I get more and more isolated that I will lose touch with where people are and that will make it more difficult for me to relate the Scripture. Or as I get older that I will lose touch.

I have another fear that I will become boring. To me the worst thing is to get up and preach and people are bored. Jack Parr once said, "It is the greatest sin in the world to be boring." I say a greater sin than that is to take the gospel of Christ which is the most desperate news, and great news, and be boring with that. Probably over half of the times I get done preaching I'm disappointed with myself. I get so excited in studying and I want to relate this and I know people have needs and then when I come and I don't quite do what I think the Lord wants me to do or what the people need me to do. My level of expectation and my actual performance...the actual preaching are a lot of times a step removed. I've also gone home a enough times to find out later that God takes up my effort, as inadequate as that might be or though I fall short, and He is able to bless that.

PENNINGTON: In general, in all the churches, do you have any fear for preaching?

RUSSELL: I've got a real concern today that there is a shift away from, even in conservative circles, of preaching the Bible. There is such an effort to be sensitive to the seeker. The person coming to church who is just looking for something. And there is a fear on the part of some that if we preach too much Bible we are going to scare him away. So the recent trend is to preach to meet needs coming at it from a psychological

point of view and then inserting a little Bible here and there and at the end as the ultimate solution. I'm afraid that the younger preachers coming on will get farther and farther from preaching and teaching the Bible. I think that the person who comes to church expects to hear the Bible. He is not going to be turned off by the Bible if it is made applicable to every day life. I'm concerned that even in conservative Bible believing churches that we are going to back away from teaching the Scripture. And that is where our power is, I think that is where our strength lies.

PENNINGTON: Do you believe that there is a necessary connection between preaching and living what is preached?

RUSSELL: Without question. Especially if you are going to be somewhere long term. Somebody who is just going to speak one time can come in and you don't know anything about that person's life. If you know a person's life and you don't believe and they don't have credibility with you, whether they are singing or if they are preaching or teaching, what they say loses credibility. You are not going to pay attention because you know what they are.

PENNINGTON: You have already described an effective preacher as "a credible speaker making truth applicable to everyday life." How, then, would you describe effective preaching?

RUSSELL: I looked at these questions and to me that is one of the harder ones that you asked. I have a tape by Fred Craddock where he says, "Everyone knows what preaching is, no one knows what preaching is." It is hard to describe...effective preaching would be a logical listenable discourse that brings God's word to bear on the life of the listener. It has to be logical, something a person can follow. It has to be something a person can listen to. You're not going to turn them off and it brings God's word to bear on the life of the person who is listening. And when that happens, the Holy Spirit does the rest.

PENNINGTON: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I think you are saying that the essence of effective preaching is actually the Holy Spirit speaking through the speaker.

RUSSELL: Oh, that is why the question you asked before about the life of the individual...if you are clogging up the Holy Spirit it is a lot harder for the Holy Spirit to flow through....God's word is so powerful that He can come through some of the most corrupt channels. Here is Jimmy Swaggart out here preaching, and you can name people, they have all kinds of personal problems. But while they are preaching people are still converted; people are still edified by their preaching. Because that individual is just a channel, just a pipeline through which God's truth flows. And it is so powerful that God's truth can come through even corrupt channels. But the essence of effective preaching is certainly dependent upon the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't just act through the Bible, but he certainly does act through the Scripture. And if we are able to make that Scripture come to bear on peoples lives then we make it possible for the Holy Spirit to be active in their lives.

PENNINGTON: You're in good company because this was the statement made by both Dwight Moody and Billy Graham that it didn't matter how much they studied or how well they delivered the message, the Holy Spirit was the essence of their preaching.

RUSSELL: It is a funny thing, too. I'm not always a good evaluator of my own effectiveness. I guess the tape ministry has done that for me. It is not good for me to listen to my own tape next week. Or two weeks later. I'm too familiar with the material. If two or three years later I listen to a tape and it is not familiar to me any more. Then I am able to see a little bit better what was effective and what was not. I find that some sermons that I thought I didn't do very well and I later listen to that and say I think God used that. Then sermons after I got finished I thought that, "Today that is what I wanted to do." I listen to later and say that didn't have nearly the power that I thought it did at the time. I've tried just to say OK, in preparation I am going to study to be as effective as I can and then when comes time to deliver it I am going to deliver it as effectively as I can and not try and be the judge and jury of my own effectiveness at that particular time.

PENNINGTON: What subjects, issues, and needs do you think need to be addressed by preachers in the immediate

future (5 years)?

RUSSELL: I think the one more than any other in my mind is God's absolute truth. That there is an absolute truth. There is a real erosion in our society of the conviction that there is anything absolute. And if we don't start with the basis that there is a truth and that truth abides in Jesus Christ and it is revealed to us in God's word, even in churches there is a vacillating moral standard. I think we have to come back again and again that there is a standard by which all things are measured and this is the standard of Jesus Christ. And then as that applies to the sanctity of life and the sanctity of the family, some of those issues that are still relevant today. The only hope that we have in Christ I think the one issue that we are going to have to commit again and again and defend that there is a standard of truth.

PENNINGTON: If you had been asked this question twenty years ago, would you have answered it the same?

RUSSELL: Twenty years ago? I don't think so. I think twenty years ago, when I first started preaching, the people broke God's law, but at least they acknowledged that such a law existed. And now, people are flagrantly violating God's laws and flaunting it and saying, "I'm not sure that is wrong. And there is no absolute standard. Homosexuality is OK because that is the way I feel. Abortion is alright because that was the best for me at that time." The humanistic philosophy of our day has really made an impact. And a lot of people even question that any standard exists. I think twenty years ago people at least acknowledged that the standard was there.

PENNINGTON: So you believe that society has changed that dramatically?

RUSSELL: I do. I just think this is a post-Christian era that Schaefer referred to, we're in.

PENNINGTON: And the only way to bring it back to reality is to preach the truth?

RUSSELL: Preach the truth. I think that the preacher that preaches the truth is in the minority. I've had

people telling me, coming from other places, "Boy it is really good to hear that stuff again, haven't heard that for a while." I think there are a lot of preachers who are skirting the issues. Maybe out of fear or out of a lack of conviction themselves. First of all evangelical Christians are in the minority, and then if we skirt the issues ourselves, then there just aren't many of us left. I don't mean to sound like Elijah as a voice crying in the wilderness, but when the Gallup poll said that (I can't remember what percentage claimed to be Christian) 80 some percent, and only ten percent were committed. I think that is about accurate. I think committed Christians are about ten percent of our society.

PENNINGTON: Where do you look for sermon material?

RUSSELL: I don't want to sound corny here, but I start with the Bible as a starting point. And say, "OK, what in this passage is relevant to the people I am going to be speaking to." I try to do that before I go to commentaries or anything. I want it to be my own thrust. If I am going through a book of the Bible, I'll usually have five commentaries that come at that book from different angles. And once I've read through and gotten basic thoughts for myself as to what I think is relevant, then I'll read those commentaries. I try to read the newspaper, and read Time magazine, and listen to the news and that is really helpful in trying to stay in touch with what is going on. A real source in sermon material is that I've preached in tandem with Dave Kennedy for a number of years. He has different insight and the bouncing back and forth of different ideas with him has really been helpful. I think that there are...I use the analogy sometimes of baking a cake. Lets say it is your birthday. You can go to the bakery and buy a cake. Or you can go to the grocer and buy a cake mix. Or you can bake a cake from scratch. Now, which of those three cakes would you rather have? It all depends on who is baking the cake. Some people aren't very good at baking a cake from scratch. If I was going to bake it you would say, "Go get it from the bakery." I think the best would be if somebody could make it from scratch. And they have learned to do that...that is the best kind of cake. And I think the same with preaching. I really don't have a big problem with somebody taking someone else's sermon and using the structure of that sermon. I have run into a lot of guys who are pretty effective at preaching but

they are not very effective at making a sermon from scratch. And I think that they can learn to use a "cake mix." They can take someone else's outline and they can throw in a few things here. But I think the best preaching is that which comes from scratch. The guy gets into the Word and he says, "OK Lord, show me what is in here that is going to be relevant to the people." And you start from there and build it because of your study of the Word and input from various commentaries. That is the kind of preacher I would like to be.

PENNINGTON: Do you believe that preaching should be the central focus and organizing principle to a preacher's ministry?

RUSSELL: It is for me. I think we need to recognize that there are some guys that are in the ministry who are not necessarily gifted to preach. They are gifted to do evangelistic work or counseling, or organizational work. And maybe that shouldn't be the central focus of their work, but for most of us it should be.

PENNINGTON: Do you think that the sermon is or should be the central focus of the worship service?

RUSSELL: Yes.

PENNINGTON: What about communion? You know that is a restorationist point of view. But our churches traditionally look at communion as the focus of the service.

RUSSELL: I remember growing up, that there would be people that would get up and leave after communion. Preaching was secondary. Acts 27, when they came together to break bread, Paul preached to them. Paul preached to them a whole lot longer than it took them to take communion. I think that Christ is the center of the worship service and whether it is remembering Christ through the communion or preaching Christ. Both events are very important. Some of that depends upon the purpose of the worship service, but I think preaching should be central.

PENNINGTON: Why?

RUSSELL: Good question. I think that the fact that we

take communion every week is the right thing to do. I think that it is good and it is a time of prayer and remembrance. And I would in no way minimize communion. That act remains the same every week. But say we just made that the focal point of every service, it then becomes just a ritual that we go through, if we are not careful. The preaching event is a variable. It changes. It has the potential to convict and to change lives in a way that, for the lost, that the communion service is not going to do. Part of the reason that I would make it the center of the worship is because of its ability to convict the lost. The communion service does not have that power in the lives of those who do not know Christ. The communion is for those who know Him. Also, the people who are shallow who need to grow have a terrible time sitting there for five, six, seven, ten minutes and concentrating through communion. And if those people are going to grow they are going to have to have someone reach out there and explain the Scripture to them. Here you have the Ethiopian Eunuch riding in his chariot. "Do you understand what you are reading?" "No, I need someone to explain it to me." And I think that for the Sunday morning audience when you have the lost, the shallow, the hurting, the preaching should be central to that worship because of its potential to change lives.

If we were gathering just a group of dedicated committed Christian people, I think, and there are times when we have done that, and the communion is the center of that worship. That is a meaningful moment. That is a terrific worship service. I would have no qualms about that. Preaching may not even be necessary. But because of the various people who are present on Sunday morning I think that the preaching should be central.

PENNINGTON: Do you ever "not feel like preaching"? If so, what do you do?

RUSSELL: Very seldom. You have another question in there, "Have you ever thought about quitting the preaching ministry?" I hear a lot of guys say, "Every Monday morning." I have to say, "No." I have enjoyed what I have been doing even in times when it has been difficult. I get discouraged, but I have never gotten discouraged to the point where I thought I would quit preaching. There have been a couple of times when I thought I would go someplace else. But I know I am doing

what God wants me to be doing, so I haven't thought about quitting. There have been a few times when I've gotten up and thought, "Boy, I don't feel like preaching." Its cold, rainy, and I'm not excited about this sermon, I just couldn't get it together like I want. Just call an associate, and pull the covers over my head and tell them I'm sick. But I have grown up with the work ethic where you do it if feel like it and you do it if you don't feel like it. You do it in season or out of season. I do it out of obedience. But I also find out that if I go through those motions and I get in there and I start, that is when the Holy Spirit comes in and lifts me up. I don't know that if I have ever come in and I didn't feel like preaching that when I finished I said, "I wish I hadn't preached."

PENNINGTON: Because there are people who get up and don't want to preach once they look out over their congregation.

RUSSELL: Oh, I know. There is a part of me...that wishes...this sounds wrong but...I know how important it is to identify with people and say, "I understand how you are feeling." I've talked to a lot of young preachers who have said, "Well, I've thought about quitting a lot." And I can identify with those people if I would say, "Well, I've thought about quitting a lot, too." But I can't honestly say that. And I talk to a lot of young men who say, "Well, there times when I don't feel like preaching." But I tell you one of the things that make guys feel like they don't want to preach is when they are having trouble at home or if they don't have a responsive congregation. The elders are down on them and they don't want to get up in front of those people. And since I have had a wonderful marriage, and since I've had, for the most part, a supportive eldership, I haven't had those kind of pressures. The one period of my life when it was the most difficult in preaching was when there was a staff problem here. And it was back when the church was young and I had only been here about five or six years. The staff member turned on me and turned on the elders and wrote a letter to the congregation and there were twenty or thirty people in the church who would come and sit in the front pews and fold their arms and try to glare me down. It wasn't fun to preach for about a month and a half then. But I've also got enough competitor in me that I'm going to say to those people, "Yeah, I'm not

going to let you get me down." The Lord's called me to preach, and even though it was not the most enjoyable thing I am doing, I'm going to overcome it. That was the hardest time, but I went ahead and did it every weekend anyway... And God honored that, too.

PENNINGTON: John Killinger, in The Centrality of Preaching in the Total Task of the Ministry has stated, "Church-attenders today are intelligent, eclectic, wary, increasingly independent, and restless--and no preacher is able to meet their needs more than partially in the Sunday morning sermon."

Do you agree with his statement?

RUSSELL: For the most part, yes. I think there is a segment of people out there who are very hungry and who would not fit that description. Paul said, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more." I think that there is a sense in which we have more dedicated people...there are people who are more dedicated in the church than they were twenty-five or thirty years ago. But the average church-goer meets that description. You really have to work to meet their needs.

PENNINGTON: John A. Broadus in On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons has suggested that piety, natural gifts, knowledge, and skill are requisites to effective preaching. Please comment on this.

RUSSELL: I think that is a good description of long term preaching. Again, I think it is really possible for a person to come in as an evangelist or a one-time speaker and not have piety, and have much knowledge. You can have a one-time sermon and really dazzle people, but if you are have a long-time pastorate, that is a good description.

PENNINGTON: So it is more than just rhetoric?

RUSSELL: Yes. I would like for people to be able to say several things. I would like for them to be able to say, "When I heard Bob Russell preach, over a long term, I've learned something about the Bible." I'd like for them to be able to say, "I believe he lived what he preached." Not that he was perfect, but he really tried to live what

he preached.

PENNINGTON: John Stott, in Between Two Worlds, makes this statement. "It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching." Do you agree?

RUSSELL: I think it is the best form, but I disagree with the strength of his statement that it is the only form...I think that expository preaching, in the long run is the most effective. I would really advocate that...but to say...that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching, that is not true. I think of how God has honored some of Billy Graham's messages, and they were not expository messages at all.

PENNINGTON: Stott describes the preacher as a sower, ambassador, steward, shepherd, one approved, and as a bridge-builder. What thoughts do you have on Stott's description of the preacher?

RUSSELL: I like two descriptions. I like it as a sower...you can't determine the results immediately...when you sow the seed it takes a while for it to grow. And we are sowing the seed of the Word of God and it is going to fall on different types of soil and some of it is going to depend on the kind of area you are sowing in. And I like the analogy of the sower and I really like the analogy of the bridge-builder. That we are to take the Biblical world and build a bridge to the modern world. And that is what I see my primary task. I think the others are applicable, but those are the two I appreciate the most.

PENNINGTON: Stott also says, "Our task is to enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today."

Is this an adequate description of the task of the preacher?

RUSSELL: I like that. I think that is an excellent definition.

PENNINGTON: What responsibility do you feel you have

to your audience?

RUSSELL: I think first of all, they have a right to expect me to live a life of integrity. They don't have a right to expect me to be perfect, but they have a right to expect me to be a person of integrity. I think that is preeminent. I think they have a right to expect me to work hard and give the effort. And at first they might not be able to tell, but in the long run perceptive people can tell whether I've worked on the sermon or if I am doing my best at the calling I have. I think they have a right to expect me to work hard. They have a right to expect me to courageously tell the truth. I've got a responsibility to them and to God. I think the audience should expect me to say to them what I think God would have me to say. Not what they want to hear, or maybe even at that moment what they think they need to hear. The audience has a right to expect me to have a word from God, to speak God's truth. They also have a right to expect me to be transparent, to be real, to be myself, not to be somebody else.

PENNINGTON: Do you think a preacher should be able to isolate himself from the bulk of the congregation, or should he mix among them and be a part of their everyday existence?

RUSSELL: The ideal answer would be to say that he must be a part of their everyday existence. The problem with that is, as the church grows in size, it is impossible to be a part of everybody's everyday existence. And also you have such a variety of needs out there. When I think about the people who are single, the people who are experiencing divorce, the people who are aged, and people who have lost children, people whose lives are going smoothly. There is such a variety of needs out there. It is impossible to be a part of everybody's everyday existence. But I need to try the best I can. And as I mentioned earlier, it is one of my fears that I would get so isolated that I would lose touch with where they are. If somebody wants to hurt me, they can say, "Hey, you are losing touch." That would hurt me because that is one of the great fears that I have.

PENNINGTON: How many "ministerial" staff members are there at Southeast Christian?

RUSSELL: At this point we have nineteen full-time ministers and we are going to add four more this year, the Lord willing we will have twenty-three.

PENNINGTON: Do you regard yourself as the "senior" minister or just one of the team?

RUSSELL: That is an easy question to answer, I'm the senior minister. I wouldn't have it any other way. You can't have more than one quarter-back in the huddle. You can't have more than one president of a company. Now, from that point on it is a manner of management style. Whether you lord it over or whether manage by service or try to lead. But you have to begin with the understanding that someone is in charge here...that gives the everybody a sense of security and makes the whole team operate as a unit.

PENNINGTON: We have covered a lot of ground today. Thanks so much for taking time out to help me with my research.

APPENDIX C

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS Name of Respondent: Michael T. Sanders

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry?

I consider him to be a role model for other preachers in that he enables the person in the pew to see that the scriptures relate to them. He is responsible to preach on issues that are current events not compromising.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective".

The effective preacher presents material in such a manner that the listener understands that what is being said is from God. Secondly, the listener is shown how this relates to him/his and finally, how to put it to use practically. In other words, the preacher is able to answer the listener when he responds to a passage with a "So what?" attitude.

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher?

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

Yes. See answer 2

(Please use the back for additional comments)

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS Name of Respondent: Jerry Nichte

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's **preaching ministry**?

Bob has accomplished taking God's word and applying it to modern day needs of people. Making God to be real is what Bob's ministry brings to those who are looking for stability in their life and not getting it from the world.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective".

If people listen and hear, then apply what they have heard.

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher?

Absolutely!

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

People are applying God's word heard in Bob's ministry and applying it to their everyday life.

Our ministry communicates God's love and people feel that from Bob's message and the extended ministry (all others involved at Southeast)

Thank You!
Jerry

(Please use the back for additional comments)

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Name of Respondent: JACK COFFE

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry?

I have served in or been a member of more than 10 churches. Bob Russell is by far the most effective preacher I have been exposed to.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective".

*Interesting speaker
Biblically correct.
Life consistant with preaching
Appeals to large cross-section of people
Positive response from people*

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher?

YES

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

God blessing his ministry

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS Name of Respondent: BOBBY NEVIZ.

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry?

I believe Bob is one of the most effective preachers in America. He is able to communicate God's word in a very relevant manner. He continues to preach God's Word and holds to His truth. I believe Bob is a man allowing himself to be used by God's Spirit and will humble himself to God's will.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective".

Effective is the ability to get something done well! To accomplish a purpose?

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher? yes.

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

Bob makes the word real and practical. He is transparent in and out of the pulpit. He relates his own life into the sermons well. He also appears to put many many hours into his sermons, based on the content of illustrations, phrases etc.

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Name of Respondent: Glen Hedgspeth

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry? -EXCELLENT!

Bible based, easy to understand AND RELATE to, effective, GREAT PRESENTATION, tied in with current affairs, CHALLENGING, WELL PREPARED, sometimes HUMOR is used to make a point WHICH Adds to the enjoyment of listening to him speak, his Speech is clear, content is excellent, his personality Appeals to many, his openness ^{allows} ~~makes~~ him as a person easy people to see themselves in similar situations AND HOW they reacted.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective". -wins people to CHRIST, BROADENS LISTENERS UNDERSTANDING OF GODS WORD, ENCOURAGES & CHALLENGES people to develop A closer PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST. PRACTICES WHAT HE PREACHES.

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher? yes

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not? Humble spirit, His personal relationship with Christ, HE RELATES THINGS/ OCCURRENCES in HIS OWN LIFE THAT TIE in WITH the SERMON, HE SPENDS A GREAT DEAL OF TIME CONCENTRATING ON MATERIAL TO BE USED in HIS SERMON (OUTSIDE MATERIALS, CURRENT AFFAIRS, ETC), HE IS VERY SENSITIVE TO THE NEEDS AND FEELINGS OF OTHERS & LAST (BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY) GOD HAS GIVEN HIM A GREAT GIFT AND HAS BLESSED HIM in MANY WAYS!

(Please use the back for additional comments)

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS Name of Respondent: Ben F. Pennington

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry? Bob believes in God & Jesus Christ. He is not ashamed of The Gospel. He has a gift of organization & delivery of This belief. He always gives God The credit for his ideas. I have heard him say he can't believe it's Bob preaching when he listens to himself. He believes it's God speaking through him. Though at all he has been able to be Bold, This is hard when more and more people watch. He remains humble though all The praise. He is a very very hard worker. I have been on Trips with him and know he speaks hours on sermon preparation. He shares ideas with other ministers.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective".

A person has an injection - give antibiotic - injection cured. The antibiotic was effective in The cure.

People are hungry for Hope - Bob provides The Biblical Truths - People are satisfied - Thus he is effective - Actually God is effective through Bob.

Effective - something that provides a needed result

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher? yes

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

He lets God work through him. He denies self.

(Please use the back for additional comments)

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Name of Respondent: R. CARPENTER

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry?

BOB'S MINISTRY IS ONE OF CONVERTING THE BIBLE TO A DOCUMENT THAT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY TO OUR LIVES. HE DOES THIS BY SPEAKING TO THE CONGREGATION ON THEIR LEVEL AS A CARING FRIEND.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective".

EFFECTIVE IS DEFINED AS SHOWING RESULTS. BOB'S MINISTRY DEFINITELY SHOWS RESULTS. WHEN YOU SEE THE NUMBER OF LIVES THAT ARE CHANGED AND THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE EAGER TO LISTEN AND BE CHANGED - THAT IS "EFFECTIVE."

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher?

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

AS BEFORE - RESULTS PROVE EFFECTIVENESS. I AM AN ENGINEER AND NOT USED TO GIVING LONG FLOWERY ANSWERS SO I'LL SIMPLY SAY THAT BOB'S TRANSPARENT HUMILITY ENDEARS HIM TO HIS CONGREGATION AND HIS OBVIOUSLY WELL PREPARED MESSAGE (APPROX 20 HOURS/WEEK) IS ON A LEVEL THAT WE ALL CAN RELATE TO.

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS Name of Respondent: TOM CLARK

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, IL 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry?

I THINK THAT BOB'S CLOSE WALK WITH THE LORD AND HIS STUDY OF THE WORD HAS MADE HIM VERY INSIGHTFUL (WISE) IN THE SCRIPTURES. THAT, COUPLED WITH HIS GREAT COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS, ALLOWS PEOPLE TO "FEEL" ON THE WORD AND LEAVE "WITH SOMETHING". PEOPLE ARE "CONVICTED" WITHOUT HAVING BEEN BADGERED.

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective".

ABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASK OR RECEIVE A DESIRED RESPONSE

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher? YES - VERY

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

HE APPLIES SCRIPTURE TO OUR LIVES (AT VARYING LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING BASED ON HIS AUDIENCE) AND RECEIVES THE PROPER RESPONSE OF PEOPLE WANTING TO COMMIT THEIR LIVES TO CHRIST IN ORDER TO RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE.

GENERAL -

MANY PEOPLE ARE DRAWN TO SOUTHEAST
DUE TO BOB RUSSELL'S PREACHING AND CONTINUE
THEIR GROWTH DUE TO THE MANY WAY THEY
ARE MINISTERED TO IN OTHER AREAS. BOB SERVES
WITH A GREAT STAFF AND THE LORD CONTINUES
TO BLESS AND MULTIPLY.

BEN -

I'M SORRY THIS IS SO LATE. IT GOT
LOST IN THE "PILES" AND WAS RETRIEVED
AFTER YOUR MISSION MESSAGE AT CHURCH.
MAY GOD BLESS YOUR MISSION EFFORTS.

AC
3-3-91

THESIS RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Name of Respondent: Robert L. Ott

Ben F. Pennington
Rt. 2, Box 226
Neoga, Il. 62447

1. From your own perspective, what is your view (opinion, concept, impression, perception) of Bob Russell's preaching ministry?

It is relevant to our day and time. No issue is unspeakable. It is uplifting and encouraging even when he is addressing issues that hurt and make you uncomfortable. He talks to or with you rather than preach at you. He spends many, many hours in preparation, but not

2. Please define your idea of the word "effective". *only studying scriptures.*

Makes you want to listen and hunger for more! Easy to understand and prompts you to action. Could be just thinking or introspection, but you can't leave and do nothing.

3. Do you believe that Robert Russell is an effective speaker/preacher?

Yes

If yes, why do you consider him to be effective? If not, why not?

He is transparent, so people can relate to him. He's just like the average man. He understands people's needs. He knows what is going on in the world and society today. He associates mostly with non-staff people. He knows what his gift is and he enriches it daily. It is evident that Jesus is Lord of his life. He doesn't

(Please use the back for additional comments)

understand why God has chosen him for the wonderful

blessings at Southeast. He blesses it in his life and he talks about it. But just because he blesses it and we do, it doesn't change God. His ability to explain and relate the scriptures to us is truly a gift. His insight has been developed by an extraordinary amount of time spent in study and preparation of every aspect (scripture, life, and society, and world events).