

## **ABSTRACT**

# **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN EXPOSITORY SERMON SERIES ON THE BOOK OF JONAH TO PRODUCE COGNITIVE, ATTITUDINAL, AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE AT CROSSROADS UMC IN WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS**

**By Jason B. Woolever**

Expository preaching is a style of preaching not currently being taught in seminaries which train United Methodist pastors even though it has been successfully utilized in various forms in other Christian traditions for centuries. There was an interest among some people of Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois for biblical preaching with a focus on life application. This intervention project tested effectiveness of expository preaching at Crossroads to produce cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral changes among worship participants. The sermons in this five-week sermon series were designed in a running commentary style, taking the congregation verse-by-verse through the book of Jonah during the season of Lent. The literature review drew from the writings conservative evangelical preachers who have emphasized the expository method, such as John Broadus, Charles Swindoll, Brian Chappell, and Timothy Keller, and progressive homiletics professor Ronald Allen. The effectiveness of the sermon series was measured using pre- and post-test surveys for quantitative data collection and focus groups for qualitative data collection.

This research demonstrates that expository preaching increases biblical literacy in the lives of those who are regularly exposed to it and has the potential to facilitate significant changes in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. This study also found that

expository preaching has the potential to provide a positive learning experience for mainline churches when relevant application, conversational delivery, and short sermon series are utilized. A surprise finding was that using pre- and post-test surveys with the congregation increases the effectiveness of expository preaching.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN EXPOSITORY SERMON SERIES ON THE  
BOOK OF JONAH TO PRODUCE COGNITIVE, ATTITUDINAL, AND  
BEHAVIORAL CHANGE AT CROSSROADS UMC IN WASHINGTON,  
ILLINOIS**

presented by

Jason B. Woolever

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

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ILLINOIS**

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

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

by

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May 2019

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my wife, Jennice, for her unending support during the completion of this project. I would also like to thank the people of Crossroads United Methodist Church and Bethel United Methodist Church who encouraged me and cheered me on throughout my Doctor of Ministry studies. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Ellen Marmon and the amazing faculty and staff of the Asbury Doctor of Ministry program for creating and facilitating such an amazing transformative learning platform.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter explains the nature of this project. It begins with an autobiographical narrative which describes my early experience with expository preaching and later experimentation within my own ministry. It then describes the problem this project seeks to address, states the purpose of the research, and states the research questions. After giving the rationale for the research, this chapter gives a definition of expository preaching, discusses the delimitations of the project, and offers an overview of the relevant literature. Finally, this chapter gives a description of the research methodology utilized in the project and closes with a brief project overview.

### **Personal Introduction**

Although I was raised in a Christian home and attended a United Methodist church with my family until I graduated high school, I did not understand the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ until my early twenties. After a season away from the church during college, I began seeking God again, and I found myself spending a good deal of time listening to preachers on the radio. One of the characteristics of their preaching that drew me in was the way that they preached and taught directly from the Scriptures. They spoke as if the listeners were following along with the passage in their own Bibles. They asked their listeners to turn to different passages of Scripture at different points in their message. I found myself sitting in my apartment in Austin, Texas each evening with my Bible open, following along as I listened to these preachers explain and apply the Scriptures. At previous times in my life, I had read the Bible occasionally but looking at the pages of Scripture as they were explained by these preachers made the text come alive. It had a profound impact on my decision to become a preacher.

While attending seminary, the preaching classes I participated in focused on a style of preaching that was similar to the style I remember from my childhood. The instructors suggested that two or three Scripture passages should be read before the sermon and that the preacher should select a “gem” or “insight” from one of the passages to build the sermon on. It was also suggested that the sermon should be from twelve to twenty minutes in length and preferably delivered from a manuscript while standing behind a pulpit. While there were many gifted preachers amongst the faculty at the seminary I attended, I still found myself inwardly drawn to the open-Bible expository style of preaching that had such an impact on my own development.

When I had opportunities to preach outside of the seminary setting at my local church, I experimented with a more open-Bible expository approach to preaching, wondering if it would be rejected or received. I found that people were not resistant when asked to follow along in their own Bibles while I referred to specific verses. After completing seminary, I was appointed to be an associate pastor at a medium-sized theologically moderate United Methodist church in northern Illinois. Again, I experimented with an open-Bible expository approach to preaching and found that people were not resistant to the use of a different approach. Many people seemed excited because that they felt they were “learning something” in a way that they had not before in their experience of listening to sermons.

Since entering full-time ministry in 2002, I have grown as a preacher and become more comfortable with my own style of “verse by verse” or open-Bible expository preaching. I have often wondered why more time is not spent teaching this style of preaching to pastors. Most of my own style was developed through dissecting and analyzing the sermons of my favorite preachers and reading books post-seminary.

I have a hunch that this style of biblical preaching directly appeals to people who are not as literate in Bible knowledge as people of previous generations. Perhaps many people in mainline churches would appreciate this style of preaching if done well. I feel that perhaps this is a historically significant style of preaching which many mainline pastors could add to their preaching “toolbox” to great advantage.

From 2007 to 2015, I served as the pastor of a congregation that grew from fifty-six people in weekly attendance to approximately two hundred and eighty when I left. The main thrust of my ministry was developed around expository preaching. In July of 2015, I was reappointed to a church which averages approximately 780 in weekly worship attendance. The directing pastor who preceded me had a reputation for being a strong preacher, but there was dissatisfaction among some of the leadership with the content of his sermons. When I was introduced to the Pastor Parish Relations Committee, it was expressed that the pastor’s sermons did not utilize the Scriptures as much as members of the congregation desired. They were hoping that the next pastor would be one who preached and taught the Bible with direct application to the listeners’ lives. As I reviewed some of the sermon videos of the pastor, I was surprised that the leadership did not find his sermons satisfying. The sermons were not expository in nature, but the key points were based on the biblical text and the sermons were delivered well.

I pondered whether it was possible that the style of preaching the leaders of this congregation craved was expository preaching. Since arriving at Crossroads in 2015, the associate pastor and I have experimented with different styles of preaching and sermon series. We have conducted topical series, series which followed the church calendar, and expository series. We have also extended the sermon time from its previous fifteen to twenty-five minute length under previous pastors to twenty-five to thirty-five minutes. It is possible that what people



wanted was more Scriptural engagement and more substantive sermons in general rather than merely expository preaching. However, a study of the effectiveness of expository preaching for this congregation seemed worthwhile.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are many types of preaching that are taught in seminaries today. These include narrative preaching, the Lowry loop, first-person preaching, topical preaching, and others. One style that has suffered neglect in the mainline seminaries is expository preaching. This style of preaching in its various manifestations has been utilized continuously throughout the history of the church (Allen and Bartholomew vii–viii). Studies have shown that modern congregations from various theological persuasions have positive experiences with this type of preaching (2). Studies have also shown that expository preaching is also very appealing to people who are new to the Christian faith (Rainer, loc. 810). Because of the historic significance of expository preaching and its proven track record in churches of today, it is worth examining whether mainline churches like the United Methodist Church could successfully integrate this style of preaching into their weekly gatherings.

In addition to current trends, there was an expressed desire at Crossroads United Methodist Church for biblical preaching with direct application to the lives of the hearers. This project provided an opportunity to test the effectiveness of an expository sermon series through a book of the Bible. It also allowed the opportunity for the congregants to express their response to this style. The book of Jonah served as an ideal book of the Bible for this research for a number of reasons. First, it was ideal because of its length. It was short enough that it could test the value of an expository series through a book of the Bible without going on extensively if the research had an adverse effect. The length of the book also allowed Jonah to be covered in its entirety in a

five-week series. Second, it was ideal because of its content. Jonah has been used to draw a line in the sand between people who interpret the Bible literally and those who do not. People who believe it is a literal historical narrative separate themselves from those who think Jonah is not a historical account. To argue about whether or not Jonah is a historical narrative is to overlook the very message of the book (Fretheim 61). Crossroads United Methodist Church is a church that considers itself Bible-based, and a majority would lean toward a literal interpretation of Jonah. The expository sermon series of the book of Jonah challenged the congregation to go beyond the question of historicity to understand the greater the issues of God's compassion toward all people, God's sovereignty over his creation, God's concern for the attitudes of his people, and other key themes.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes in the worship participants at Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois as a result of an expository sermon series on the book of Jonah that was presented over a five-week period.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Research Question #1**

What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in regard to the book of Jonah prior to the sermon series?

#### **Research Question #2**

What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in regard to the book of Jonah after the sermon series?

#### **Research Question #3**

What elements of the sermon design and delivery assisted the participants in experiencing these changes?

### **Rationale for the Project**

The primary rationale for this project comes from Scripture itself. Jesus said that wise people not only listen to his teachings but also put them into practice in their daily lives (Matthew 7:24-25; Luke 6:47-48). Paul wrote that all Scripture is a gift from God to “teach us what is true and make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT). The expository method of preaching is one that has the simple aim of explaining the Scriptures and applying them to people’s lives to promote understanding and obedience.

There are several additional reasons that provide rationale for this project. The first reason this study matters is because expository preaching has a long running history in the Church (Allen and Bartholomew 2-31; Stitzinger 5-32). Because preachers have utilized expository preaching for hundreds of years, it is important that the practice be examined. A second reason this study matters is because expository preaching is proving to have positive effects in some churches which use it (Allen and Bartholomew 2; Rainer, loc. 810). Because it appeals to long-time Christians and those new to the faith alike, it is important that expository preaching be considered as a sound option in mainline churches, like The United Methodist Church, today.

A third reason this study matters is because there are many benefits which are named by advocates of expository preaching. These include benefits the preacher receives as well as benefits the congregation receives. One benefit to the preacher is the saving of time for Scripture

selection and research(Richard 17; Vines 35; Swindoll 94; Chapell, *Christ -Centered* 66).

Expository preaching also safeguards the preacher against the tendency to only preach on popular topics or favorite topics(Richard 17; Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 66; Doriani 35). It also prevents the preacher from avoiding difficult subjects which occur in Scripture(Stedman 202; Vinesand Shaddix34-35). The research required for expository preaching is perceived to provide spiritual nourishment to the soul of the preacher(Richard 17; Koller 29). Expository preaching allows the preacher to communicate with the authority derived from the Scriptures themselves as they are presented with the intention of communicating the author's intended meaning(Swindoll 137; Carson 1). A benefit of expository preaching for the congregation is an increase in biblical literacy(Richard 18; Vines 34; Koller 29). It also teaches listeners how to study the Scriptures on their own(Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 66; Carson; Doriani 35). In addition, expository preaching helps the listeners focus on the Scriptures as opposed to their own problems (which can occur with topical preaching)(Koller 30).

A fourth reason this study matters is because Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois has entered into a new era as a congregation. In July 2015, they received a new directing pastor after eleven years with their previous one. They are in the process of discerning what their identity will be among many other large churches in the area, many of them are very conservative. The congregation seemed to be longing for preaching which is more directly from the Bible. Since the arrival of their new pastor in 2015, the congregation has been exposed to several different styles of preaching. This study allowed the researcher to gain direct feedback about whether the expository method was effective in facilitating desired change and whether it was desirable for future sermons.

A fifth reason this study matters was because Jonah has important themes which Crossroads needed to grapple with. As a comfortable, upper middle class congregation, Crossroads needed to be reminded of God's compassion toward all people, those close in proximity and those far away. As a congregation in a community which went through a major catastrophe due to an EF4 tornado in November of 2013, Crossroads needed to be gain a biblical understanding of God's sovereignty over his creation. Since that time, the world has experienced a number of other natural disasters which raise theological questions in people's minds. As a congregation living in a time where there is growing religious strife due to local and global terrorism, Crossroads needed to be made aware of God's concern for the attitudes of his people. As a conservative evangelical congregation, Crossroads needed to be made aware that the message of the book of Jonah is much more than a story of a man being miraculously kept alive inside the belly of the fish. Finally, it was advantageous for the people of Crossroads to understand how Jonah foreshadows the ultimate rescue which has come and is coming through Christ and how that should strengthen their faith and practice.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Expository preaching—For the sake of this research, expository preaching was defined as preaching which focuses on explaining and applying a specific biblical text in a worship setting.

### **Delimitations**

The research for this study was conducted at Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois. This setting was chosen because it is the congregation that I have been appointed to pastor for this season. I have a desire to develop a preaching ministry which will serve this church throughout my tenure and beyond. I wanted to listen to the desires for more biblical preaching expressed by the church prior to my arrival and experiment with the

expository method as a response. Five weeks seemed like an ideal length because it allowed an entire biblical book to be covered without exhausting the congregation if they had waning interest. The relatively short span of five weeks also increased likelihood that there would be enough participants who had experienced all of the sermons so that the study would be meaningful.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The literature for this project was collected primarily from books and journal articles about expository preaching. There were several books which are cited frequently by advocates of expository preaching. In the current era, two of the most frequently noted are Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* and Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. Robinson's text was originally published in 1980 and was released in its third edition in 2014. Chapell's text was originally published in 1994 and its second edition was released in 2005. Both of these authors continue to have significant influence on modern proponents of expository preaching. Another influential text often noted by advocates of expository preaching is *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* by John Stott which was published in 1982. A text noted in Baptist circles was written by Jerry Vines and entitled *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation*. It was published in 1985 and was followed by *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* in 1986. These two volumes were combined into a single volume and edited by Jerry Shaddix for the 1999 release entitled *Power in the Pulpit*.

Charles Koller's book *Expository Preaching Without Notes*, published in 1962, was also very helpful. It was followed in 1964 by *Sermons Preached Without Notes*. In 2007, the two volumes were published together as *How to Preach Without Notes*. The volume named by

Chapell as being the most foundational to modern expository preaching is *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* by John Broadus. This preaching textbook was originally released in 1870 and the fourth edition was released in 1979. A volume which demonstrates how expository preaching can be utilized in churches of various theological persuasions today is *Preaching Verse by Verse* by Ronald Allen and Gilbert Bartholomew. The text was released in 1999 and gives an apologetic for verse-by-verse expository preaching, laying a historical foundation. It then offers a step-by-step process for the development of running commentary sermons in various forms. The above volumes generally give short defenses of the practice of expository preaching, laying theological and biblical foundations for it. They then focus on instruction in how to develop and deliver expository sermons. The journal articles that were surveyed were largely defensive in nature, arguing that expository preaching is the most biblical model and that it ought to be used above all others.

For developing the sermons on Jonah, four primary resources were used in addition to the researcher's personal biblical examination of the text in various Bible translations. Two of them—*The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* by Terence E. Fretheim and *Jonah: The Old Testament Commentary* by James Limburg—were chosen because they are the first two books on the on the “highly recommended” list of commentaries for the book of Jonah in David R. Bauer's *Essential Bible Study Tools for Ministry* (Location 4718). The third, *Man Overboard! The Story of Jonah* by Sinclair B. Ferguson was chosen at the recommendation of fellow pastors. The fourth, the *NLT Study Bible*, was chosen as an accessible resource for basic background which is based on the translation of the Bible which is found in the pews of Crossroads UMC. Because of its presence in the congregation, it is the translation most often used in sermon

presentation at Crossroads. The scholar who authored the Jonah commentary in the *NLTSB* is G. Patrick LaCosse.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Type of Research**

This project utilized mixed methods to accomplish its research purpose. This study was an intervention by nature, and both quantitative and qualitative tools were used. The quantitative tools were pre-test and post-test surveys which were taken before and after the five-week sermon series on Jonah. They were electronic surveys created and administered by Survey Monkey. A link to the surveys was sent to every person on the Crossroads UMC email list with a cover letter explaining the research being conducted. The participants were asked to create a code based on the last four digits of their social security number to allow for confidentiality.

Only participants who heard all five of the sermons were considered valid participants because of the need for them to be exposed to the entire book of Jonah to test the effectiveness of the series. An email inviting participants to take the first survey was sent out two weeks before the first sermon in the series. An email inviting participants to take the second survey was sent out the week after the completion of the last sermon in the series.

The qualitative tools employed for this were four focus groups, two from each worship service, each made up of eight volunteers. The volunteers were randomly selected by the researcher's personal assistant after everyone who was willing to participate in a focus group had responded to an email request for focus group participants.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were the members of Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois. The church was established in 1828 by Methodist circuit rider Jesse



Walker. The original church building was located in downtown Washington until the congregation moved to a larger facility at a new location in 2001. In 2005, the church changed its name from First United Methodist Church to Crossroads United Methodist Church. The name symbolizes the location of the church which is at the corner of Illinois Route 24 and Main Street.

After moving, the congregation grew from approximately 480 in weekly worship attendance to approximately 800 in attendance in 2010. The church built a new sanctuary in 2011 which they still owe \$4,000,000 on. In January 2015, it was announced that the Directing Pastor of eleven years was being reappointed to serve at another parish. When the Pastor Parish Relations Committee was interviewed by the District Superintendent about what they felt the church needed in a new pastor, they expressed that they wanted a pastor who preached the Scriptures and applied it to their lives. They felt that the sermons had been filled with too many stories which were not taken from Scripture. The researcher was appointed to begin serving as the Directing Pastor of this congregation in July 2015. The town of Washington is inhabited by 15,000 people and is located on the east side of Peoria, Illinois. Many of the people in the town, and thus many people in the church, are employed by Caterpillar Inc. Approximately 99 percent of the members and attenders at Crossroads UMC are Caucasian. Many of the men and women of the congregation are engineers at Caterpillar, Inc. Everyone affiliated with Crossroads UMC who had submitted their email address to the church database was invited to participate in taking the pre- and post-test surveys. The participants in the focus groups were chosen from the two different worship services since they reach slightly different demographics.

### **Instrumentation**

The data needed to answer the first two research questions was collected primarily through two researcher-designed fixed-choice surveys administered electronically. The pre-test

survey was designed by the researcher and covered several topics relevant to the research. There were ten items to measure the participant's knowledge about the Jonah. Ten items measured the participant's beliefs and attitudes toward themes that are addressed in Jonah. Finally, ten questions measured the participant's behaviors that might be affirmed or challenged by the series on Jonah. The thirty-question post-test survey was identical to the pre-test survey with the addition of one open-ended question seeking specific comments about the sermon series. The focus group method was employed as the primary instrument for collecting data to answer the third research question even though the seven questions opened the conversation about the project in general and the other research questions.

### **Data Collection**

The quantitative data for this study was collected through pre- and post-test surveys. These surveys were designed by the researcher, identical in content, and administered electronically through Survey Monkey. A link to the survey with an invitation to participate was sent out to every person on the church email list.

The qualitative data was collected through focus groups made up of volunteers from each worship service. The entire congregation was invited to volunteer to be a part of the focus groups as long as they had been present for or listened online to each of the five sermons in the sermon series. From those who volunteered, the researcher's personal assistant randomly selected sixteen participants from each worship service. These were broken up into two focus groups. The focus group meetings used a discussion guide and a facilitator to lead the discussion. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis by the researcher.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this project was multi-faceted. The quantitative data generated from the pre- and post-test surveys were initially analyzed using the tools provided by Survey Monkey. The open-ended question at the end of the post-test survey was analyzed along with the qualitative data gathered from the researcher's personal notes and the focus groups. All data gathered in this project was analyzed using Moschella's three-tier approach to reading data (Moschella 172-73; Sensing 196-97). In addition, the coding of data for the sake of detailed thematic analysis relied upon the practices put forth as Creswell's eight-step coding process as explained by Tim Sensing (Creswell 192; Sensing 204-205).

## **Generalizability**

This study could be repeated by any pastor in a position to preach a sermon series to a congregation of people. Depending on access to technology, the data collection plan might need to be adjusted to meet the needs of the participants. The selection of focus group participants would also need to be adjusted to fit the demographic and worship schedule of the congregation where the study was conducted.

## **Project Overview**

Chapter 2 of this project reviews literature related to the biblical, theological, historical, and pastoral foundations for expository preaching and then offers exegetical discussion related to the genre, authorship, historical setting, and themes and content of the book of Jonah.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology which was utilized in the execution of this project.

Chapter 4 offers analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data which was gathered through the research of this project.

Chapter 5 details the major findings of this research and discusses relevant applications for future ministry.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Overview of Chapter

This chapter of the dissertation is divided into four sections. The first section addresses the biblical and theological foundations for the project. The second section examines a selected sample of books and journal articles which discuss expository preaching. It discusses various definitions of expository preaching, historical foundations for expository preaching, and benefits and criticisms of it. The third section addresses the book of Jonah. It was developed using four primary resources and has two divisions. The first division discusses background information on the book of Jonah, including genre, authorship, dating, and major themes of the book. The second division shares the researcher's sermon exegesis for each of the five periscopes into which the book of Jonah was divided for this project. The final section of this chapter describes the research design and the literature which was utilized in the construction of the project.

#### Biblical and Theological Foundations

##### Biblical Foundations

This section of the literature review will examine first the Old Testament foundations and then the New Testament foundations of expository preaching.

**Old Testament Foundations.** Most proponents of expository preaching cite Ezra as the primary biblical example of an expository preacher (Vines and Shaddix 19; Briscoe 125–6; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* 86–7; Deuel 125; S. Ferguson 77; Smith 53). David C. Deuel states “Ezra embodies an early and inspiring example for expositors of all ages” (126). The primary passage from Nehemiah which describes expository preaching is Nehemiah 8:5-8:

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup> Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. (NRSV)

The key verse from this passage, which acts as a basis for expository preaching, is verse 8. The basic steps to expository preaching are laid out in this verse. The Scripture is read and then explained so that it can be understood and acted upon. Many have examined the meaning of this verse extensively. Steven J. Lawson points out that the Hebrew word translated as “read” is the same word that is used in the book of Jonah to describe how he “cried out” to the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:4). This word is used multiple times in the Old Testament to refer to someone calling out. This points to the necessity of a careful and passionate public reading of Scripture before it is expounded upon (Lawson, *Pattern* 462). Michael A Fishbane perceives that Ezra was very diligent to give “exact pronunciations, intonation and phrasing, so as to make the unites of the piece and its traditional sense readily comprehensible” (Lawson, *Pattern* 462–3; Fishbane 109). When he read the text, Ezra and the other preachers did so “with interpretation.” This is the expositional part of what Ezra did. Derek Kidner notes that this phrase could imply “either that the reading was well articulated or that the law was read and expounded section by section. Either of these would be appropriate, probably both were true” (106). Then the preachers “gave the sense,” so that all of the people could understand the text that had been read. Deuel writes,

Few other passages in the OT or the NT depict expositional preaching in such detail for what it truly is, i.e., ‘exposing’ the written Word of God to the community of faith so that the people hear with a view to learning, learn with a view to fearing, and fear with a view to practicing godliness.

He also points out the while we do not have knowledge of how Ezra might have applied this passage specifically to the lives of his listeners, we understand this passage to be an example of the Law being reapplied to a new context, the post-exilic community (136).

The significance of Nehemiah 8 to expository preaching cannot be overstated. Vines comments that these verses from Nehemiah 8 are “an excellent illustration of a preaching event” (19). Stuart Briscoe writes, “For many years these verses have served as the basis for my attempts at preaching” (126). Chapell said this is “[p]robably the best description of ancient exposition,” and believes that it demonstrates the process of presenting the Word, explaining the Word, and then exhortation with application which all preaching should follow (Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 86–87). Chuck Smith stated, “I believe this is a worthy definition of expository preaching- to read the Word, give the sense, and case the people to understand the meaning” (Smith 53). For Smith, this passage from Nehemiah *defined* the appropriate form of biblical preaching. Fishbane points out that that there is no evidence that Ezra was enacting a new form of communication. Rather he “inherited a venerable Israelite tradition of scribal and textual scholarship” (Deuel 126; Fishbane 37). Thus not only did Ezra utilize expository preaching but also demonstrated that it was in common usage in ancient times.

Ezra also modeled a private commitment to God’s instructions which is fundamental to being an expository preaching. Ezra 7 reads, “He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that the LORD the God of Israel had given... Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and

to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (vss.6, 10). Lawson puts forth that this should be the pattern that all preachers should follow being “committed to the study of Scriptures in a way that is consuming, careful, and comprehensive” (Lawson, *Pattern* 457). In addition to Ezra’s private disciplines of study and obedience, he also instructed leaders apart from the congregation (Ezra 8:13; Deuel 137).

While Ezra’s ministry as described in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra appears to be the only Old Testament example, which lays a foundation for expository preaching, the example of Ezra’s ministry is extremely significant for expository preaching advocates.

**New Testament Foundations.** There are six passages of Scripture which are used by some to lay a foundation for expository preaching from the New Testament. These are Luke 4:16-28, Luke 24:13-35, Acts 20:26-27, I Timothy 4:13, 2 Timothy 2:15, and 2 Timothy 4:2-5. Each of these will be discussed in this section of the literature review and then assessed.

Luke 4:16-28, a passage from the early ministry of Jesus, is sometimes pointed to as an example of expository preaching. In the passage, Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day according to his custom. He stood up to perform a Scripture reading. He read Isaiah 61:1-2a. Following the Scripture reading, he sat down and made commentary or expounded on the passage. If this could be considered preaching in the traditional sense, it would fit a very broad definition of expository preaching. Richard L. Mayhue accepts this as an example of expository preaching (119). David Jackman states plainly, “This account establishes Jesus as an expository preacher” (Jackman 3). Vines writes that Jesus “was set upon providing clear explanation to His hearers, both in the synagogue worship and in other contexts. He often read and explained Scriptures as a visiting rabbi” (19). For Vines, this passage demonstrates a pattern Jesus frequently followed for preaching rather than an isolated incident.



Another Scripture passage sometimes understood as foundational for expository preachers is Luke 24:13-35 (Vines and Shaddix 19). As the resurrected Jesus walked along the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and an unnamed companion, his identity was unknown to them. The two travelers were downcast because of Jesus' crucifixion, saying they had hoped that Jesus "was the one who would redeem Israel." Their disappointment had been compounded by the report of the women who had said that the angels had told them that Jesus was alive. Others had investigated the tomb and found it empty but had not seen Jesus. Then in verses 25-27, Jesus exclaimed, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures." Mayhue refers to Jesus' response recorded in verse 28 as a "thematic exposition" (Mayhue 119). Chapell says the Greek word *diermeneuo*, translated "interpreted" means "to unfold the meaning of something," which is a key part of expository preaching (Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 86). After Cleopas and the other disciple realized that it was the resurrected Jesus who had been walking with them, they remarked in verse 32, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" Chapell explains that the verb *dianoigo*, translated as "was opening" expresses the idea of showing the full implications of something, like opening a door to show what's inside. In response, he states, "*Unfolding and opening* the meaning of the Word of God characterize the expositor's task" (Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 86). In an article, *The Future of Expository Preaching*, Chapell points out that verse 27 shows us that in all expository preaching we should follow the example of Christ in showing how the Old Testament writings foreshadowed Christ (Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching" 73).

Another passage, which is seen as foundational for a number of expository preachers, is Acts 20:20-27. In his article *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, Mayhue states that the “spirit of expository preaching is exemplified” in Nehemiah 8:8 and Acts 20:26-27 (Mayhue 118). In the Acts passage, Paul was bidding farewell to the elders in Ephesus and said, “I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Mayhue 118). The King James Version emphasizes what many expository preachers see as important in Acts 20:27. It translates the last phrase as “whole counsel of God” rather than “whole purpose of God.” This verse is especially significant to expositors who believe that the correct form of expository preaching is to take a congregation verse by verse through entire books of the Bible. Chuck Smith, the founding pastor of the Calvary Chapel denomination of churches, says that this type of preaching was a “Distinctive” of Calvary Chapel churches. Noting Acts 20:27, he writes,

Now, how is it possible for a person to claim to have declared ‘*the whole counsel of God?*’ The only way a person could make that claim to his congregation would be if he taught through the whole Word of God with them, from Genesis to Revelation.” (Smith 51)

Briscoe does not believe this passage speaks to the need for preaching exhaustively through every book of the Bible but is a call to not “treat vast areas of Scripture with benign neglect” (Briscoe 107). The implication of Acts 20:27 for Briscoe is variance and faithfulness to the overarching biblical witness as opposed to exhaustiveness. For D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, preaching the whole counsel of God means preaching individual passages of Scripture in light of the whole of Scripture rather than as isolated texts (Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* 78).

Paul's instructions to Timothy are also considered foundational to the practice of expository preaching (Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 86; Mayhue 113). In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul wrote, "Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching." Chapell points to this text as example of how the three-fold pattern of presentation, explanation, and exhortation, which is laid out in Nehemiah 8, was utilized in New Testament times. Presentation of the Word is "the public reading of Scripture;" explanation of the Word is "teaching;" exhortation from the Word is "exhortation." (Chapell, *Christ-centered* 86). This pattern is also seen in 2 Timothy 4:2 where Paul instructed Timothy, "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (NIV). According to Chapell's formula, presentation of the Word is "preach the word," explaining the Word is "with careful instruction," and exhorting or applying the Word is "correct, rebuke, and encourage" (Chapell, *Christ-centered* 86).

James F. Stinzinger offers an interesting analysis of how New Testament preaching transitioned into expository preaching. In his article *The History of Expository Preaching*, he allows for two basic forms of preaching in the Bible. The first was *revelatory*. Revelatory preaching occurred when the Word of God came through the preaching, speaking, or writing of prophets, apostles, or Christ himself. This was *new information* or revelation. The other form of preaching was *explanatory*. Explanatory preaching is what we call expository preaching. It is an explanation of a body of revelation that has already been spoken or written. Ezra utilized explanatory preaching because he was preaching or teaching the law of Moses. Stitzinger lists the speeches of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 4:16-29 as examples of Jesus doing preaching that is both revelatory and explanatory since he is giving new revelation and unfolding prerecorded revelation (9). Many of the speeches of the early church preachers found in the book

of Acts also fall into this category, including Peter's Pentecost speech in Acts 2:14-36, Stephen's testimony in Acts 7:2-53, and James' speech to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:14-21 (10).

When the canon arrives at Timothy, Paul's instructions to Timothy call for Timothy to focus only on *explanatory* proclamation. These include 1 Timothy 4:13, 2 Timothy 4:2-5, and also 2 Timothy 2:15 which says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth." Stitzinger deduces,

While earlier preachers of Scripture gave both revelatory and explanatory messages, the 'Timothys' sent out by them were to concentrate on explanations... As the NT era drew to a close, the work of biblical preachers became that of explanation only rather than or revelation and explanation.(11)

Stitzinger, employed at The Master's Seminary at the time of this writing, approaches Scripture from a Dispensational perspective. His view of the spiritual gift of revelatory prophecy would be that it ceased to be operative after the close of the apostolic era. However, his remarks about the biblical witness demonstrating preachers expounding on prerecorded revelation and the instructions for Timothy to act in this manner are noteworthy.

These passages from the biblical record, which are often cited as foundational to expository preaching, lead to a number of conclusions. The example of Ezra clearly demonstrates a method of running commentary oratory which was used effectively by an Old Testament priest and those who assisted him and gave a pattern which has been continued to be utilized for thousands of years. The example of Jesus in Luke 4 shows that Jesus honored the synagogue preaching customs of first century Judaism and used them to communicate God's message to people of his time, opening their eyes to the fulfillment of prophetic writings. It must be acknowledged that Jesus' comments following the Scripture reading would not meet the

criteria for expository preaching set forth by most proponents of the style in modern times. The example of Jesus on the Road to Emmaus demonstrates the need for the Scriptures to be expounded and for people to understand how Christ fits into the grand narrative of redemption. This biblical episode offers some justification for expository preaching; it must be acknowledged that it does not detail an actual preaching event in Scripture. Using Paul's parting words to the Ephesians in Acts 20:27 as a foundation for systematic expository preaching seems to lack plausibility. A more natural reading of the text is that he communicated to them everything that God had instructed him was necessary and prudent for them to know. Nevertheless, Acts 20:27 can inspire preachers of God's Word to preach from all parts of the Bible with faithfulness and variance rather than preaching only from familiar or easily accessible texts. The most persuasive biblical foundation for expository preaching seems to come from looking at Paul's instructions to Timothy after considering the example of Ezra. Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2 fall the most naturally into the pattern illustrated in Nehemiah 8 and the pattern established by Chapell. While it is not possible to say that these passages from the pastoral epistles offer definitive instructions for Christian preachers of all time, these instructions to Timothy do establish the pattern of preaching which has been used historically and could be described as expository.

### **Theological Foundations**

There are two theological convictions which are foundational for the majority of proponents of expository preaching and which incline them toward preaching in this manner. These foundational convictions are the doctrine of the verbal plenary inspiration of the Scriptures and the inerrancy of Scriptures. In this section, the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture will be

discussed followed by an explanation of the specific doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration. Then the doctrine of inerrancy will be discussed.

The key Scriptural passage that addresses the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The passage reads, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (NRSV). The Greek word translated as “inspired” in verse 16 is *theopneustos*. The New International Version translates the same word as “God-breathed.” The English Standard Version opts for “breathed out by God.” Thomas Oden notes that *theopneustos* does not imply inspiration as modern people commonly use of the word. While the phrase “inspiration of Scripture” is the common title given to this doctrine, the Greek word “focuses on the simple spiration (breathing) of God’s own life into the written word, rather than upon an autonomous process of *inspiration* as is separable from the Speaker-Breather-Inspirer” (Oden 68). The writer was not inspired by God’s beauty or power as one might be when looking at a sunset or majestic landscape. Rather, God was utilizing the faculties, writing styles, and particularities of the human writer to breath into existence the writings through which human beings come to a saving knowledge of God and grow in grace. This means that the writings of Scripture “remain as truly God’s own address as if spoken audibly from Sinai’s burning bush” (Oden 69). It is for this reason that the Scriptures are referred to as the Word of God. Richard Holland explains that expository preaching is “driven by the commitment to the Bible as the Word of God” (Holland 30). Reformed pastor John Piper writes, “Where the Bible is esteemed the inspired and inerrant Word of God, preaching can flourish. But where the Bible is treated merely as a record of valuable religious insight, preaching dies” (Piper 40). John Stott believes that an appropriate definition of Scripture is “God’s Word written.” He borrowed this

phrase from Article 20 of the Church of England's 39 Articles (Stott 96). Not only do advocates of expository preaching believe the Scriptures are inspired by God but also that it is necessary that the expository preacher have this conviction and be motivated and guided by it (Vines 53). The goal of the expository preacher to explain and apply the given text is undergirded by the conviction that it is inspired by God.

There are different understandings of the doctrine of inspiration. Some have suggested that the communities which produced the Scriptures were inspired by God. Others have suggested that the individuals who wrote the Scriptures were inspired. Others have suggested that it was merely the concepts communicated in Scripture which were inspired. The view of inspiration held to by most expository preaching advocates is often referred to as "verbal plenary inspiration." *Verbal* refers to the idea that the word of Scripture themselves are God-breathed, and *plenary* refers to belief that the entire canon of Scripture is inspired (Vines and Shaddix 50). In his 1958 book *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, J.I. Packer defended this doctrine against those who held to "dictation theory" which supposes that the Holy Spirit dictated the exact words the biblical writer should use. Rather than dictate wording, "God completely adapted His inspiring activity to the cast of mind, outlook, temperament, interest, literary habits, and stylistic idiosyncrasies of each writer" (Vines and Shaddix 50-51; Packer 51). Stott agrees with Packer about inspiration not meaning dictation. The Holy Spirit placed the Word of God in human minds and mouths so that their thoughts and words were completely their own as well as God's own (Stott 97).

In *The Meaning of Inspiration*, Frank Gaebelein, explains that the writers of Scripture "wrote under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God, the result being in every word of the original documents a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message which God desired to

give to man” (Vines and Shaddix 50;Gaebelein 9). This view holds that the verbal expressions recorded by the biblical writers in the original manuscripts were guided by the Holy Spirit even though their personalities were not hindered (Vines; Pache 71).

The idea of plenary inspiration is derived also from 2 Timothy 3:16 which says that “*all* Scripture is inspired by God and is useful.” For expository preachers, this includes every book of the Protestant canon of Scripture. For this reason, Sinclair Ferguson explains, “it follows that all Scripture is relevant to preaching and, indeed, preachable. No pastor can dodge his responsibility to ransack the whole of Scripture and expound it in its entirety” (S.B. Ferguson 76). This is partially why expositors believe in the benefit of preaching systematically through books of the Bible. Even the parts that are less well known are inspired and useful. Holland states that Paul’s charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 was to emphasize that “every part of the sacred writings, even the smallest, which provide wisdom until salvation is a product of God... *every* part and *all* parts of Scripture are God-breathed” (35). The doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture is central to understanding the motives of most advocates of expository preaching. Holland proclaims, “Inspiration’s influence on what, how, and why we preach expositionally cannot be overstated. If we have a canon that was breathed out from writers by God, what could possibly rival it as sermonic material” (36). It is apparent from Holland’s statement that his conviction is that expository preaching is the only type of preaching that honors the inspired nature of Scripture.

It must be noted that the doctrine of inspiration is only to be considered applicable to the original manuscripts of Scripture. Thus any other manuscript, including modern Bible translations, would not be considered “inspired by God” and “God-breathed” in this doctrinal sense. Though the original manuscripts are not available for consideration, it is commonly held



that textual criticism has made it possible for the wording of the originals to be essentially reconstructed (Vines and Shaddix 52). Oden puts forth that

The believing church ecumenically consents to the premise that the Holy Spirit has so reliably protected this recollection and transmission of scripture that nothing essential to salvation has been lost. The account of God's saving action toward humanity in this way is available to be read wherever canonical scripture is rightly recalled, translated, understood, and reappropriated. (68)

While the original inspired texts are not available, the Holy Spirit has overseen the transmission of God's Word in such a way that those who study and preach it can be confident of its message.

Another theological doctrine which lays a foundation for expository preaching is the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scriptures. This doctrine flows out of the doctrine of inspiration. Inspiration gives the reason why the Bible can be trusted and inerrancy gives the degree to which it can be trusted (Holland 36). Inerrancy is a complicated doctrine which holds that there were no errors of any kind in the original manuscripts of the Scriptures. This includes matters of science, history, and prophecy. This is important to some expositors who believe the preacher expounding the Bible must believe it is completely reliable and trustworthy (Vines 52). In an article entitled "Infallibility and Inerrancy," Paul Feinberg defines the doctrine of inerrancy as

...the claim that when all the facts are known, the scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be without error in all that they affirm to the degree of precision intended, whether that affirmation related to doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, etc. (Holland 37; Feinberg 120).

This definition of inerrancy does give some latitude with regard to the interpretation of certain Scriptures as it is not known at this time what was intended in every case and since we do not

have the original manuscripts. John Frame summarizes the doctrine saying, “When we say the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the Bible makes good on its claims” (Frame loc.3609). This doctrine is considered essential to those who hold to verbal plenary inspiration because God’s character is tied to his Word. If his character is impeccable, his nature is unchanging, and the Bible is the Word of God, then it must not have errors within (Holland 37). This doctrine is also considered essential because the Bible gives the record of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which the Christian faith is based upon. Thus Brian Edwards states, “We cannot have a reliable Savior without a reliable Scripture” (Holland 36; Edwards 138).

While there are other theological convictions which contribute to a theology of preaching in general, the literature reviewed for this study reveals that most writers who are insistent on the use of expository preaching do so because of a commitment to the doctrines of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

## **Expository Preaching**

### **Definitions**

The literature reviewed for this project demonstrates that there is not a single definition for expository preaching. However, a survey of the works of influential writers on the topic reveals that there is substantial agreement on two basic elements: explanation and application. Expository preaching is primarily an explanation of the meaning of a biblical text followed by application of the implications of the text to the lives of the audience (Chapell, *Christ-centered* 31; Broadus 58-59, 210; Koller 21; Vines and Shaddix 28-29; Parker 76; Scarf 86; Enoch 72; Liftin 338; Robinson 21, 25). Examples from just a few authors illustrate this. In 1870, a book entitled *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* by John Broadus was published. This is thought by some to be a landmark text on the topic (Stitzinger 25; Chapell *Future* 28). In the text,

Broadus defines an expository sermon as one as “one which is occupied with the exposition of Scripture” (Broadus 58-59). Later he includes that “[t]he application of the sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but the main thing to be done” (Chappell, *Christ-centered* 85; Broadus 210). Jerry Vines defines an expository sermon as “a discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth from a given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners” (Vines and Shaddix 28-29). T.H.L Parker, who examined the expository preaching of John Calvin, writes, “Expository preaching consists in the explanation and application of a passage of Scripture. Without explanation it is not expository; without application, it is not preaching” (Parker 76; Scharf 86). Albert Mohler has stated that expository preaching “takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible” (Winburn 30). Each of these definitions includes the elements of explanation and application of a biblical message.

There are some who define expository preaching without making reference to the element of application while others who insist that without application, preaching cannot be called expository. John Stott made a strong assertion about Christian preaching and expository preaching in this 1982 publication *Between Two Worlds*:

It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository. Of course if by an ‘expository sermon’ is meant a verse-by-verse explanation of a lengthy passage of Scripture, then indeed it is only one possible way of preaching, but that would be a misuse of the word. Properly speaking, ‘exposition’ has a much broader meaning. It refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound a Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor prizes open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is

obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is ‘imposition,’ which is to impose on the text what is not there. But the ‘text’ in question could be a verse, or a sentence, or even a single word. It could equally be a paragraph, or a chapter, or a whole book. The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. (Stott 125–26)

While Stott demonstrates a broad understanding of expository preaching, he makes no mention of the need for application of the text to the lives of the hearers. Similarly, Donald Barnhouse defines expository preaching as simply “the art of explaining a text of the Word of God, using all the experiences of life and learning to illuminate the exposition” (Vines 31). Others are adamant to emphasize that without application there is no expository preaching. Charles Koller notes the difference between an “Exposition” and an “Expository Sermon.” The former is merely an exegetical lecture on a Bible passage. “An ‘Exposition’ becomes a sermon, and the teacher becomes a preacher, at the point where an application is made to the hearer” (Koller 21). Ronald Allen expresses that experience of hearing “expositions” which are not “sermons” has turned many people off to the very notion of expository preaching (Allen 1).

While the vast majority of those whose writings were reviewed agreed on the two elements of explanation and application, there were other elements that some writers added to their definitions of expository preaching. Some of them exerted that when crafting expository sermons a certain type of structure must be followed (Koller 21; Enoch 72; Chapell *Christ-centered* 31; Broadus 54-59). Broadus believed that the divisions of the sermon must be derived from the divisions of the Scripture passage and that each division of Scriptures should be explained in turn (Broadus 54-59). Chapell agrees with Broadus’ emphasis on the necessity of a

certain type of structure being required of expository sermons. He defines expository preaching as

a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text (*Christ-centered* 31).

This emphasis on a certain structure is not universal among those who define expository preaching.

Others who define expository preaching have insisted that a certain amount of Scripture must be utilized. For example, in his 1952 book *Expository Preaching for Today*, Andrew Blackburn writes that an expository sermon “comes mainly from a Bible passage longer than two or three consecutive verses. This kind of message differs from a textual sermon chiefly in the length of Bible passage” (Blackwood 113; Enoch 71). Charles Koller agreed with this insistence as did notable preachers W.A. Criswell, Charles Spurgeon, and George W. Truett (Koller 22; Enoch 71-72).

Finally, some advocates of expository preaching put forth that in this style of preaching the message must be communicated through a study of the text. For example, in 1980, Haddon Robinson offered a definition of expository preaching which has become well known in *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Scharf 23). Robinson defined expository preaching as

the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy

Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.(Robinson21)

This emphasis on the biblical concept for the sermon being “transmitted through... a study of the passage” is also shared by Duane Litfin and Charles Swindoll (Litfin 338; Swindoll 102-03, 136). Swindoll purports that an “expository exposition” (sermon) differs from a “homiletical exposition” in how the findings of a preacher’s sermon research is shared. A homiletical exposition shares the findings of the research in the content of the sermon, but an expository sermon transmits the message through a study of the given biblical text (Swindoll 102-03). Though some writers assert that expository sermons must have a certain structure, a certain length of Scripture passage, or a way of transmitting the message, these are not universally agreed upon by those who practice expository preaching.

There are also some who seek to define expository preaching according to a preaching plan rather than a particular sermon. After acknowledging confusion surrounding the term in his *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (1995), Harold T. Bryson defines expository preaching as “the art of preaching a series of sermons, either consecutive or selective, from a Bible book” (Bryson 79; Scharf 86). Vines nuances this understanding by noting a difference between an expository *sermon* and expository *preaching*. His definition of an expository sermon is given above, but expository preaching consists of “the delivery of expository sermons on a consistent and regular basis.” Vines then goes further and makes a distinction between *general exposition* and *systematic exposition*. General exposition is an expository sermon based on a selected text of Scripture. Systematic exposition is “the consecutive and exhaustive treatment of a book of the Bible or extended portions thereof, dividing the text into paragraphs and consecutively preaching from them” (31-32). According to

this understanding of expository preaching, the expository sermon must be situated within a longer series of many expository sermons on consecutive texts within a book of the Bible if expository preaching is going to take place.

Finally, it is worthy of consideration that some define expository preaching in a very broad sense. Ronald J. Allen is an example of this. He suggests that all sermons can be broken into one of two categories: expository or topical. Expository sermons are those which begin with a passage of Scripture, and then the content of the sermon is centered on the passage. He explained that in expository preaching,

the purpose of the sermon is to help the congregation interpret its situation from the perspective of the gospel through the lens of a biblical passage or theme. The sermon centers in the exegesis, theological analysis, and hermeneutical appropriation of the biblical material. (*Patterns* x)

Topical sermons, on the other hand help “the congregation interpret the topic from the perspective of the gospel” (Allen *Patterns* x). In *Patterns of Preaching*, Allen presents thirty-four different types of sermons and suggested that all of the different sermons could fall into either the expository or topical category. Allen is also an advocate for the recovery of a specific style of expository preaching known as “running commentary.” He defines this as

preaching that centers on the exposition of the ancient and contemporary significance of a biblical text by following the structure of the text itself. The sermon unfolds much like a commentary on the Bible; the preacher interprets the passage sense unit by sense unit, sometimes word by word. (Allen and Bartholomew vii–viii)

As will be observed in the history foundations for this study, the running commentary style of preaching seems to be primary style of expository preaching utilized throughout history.

Nevertheless, Allen's view exemplifies an understanding by some that expository preaching is a term that can be applied in the broadest possible way.

While there are a variety of ways to define expository preaching, the common denominator in the majority of literature is that expository preaching involves the reading of a biblical text, explaining what it means, and applying it to the lives of the listeners. This is how the expository preaching is understood for the sake of this project.

### **Historical Foundations**

Expository preaching (especially in the form of "running commentary") is a mode of preaching that has been continuously utilized since before the Christian Age. This section will discuss examples of expository preaching (beyond the biblical canon) by giving examples from different historical periods leading up to modern times.

**Qumran Community.** Ronald J. Allen postulates that the beginning of running commentary can be traced to the Qumran community which was in existence from roughly 130 B.C. to 70 A.D. The Qumran commentators would cite a portion of a Scripture passage and then provide commentary. They did not aim to interpret passages historically but rather "to help the community discern its identity, situation, and mission, in the light of the text as read through Qumranian theology" (Allen and Bartholomew 15–16; Vanderkamm 44).

**Second and Third Centuries.** Beyond the possible expository efforts of the early church apostles which are recorded in the New Testament, Origen (185-254) is the earliest known Christian preacher to employ an expository style of preaching (Allen and Bartholomew 18; Winburn 17). As a representative of the Alexandrian school of philosophy, Origen would speak of Scripture passages from the vantage point of the literal, the mystical, or the allegorical perspective. Application would be made from the interpretative level that was most needful to



the listeners. Origen's homilies typically involved a passage of Scripture being divided into units of about a verse. Then he would normally go through a similar process with each unit:

(1) he refers to the biblical word to be interpreted, (2) he states the theological context within which to understand the materials, (3) he elucidates individual words and thoughts, and (4) he incorporates the hearer into the text so that the text can be specifically applied to the situation of the hearer (Allen and Bartholomew 18; Torjeson 41).

Stitzinger acknowledges that Origen's efforts "stimulated an increased interest in exposition of the text" in Origen's time (13).

**Fourth and Fifth Centuries.** In the fourth century, noted expository preachers include John Chrysostom (circa 347-407), Augustine (354-430), and Cyril of Alexandria (circa 375-444). Chrysostom preached for a dozen years in Antioch before becoming a bishop in 398 A.D. Chrysostom's preaching involved working systematically through books of the Bible, using the 'literal' interpretation which was characteristic of the Antiochene system of exegesis, and moral applications from the text which were fitting to his hearers (Stott 21). Contrary to the preaching patterns of most preachers of his time, Chrysostom's preaching would include "verse-by-verse and line-by-line" exposition of the given text (Stitzinger 14). He preached through many books of the Bible, giving sixty-seven sermons from Genesis, ninety from Matthew, eighty-eight from John, and fifty-five from Acts (Enoch 90; Old, *Patristic* 173). Augustine preached most commonly to uneducated crowds and "he always aimed to give a clear exposition of the biblical text" (Pasquarello III 26). He began a series of sermons on John's Gospel in 407 which was intended to expound the entire book but which was interrupted by Eastertide. Michael Pasquarello III writes of Augustine that "he was less preoccupied with the world that produced

the Bible and more concerned with learning to live in the world that the Scripture produces” (Pasquarello III 26–28). Hughes Oliphant Old maintains that many of the Greek fathers during this period utilized expository preaching “as it had become the tradition in both synagogue and church,” usually only parting from *lectio continua* for catechetical and festal preaching (Old, *Patristic* 51). Cyril of Alexandria (circa 375–444) had an expository preaching ministry that has been preserved in the form of Bible commentaries. One such commentary has more than 150 sermons which were taken from his *lectio continuo preaching* from the Luke’s Gospel. There is evidence that Cyril did similar expository work from Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Matthew, John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews (Old, *Patristic* 112–113).

**Medieval Period.** Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) is one of few preachers from the Medieval period who is regarded by some as an expository preacher. The Cistercian monk was given the honorific title *Doctor Melliflus*. The meaning is “the Doctor whose teaching is as sweet as honey.” His method of interpretation was allegorical. His “greatest masterpiece” was a sermon series on the Song of Songs which contained eighty-six sermons. He began the series in 1135 and continued it up until he died in 1153 (Pasquarello III 54–59). Old remarks that there is not much evidence of expository preaching during the High Middle Ages, suggesting that it is because preachers simply had limited understanding of what the Scriptures actually meant. Knowledge of Greek and Hebrew was nearly non-existent among preachers of the time. The Franciscan Bonaventure (circa 1217–74) did, however, produce a series of seventy-nine expository sermons on the Gospel of John which are similar to those of John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria (Old, *Medieval* 364; Enoch 92–93).

**The Reformation.** The three most noted expository preachers of the Reformation period were Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Luther picked up on the notion laid out by Erasmus that the preaching of the Word was of higher importance than even the sacraments, because “the sacraments depend for their efficacy on their interpretation by the Word” (Stott 23). Luther listed nine “properties and virtues” of good preachers. The first was that they “teach systematically” (24). Luther’s conversion came through his diligent study of the Scriptures, especially his desire to understand the book of Romans. Afterward, he threw himself into expository exposition of books of the Bible. Luther’s expository ministry resulted in the production of commentaries on Genesis, Psalms, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, 2 Peter, and Jude (Stitzinger 17). Luther called preachers to preach the Scriptures rather than what Allen describes as the “increasingly sophisticated decorative rhetoric, combined with highly philosophical content and a minimum of attention to the scripture” which had been common in centuries prior (Allen and Bartholomew 20). For Luther,

Listeners are to hear God speaking in his saving power and presence in sermons. The aim of the sermon is therefore to help hearers understand the *text*, not just a religious truth. Its goal is that God may speak a gracious word through a text so that people may be given faith or be strengthened in faith by the Holy Spirit.(Allen 20; Meuser 47)

Luther’s sermons would normally focus on a selection of Scripture, taking a central idea from the heart of text and bringing that to forefront. With little introduction, he would state the central idea and then follow the text through, not imposing an external structure to the passage for the sake of the sermon. He would move verse by verse, offering exposition of individual verses,

relating them to the central point he had announced at the beginning of the sermon (Allen 20).

Pasquarello explains,

The urgent task to which Luther devoted himself with single-minded purpose was to break open the words of Scripture so that the Gospel, the living voice of God present in Christ, the Savior and salvation mediated through the language and grammar of Scripture, ‘be set loose by the Spirit to reach not only the minds but the very hearts and souls of its listeners to create that comes by hearing.’ (111; Steinmetz 259)

For John Calvin, the preaching task was nearly synonymous with “teaching.” Calvin’s purpose in preaching was to expound passages of the Scripture. He would design sermon series on different books of the Bible and start the series by giving an overview of major themes in the book. He would then work systematically through the book, passage by passage. In the individual sermons, he would divide the passage into individual units of interpretation. He would then explain the piece of Scripture under consideration, usually a verse or less. When needed, he would utilize word studies, grammatical analysis, historical references, biblical cross-references, and Christian doctrine. He would conclude by making application from the text which was suitable to the hearers (Allen and Bartholomew 21–22). Stitzinger calls Calvin “the most significant expositor of the Reformation era.” Calvin shared the conviction of modern expository preachers about the necessity of unfolding the intent of the biblical author. In his commentary on Romans, he wrote, “Since it is almost the only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses the mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author” (Stitzinger 19–20). Like Luther, Calvin was a very industrious preacher. He preached verse-by-verse through books of the New Testament on Sunday mornings and books of the Old Testament on weekday mornings.

Calvin translated Scripture himself, both from the Hebrew and Greek texts. In the last 15 years of Calvin's life, he preached verse-by-verse through half of the Bible (Parker 58–60; Winburn 19).

Ulrich Zwingli was greatly inspired by the expository preaching of John Chrysostom. He began preaching in a similar *lectio continuo* fashion from the outset of his ministry as Great Minister in Zurich in 1519. He started with Matthew's gospel, and spent a year preaching through it section by section each day. He then went on to preach through Acts, 1 Timothy, 1 and 2 Peter, and Hebrews. It took him about seven years to preach through the entire New Testament after which he turned to the Old Testament. His influence on the preaching of his peers was considerable. Old states:

This systematic interpretation of Scripture was received with considerable enthusiasm in Zurich and his colleagues observed it with great interest. One by one the Christian humanist preachers of the Upper Rhineland began to follow his example. In southern Germany it was this kind of systematic biblical preaching which won the people to the Reformation. (*Reformation* 46)

Other notable expository preachers of the Reformation age include Henry Bullinger (1504-1575) and John Knox (1513-1572) as well as Anglican preachers John Jewel (1522-1571), Hugh Latimer (1485-1555), and Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603) (Stitzinger 20–21).

**The Puritans.** Following the Reformation era, the Puritans took up the banner of expository preaching with great fervor. Stott quotes Irvonwy Morgan as saying “The essential thing in understanding the Puritans is that they were preachers before they were anything else” (28). Stitziner agrees, saying, “More than anything else, the Puritans were preachers.” Expository preaching was so important to the Puritans that they moved the pulpit to the front center of the worship space, replacing the altar, so that attention would be upon the open Bible (21). David

Martin Lloyd Jones explains that for the Puritans, “true preaching is always the exposition of the Word of God. It is not a mere exposition of the dogma or the teaching of the church... Preaching, they said, is the exposition of the Word of God; and therefore it must control everything” (Lloyd-Jones, *Puritans* 375, 378; Stitzinger 21).

Many expositors from the Puritan tradition could be mentioned. Four of the most notable were William Perkins (1558-1602), John Cotton (1582-1652), Richard Baxter (1615-1691), and Matthew Henry (1662-1714). An early influence within Puritanism was William Perkins (1558-1602). He wrote a preaching manual for preachers in the Church of England entitled *The Art of Prophesying*. His conviction was that preaching is giving forth the testimony of God himself, and developed four principles to guide preachers:

- ❖ To read the text distinctly out of the canonical Scriptures.
- ❖ To give the sense and understanding of it, being read, by the Scripture itself.
- ❖ To collect a few and profitable points of doctrine out of the natural sense.
- ❖ To apply the doctrines, rightly collected, to the life and manner of men in a simple and plain speech (Perkins 762; Stitzinger 22).

John Cotton (1582-1652) was a Puritan of great reputation both in England and New England. Cotton preached in *lectio continuo* fashion through nearly the every book of the Bible over a twenty year tenure in Boston. He preached three or four times each week. He supposedly preached through each New Testament books once and some twice. In preaching through the Old Testament, he got through the middle of Isaiah before passing. Many of Cotton’s sermon series were published as commentaries. Of particular interest were his sermons on Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, the latter of which drew attention from many Puritans because they believed it

spoke of the love shared between Christ and Christ's Church (Old, *Moderatism* 178–79; Enoch 95). Richard Baxter (1615–1691) is remembered especially because of this book *Reformed Pastor* which he wrote at least in part to address the laziness and neglect among his clergy peers. In the book, he laid out the method of ministry which was employed in Kidderminster. In addition to passionate expository preaching, Baxter and his colleague would meet with each family in their 800-family parish once a year to examine their spiritual progress. It was expected that the families would be learning the prescribed catechism together. During the one-hour meeting with Baxter, the families would be asked to recite the catechism and then Baxter would offer explanation on any part that needed clarification. Baxter's ministry was defined by the joint emphasis on expository preaching and family discipleship (Stott 29–30).

The English Presbyterian pastor Matthew Henry (1662–1714) had an expository preaching ministry, the fruit of which is still in use today. His six-volume commentary *Exposition of the Bible* is the result of the exegetical work that Henry put into preparing sermons for his regular Sunday services in Chester. Henry would begin his study of Scripture between four and five in the morning each day. He preached normally seven times each week, twice on Sundays, and on Thursdays he gave an additional Bible lecture (Enoch 95; Old, *Moderatism* 30). Old notes that this is another example of historical expositors whose works have been preserved in the form of Bible commentary rather than sermon format (30).

Following the Reformation, many of the historically significant preachers of the Evangelical Awakening, such as John Wesley and Whitefield, were largely topical and textual preachers rather than expository. (It might be noted that John Wesley did publish verse by verse exposition on the Sermon on the Mount) (Enoch 96; Winburn; Stitzinger 24). Nevertheless,

expository preaching has continued to have a presence among evangelical Christians since the Reformation.

**Nineteenth Century.** The nineteenth century produced a number of expository preachers of note. Among them are Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910), John Broadus (1827–1895), and Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892). Maclaren rose to international fame from obscurity during his sixty-three year ministry. After 1869 at his Baptist church in Manchester, he preached to audiences exceeding 2,000 each week. He was known for masterfully laying open the original meaning of a Scripture passage. Maclaren studied the Scriptures faithfully, reading a chapter from his Hebrew Bible and a chapter from his Greek Bible on a daily basis (Winburn 21; Stitzinger 25). He wrote these words in 1896:

I believe that the secret of success for all our ministries lies very largely in the simple charm of concentrating their intellectual force on the one work of preaching. I have tried to make my ministry a ministry of exposition of Scripture. I know that it has failed in many respects, but I will say that I have endeavored from the beginning to the end to make that the characteristic of all my public work. I have tried to preach Jesus Christ, and the Jesus Christ not of the Gospels only, but the Christ of the Gospels and Epistles: He is the same Christ (Maclaren 151; Stitzinger 26).

Stitzinger notes that thirty-two volumes of Maclaren's sermons, as well as his contributions to *The Expositor's Bible*, are still regarded and utilized by Christians today (26). Broadus was a Baptist pastor who became a homiletics professor at Southern Baptist Theological University in Louisville, Kentucky. His great contribution to the legacy of expository preaching was his text *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, first published in 1870. By the end of the nineteenth century, the book had become the most widely utilized homiletics text in the



country, proving useful in seminaries of several denominations. It was translated into other languages for use in mission schools in Japan, China, and Portugal (Broadus vii). Bryan Chapell (author of popular expository preaching text book *Christ-Centered Preaching*) gives Broadus credit for codifying Chapell's preferred method of expository preaching (Chapell, *Future* 68).

Spurgeon was a Baptist preacher with Reformed Theology who preached at Metropolitan Tabernacle for thirty-eight years. Over 3,560 of his sermons were published in over sixty-three volumes. Though wildly popular as a preacher, and insisting that he was a faithful expositor of the Scriptures, his exegetical efforts did not hold up to the scrutiny of some historians of homiletics. However, he did author a seven volume verse-by-verse exposition of the Psalms entitled *The Treasury of David*, which is considered a valuable contribution to expository studies (Winburn 21–22; Stitzinger 26–27).

G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) are named as historical examples of effective expository preachers by both Allen and Stitzinger. Morgan pastored Westminster Chapel in London on two separate occasions. Vines states that Morgan has been called the “Prince of Expositors” (40). Morgan would often work from a shorter text and give it a full exposition, combined with relevant application (Allen and Bartholomew 24). Morgan is known to have been a careful student of the Bible in its entirety and he would conduct his exegesis with careful consideration of the entire canon (Stitzinger 27). Lloyd-Jones also pastored at Westminster Chapel and was known for never being out of his pulpit on Sunday mornings except when on vacation (Stott 46). Lloyd-Jones had an interesting view of preaching, not seeing individual sermons as separate events, but “simply [as] continuing where he was in the ongoing exposition of a book of the Bible” (Stitzinger 28). Allen comments that Lloyd-

Jones' preaching is "particularly noted for the vividness with which it moves from ancient to contemporary settings through illustration and commentary" (Allen and Bartholomew 26).

This historical survey of expository preaching in various forms shows that it has been practiced by Christian preachers for two millennia. The Reformation preaching of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli reintroduced the practice in influential ways, and it was adopted wholeheartedly by the Puritans. Its historic foundations were well laid moving into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Expository preaching continues to be a method utilized to expound God's Word in many Christian denominations, even though there are few noticeable examples of its use within Wesleyan Christianity.

### **Benefits**

Proponents of expository preaching name several benefits that both preacher and congregation receive when it is frequently employed. This section provides a survey of the expressed benefits.

**Benefits to the Preacher.** One benefit often noted is that systematically preaching expository sermons through a book of the Bible saves the pastor time. First, it spares the pastor time and effort that would be spent choosing a sermon text or topic for the weekly message (Richard 17; Vines 35). After the preacher has selected the book of the Bible and broken it up into manageable segments, then the preacher "never has to wonder what he's going to say each Sunday" because the text dictates the subject (Swindoll 94, 102). Second, preaching through books of the Bible saves research time. While preaching through a book of the Bible, the preliminary background work about the book's author, historical background and context, and cause for writing carries over week by week until the completion of the series (Chapell 66).

Another benefit of systematic expository preaching is that it keeps a preacher from only preaching on the topics she favors above others (Richard 17; Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 66; Doriani 35) and topics driven by the news headlines or personal experience (Swindoll 103). Ralph Moore, church-planter and founding pastor of the Hope Chapel movement of churches has written that his two-year preaching plan when he starts a new church is teaching consecutively through Philippians, Acts, Romans, and 1 Corinthians. He believes that “Preaching through books of the Bible will limit your ability to beat certain subjects to death. It will keep you from riding spiritual hobby horses that move people but do not take them anywhere” (Moore 187–88). Preaching through books of the Bible allows one to deal with both popular themes and unpopular ones in a way that textual preaching does not. It also allows for a completed sermon series to be formed into a resource which might be utilized as a commentary for other pastors and students of Scripture (Stedman 202). Vines says that systematic expository preaching “holds [the preacher] accountable for preaching what God says and not what the preacher wants to say.” It forces the preacher to deal with subject matter which would likely either be overlooked or intentionally avoided. It also keeps the preacher from “using the Bible as a club” and pulling out Scripture passages for sermons which might be used for scolding God’s people inappropriately in difficult times (Vines 34–35). Expository preaching demands the preacher deal with difficult texts and keeps him from straying from the Scriptures (Doriani 35). Whereas topical preaching might abstract truths from the Bible’s central story line, expository preaching draws the teaching directly from the passage at hand (Carson). This is what gives a message power and effectiveness (Busenitz 139; Chapell, “Future” 65).

Another benefit for the preacher is that expository preaching benefits the preacher spiritually. Koller states that while many types of preaching have been used mightily by God,

“Expository preaching feeds the soul... the preacher is building up spiritual resources far beyond the immediate objectives of the sermon” (29). It requires one to grow in knowledge and mastery of the contents of the book of Scripture being preached through. Forcing oneself to struggle through difficult passages will likely lead to spiritual growth (Richard 17).

Another alleged benefit of expository preaching is that it allows the preacher to preach with more authority. Expository preaching advocates belief that the authority for the themes expressed in the message comes from God rather than the preacher (Swindoll 137). D.A. Carson believes that this type of preaching gives a preacher confidence for she knows she is proclaiming God’s message and not her own. It also gives authority to the sermon, because the truths presented are taken directly from the Scripture (Carson 1).

Expository preaching also benefits the preacher because it works against slothfulness. With the great flexibility that pastors have with regard to how they use their working hours, they can be slack in putting adequate time into sermon study and preparation. Vines argued that it is not possible for a preacher to be lazy and successfully put in the work needed for well-prepared expository sermons on a regular basis (Vines 34).

**Benefits to the Congregation.** One benefit of expository preaching often mentioned by its advocates is that it increases the biblical literacy of those who are regularly exposed to it (Richard 18; Vines 34). Koller suggests that expository preaching uses more material from Scripture than topical or textual preaching. He thinks that if it is was the primary method of preaching a congregation was exposed to, it would prove most fruitful in “developing a people rooted and grounded in the Word of God.” He believes expository preaching to be the church’s “best answer to the challenge of widespread biblical illiteracy” (Koller 29). Allen wrote that his preferred style of running commentary expository preaching can “help the congregation become

acquainted with the Bible by drawing the congregation into the world of the Bible through attention to the detail of the particular biblical texts. The congregation can become immersed in the language, imagery, associations, and movement of the text.” He adds, “sermons in running commentary model a significant way to approach, understand, and evaluate biblical material”(Allen and Barthalomew 4).

In addition to literacy, Chapell explains that the congregation will “begin to see the organizing themes and schemes of the Bible instead of perceiving it as an impenetrable mishmash or maxims, morals, and stories” (*Christ-Centered* 66). They will grow in their understanding of the thematic unity of the Scriptures.

Another benefit is that expository preaching helps keep the focus of a congregation on God and the Bible rather than on their problems. Koller believes topical preaching based on the different problems that people go through can error by leading people to focus more on their problems than God. Expository changes the listeners’ gaze from temporary problems to God’s Word (30).

Expository preaching also serves the purpose of helping the listeners learn how to study the Bible on their own (Carson 1; Doriani 35). As the preacher leads the congregation through the insights discovered in the study, he points people to verses of Scripture and helps them “discover timeless truths in the pages of God’s Word” (Swindoll 136). Swindoll explains, “I get to see the discovery dawn in their faces. It’s like a light goes on behind their eyes, and I *love* it when that happens!” He believes that while there are times which call for other types of preaching that this experience only comes through expository preaching (Swindoll 136–37). Expository preaching is also thought by some to create an appetite for the Bible in hearers which

prompts them to study the Bible for themselves. It increases their excitement for the Bible and models for them how to teach it and minister to others (Vines and Shaddix 36).

Expository preaching is also believed to strengthen hearers by filling them with a reservoir of biblical truth for difficult times. It “broadens people’s horizons” by opening their eyes to be able to see the world and eternity in light of God and the Scriptures. Vines states that “The lack of moral strength and conviction that plagues our day is due to a large degree to the lack of Bible preaching.” (Vines and Shaddix 37). Vines believes that moral strength comes from exposure to expository preaching.

Expository preaching has also proven to elicit a strong positive response from congregations. Allen says that, “Many people in North America associate encounter with the Bible with encounter the transcendent” (Allen and Bartholomew 2). By dealing with the text in the significant way that expository preaching requires, many listeners get the impression that the preacher is “dealing significantly with God and life”(Allen and Bartholomew 2). Allen draws a connection between the many systematic programs available in churches for studying the Bible and the positive response to running commentary expository preaching. He believes that people today feel the need to become better students of the Bible. He points out the work of seminary administrator James Fish who has served as an interim pastor on several occasions. Fish had the opportunity to experiment with different types of preaching. He experimented with verse-by-verse preaching and said “These ‘expository Bible studies’ have consistently drawn the strongest positive response from the congregations” (Fish 357; Allen and Bartholomew 2). Studies have proven a correlation between expository preaching and the evangelistic effectiveness of churches. Apparently, expository preaching has great appeal for people who are coming back to the church after a season of inactivity or a life-time away from church life (Rainer). The positive

experience that churches are having with expository preaching is leading to a resurgence of the method in evangelical churches (Gilbreath).

Stephen J. Lawson conducted a study of the Acts 2:42-47 to support the cause of expository preaching. He explained that the early church members' devotion to the apostle's teaching caused them to experience a more energized fellowship among the believers, an elevated life of worship, an enriched life of service to one another, an expanded sense of joy, and an enflamed devotion to evangelism. These early believers did not have the same access to the Scriptures in written form that we do. However, Lawson suggested that a commitment to expository preaching is the modern-day equivalent of "devoting [ourselves] to the apostles' teaching." He believes that modern churches will experience a spiritual vibrancy akin to that of the early church if preachers are committed to expository preaching in their pulpits (Lawson, "Priority" 213-16.)

The stated benefits of expository preaching can be summarized as follows. Benefits for the preacher are: it saves the pastor time, it feeds the pastor's soul, it grants the pastor authority, and it holds the pastor accountable. Frequently cited benefits that congregations receive from expository preaching are increased biblical literacy, education in how to study the Bible, and an overall positive learning experience.

### **Criticisms**

While expository preaching has many who advocate for its use, there are also those who are highly critical of this style of preaching. This section will examine the thoughts of three critics of expository preaching as its often perceived. These critics are Andy Stanley, John Ortberg, and Keith Willhite.

Perhaps one of the most well known critics of systematic expository preaching is Andy Stanley. In *Communicating For a Change*, Stanley writes, “This approach requires no creativity. This approach need not include any application. This approach assumes a great deal of interest by the audience. And honestly, this approach is easy when compared to other methods of communication.” Stanley concludes that there are three goals that preachers adopt for their preaching, most likely without knowing it: “to teach the Bible to people,” “to teach people the Bible,” or “to teach people how to live a life that reflects the values, principles, and truths of the Bible.” Stanley puts himself in the third category, which is the optimal one, and puts systematic expository preachers in the first category. He acknowledges that people who use this method are trying to help people understand how to study the Bible but he does not affirm the method (93-95). Ironically, later in the book, Stanley does commend a form of running commentary preaching which he utilizes regularly. It involves walking the hearers through the text with explanatory comments throughout the body of the sermon. He encourages this rather than reading the passage before the sermon. In Stanley’s opinion, “the text should be the *most* engaging part of the message” (158–61). For Stanley, the main criticism appears to center on the way that preachers plan their preaching and the goals of the sermons rather than expository preaching itself. He would rather the preacher start with the needs of the audience and use a single passage of Scripture to address those needs, utilizing running commentary in the preaching of the message. His criticism that systematic expository preaching lacks creativity and “is easy” is fair. One of the frequently mentioned benefits of expository preaching is that it saves time. Creativity requires extra time and can be difficult. None of the surveyed advocates of expository preaching cite creativity as a value that they are seeking to uphold. His criticism that



systematic expository preaching does not require application would be rejected by the surveyed advocates of expository preaching.

John Ortberg is another critic of expository preaching. He has written an article entitled “Biblical Preaching Is About Life-Change, Not Sermon Form,” where he takes issue with those who say that expository preaching is more biblical than textual preaching or topical preaching. He notes, “Expository is a word that gets thrown around a lot. Some people think of it as verse-by-verse preaching, or where points and subpoints are from one text in Scripture” (452). Ortberg believes that Jesus did not use this method of preaching. Rather, Jesus primarily told stories and drew out implications for the listeners’ lives. Ortberg also believes that the apostles did not preach in this manner. He argues that there is no example of anyone preaching verse-by-verse through an Old Testament text anywhere in the New Testament. For Ortberg, expository preaching is a form of preaching that “human beings created.” However, Ortberg does agree that expository preaching does increase biblical literacy and agreed that it is not a “bad thing.” Ortberg would agree with Thomas Long who states that what makes a sermon biblical is not how many Bible verses are used in the sermon (Long 52). It is possible to quote many verses throughout a sermon and misinterpret every one of them. Ortberg seems to be arguing against the attitude of some advocates of expository preaching rather than against the practice itself. It is apparent that he does not appreciate being labeled as unbiblical because he is not a traditional expository preacher. He also rejects the biblical foundations that many cite for expository preaching (Ortberg 452). For Ortberg, the passage in Luke where Jesus enters the synagogue, reads Isaiah 61, and then comments on it is not an example of expository preaching. Neither are Paul’s admonitions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2.

Keith Willhite is a critic of expository preaching who also happens to be an advocate of expository preaching. His criticism of much expository preaching is that it is boring and dull. He laments that often audience receptiveness is not adequately taken into consideration. He writes, “Unfortunately much of expository preaching is merely pedantic explanation, almost to the extreme of being an oral commentary” (355). For this reason, Willhite advocates for the incorporation of contemporary rhetorical theory into the practice of expository preaching. This holds potential for moving from Scripture explanation to application and persuasion (366).

Ronald Allen is a process theologian and apologist for the recovery of expository preaching within theologically diverse denominations. In *Preaching Verse By Verse*, which he coauthored with Gilbert Bartholomew, he addresses the bias against expository preaching in mainline churches based on its perceived dullness (1). He demonstrates ways of using the method creatively in order to overcome dullness. Any style of preaching can be dull for listeners when presented without energy, creativity, and consideration for the sensitivities of the audience. Because of the emphasis on explanation, which is intrinsic in expository preaching, those who utilize it need to employ strategic creativity to avoid a boring listening experience.

These criticisms of modern expository preaching and its advocates deserve consideration. Advocates of all types of preaching styles would benefit from guarding themselves against blinkered and ungodly attitudes toward people who use different styles. Preachers of all styles would bless their hearers by guarding against detached and uninteresting preaching which values highly the Scriptures but communicates insensitivity to the needs of the congregation.

### **Jonah Background**

For developing the sermons on Jonah, four primary resources were used in addition to the researcher’s personal biblical examination of the text in various Bible translations. Two of

them—*The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* by Terence E. Fretheim and *Jonah: The Old Testament Commentary* by James Limburg—were chosen because they are the first two books on the “highly recommended” list of commentaries for the book of Jonah in David R. Bauer’s *Essential Bible Study Tools for Ministry* (Location 4718). The third, *Man Overboard! The Story of Jonah* by Sinclair B. Ferguson was chosen at the recommendation of fellow pastors. The fourth, the *NLT Study Bible*, was chosen as an accessible resource for basic background which is based on the translation of the Bible found in the pews of Crossroads UMC. Because of its presence in the congregation, it is the translation most often used in sermon presentation at Crossroads. The scholar who authored the Jonah commentary in the *NLT SB* is G. Patrick LaCosse.

## **Genre**

The genre of the book of Jonah is an issue of great debate among scholars. Canonically, it appears among the writings of the twelve prophets and has since the second century although some scholars disagree with its placement there (Limburg 20–21; Fretheim 67–68). It sets itself apart from the other prophetic writings in that it is narrative in nature, rather than featuring prophetic oracles and prayers as other prophetic writings do (Limburg 19; LaCosse 1475). It is also unique in that Jonah is the only prophet who is commissioned to take a message to a foreign land (Limburg 22; LaCosse 1476). In addition, almost all of the dialogue directed toward Jonah is in the form of question. There are fourteen questions in this short book which is a frequent characteristic of wisdom writings such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job (Limburg 26; Fretheim 30). Another unique characteristic of Jonah is that he is the only prophet who refused an assignment and had to be commissioned a second time (Limburg 22; LaCosse 1476). Because of these issues, there is not a consensus on the genre. Ferguson assumes unapologetically that Jonah

is historical narrative and quite possibly autobiographical (S.B Ferguson xi). LaCosse briefly considers other genres but suggests that the book is best understood as a historical narrative which aims to offer theological and moral guidance to the reader (1476). Limburg opts to designate Jonah as a “didactic story” which was developed around the historical character Jonah, son of Amittai (2 Kings 14:23-27). Limburg points out the great similarities between Jonah and the miracle stories about Elijah and Elisha which are found in 1 and 2 Kings. Still, he prefers the designation of “story” over historical report, allegory, parable, or midrash because it allows one to remain neutral on the issue of the historicity of the events described. He believes the extensive use of questions in the book of Jonah suggest that it is meant to be used didactically (22–26). After considering the other options, Fretheim non-forcibly puts forth that Jonah is perhaps best understood as a satirical, didactic, short story (72). He spends a great deal of time discussing the use of irony in the book of Jonah (51–55). This causes him to add the adjective “satirical” to his designation (70–72). He emphasizes that it appears that nearly every verse in the book is laden with theological content. This supports the conclusion that Jonah is meant to be used didactically. This also keeps him from being able to accept the book as a historical narrative (66). Fretheim’s opinion is that the question of historicity is not nearly as important as the message that the book seeks to convey (14). Because the researcher is in agreement with Fretheim on this matter, the sermon series will seek to present the themes and messages from God found in the book of Jonah without getting sidetracked about the question of historicity.

### **Historical Setting**

By naming the main human character of the book of Jonah as “Jonah son of Amittai,” the anonymous author places the story within a particular historical setting. The writer of 2 Kings names Jonah the son of Amittai as the prophet from Gath-hepher who foretold that God would

expand the borders of the nation of Israel once again (14:25). This occurred during the reign of Jeroboam II who ruled over the northern kingdom of Israel from 793-753 B.C. Although Jeroboam II “did what was evil in the Lord’s sight,” God allowed Israel to experience great prosperity during his reign and God allowed Israel to push its borders to where they had been under the reign of Solomon. However, in spite of this expansion, the injustice and oppression of the poor during Jeroboam II’s reign was condemned by the prophets Amos and Hosea (Patterson 654). Regardless of whether one accepts the book of Jonah as a historical narrative, by naming the lead human character in the book as “Jonah son of Amittai,” the author portrays the events of the book in the context of the eighth century B.C. This makes him a contemporary of Amos and Hosea, even though the formats of those books differ significantly from the style of Jonah. During this historical period in the Near East, Assyria was a rival world power of Israel and Nineveh was one of its great cities (Limburg 21-22). During the time of Jeroboam II, the dominance of Assyria decreased steadily due to poor leadership, but after his reign it experienced a resurgence which resulted in its pummeling of Samaria in 722 B.C. and thus the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. Jonah was sent to preach to the city of Nineveh at the low point in their political strength (LaCosse 1474–75).

### **Authorship and Dating**

Commentators also have differing opinions on the authorship of book of Jonah. Ferguson suggests that it is most likely autobiographical, even though it is written in third person (xi). LaCosse puts forth that if Jonah himself did not write it, it was likely written by a fellow prophet who was an associate of Jonah’s (1475). Limburg does presume to hypothesize about the identity of the author but deduces that the book was written at the earliest in the eighth century B.C. and at the latest in the second century B.C. because Jonah is mentioned among the Twelve Prophets

in Sirach 49:10. Limburg cites a number of scholars who place the writing of Jonah among the various centuries from the eighth century B.C. to the second century B.C. Although he leans toward a composition date that is late exilic or post-exilic, he does not believe that finding the date of the composition of the book is essential to understanding its meaning or significance (28-31). Fretheim makes no effort to name an author for Jonah but suggests that the book was likely authored in the fifth century. He notes that the language used is more common in post-exilic writings. Jonah was perhaps written shortly prior to or shortly after the reforms instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah. The tenor of Jonah is reflective of the time of “spiritual depression” which is portrayed in the book of Malachi (34–37). Because there such a divergence of scholarly opinion regarding the authorship and dating of Jonah’s composition, Limburg suggests that these issues should not be seen as central to gaining a grasp of the book’s content (28–29).

### **Themes**

There are several theological claims made in the book of Jonah which are noted by scholars and make the book theologically rich. A major theme in the book is that of God’s sovereignty over all creation. God has created all things and has the ability to control and manipulate the natural world at will (Limburg 34; S. B. Ferguson xii; Fretheim 21; LaCosse 1475–76). Another theme is that God cares for and desires the salvation of all the people on the earth, not just those who already identify as God’s (Limburg 34; S. Ferguson xii; Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476). In addition, Jonah shows that God may at times change his mind and relent from bringing judgment in response to the repentance of humans (Limburg 34; Fretheim 23; LaCosse 1479). In fact, God’s desire is always to show mercy rather than to inflict judgment (Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476–77). Jonah also displays the themes that God of Israel is the only true God, and that God rescues people who call on him in trouble (Limburg 35). A final significant theme

of Jonah has to do with how wrong beliefs can lead to wrong actions and how God is very concerned about the beliefs and attitudes of his people toward God and other human beings (Fretheim 18–19).

### **Sermon Exegesis**

The authors of the four different primary sources used for the Jonah research divided the book differently. Ferguson divided it into five segments (vii), Limburg into seven(7), and LaCosse into two (1475). Fretheim suggests six segments best outline the author's thoughts (55) but deals with the text a chapter at a time (7). For the five sermons in the Jonah series, the text of the book will be divided into 5 segments, utilizing the following divisions: 1:1-3; 1:4-16; 1:17-2:10; 3:1-10; 4:1-10. This section of the Literature Review will give an exegetical overview of each of the segments. After significant exegetical discussion, each segment below will conclude with a paragraph including theological observations, identification of which of the major themes discussed above are emphasized in the Scripture segment, and thoughts about relevance to people of Crossroads United Methodist Church.

#### **Jonah 1:1-3**

These opening three verses can naturally be divided into two parts. Verses 1-2 reveal the LORD giving a message to Jonah, and verse 3 shares Jonah's response to the LORD's message. Verse 1 opens the book of Jonah with an expression ("The word of the LORD came to..." [ESV]) found over a hundred times in the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. It is used when a person is given a new, clear communication from God. The communication could be intended specifically for the receiver or for the receiver to pass on to another individual or nation (S. B. Ferguson 11–12). This phrase is used repeatedly in the Elijah stories in 1 Kings. The expression is also found in the books of 1 Samuel-2 Kings to share that God was

communicating something to Samuel, Nathan, Solomon, Jehu, and others (Limburg 3738). The expression is also used at the opening of the prophetic books of Hosea and Joel (Fretheim 76).

There is something very common about the opening words of the book of Jonah.

The two primary characters of Jonah are also introduced in verse 1. They are the LORD and Jonah son of Amittai. The word translated “The LORD” in the New Living Translation of the Bible is the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. This was the name used to refer to the God of the Hebrew people. It is the most common name for God used in the book of Jonah, appearing twenty-two times. The other names are God (Hebrew *Elohim* [or *El* on one occasion]), appearing thirteen times and the LORD God (Hebrew *Yahweh Elohim*), appearing four times (Limburg 45). The use of the name *Yahweh* in the book of Jonah is very significant because of the mission that Jonah is given. Although he is the God of the Hebrews, the book of Jonah makes it clear that *Yahweh* is not merely the God of one specific tribe. He is concerned about the character, the conditions, and the destinies of nations beyond Israel who might even be enemies of Israel (Limburg 46). Still, *Yahweh* is first and foremost the God of the Hebrew people. This is evidenced in verse 1:9. When asked of his home country and nationality, Jonah responds, “I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (NLT). The other main character is Jonah son of Amittai. The word *Jonah* is the Hebrew word for “dove.” Limburg believes there is no special significance to this meaning because the practice of naming human beings after animals is not uncommon in the Hebrew language (Limburg 38). Fretheim does find it significant that Jonah’s father Amittai is referenced in the opening verse of the book of Jonah though. For Fretheim, this is evidence that the author wanted to be clear that he was referencing the same prophet named in 2 Kings 14:25 (41). Jonah, son of Amittai, had a unique prophetic ministry in that he prophesied during the forty-one year reign of Jeroboam II who “did what was



evil in the LORD's sight" and allowed Israel to continue in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat. During that time, Jonah was called to prophecy good news to disobedient Israel. God promised Israel through Jonah that they would recover the territories between Lebo-hamath and the Dead Sea, and God fulfilled that promise (2 Kings 14:23-25). Jonah would have served as a royal advisor to the king, offering Jeroboam II counsel of a theological nature on military and political matters. Limburg asserts that since Jonah's counsel showed itself correct that Jonah most likely enjoyed a good reputation in Israel (38). Ferguson remarks that though he lived in dark days for the kingdom of Israel that Jonah enjoyed a great number of privileges as a prophet (2). The importance of understanding the known reputation of Jonah, son of Amittai, from the point of view of Jewish history is that the assignment given to Jonah in the book of Jonah is so different than Jonah's assignment in 2 Kings. Jonah first served in a place of privilege, offering counsel to his own king and announcing good fortune to his own people within the comforts of the royal court. In the book of Jonah, his assignment is announcing bad news to enemies of Israel, far from home, away from all former comforts. Outside of 2 Kings and the book of Jonah, the only other places in the Christian Bible that the person Jonah is mentioned are in Matthew 12:38-41; 16:1-4 and Luke 11:29-32 (Limburg (39)).

Verse 2 gives the details of Jonah's new assignment. Yahweh tells him: "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are" (NLT). The phrase "get up and go" is standard for a prophetic commissioning as evidenced in 1 Kings 17:9 and Numbers 22:20-21 (Limburg 39). The place that Jonah is sent to is what sets this assignment apart as he is the only prophet of God ever to be commissioned to take a message to a foreign land (Limburg 22; LaCosse 1476). Nineveh was already a city with a long history by the time Jonah was sent there. Biblically, its origins can be traced back to

Genesis 10:11-12 where it says, “[Nimrod] expanded his territory to Assyria, building the cities of Nineveh, Rehebothir, and Resen (the great city located between Nineveh and Calah)” (NLT). Nineveh was an important city in the Assyrian Empire until it was eventually destroyed in 612 BC (LaCosse 1476). The evils of Nineveh are decried in writings of the prophets Zephaniah and Nahum. In Zephaniah 2:13-15, the prophet accentuates the sinful arrogance of Nineveh. Nahum writes that Nineveh is “scheming against the LORD” (1:9) and is “the city of murder and lies” which is “crammed with wealth and is never without victims” (2:1). In addition to its internal sins, Nineveh led others astray. Nahum 3:4 says Nineveh is “a beautiful and faithless city, mistress of deadly charms, [who] enticed the nations with her beauty. She taught them all her magic, enchanting people everywhere.” The book of Nahum concludes by stating, “There is no healing for your wound; your injury is fatal. All who hear of your destruction will clap their hands with joy. Where can anyone be found who has not suffered from your continual cruelty?” (3:19 NLT). Limburg purports that it’s against the morally disastrous backdrop of Nineveh’s sins as laid out in Zephaniah and Nahum that we must read the book of Jonah (42-43). These thoughts give insight into what Yahweh means when he says in verse 2 that he has “seen how wicked [Nineveh’s] people are.”

Nineveh is also referred to as “the great city.” The Hebrew word *gadol*, translated “great” in verse 2, appears fourteen times in the book of Jonah. It is the most repeated word in the book. Its appearance throughout the book creates a sense of extraordinariness. It is not only applied to Nineveh and the Ninevites but also to God’s actions and Jonah’s responses (Fretheim 43-44). For Fretheim, the reappearance of the word helps create a sense of satire or irony (54). Outside the book of Jonah, *gadol* is used only twenty-eight times in the writings of the other eleven minor prophets (43). When the word appears again in Jonah 3:3 to describe Nineveh, the

description is augmented, stating that Nineveh was “an exceedingly great city,<sup>a</sup> three days' journey in breadth” (ESV). When describing Nineveh as a “great city” in Jonah 1:2, the author seems to be referring to the vastness of its area and population. It seems to be the large population of the city that makes Yahweh feel compassion for it. In the last verse of the book, Yahweh points out to the pouting Jonah that “Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals.” Then he asks, “Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?” (4:11 NLT). Limburg notes that the use of the word “great” to describe a city is rare in the biblical record, that the Jonah writer uses it to create a picture in the reader's mind of a “far-off sprawling metropolis of ancient times,” and that archeological evidence confirms that it was indeed such a city (39-40). Limburg aptly states that Yahweh's global and ecumenical concern is made evident from these opening verses of Jonah, showing that he is a God that “cares about the great cities and nations of the earth” (46).

In verse 3, Jonah responds in a way that sets him further apart from any other biblical prophet. It was common for a prophet to “rise and go” when told to by Yahweh (Num. 22:20-22; 1 Kings 17:8-10). What was not common was for a prophet to rise and go “in the opposite direction” as Jonah did in verse 3 (NLT). The text says he did this to flee “from the presence of the LORD” (ESV). The structure of verse 3 is notable. Fretheim finds that the repetition is unfitting if the author is merely relaying a story. He suggests that the author is using a literary device known as a chiasmus for the sake of emphasis. The first and last parts of the verse state that he went “to Tarshish” to flee “from the presence of the LORD” (ESV). Tarshish is mentioned again in the middle section of the verse. Then, in the middle, the text says twice that he “went down,” first to Joppa and then into the ship that he found in Joppa (79). Limburg notes that there are four times in Jonah when he reportedly “goes down.” In addition to those

mentioned above, we'll see this phrase again in 1:5 when he goes down into inner part of the ship and in 2:6 when says Jonah says he went down to very depths of the sea. This suggests to Limburg that Jonah is attempting to separate himself both horizontally (see below) and vertically from God (43).

The precise meaning of “Tarshish” is not agreed upon unanimously. There are three worthy opinions. The first is that Tarshish refers to Tarsus in Asia Minor. This was the view held by ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (LaCosse 1476; Limburg 43). Another is that “Tarshish” could be a generic reference to the sea or to a destination accessible by sea. (LaCosse 1476). This view is suggested by the Targum which translates the phrase simply “to go with them to the sea.” There are a number Old Testament Scriptures which suggest that ships of Tarshish were impressive vessels (Limburg 43). The most popular interpretation is that Tarshish was a port city in on the southwestern coast of Spain known as Tartessos. If this was the case, it would mean that geographically Jonah was attempting to travel as far as possible in the opposite direction of Nineveh. This view is supported by the New Living Translation’s word choices for the opening phrase of verse 3. Whereas the ESV reads “Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish,” the NLT translators chose to omit the word “Tarshish” and say “Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction.” Both LaCosse and Limburg propose this as a sensible view and one which fits the general tenor of the narrative (LaCosse 1746; Limburg 43). Jonah was attempting to get as far away from his assigned field of ministry as possible.

Joppa’s location is not ambiguous. Joppa, which is modern day Yafo near Tel Aviv, was a key Mediterranean port city. It is mentioned in the Old Testament in 2 Chronicles 2:16 and Ezra 3:7 as well as in Acts 9:36-43 in the New Testament (LaCosse 1476; Limburg 43-44). It was a logical port city for a trip heading in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

The fact that Jonah fled from the assignment to go and preach in Nineveh sets him apart from other biblical prophets. No other prophet ever refused an assignment from the LORD (Limburg 22, 42; LaCosse 1476). The author of Jonah does not reveal the reason that Jonah fled from this assignment until the later in the book of Jonah. In 3:10, we learn that God responded to the repentance of the people of Nineveh by changing course and not destroying them as Jonah had told them he would. This “greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry” (4:1 NLT). He registered his complaint with Yahweh by saying, “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people” (4:2 NLT). Jonah fled because he did not want to preach judgment to the Ninevites lest they repent and be forgiven (Limburg 42; Freitheim 77; LaCosse 1476; Ferguson 14). Why would Jonah not want Nineveh to repent and receive mercy? Some have said that he feared it would make him look like a liar since he was to announce impending judgment not just possible judgment (Limburg 42-43). Others have suggested that Jonah feared he would be seen as a traitor by his own people. Nineveh was a key city of Assyria, and Assyria was a staunch adversary of Israel. At the time that Jonah, son of Amittai’s, ministry, Assyria was experiencing a low point in their power. The prospect of God wiping out Nineveh would have appealed to Jonah and the Israelites. The prospect of God sparing Nineveh did not appeal to Jonah in any way. Eventually Assyria would destroy Samaria, the capital of Israel. Jonah knew that his reputation with his own people would be tarnished if he was the prophet who led the enemy to repentance. He had no desire to be a traitor to Israel or perceived as one by his peers (LaCosse 1474; Ferguson 14). Freitheim believes that Jonah’s reason for fleeing was a theological issue. Jonah held the common belief of Israelites of his day that the wicked deserved judgment. The

LORD told Jonah that he had seen how wicked the people of Nineveh were (1:1). Jonah felt they deserved destruction. He feared they would not get it if he told them it was coming so he resolutely set out to avoid delivering the message. His struggle was primarily with God's character and reputation as a merciful God. He wanted God to adopt a position of strict justice (Freitheim 78).

Another exegetical question deals with what Jonah was attempting. Did he really believe he could flee from the presence of Yahweh? The four commentators agree that Jonah would have known the impossibility of literally escaping the LORD's presence. Limburg, LaCosse, and Ferguson point to Psalm 139 as the straightforward statement of the impossibility. David writes in verse 7, "I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence" (NLT) (LaCosse 1476; Ferguson 15; Limburg 43). Ferguson explains that Jonah was not fleeing from the omnipresence of God but rather his "felt presence." In other words, he was fleeing from the place he had worshiped God, served God, and prayed to God. He was also fleeing from the place that he would be if he were going to be obedient to God. He was fleeing from a life with God, hoping to get far enough away that he would forget the "haunting pressures of the word from God" which had called him to go to Nineveh (16). Fretheim draws a distinguish between God's cultic presence which was tied to the spiritual life and practices of Israel and the structural presence of God through which God is present in the whole world. He draws the comparison to people who decide to break off regular church attendance or Christian fellowship because they do not want God to be a part of their lives. They may stay far away from anywhere God's word is proclaimed (80). The general meaning of Jonah's actions are that he wanted nothing to do with God's assignment to go to Nineveh.

When one asks of the text, “What does this text say about God?” a number of observations could be made. This text shows that Yahweh is a God who speaks to human beings. It shows that he is a God who sees the wickedness of human beings. In addition, he is a God who plans judgment against the wickedness of human beings. From these verses, one could also say that he is a God who announces that judgment ahead of time to give human beings a chance to repent. He is a God who sends people on unpleasant missions. Finally, he is a God from whom his people sometimes attempt to flee. Of the major themes discussed above, the one which presents itself in the opening three verses is that God cares for and desires the salvation of all the people on the earth, not just those who already identify as God’s (Limburg 34; S. Ferguson xii; Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476). This is a message that is as timely for the people attending my congregation today as it was for the Israelites of Jonah’s day. People need to be reminded that God is not just a God who cares about the well-being of Caucasian affluent Christians in the Midwest. He cares just as much about the people we consider our political adversaries at home and abroad. God cares about the salvation of people we consider “evil” just as much as he cares about us. He even calls us to be in mission and ministry to people who, in the depths of our hearts, we may wish did not exist. He calls us to reach out to them with the message of the coming judgment and the salvation available in Yahweh.

### **Jonah 1:4-16**

The structure of this section of Scripture is a chiasm in verses 4-15, with verse 16 serving as a concluding remark. The section begins with the Lord hurling a mighty wind upon the sea after Jonah in verse 4. It results in a terrible storm which threatens the ship Jonah is traveling on. The section ends with the sailors hurling Jonah into the sea in verse 15 which results in the sea becoming calm again (Limburg 47). At the center point of this passage is verse 9 which is

regarded as a confession of Jonah's faith. This is emphasized by the fact that in the Hebrew there are ninety-four words from the beginning of verse 4 to the opening words of Jonah's statement "I am a Hebrew" and ninety-four words from the beginning of verse 10 to the end of verse 15 (Limburg 48). The significance of verse 9 will be discussed below.

The narrative begins where verse 3 left off. In verse 3, Jonah was attempting escape from the Lord and the Lord's call for him to preach in Nineveh. In verse 4, the Lord is portrayed as pursuing Jonah with the powers over nature at his disposal. He will not allow Jonah to go his own way, but desires to have Jonah come to his senses (Fretheim 82). In verse 4, it reads that the Lord "hurled" a great wind upon the sea. The word for "hurled" is used four times in this section. In verse 5, the desperate sailors hurl their cargo overboard to try to either lighten their load or appease their gods (Fretheim 82–83). In verse 12, Jonah suggests that the sailors hurl him into the sea. In verse 15, the sailors do hurl Jonah into the sea (Limburg 43, 48, 49). This is the same word used in the stories of King Saul to describe how he hurled his spear at David (1 Sam. 18:11) and Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:33) on occasions. It suggests that in verse 5 that God is unleashing the weaponry of his heavenly arsenal to pursue his servant Jonah (Limburg 48). Limburg notes that the contents which were hurled into the sea as the sailors prayed to their gods in verse 5 were likely quite costly. He cites the description of ships of Tarshish in Ezekiel 27:12–25 and suggests the possible cargo could be expensive metals, horses, mules, ivory, and other desirable products (49). Since the seas did calm down when Jonah was hurled into the waters, Fretheim proposes the sailors may have hoped to accomplish that first with the sacrifice of the cargo (82).

Verse 5 shares that when the durability of the ship was challenged by the storm, the sailors were "fearing for their lives" (NLT). The word "fear" is used six times in its verb or noun



form in chapter 1 of Jonah. In verse 5, the sailors fear for their lives. In verse 9, Jonah says that he fears (“worships” NLT) the LORD. In verse 10, the sailors have great fear (“were terrified” NLT) when they hear this news. In verse 16, after the sea calms down, the sailors have a great fear (“were awestruck” NLT) for the LORD (Limburg 47;Fretheim 57). In verses 10-16, the word for fear is used in both verb and noun form together to intensify the meaning. (Limburg 57). The word fear is used in a couple of distinct ways in the Bible. In one sense, it can refer to simply being afraid as in verses 5 and 10. In another sense, it can refer to an attitude of reverence or honor toward a deity as in verses 9 and 16 (Limburg 57). It is noted that the sailors go from being afraid of the storm, to being greatly afraid of the LORD, to having fearfully reverent worship of him by the end of the scene (Fretheim 47).

One of the ironies of this passage of Scripture has to do with the difference between the actions of Jonah and the other people on the ship. When the rest of the people on the ship are terrified of the storm, praying desperately to their gods and throwing things overboard, Jonah is “sound asleep down in the hold” (vs.5 NLT). The Hebrew suggests this was a deep sleep, perhaps even one brought on by God. The same phrase is found in Genesis 1:21 in the creation account where it says, “The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep” (Limburg 50; Fretheim 83). This is also the same language used to describe the sleep of Sisera who was in such a slumber that he did not hear Jael coming upon him to kill him in Judges 4:21. Similarly, Jonah was so heavily asleep that he had no awareness of the storm which was threatening the ship and travelers (Limburg 50). The Hebrew also portrays the sleep of one who is not at all fitful or disturbed in any way (Fretheim 83). LaCosse suggests that perhaps this sleep was brought on by God in order to push the crisis to the breaking point so that the sailors would know that their pagan gods were of no help (1477). Ferguson hypothesizes that the sleep may have

been brought on by Jonah's complete exhaustion from running or even relaxation because he had thought he had safely escaped (23).

In verse 5, the author also introduces the sailors who were working the boat that Jonah had boarded. The only other place the word translated "sailors" occurs is in Ezekiel 27 (vv.9,27, 29) where it speaks of the sea-faring people of Tyre and their ships (Limburg 49). The pagan sailors are depicted in a favorable manor throughout this narrative. In verse 5, their piety is evidenced by their quickness to pray to their gods and offer of the cargo as sacrifices (Limburg 49). In verse 6, the captain of the ship is the one who wakes up Jonah to pray (Limburg 50-51; Fretheim 84). The sailors hold to a firm belief system which is demonstrated in their assumptions that the storm was punishment for evil that someone on the ship had done and that God communicates through casting lots (Limburg 51; Fretheim 84). Limburg suggests that their reaction to Jonah in verse 8 shows they were slow to assume guilt which is a notable character quality (Limburg 52). Their response to Jonah in verse 10 illustrates that they cannot imagine treating their own gods the way Jonah treated the LORD (Fretheim 86-87). Even after Jonah gave them instructions to throw him into the sea, they do not desire to harm him. In verse 13, the soldiers are seen rowing frantically to get Jonah back to the place that he had boarded, hoping to set him back on the right path and spare his death (Fretheim 89; Ferguson 26; LaCosse 1477). In verse 14, the sailors are found actually praying and crying out to the LORD (Limburg 55-56; Fretheim 90). After throwing Jonah into the sea and observing the way the sea calmed down, their most dramatic act of piety is found in verse 16. At this point, the sailors actually begin worshiping the LORD, offering him sacrifices and vowing to serve him (Limburg 57-59; LaCosse 1477). Jonah does pledge to worship the LORD in this fashion until 2:9 when he concludes his song of thanksgiving from the belly of the great fish. When it says in verse 16 that

the sailors “feared the LORD” (ESV), it is the same language used by Jonah in verse 9. He says there, “I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land” (ESV). After the storm, the sailor’s devotion to LORD is expressed in the same way. Fretheim says that in verse 16 the author speaks of the sailors’ complete conversion to Jonah’s God (90). In seeking to flee from God and the task to preach to the Ninevites, Jonah ends up converting the pagan sailors as well (82). Ferguson seems to be in agreement with Fretheim about this (17). LaCosse believes it unlikely that full conversion took place, saying it’s more probable that the sailors merely added the LORD to the list of the gods they worshiped (1477).

At the center of the concentric structure of this section of Scripture is Jonah’s statement in verse 9. In verse 8, the crew or the ship demand answers from Jonah, asking, “Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?” (NLT). Jonah answers them in verse 9, saying, “I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” There are varying opinions on which of the four questions asked by the crew Jonah attempts to answer with this response. Fretheim believes that Jonah’s response is not tied to any of the questions (85). Limburg states that he was answering the fourth question (54). Ferguson suggests that Jonah’s answer satisfies all of the questions except the one about his occupation. This shows that at this point Jonah is no longer able to say, “I am a prophet of the LORD.” He had abandoned his occupation when he fled from God (25). While the relationship between verses 8 and 9 are somewhat ambiguous, the content of verse 9 remains very significant. This is the first time that Jonah speaks in the book (Limburg 53). Jonah identifies himself as a Hebrew which ethnologically means that he is a member of the people of Israel. This term is usually used by foreigners when speaking about the Israelites in the Old Testament writings (53). It is possible that Jonah’s identification as a Hebrew is a way of answering the last three

questions asked by the sailors (Fretheim 85). He then makes his confession of faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel (Limburg 54; Fretheim 85). Although showing himself disobedient to the LORD in his actions, he is showing himself orthodox in his beliefs. His problem is not a lack of faith but a lack of obedience (Limburg 54). He also speaks to the crew of the sovereignty of the LORD over heaven, the seas, and dry land (Limburg 54; Fretheim 85; LaCosse 1477). Non-Hebrew peoples believed many of their gods had jurisdiction over specific realms and functions, but in typical Old Testament fashion, Jonah declares the God of Israel is God over all (LaCosse 1477). Fretheim points out that it should be noted that Jonah only speaks about Yahweh to the pagan sailors when backed into a corner (85). Jonah's presence amongst the sailors and his confession of faith prove indispensable in the salvation of the sailors. Without his presence on the boat, they would not have seen the display of Yahweh's power. Without his confession of faith, they would not have known which god was responsible for the storm (Fretheim 85).

By asking what this passage tells us about God, a number of observations can be made. These verses declare that Yahweh is the God of heaven. He is the God who made land and the sea. It is a God who has the power to manipulate the forces of nature to do his will. He is a God who pursues human beings. He is a God from whom human beings cannot escape. He is a God who uses imperfect servants to do his will. He is a God who uses the confession of his people to bring about faith in non-believers. He is a God who evokes belief, worship, and allegiance from non-believers with demonstrations of his power. Three of the major themes of Jonah are exhibited in this section. First, God's sovereignty over all creation is articulated by Jonah in verse 9 and displayed in God's actions (Limburg 34; Fergusson xii; Fretheim 21; LaCosse 1475-76). Second, that God cares for and desires the salvation of all people of the earth is reflected in how God used the events of this section to bring about the conversion of the sailors (Limburg 34;

Fergusson xii; Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476). Third, that the God of Israel is the only true God is articulated in the confession of Jonah in verse 9 (Limburg 35).

There are several applications from this text for the people of Crossroads UMC. One is that the people of our community need to be reminded how important it is that we profess our faith in Christ. Though Jonah's confession did not come from a pure heart, his confession of belief gave the information the sailors needed to be saved. We need to remember that we cannot assume that people know who we are and who we worship. Sometimes we have to be a verbal witness for the LORD even knowing that we are flawed like Jonah. Another application has to do with our attitudes toward outsiders. Very much like the story of the Good Samaritan, in this text God makes sailors the ones who appear righteous rather than the Hebrew. There is a rebuking element in the text. It points out that sometimes our attitudes are not appropriate for the faith we profess. Sometimes those who we consider outside of the faith act more like we should than we do. We need to speak the truth about who God is and maintain a humble attitude toward others. A final application would be that we need to remember that even good-hearted pagans need to turn to the true God. Despite the fact that the pagan sailors acted better than Jonah, they still needed to turn and become worshipers of the only true God. In the pluralistic society we live in, we must never forget that there is only one God, and he only can save.

### **Jonah 1:17-2:10**

The structure of this third section of the book of Jonah includes two bracketing statements and a prayer of thanksgiving. The bracketing statements are found in 1:17 and 2:10 and involve the great fish (Limburg 50; Fretheim 93). In 1:17, the segment begins with the statement, "Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah" (NLT). In 2:10, the segment ends with the statement, "Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the

beach” (NLT). These brackets serve as mechanisms to show the reader that God is the primary actor in this section. God is then credited in verse 3 with throwing Jonah into the sea to begin with and in verses 6 with delivering Jonah from the clutches of death. This establishes that this is a chapter about God saving Jonah from death through a fish even though Jonah was deserving of death for his disobedience (Fretheim 93). The structure of the psalm of thanksgiving in verses 2-9 will be considered below.

It should be noted that in the Hebrew text of this segment of Jonah that 1:17 is actually numbered as 2:1. This seems to indicate that the story of Jonah 2 begins with what English Bibles suggest is the last verse of chapter 1 (Limburg 60; LaCosse 1477). The prior section of Scripture ends with Jonah being thrown into the sea by pagan sailors who seem to be converted into worshipers of Yahweh. Then, when it appears that all hope is lost for Jonah, the text says that the LORD “appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah” (ESV). The word “appointed” is used four times in the book of Jonah and always with reference to the LORD’s control over nature (LaCosse 1477). Here the LORD appoints a fish to swallow Jonah to keep him from drowning. In 4:6, the LORD appoints a plant to provide shade to shelter Jonah from the heat. In 4:7, the LORD appoints a worm to destroy the plant. In 4:8, the LORD appoints a scorching wind to amplify the harsh effects of the heat Jonah is experiencing (Limburg 60; LaCosse 1477). This same word for “appoint” is used in the first chapter of Daniel. In Daniel 1:10, it says that king appointed a certain diet for the young men in training. In verse 11, it says that the king had appointed a steward to have charge of Daniel and his comrades. Limburg points out that as a human king can appoint or assign servants particular tasks, Jonah shows that the LORD can assign any of the elements of the created world to do his bidding (60). This is one of the major

themes of the book of Jonah: God's sovereignty over all creation (Limburg 34; Ferguson xii; Fretheim 21; LaCosse 1475-76).

The "great fish" deserves to be recognized and discussed at this point. This is the seventh of fourteen times that the word "great" is used in Jonah. It is the most commonly used word in the book of Jonah (Fretheim 43). The fact that the fish was great is all the information we receive about it. No species of fish is implied with this description (Limburg 61; Fretheim 95; LaCosse 1477). Josephus, writing at the end of the first century, may have been the first to have identified the great fish as a whale (Limburg 61). Although Ferguson sees the great fish as a vehicle of judgment (30), Fretheim believes it rather to be a vehicle of deliverance (96-97). Fretheim emphasizes that Jonah's distress was not caused by being in the fish. Rather, the prayer of thanksgiving in 2:1-9 is a prayer about how God saved Jonah *through* the fish (96-97). LaCosse and Ferguson assume the historicity of Jonah's stay in the belly of the fish (LaCosse 1477; Ferguson 31). LaCosse argues that to claim it is impossible for God to sustain Jonah in the belly of the fish is to oppose one of the major themes of the book which is God's sovereignty over the created order. Fretheim points to Daniel 3:14-17 as another example of how God worked miraculously to overrule the normal processes of the human body (1477). Ferguson warns against focusing too much on the great fish at the expense of losing focus of the great God (31).

The author informs us in 1:17b that Jonah's stay inside the fish lasted "three days and three nights." The only other place this phrase occurs in the Old Testament is in 1 Samuel 30:12 where it says that David's men found a depleted Egyptian who had not eaten for three days and three nights (Limburg 62; Fretheim 97). There are a few suggestions on this significance of this time period to narrative of Jonah. Limburg explains this as the amount of time it took for the fish to transport Jonah back to the place where he would vomit him up on the beach (62). Fretheim

sees this as an approximation of time which may have had spiritual significance to the people who originally received the text. He references an ancient Sumerian text, noting it was believed by some of this time period that this was the amount of time it took to travel from earth to the underworld. Since Jonah claims that he called to God “from the land of the dead” (2:2), perhaps “three days and three nights” describes the amount of time it took for the fish to bring Jonah back from the underworld (98). Of great significance for Christians is that this phrase was later picked up by Jesus in Matthew 12:40. There he says that as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, the Son of Man will be in the belly of the earth for the same amount of time (Limburg 72; LaCosse 1477; Fretheim 98).

The structure and contents of verses 2-9 fall into the typical pattern of a psalm of individual thanksgiving (Limburg 63; Fretheim 94; LaCosse 1477). Jonah himself seems to identify this section as a song of thanksgiving in verse 9 which suggests that it best be understood that way (Limburg 64). Other psalms from the book of Psalms which fall into this category include Psalms 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 66, 116, 118, and 138 (Limburg 64-65). Psalms of thanksgiving include a grateful response to the LORD for some specific act of rescue. They assume the presence of a congregation gathered either for instruction or worship. They tell the story of the deliverance experienced. The heart of psalms of thanksgiving is the story of deliverance, briefly summarized and then expanded upon. They also often speak of a thank offering of vows to be performed (Limburg 65; Fretheim 94). Fretheim offers a very simple structure for understanding these psalms and applies it to Jonah’s song. They begin with an introduction, move on to a recollection of the distress from which the author has been rescued (often including a quotation of a cry for help), move on to a report of the rescue, and end with a conclusion of some sort (94). In Jonah 2, the introduction is found in verse 2. Then Jonah gives a



brief summary of the distress and deliverance he will describe in more detail in the verses that follow. This is a common type of introduction to songs of thanksgiving. The recollection of the distressful situation is found in verses 3-6a. The report of deliverance is very brief and is found in verse 6b. The conclusion is found in verses 7-9. It has three distinct parts. Verse 7 is another brief summary of the entire salvation event. Verse 8 contains a “word to the congregation.” (Limburg adds that verses 2a, 7a, and 9b also seem to address the congregation rather than God.) Finally, verse 9 contains a vow to praise the LORD (Limburg 65; Fretheim 101-103).

Jonah’s prayer has a structure that is common to other psalm of thanksgiving. In fact, most of the phrases in Jonah’s song of thanksgiving can be found in other Psalms (Limburg 63; Fretheim 94; Ferguson 31-34). Because of the great extent of common language with other Psalms, there are different opinions about how it was constructed. Ferguson puts forward that many argue that this chapter of Jonah is a later compilation which could never have been uttered by Jonah. He believes however that there is a very high probability that Jonah prayed the prayer exactly as it is recorded. It is not unlikely that Jonah would have known many of the Psalms from the Bible. He could be utilizing the spiritual resources that he had gleaned through many years of being a spiritual leader among the people of Israel. Ferguson suggests that this shows Jonah’s return to the Word of God after fleeing from it (34).

The section of Jonah’s prayer which is unique to him is found in verses 5-6. There he says, “the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever” (ESV). This section describes how Jonah had nearly died by drowning before the LORD sent the fish to rescue him. The word translated “weeds” is the same word translated “reeds” in Exodus 2:3. The word translated “wrapped” is the one used to describe how the turbans would be wrapped around the

heads of the priests of Israel (Exod. 29:9). The statement phrase “went down” which first appeared twice in 1:3 and then in 1:5 appears for the final time in 2:6. This completes Jonah’s attempt to flee both horizontally and vertically from God (Limburg 68). This unique section is used to explain how close to physical death actually was Jonah was before he was rescued.

Verse 8, the primary “word to the congregation,” is evaluated differently by Limburg and Fretheim. The verse simply states, “Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God’s mercies” (NLT). Limburg believes that this verse shows the didactic intent of Jonah’s psalm. It shows us how it was used in the worshipping life of Israel. It reveals that the intended audience was a people who were engaged in idol worship (69-70). Fretheim sees verse 8 as a sign of Jonah’s lack of true repentance. He believes Jonah is taking a superior attitude toward others, comparing their behavior to his faithfulness. For him, this psalm demonstrates that Jonah has not changed in any way (103-04).

Verse 9 is important in a couple of ways. In verse 9a, Jonah finally vows to do what the pagan sailors have already done. In 1:16, they offered Yahweh sacrifices and vowed to serve him. Jonah now vows to do that at some future time (Fretheim 103; LaCosse 1478). Verse 9b has a simple theological statement: “Salvation comes from the LORD” (ESV). Limburg suggests that this verse is the theological center of chapter 2 much as 1:9 was the theological center of chapter 1 (71). Fretheim says this verse is the key line in the entire book of Jonah. Its truth is demonstrated throughout. In chapter 1, the LORD saves the sailors who call upon him. In chapter 2, the LORD saves Jonah when he cries out to him. In chapter 3, the LORD saves the Ninevites who repent and turn to him. In chapter 4, God’s argument with Jonah is about God’s right to have full freedom in saving whom he will (103-04). LaCosse proposes that the truth that “salvation comes from the LORD alone” (NLT) is one that the nation of Israel as a whole

apparently needed to be reminded of. The LORD's salvation is his to give to whomever he pleases, and those who have been recipients of it have no right to restrict the flow of it others (1476).

In response to the question, "What does this text say about God?" many things may be observed. This text shows that God has power to use animal life to fulfill his purposes. He is a God who hears and answers prayers. He is a God who snatches people from the jaws of death. He is a God who saves whomever he wishes. He is a God who offers mercy to those who turn to him even if it's at the very last minute. Five out of the seven major themes mentioned are demonstrated in this chapter. It demonstrates God's sovereignty over all creation (Limburg 34; S. B. Ferguson xii; Fretheim 21; LaCosse 1475–1476), that God may at times change his mind and relent from bringing judgment in response to the repentance of humans (Limburg 34; Fretheim 23; LaCosse 1479), that God's desire is always to show mercy rather than to inflict judgment (Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476–77), and that God rescues people who call on him in trouble (Limburg 35).

There are many applications from Jonah 2 for the people of Crossroads and other contemporary people. This chapter shows that we should not put our trust in any idols (money, sex, power, spiritual pedigree, national identity, etc.) but rather in the LORD. Since God delivers those who call on him in trouble, we should call upon him in our troubles. We should recognize that the God who made the sea and dry land continues to control events in the natural world and may manipulate them (Limburg 70-72). In addition, this chapter reminds us that the inadequacy of our prayers does not limit God's freedom to respond with salvation. We should pray confidently even if we feel inadequate (Fretheim 74). We should remember that thanksgiving is always the appropriate response to God's benevolent actions toward us (Fretheim 95). We should

remember that God is sovereign over the actions of other human beings whom he often uses as his instruments (Fretheim 101). This chapter also shows us that we should use the resources of the Psalms and God's Word to help us draw near to God as Jonah did. It also shows us that sometimes we need to experience the grace of God toward ourselves before we can minister it to others (Ferguson 34-35).

### **Jonah 3:1-10**

The structure of this section of Jonah is easily identifiable. It begins with the LORD recommissioning Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh in verses 1-2. Jonah then obeys the LORD in verses 3-4. In verses 6-9, the Ninevites repent of their sin against the LORD. The section concludes in verse 10 with the LORD relenting of the disaster that he had said he would bring upon Nineveh (Limburg 74, 77; Fretheim 105).

The wording of verses 1-2 is noticeably similar to that of 1:1-2. Thus the second half of the book of Jonah begins the same way the first half did (Limburg 75; Fretheim 105; Ferguson 58; LaCrosse 1478). The words of 3:1 are identical to the words of 1:1 except for the fact that "son of Amittai" in chapter 1 is replaced with "a second time" in chapter 3. This language of the word of God coming to someone "a second time" is not entirely new. It is also found in Jeremiah 1:13, 13:3, and 33:1. However, in Jeremiah it is to say something new to Jeremiah. Only in Jonah does the word of God come a second time to say essentially the same thing. Jonah is the only prophet to have the same assignment given to him twice. Limburg points out that Yahweh does not speak to Jonah about his previous behavior or attitude. He does not use this as a teaching opportunity, but appears to demonstrate the characteristics that Jonah will point out in 4:2 (Limburg 75-76). There is another variation between 1:1-2 and 3:1-2 which is found in 3:2. In 1:2, the LORD tells Jonah to call out against Nineveh, "for their evil has come up before me"

(ESV). In 3:2, he tells Jonah to call out against Nineveh “the message that I tell you” (ESV).

Ferguson notes that implied in the LORD’s commission to Jonah in 3:2 is a command for Jonah to render complete obedience rather just deliver a message (58).

Verse 3 begins by resolving the tension which was created in chapter 1. In chapter 1, Jonah rose to flee from the LORD’s presence. In chapter 3, he rose and went to Nineveh “according to the word of the LORD” (ESV). This phrase which demonstrates obedience to the command of the LORD places Jonah back in the historic stream of prophetic behavior. This phrase is also used in reference to the actions of Elijah (2 Kings 1:17, 9:26, 10:17), Elisha (2 Kings 4:44, 7:16), the unnamed man of God (2 Kings 23:16), and other prophets (2 Kings 24:2). Although he is not named as a prophet in the book of Jonah, this phrase places him unambiguously in the category of Old Testament prophet (Limburg 76).

Nineveh is introduced again in verse 3 after not receiving any mention in chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on the city and people of Nineveh. The word “Nineveh” is actually mentioned seven times in this chapter (Limburg 77). The city’s size is spoken of in two distinct ways in verse 3. It is referred to as an “exceedingly great city” and also as a city which is “three days’ journey in breadth” (ESV). The NLT translates these phrases saying Nineveh is “a city so large it took three days to see it all” (Limburg 77; LaCosse 1478). Archaeological evidence does not confirm that Nineveh was this large (Limburg 78; LaCosse 1478; Fretheim 106). There are different opinions on how to interpret what the author of Jonah is trying to communicate with this description. Limburg points to excavations from the eighth century B.C. which indicate that Nineveh was a city with encompassing walls in the shape of a trapezoid with a total perimeter of approximately seven and half miles. The longest distance across the city was approximately two and three quarter’s miles. He speculates that perhaps Jonah’s author is referring to how long it

took for Jonah to wander about in the city preaching. Perhaps the three days refers to the time it took for someone to travel in from the suburbs and return. Perhaps it was simply exaggeration for the sake of effect. Regardless, the author is trying to create a feeling astonishment at the size of the city in the reader's mind. He believes that by the time Jonah was written Nineveh had been destroyed for some time. Nineveh is thus meant to function as a symbol of all of the great cities of the world (78). Fretheim also believes the author is employing exaggeration for the sake of narrative effect (106). LaCosse agrees that Nineveh was not as large as the author describes it in Jonah 3 but also disagrees with Limburg on the actual circumference. He reports that it was roughly three miles while agreeing that it would not have taken three days for Jonah to walk around it. He suggests that the description of Nineveh as "a city so large that took three days to see it all" (NLT) could be meant to communicate that was how long it would take Jonah to spread his message thoroughly in the city. He also offers that the author's description of Nineveh's size could include the area of the villages which surrounded the city (1478). Regardless of how one assesses the historic size of Nineveh to the author's description, it is clear that the author is describing a city of vast size and capacity.

Verse 4 reports that when Jonah arrived he entered the city, going only one day's journey in, and starts calling out "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown" (ESV). In the Hebrew, Jonah's message consists of only five words. Unlike most prophetic messages, Jonah gives no reason for why Nineveh will be overthrown. Limburg says it lacked creativity (79). Fretheim says it demonstrates poor communication and a half-hearted effort (107). Ferguson suggests that perhaps the five words reported by the author are merely a summary of Jonah's message which could have been embellished in detail when delivered. Regardless, Ferguson holds this up as an example of our need to keep the God's message simple and clear so that

people can respond (61). The “forty day” aspect of Jonah’s message is at the same time familiar and unique. It is familiar in that it is a common duration of time utilized in biblical narratives. It was the length of the flood in Genesis 7. It was the amount of time Moses spent on Mount Sinai in Exodus and Deuteronomy. It was the duration of the operation undertaken by the Israelite spies in Numbers 13. It was the length of time that Goliath taunted the Israel army in 1 Samuel 17. It was the time of the journey of Elijah to Horeb in 1 Kings 19. With all the familiarity associated with the forty day time period in Old Testament narratives, what is unique is that Jonah is the only prophet to ever have attached a time limit to a message which was preached to a disobedient people. Fretheim posits that perhaps the forty day time limit was an attachment that Jonah made to the message God had given him (108). The word translated “overthrown” is one that is also found in the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Just as those cities were overthrown by God for their depravity, the author is suggesting that this is the exact fate that was about to befall Nineveh (Limburg 79).

Verses 5-9 give the details of the dramatic repentance which took place in Nineveh as the result of Jonah’s preaching. This is the second time that pagans have turned to God in the book of Jonah, the first being the sailors in 1:16 (Limburg 80; LaCosse 1478). Fretheim explains that the statement in 3:5 that “the people of Nineveh believed God” (ESV) shows that they responded in true saving faith. This puts them in with Abram in Genesis 15:6 and the Israelites in Exodus 14:31. The Hebrew suggests that they do more than believe Jonah’s prediction would come true. Rather they put their trust in Jonah’s God, even though there is no mention of God in Jonah’s reported message (111). In addition to responding in faith, they also respond in fasting. There is great evidence that fasting as a sign of repentance and sorrow was very common in Israel and other countries; the scope of the fasting in Nineveh sets it apart (Limburg 82; Fretheim 111).

Verse 5 tells us that the fasting in Nineveh involved everyone from “the greatest of them to the least of them” (ESV). In verse 6, word reaches the king and he joins the fast, coming down from his throne, putting on sackcloth and sitting in ashes. Fretheim points out that since kings in ancient Near Eastern culture were perceived to be semi-divine that it could be said that the king’s descent from his throne demonstrates that the god of the Ninevites was bowing down to Jonah’s God (111). In verses 7-8, the king of Nineveh utilizes his full governmental authority to command all humans and animals participate in a total fast from food and water. The beasts must even be covered with sackcloth as a sign to God of their repentance. Everyone must call to God for mercy. He even calls for complete repentance of all the evil and violence which had caused this negative attention from God to come their way. The involvement of the animals to this extent is unique to the book of Jonah (Fretheim 111). Just as God expresses his concern for the animals of Nineveh in the last verse of the book, here the author illustrates the solidarity between humans and animals under the hand of God (Limburg 83). LaCosse explains that the extension of the fast to the animals demonstrates that the king was requiring all normal operations of Nineveh to be brought to an abrupt halt because of the direness of the circumstances (1479). Limburg shows that when the king calls everyone and every beast to “turn from his evil way” that he is using language that the Hebrew prophets, historians, and wisdom teachers use on multiple occasions to call people to get on the right path before God. By doing this, the author is casting the king of Nineveh as one who is becoming an example to others of the piety expected of Israelites (83).

Another laudable characteristic of the king of Nineveh is the attitude he takes towards God. When the king calls for a complete fast of beasts and animals his stated basis for doing so in verse 9 is, “Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we



may not perish?” (ESV). There are two other biblical texts where this language is used. In 2 Samuel 12 when David and Bathsheba’s newborn baby was on the brink of death, David fasted and wept saying in verse 22, “Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and the child may live?” In the book of Joel, the prophet calls the people to return to the LORD saying, “Who knows whether he will not turn and relent?” In all three cases, this particular phrasing is tied to people fasting to attempt to solicit mercy from the LORD. It is also an acknowledgement from those fasting that there is no guarantee that repentance will procure the desired response from God. The “Who knows?” acknowledges that human beings do not control God but that God has freedom to save who he will. Limburg finds it commendable that the king does not assume automatic forgiveness of the evils of his people (Limburg 83-84, 88). Fretheim suggests that the king’s statement demonstrates a highly sophisticated understanding of God and how he works in the world. It is also an example of irony because it is the heathen not Jonah who understand the sovereign freedom of God to save who he will. The king reminds the reader that while God’s salvation is usually contingent upon repentance that repentance does not entitle one to salvation. God is free to act as he pleases (112-13). Ferguson believes the statement of the king in verse 9 demonstrates that his repentance was accompanied by a “mustard seed” of faith in God, not strong or sure faith, but a small amount which did pay off (74).

Chapter 3 concludes in verse 10 with God relenting of the disaster that he had announced he would bring upon Nineveh. Just as God had taken note of the evil that the people of Nineveh had been committing (1:2), now he sees how they repented and “how they turned from their evil way” and he was satisfied (Limburg 86). This is not the first instance in the Old Testament of God changing his mind about punishing. Another example is when Moses interceded for the people of Israel after the event with the golden calf in Exodus 34:12-14. Also in Amos chapter 7,

twice upon Amos' intercession, the LORD relented from bringing disaster upon the people of Israel (Limburg 86, Fretheim 114). What happens in Jonah 3 is very much an illustration of what the LORD says Jeremiah 18:7-8: "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoke, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster I intended to do to it" (ESV). This response from God was what Jonah was afraid of all along (Limburg 88; Fretheim 106). Though the LORD relenting of disaster in response to repentance of human beings is not unprecedented, there are a couple unique aspects of the Jonah 3 incident. First, this is the only recorded time that God relents from punishing a nation other than Israel. This shows that God's love and patience which Israel had experienced was also available for all people. It shows that God's will toward the entirety of creation is salvific rather than vengeful in nature (Limburg 86; Fretheim 114). Second, whereas the Exodus and Amos passages involve someone interceding for the ones destined for destruction, Jonah had no interest in the salvation of Nineveh (Limburg 86). This is another example of the greatness of God's mercy.

When asking what this passage says about God, a number of significant observations emerge. This passage shows that the LORD is a God who at least sometimes gives his servants more than one chance to do his will. He is a God who delivers his messages through human agents. He is a God who brings judgment on the wicked. However, he is also a God who announces judgment ahead of time to give people a chance to turn back from their evil ways. This passage shows that the LORD is a God who tends to respond favorably to genuine acts of repentance. It also shows that he is a God who is not opposed to changing his mind about judgment when people repent before it's too late. The major themes of Jonah emphasized in this section are as follows: God cares for and desires the salvation of all the people on the earth, not

just those who already identify as God's (Limburg 34; S.B.Ferguson xii; Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476). God may at times change his mind and relent from bringing judgment in response to the repentance of humans (Limburg 34; Fretheim 23; LaCosse 1479). God's desire is always to show mercy rather than to inflict judgment (Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476–77). God rescues people who call on him in trouble (Limburg 35). There are many relevant applications that can be drawn from Jonah 3. One would be that as Jonah did, we ought to go to the places where the need is the greatest, where people have not heard about God's judgment and grace. We ought not just stay in the safe places of our own religious communities (Limburg 77). We also learn that we ought to fully and truly repent of known sin like the Ninevites did. We need to know that the Lord sees the sins of people living in the most affluent cities and he will hold them accountable. We need to truly repent of known sin before it's too late (Limburg 87). We also learn that we can be used by God to carry his message to others even though we are imperfect ourselves. Jonah was far from perfect. His attitude is still suspect yet God used him mightily. We also can be used by God long before we have reached full spiritual maturity. In addition, we learn that messengers of God's Word are crucial to God's work in the world. The Ninevites repented because a messenger shared a message. We need to be willing to be God's messengers so that people can repent and turn to God (Fretheim 109; Ferguson 61). Another application is that entitlement is never the right attitude before God. The attitude of the king of Nineveh toward God is the appropriate one for all seeking mercy. We are to go to God humbly, asking for salvation, never demanding it (Fretheim 113). In addition though, we need to remember that God's disposition toward the human race is always a longing for their salvation. We should have a similar disposition as we think about those people who are different than us or even who are caught up in terrible evil. We should also remember it when we are the ones caught up in sin (Fretheim 114).

### **Jonah 4:1-11**

The final chapter of the book of Jonah is structured in an ABCCBA chiasmus similar to that of chapter 1 (Fretheim 117). The emphasis of this chapter is not the fate of the city of Nineveh, but the state of the prophet Jonah (Limburg 88). The chapter opens with Jonah issuing a prayer to the LORD (4:2). He states his complaint against God's mercy and then beseeches the Lord to kill him in verse 3. In the Hebrew, Jonah's opening prayer is thirty-nine words. The chapter ends in verses 10-11 with the LORD making a speech of explanation for his mercy which is also thirty-nine words in the Hebrew (Limburg 97). In the middle section (vs.4-9), the LORD challenges Jonah's understanding of justice and manipulates nature one final time in order to provide an object lesson which he uses as the basis for his closing argument.

In verse 1 of chapter 4, the narrator reports that Jonah is extremely upset that the Ninevites have repented and that the LORD has relented. The English Standard Version of verse 1 has a footnote which says that the opening words of chapter 4 could read, "it was exceedingly evil to Jonah." The word translated "evil" here (Hebrew *ra'ah*) was used three times in chapter 3. In 3:8, it is used to tell of how the Ninevites turned from their evil ways. In 3:10, it is used to report how God saw that they had turned from their evil ways. It is also used in 3:10 to describe how the God relented of the evil ("destruction" NLT, "disaster" ESV) he had planned to bring upon them. So now in chapter 4, it is reported that the fact that the LORD relented of the evil he was going to bring upon the Ninevites seems evil to Jonah. He is very angry about how things have played out (Limburg 89).

Jonah opens his prayer in verse 2 by stating clearly that his worst fears in this matter have been realized. He had thought this could happen while he was still in Israel. He did not think it was good or desirable so he fled to Tarshish. It is not until this final chapter that Jonah's motives

are clearly revealed (Limburg 89). Jonah then explains in the second half of verse 2 that it is God's gracious character, apparently well-known to Jonah, which made Jonah not want to be involved in the assignment. In stating the LORD's character, Jonah recites a statement of faith which practically held the status of a creed in ancient Israel (Fretheim 119). The LORD first gave this self-disclosure about himself to Moses when he passed before him in Exodus 34. It says in verses 6-7, "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression of sin...'" (ESV). This statement, as least in part, occurs some ten times in the Old Testament in addition to the Exodus passage and is alluded to in many other places (Fretheim 119). The addition of the phrase "and relents from disaster" however is only found in one place besides Jonah 4:2 and that is in Joel 2:13 (Limburg 90). Nevertheless, the fact that Jonah makes this common statement of faith in Yahweh demonstrates at least two important things. First, it demonstrates that Jonah is thoroughly familiar with and steeped in his own religion tradition and its language (Limburg 90). Second, and perhaps more relevant to the narrative of the book of Jonah, it demonstrates that the steadfast love and gracious disposition of Yahweh is not limited to the nation of Israel. It is in fact his disposition toward all of creation, including pagan nations and animals (Limburg 92; Fretheim 119). Jonah concludes his opening prayer in verse 3 by asking the LORD to take his life because it would be better for him to die than to live. Jonah is not the first or the last biblical character to express a death wish. Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Moses (Exod. 32:32; Num. 11:15), Job (6:8-9), and Jeremiah (20:14-18) did the same (Limburg 92; Fretheim 121; Ferguson 121). Though there are notable similarities between Elijah's death wish and Jonah's, the distinction is also notable. Elijah seems to have felt as if he had failed. Jonah's misery is tied to the fact that

his mission was successful (Limburg 92; Fretheim 121). Different theories are proposed for why Jonah wished to die. Limburg offers a suggestion found in ancient midrash which is that Jonah had lost his hair and clothing in the belly of the fish. This caused him to be in a miserable condition brought about by mosquitoes, ants, and fleas (92). Fretheim proposes that this is a sign of mental instability combined with an improper theology (120-21). Ferguson uses the words “infantile spiritual regression” to explain the emotions and behaviors Jonah is exhibiting in this prayer (79). Limburg also points out that every other scene in the book of Jonah is initiated by the LORD. In this scene alone, Jonah initiates the conversation, and he does so to express his anger with the LORD. The LORD responds to Jonah with a question. The extensive use of questions is an observable characteristic of the book of Jonah, hinting that it’s intended to be used for didactic purposes (Limburg 20-22). The LORD’s question challenges Jonah’s understanding of justice. He simply asks, “Is it right for you to be angry about this?” (NLT). This exchange marks the first piece of conversation between Jonah and Yahweh in the book (Limburg 94). Fretheim notes that God’s condescension to speak with Jonah in his anger shows that he is not only patient with people who are living in blatant sin like the Ninevites. He also has patience and love toward his own children. This is a picture of God pursuing Jonah, refusing the death wish but willing to stay engaged in the conversation (122).

The narrator then presents Jonah as exiting the discussion in anger in verse 5 (Limburg 94). He then goes out to the outskirts of Nineveh to watch and see what happens. He is holding out hope that the LORD will still punish the Ninevites in the same way he punished the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He seems to be holding to his convictions regarding the just punishment of Nineveh, and demonstrating by his actions that God ought to reconsider relenting (Limburg 95; Fretheim 123). Jonah then makes a booth for himself to give him shade while he waits. The

word booth (Hebrew *sukkah*) is one that is used many times in the Old Testament. Booths were used to give shelter to cattle (Gen. 33:17), to soldiers while in the battlefield (I Kings 20:16, 20), and other ways (Isa. 1:8). Most notably they were used extensively during the Feast of Booths where they were erected to commemorate the time that the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness under Moses' leadership (Limburg 94-95).

In verses 6-8, the LORD comes to Jonah again, still refusing to leave him alone in his darkness (Limburg 94; Ferguson 81). The LORD again manipulates nature to do his bidding. Here the narrator again uses the word "appoint" three times to describe God's power of over nature (Limburg 95; Ferguson 82). First God appoints a plant of unspecified species to grow very quickly over Jonah to increase the shade and comfort (Limburg 95; Fretheim 123; Ferguson 81). The ESV Bible has a footnote which says that probably the plant was a castor oil plant. Ferguson notes the humor and appropriateness of this since castor oil is often used as a punishment for children (81). Fretheim agrees that it could be a castor oil plant but also suggests that it could have been a unique plant created by God for this specific moment in history (123). The purpose of the plant as stated in verse 6 is to "save Jonah from his discomfort" (ESV). The word translated discomfort is the one translated "evil" (*ra'ah*) in chapter 3 and 4:1 (Limburg 95; Fretheim 123). This extension of mercy to Jonah results in a dramatic mood change. He becomes "exceedingly glad" (ESV). The next morning the God appoints a worm to come, attack the plant, and destroy it. Then he appoints a "scorching east wind" (ESV) to increase Jonah's experience of heat and distress (Limburg 96; Fretheim 124). Ferguson says these "appointments" should be seen as God's efforts to draw Jonah back to him (82-83). The destruction of the plant and the heat of the elements results in Jonah growing very faint and very angry. Fretheim believes that the intended lesson is for Jonah to experience a small dose of God's judgment so

that he will come to understand how awful it would have been for the Ninevites to experience it. The result should have been Jonah realizing that if he hated it so much that he could not possibly wish it upon others (125). This did not happen. In verse 8, Jonah again cries for death, repeating the words of verse 2, “It is better for me to die than to live” (Limburg 96; Fretheim 125). In verse 9, the LORD responds by again challenging Jonah’s understanding of true justice and Jonah responds that he is still in the right.

In verses 10-11, the story reaches its conclusion with a word from the LORD. He points out Jonah’s anger over the death of the plant which came as an undeserved gift of grace and then withered. Then he explains how much more appropriate it is that he cared for the salvation of the large city of Nineveh where people did not know “their right from their left” (ESV) who are “living in spiritual darkness” (NLT). The story ends with the LORD expressing that he also has great pity and concern for the many animals who live in Nineveh whom would also have been lost if it had been destroyed (Limburg 97; Fretheim 129-30). The last sentence in the book of Jonah is a question the LORD leaves for Jonah to ponder which we also must ponder (Fretheim 131; LaCosse 1479).

When asking the question, “What does this passage say about God?” many observations can be made. This passage shows that the LORD is a God who sometimes upsets people. He is a God who challenges human assumptions about what is right and wrong. He is a God who sometimes speaks to human beings through questions. He is a God who has power to manipulate plants, animals, wind, and sun for his purposes. He is a God who feels sorry for those who live in spiritual darkness. He is a God who feels compassion for animal life. He is a God whose grace toward outsiders is sometimes disliked by insiders. He is a God who goes to his people to teach



them a better way to be. He is a God who cares about the spiritual condition of his servants. He is a God who cares about the masses and the individuals.

Many of the major themes of the book of Jonah stated above are accentuated in this chapter. It shows God's sovereignty over all creation. God has created all things and has the ability to control and manipulate the natural world at will (Limburg 34; S. B. Ferguson xii; Fretheim 21; LaCosse 1475–76). It portrays how God cares for and desires the salvation of all the people on the earth, not just those who already identify as God's (Limburg 34; S. Ferguson xii; Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476). It discusses how God may at times change his mind and relent from bringing judgment in response to the repentance of humans (Limburg 34; Fretheim 23; LaCosse 1479). It drives home how God's desire is always to show mercy rather than to inflict judgment (Fretheim 25; LaCosse 1476–77). Finally, this chapter demonstrates vividly how wrong beliefs can lead to wrong actions, and God is very concerned about the beliefs and attitudes of his people toward God and other human beings (Fretheim 18–19).

There are many relevant applications for the lives of the Christians of Crossroads UMC and around the world which can be taken from this passage. This shows us how bad theology leads to disobedience and despair so we ought to watch our theology closely and be open to correction (Fretheim 121). It shows how our understanding of justice needs to be continually corrected by God lest we find ourselves fighting for the wrong causes. It also shows how our spiritual lives might need to be monitored closely if we hope to increase in maturity. Jonah seems to be “back to square one” in terms of his spiritual growth in this last chapter of the book (Ferguson 80). It also shows that just as crisis or trauma can lead people to regressive behavior, this can happen in the spiritual realm. We need to always be on guard (Ferguson 79). This passage also demonstrates how just because we may be witness to powerful spiritual blessings

where God moves mightily in people's lives, it does not mean that our hearts will be in the right place. Spiritual blessings around us do not necessarily mean spiritual wholeness within us (Ferguson 81). This also shows us that God is not just concerned for the service his people can render. He's very concerned about their hearts and souls. He keeps pursuing his servants to stay open to his grace. He does not run away from them when they have bad attitudes. He's not satisfied with them just getting a job done. He cares about them deeply (Ferguson 88). Finally, this chapter reminds us again that God is very concerned about the well-being of people who do not know him who are headed for destruction. He is very concerned about animal life as well. Because God cares about these things, we also ought to care about them deeply.

### **Research Design Literature**

This particular research project is defined as an intervention. This type of project involves diligently analyzing the ministry context, constructing meaningful action, and examining the results (Sensing 62). This type of "action research" utilizes the unique relationship of the pastor as researcher, and focuses on addressing a perceived problem or opportunity within a particular context (60). This intervention utilized a multi-method approach to data collection in order to increase the validity of the research (61).

The data needed to answer the first two research questions was collected primarily through two researcher-designed fixed-choice surveys administered electronically. The second survey included one open-ended question which allowed for people to give feedback about what impacted them in the sermon series. The large number of participants invited made the use of interviews or questionnaires less desirable options (Sensing 115). The structured response format enabled the participant to respond with ease and for the researcher to accumulate responses efficiently (Trochimweb). There are other benefits of using a fixed-choice or close-ended

questionnaire survey. It provides data that is easier to understand and interpret. It provides respondents with reminders of knowledge that may have been acquired in the past but not thought of recently. It also gives the respondents memory cues which could be used to engage in conversation when participating in a focus group at a later time (Church and Wacławski 68). The addition of one open-ended question gave participants the opportunity to offer qualitative feedback about the sermon series if they felt inclined.

The focus group method was employed for collecting data to answer the third research question. There were several reasons for using focus groups for this segment of the research. One was because the multi-method approach enhances triangulation and validity (Sensing 61, 72). Since the surveys provide a certain amount of quantitative data, the focus groups contributed greatly to the qualitative dimension of the study. At the recommendation of Sensing (123) and Krueger (2), there were both a facilitator and a note-taker present. The material used for training the facilitator and note taker was found on pages 120-24 of Sensing's *Qualitative Research*. The focus group data collection method was also chosen so that there would be increased synergy in the discussion which would not be possible in a one-on-one interview. The focus groups allowed the memories and thoughts of the participants to play off of each other and stimulate formerly unrecognized insights (Sensing 120). The focus group sessions were conducted according to the recommendations outlined in Richard A. Krueger's document, "Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews" (4).

### **Summary of Literature**

The review of literature for this project reveals a number of important findings about both expository preaching and the book of Jonah. Regarding expository preaching, the literature addressed the biblical and theological foundations, definitions, history, benefits, and criticisms of expository preaching. The Old Testament biblical foundation for expository preaching is laid in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, specifically in Nehemiah 8:8. There the teaching ministry of Ezra is described in a way which provides a model for many contemporary proponents of expository preaching. In the New Testament, there are six passages of Scripture which are referenced as foundational to expository preaching: Luke 4:16-28, Luke 24:13-35, Acts 20:26-27, 1 Timothy 4:13, 2 Timothy 2:15, and 2 Timothy 4:2-5. Of these, 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2 most naturally support the model of preaching attributed to Ezra and the modern practice of expository preaching. The two key doctrines which lay the theological foundation for expository preaching are the doctrines of the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture and the inerrancy of Scripture. Both of these are strongly held by the majority of modern advocates of expository preaching. Regarding definitions of expository preaching, there are many, but a survey of them shows that the majority of them share a common emphasis. In expository preaching, the Scripture passage is read, it is explained, and then it is applied to the lives of the hearers. The historic foundations of expository preaching can be traced back to the time of the Old Testament prophet Ezra. There is evidence that the running commentary style of expository preaching has been in use throughout Christian history even though not widely in every period. Historical examples of expository preachers include Origen in the third century, Chrysostom and Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries, and perhaps Bernard of Clairvaux in the Medieval period. The Reformation period and the Puritan era brought a great resurgence of expository

preaching. In the nineteenth century, expository preaching became a standard method of preaching, codified in part by the writing of John Broadus. Expository preaching continues to be in common usage in modern times. The stated benefits of expository preaching can be summarized as follows. Benefits for the preacher include saving the pastor time, feeding the pastor's soul, granting the pastor authority, and holding the pastor accountable. Frequently cited benefits of expository preaching can be summarized as increasing biblical literacy, educating in how to study the Bible, and providing an overall positive learning experience. Criticisms of expository preaching are that it focuses too much on the text and not enough on the listener, that it can be boring, that it lacks creativity, and that its advocates often have an attitude of superiority toward other types of preaching.

Regarding the book of Jonah, the literature addressed the genre, authorship, dating, and major themes of the book and provided extensive exegetical insight into each chapter. The genre of the book of Jonah is a matter of great debate. Some would say it is historical narrative, even an autobiographical historical narrative. Some would call Jonah an allegory, a parable, or midrash. Others would say it is a satirical, didactic, short story. Others would argue that historicity is not nearly as important as the message the book seeks to convey. The author of Jonah firmly places the historical setting of the book in the eighth century B.C., because Jonah the son of Amittai is named in 2 Kings 14:25 as a prophet who ministered during the reign of King Jereboam II who ruled Israel from 793-753 B.C. The authorship of the book of Jonah is a question of debate among scholars. Those who consider it autobiographical would say that Jonah himself wrote the book in third person. Others have suggested that authorship should be ascribed to an anonymous author from the eighth, fifth, or second century B.C. The literature also shows that there are several key themes in the book of Jonah which are laced throughout each chapter

and proven by the exegesis. These themes are as follows. God is sovereign over all creation. God cares for and desires the salvation of all the people on the earth. God may at times change his mind and relent from bringing judgment in response to the repentance of humans. God's desire is always to show mercy rather than to inflict judgment. The God of Israel is the only true God. God rescues people who call on him in trouble. God is very concerned about the beliefs and attitudes of his people toward God and other human beings.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the nature and purpose of this ministry project for the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary. The research questions are provided with an explanation of which data collection tools were utilized in gaining answers to them. The chapter also describes the context in which this project was completed and the participants involved. The process of data collection and analysis is explained in detail along with the reliability and validity of the research process.

#### Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes in worship participants at Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois as a result of an expository five-week sermon series on the book of Jonah.

This project was an intervention within the life of the congregation to examine the effects of a style preaching which is not common in mainline Protestant churches. The hope of the project was not to prove the effectiveness of expository preaching but to test it. The five-chapter scope of Jonah kept the project from being unreasonably long. Going verse-by-verse through a book of the Bible seemed advantageous to test the expository preaching style, since *lectio continuo* is a common long-term preaching strategy utilized by many expository preachers (Keller 39-41).

Adults, age eighteen and older, who attend Crossroads were invited to participate in a pre-test survey of their knowledge of the contents of the book of Jonah, their attitudes toward the issues discussed in Jonah, and behaviors which are addressed in Jonah. People were invited to

participate freely in the surveys, being informed that their surveys were to be used in this study. Then the five expository sermons were preached on consecutive Sunday mornings at Crossroads. At the conclusion of the sermon series, adult, age eighteen and older, were invited to participate in the study by taking a post-intervention survey which was identical to the pre-test survey with the addition of an open-ended question. Following the completion of the sermon series and the invitation to participate in the post-test survey, two focus groups from each worship service were created to participate in a semi-structured conversation about the effectiveness of the expository sermon series to facilitate changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Research Question #1**

**What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in regard to the book of Jonah prior to the sermon series?**

The primary method used for answering this research question was a thirty-question pre-test survey conducted through Survey Monkey, an online research tool. The survey covered several topics relevant to the research. Questions 1-10 measured the participant's knowledge about the book of Jonah. Questions 11-20 measured the participant's beliefs and attitudes toward themes that are addressed in Jonah. Finally, questions 21-30 measured the participant's behaviors that might be affirmed or challenged by the series on Jonah.

#### **Research Question #2**

**What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in regard to the book of Jonah after the sermon series?**

The primary method used for answering this research question was a post-test survey conducted through Survey Monkey. The questions were identical to those asked in the first



survey. Questions 1-10 measured the participant's knowledge about the book of Jonah. Questions 11-20 measured the participant's beliefs and attitudes toward themes that are addressed in Jonah. Questions 21-30 measured the participant's behaviors that might be affirmed or challenged by the series on Jonah. The responses of the second survey were compared with the responses to the pre-test survey to report changes in the participants' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors as individuals and as a group. The post-test survey also included one open-ended question, asking people to share what connected with them during the sermon series.

### **Research Question #3**

**What elements of the sermon design and delivery assisted the participants in experiencing these changes?**

The primary method for answering this research question was the focus groups. The groups provided detailed feedback about the different elements of sermon design and delivery. The focus group format allowed the comments of participants to stimulate additional comments from other participants in gaining the qualitative data. Dialogue between the participants created rich feedback that helped explain why people scored the way they did on the pre and post surveys (Sensing 120).

### **Ministry Context(s)**

Crossroads United Methodist Church is located in the city of Washington, Illinois. The city's population is around 15,000, but is less than ten miles away from Peoria, Illinois, which has a population of around 115,000 (Data). The town was founded in 1825, and the church, currently named Crossroads, was founded in 1828. The largest employer in Washington and the greater Peoria area is Caterpillar, Inc. which is currently the world's largest manufacturer of equipment for construction and mining, diesel and natural gas engines, diesel-electric locomotives, and industrial

turbines (Caterpillar). The Caterpillar culture is very pervasive in Washington, and it is reflected in the demographic data of the city. The average household income is \$82,074. White-collar workers making up 68.4 percent of the workforce in Washington versus only 31.6 percent blue collar. A majority of adults over the age of twenty-five (67.8 percent) have at least some college education. Only 5.6 percent of people in Washington live under the poverty level compared to 10.3 percent statewide. In addition, Washington is a very homogeneous population with more than 94 percent of the population being non-Hispanic Caucasian (*Quick Insite Report*). The average age of a Washington resident is 38.44 with a majority of the households with children (76.2 percent), being traditional married couple households (*Executive Insite Report*). The influence of Caterpillar has resulted in Washington becoming a community with many engineers with analytical personalities and discretionary income.

Religiously, Washington is known for being a city with a strong Christian influence. A well-known narrative for why so few people were harmed during the EF4 tornado of 2013 is because they were all in church that Sunday morning. Washington sustains two churches of 700-800 in attendance, one church of 400-500, another of 300-400, and several others of small to medium size. There is a sense of competition that accompanies the cooperation among the churches. Two of the larger churches in town have emerged within the last decade and have placed pressure on the established churches. In addition, there are many other large churches in the greater Peoria area. While most people in the Washington area would call themselves Christians, they often switch churches on the basis of a favorable pastor or new program. It is uncommon to meet someone in Washington who does not claim affiliation with some church.

Crossroads has a reputation for being a large conservative, evangelical congregation within the United Methodist tradition. That said, there are many Christians in Washington of a

*more* conservative persuasion which makes Crossroads appear more moderate within the community. There is a strong desire within the Crossroads leadership to hear the message of the substitutionary atonement of Christ regularly preached and for the Bible to be emphasized in the preaching. There are several within the congregation who, though conservative in theology, have homosexual family members which makes them more sympathetic toward some liberal ideals. There are also several leaders who have experienced divorce and remarriage and are more comfortable within the grace-based environment of United Methodism than they would be in the large Southern Baptist or non-denominational churches nearby.

The conservative leanings of Crossroads have also made the church hesitant to accept the role of female leadership in the past. Crossroads currently has a female associate pastor who is helping to demonstrate the effectiveness of women in leadership. The majority of Crossroads' members are Baby Boomers or people of Generation X or the Elder generation (ages thirty-six and up). There are a growing number of Millennials at Crossroads who are less conservative politically and theologically (ages eighteen to thirty-five). Efforts have been made and are proving successful to aid Crossroads in embracing the full embodiment of the grace-centered evangelical United Methodist tradition. In summary, Crossroads is conservative within United Methodism but moderate to liberal compared to the more conservative Reformed traditions within which expository preaching is frequently found.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

For the pre- and post-test surveys, adults in the congregation, age eighteen and older, were invited to participate. The goal was to get as broad a representation of congregational participants as possible. Among those who participated in the two surveys, only the results from those who

indicated that they had listened to all five of the sermons were analyzed. Since the sermons were available to be viewed online by the Tuesday after the Sunday they were preached in worship, those who missed a Sunday morning preaching event could catch up at a later time if they desired.

The participants of the four focus groups were from both of the two worship services. At the conclusion of the sermon series an email was sent out to the congregation inviting everyone over the age of eighteen to formally express interest in participating in the focus groups. They were informed that only those who had been able to watch or listen to all five Jonah sermons were eligible to participate in the focus groups. They were also informed that from those who expressed interest, sixteen people from each worship service would be selected by drawing names out of a bag. Those interested in participating were asked to send an email to the researcher's assistant saying, "I am willing and interested in being a part of the focus groups." In addition, people were asked to indicate in the email the worship service they attended. The names of those who expressed a willingness to participate in the focus groups were then placed on individual slips of paper by the researcher's personal assistant. The slips of paper were folded and divided up into two separate brown sandwich bags based on which volunteers went to which worship service. The researcher's assistant then drew eight names out of each bag to determine which volunteers would be invited to participate in the focus group discussions.

### **Description of Participants**

The participants in the pre- and post-test surveys were made up of adults over the age of eighteen who attend both 8:30am and 11:00 am worship services at Crossroads. Since the surveys were only administered electronically, congregants who did not have access to a computer were excluded from participation.

The people who participated in the focus groups were also from both services. The participants included male and female adults ranging from ages eighteen to eighty-five. Some had been attending Crossroads for a number of years and some were newer to the congregation. All of them had listened to each of the five sermons in the Jonah sermon series.

The people who gave unsolicited feedback which was collected in the field notes were male and female adults ranging from age eighteen to eighty-five. Some had been attending Crossroads for a number of years and some were newer to the congregation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Steps were taken to ensure that people felt comfortable participating in the project. There were consent forms for both of the data collection methods utilized. For the electronic surveys, the consent forms asked participants to identify themselves in the space provided with either the last four digits of their social security number or another four-digit number of their choosing. They were informed that if at any point they felt stressed by the questions that they should feel free to stop taking the survey immediately. They were also informed that participating in the first survey would not obligate them to participate in the second one. Participants were informed that no effort would be made by the researcher to discover their personal identity. The four-digit code would only be used to pair post-test surveys to pre-test surveys. They were also informed that their code numbers would be seen only by the researcher and his personal assistant.

The identities of those interested in focus group participation were known only to the researcher's personal assistant. Those who participated signed a consent form indicating their knowledge of the following. The meetings would be audio recorded on a Zoom Q3 audio recorder. Then the recordings were transcribed by the researcher's assistant. Once the project was complete, the audio and transcriptions would be destroyed. The participants also acknowledged on the consent

form that their participation was entirely voluntary. In addition, they would not disclose the identities of other participants in the focus group to anyone who did not participate. The facilitator and researcher's assistant also signed consent forms agreeing not to disclose the identities of focus group participants.

The identities of those who offered unsolicited feedback were not included in the field notes of the researcher. When someone offered comments which were relevant to the research, their comments were recorded with a number assigned to them. This number was used to pair later comments with earlier ones without recording the name of the commenter.

### **Instrumentation**

The data needed to answer the first two research questions was collected primarily through two researcher-designed fixed-choice surveys administered electronically. The second survey included one open-ended question which allowed for people to give feedback about what impacted them in the sermon series. These surveys were subjected to expert review by Dr. Ellen Marmon and Dr. Milton Lowe. The surveys were seen as the best option for collecting data for these research questions because the hope was to engage dozens, if not hundreds, of participants. The large number of participants invited made the use of interviews or questionnaires less desirable options (Sensing 115). The structured response format enabled the participant to respond with ease and for the researcher to accumulate responses efficiently (Trochimweb). There are other benefits of using a fixed-choice or close-ended questionnaire survey. It provides data that is easier to understand and interpret. It provides respondents with reminders of knowledge that may have been acquired in the past but not thought of recently. It also gives the respondents memory cues which could be used to engage in conversation when participating in a focus group at a later time (Church and Wacławski 68). The addition of one open-ended question

gave participants the opportunity to offer qualitative feedback about the sermon series if they felt inclined.

The survey was designed by the researcher and covered several topics relevant to the research. There were ten items to measure the participant's knowledge about the Jonah. Ten items measured the participant's beliefs and attitudes toward themes that are addressed in Jonah. Finally, ten questions measured the participant's behaviors that might be affirmed or challenged by the series on Jonah. All of the information regarding the book of Jonah was gathered from the researcher's extensive exegetical study (The gleanings of that research can be found in the Literature Review section on Jonah). Other online surveys on the book of Jonah were also consulted in order to ascertain what other biblical educators discerned as important. The survey questions, including the built-in consent form, were loaded into Survey Monkey so that the survey could be distributed to the entire church email list. (This was done with the approval of the District Superintendent and the Pastor Parish Relations Committee.) The thirty-question post-test survey was identical to the pre-test survey with the addition of one open-ended question seeking specific comments about the sermon series.

The focus group method was employed for collecting data to answer the third research question. There were several reasons for using focus groups for this segment of the research. One was because the multi-method approach enhances triangulation and validity (Sensing 61, 72). Since the surveys provide a certain amount of quantitative data, the focus groups contributed greatly to the qualitative dimension of the study. At the recommendation of Sensing (123) and Krueger (2), there was both a facilitator and a note-taker present. The facilitator was a member of Crossroads who had developed professional facilitating skills through his corporate job. The researcher's personal assistant acted as a note-taker so that she could observe body language,

voice inflection, and listen for key phrases and themes without the anxiety of moving the discussion forward. Both the facilitator and the note-taker were trained by the researcher on the Saturday morning prior to the first focus group meetings. The material used for this training was found on pages 120-24 of Sensing's *Qualitative Research*. The note-taker took copious notes throughout the focus group sessions based on observations. Afterward, the researcher's assistant transcribed the recording of the focus group meetings. The data gathered from the note-taker's observations were used to supplement that gathered from the transcriptions. The focus group data collection method was also chosen so that there would be increased synergy in the discussion which would not be possible in a one-on-one interview. The focus groups allowed the memories and thoughts of the participants to play off of each other and stimulate formerly unrecognized insights (Sensing120).

### **Expert Review**

The surveys and focus group questions were submitted to Dr. Ellen Marmon and Dr. Milton Lowe before the intervention was conducted for "expert review." Having coached many students through Doctor of Ministry projects, they were able to offer feedback to guarantee that the tools were adequate. They also examined the tools in light of the research questions and gave helpful feedback. The feedback was incorporated into a revision which was then submitted for final approval before the tools were utilized.

### **Reliability & Validity of Project Design**

The reliability and validity of this project were confirmed in the following ways. The tools chosen for data collection for this study were suggested in the Doctor of Ministry training. Since this was an intervention, pre-/post-test surveys were recommended as the tool for gathering quantitative data. Focus groups were recommended to provide a mixed method approach and



triangulation of the survey data and analysis. After the tools were developed, they were reviewed by Dr. Ellen Marmon and Dr. Milton Lowe. The extensive feedback was incorporated into subsequent revisions of these tools until they met Doctor of Ministry standards for reliability and validity.

This study is one that could be carried out by any preacher who wished to test the effectiveness of expository preaching in their setting. A congregation's history with expository preaching would not limit the preacher's ability to test its ability to promote cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral change.

### **Data Collection**

This particular research project is defined as an intervention. This type of project involves diligently analyzing the ministry context, constructing meaningful action, and examining the results (Sensing 62). This type of "action research" utilizes the unique relationship of the pastor as researcher and focuses on addressing a perceived problem or opportunity within a particular context (60). The hope was that the results of the intervention would give evidence in favor of or against the usefulness of a particular style of biblical preaching to promote cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral transformation within the lives of the people of Crossroads United Methodist Church. This intervention utilized a multi-method approach to data collection in order to provide for adequate triangulation and increase the validity of the research (61).

In the month prior to the invitation to participate in the electronic pre-test survey, the congregation was informed via a church announcement, electronic media, and social media that they would be invited to participate in the survey. Two weeks before the sermon series began, the survey, with an invitation to participate, was emailed out to everyone on the church email list. The survey link and invitation were also posted on the church Facebook page.

The researcher then preached a five-week expository sermon series on the book of Jonah at the 8:30am and 11:00 am worship services at Crossroads UMC. The sermons were also uploaded on Tuesday of the following week onto the church website. A link to the sermon video was sent out to everyone on the church email list on Wednesday or Thursday of the week. A link to the sermon video was also posted on Facebook for people to watch if they missed it on Sunday.

The week following the completion of the sermon series, the second survey was sent out electronically through the same channels used for the pre-test. The consent agreement was slightly different and the background questions for the participant were excluded. These would be unnecessary because the four-digit code would be used to identify the participant so that their results could be paired with the first survey. All survey participants were given two weeks to complete their second survey.

The focus groups were set up in the following way. After the second survey was sent out, an email was sent out to the congregation again, inviting everyone age eighteen and older to formally express interest in participating in the focus groups. All adults who had been able to watch or listen to all five Jonah sermons were invited to express interest and indicate what worship service they normally attended at Crossroads. From those who expressed interest, sixteen people were randomly selected from each service by drawing names out of a bag. The names were selected randomly based on worship service rather than based on age or other demographic. This was an act of sensitivity to show impartiality since many people expressed a willingness to participate. It was also an act of sensitivity so that no one felt discriminated against based on age which is an issue that is ongoing at Crossroads. The thirty-two people whose names were drawn were invited by email to attend the focus group meetings.

The four focus group meetings took place on two Sundays a week apart. The focus groups for the 8:30am service were held at 2:00 pm in the choir room behind the sanctuary. This location was chosen for maximum privacy. It is away from the flow of traffic and the doors do not have windows. The focus groups from the 11:00 am service were held at 7:00 pm on the same Sunday evenings in the same room. For the focus group meeting, the chairs were arranged in a circle with a recording device in the middle of the group. The facilitator sat in the circle with the participants and the researcher's personal assistant sat at a table off at the side. The focus group sessions were conducted according to the recommendations outlined in Richard A. Krueger's document, "Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews" (4). The participants were welcomed by the facilitator in a friendly way. They were given a consent form to sign and pass to the facilitator before beginning. The form emphasized that no names would be used in reporting the research; instead, the researcher's assistant would use numbers to identify each speaker. After they had a few minutes to read and sign the consent forms, the facilitator reminded the participants of the reason for the focus group meeting and what the goal of the research was. He also reiterated to them how they were selected to be a part of the group. The facilitator then laid out the guidelines for the discussion time. He asked them to please turn off their phones or put them on airplane mode. He told them that there were no right or wrong answers but that their feedback was very important for gaining accurate data for this project. He also asked that they speak one at a time since this was being audio recorded and would be transcribed. He asked people to feel free to speak to other members of the focus group throughout the session, referring to them by the name given on their name tags. He also reminded them of the confidentiality of the event. They were asked to please respect everyone else in the group by agreeing not to discuss the opinions of the other participants after the group

meeting. After these introductory thoughts, the facilitator worked through the guided discussion questions provided by the researcher. After the facilitator had finished the guided discussion, he spent several minutes summarizing what he had heard and asked for the participants to correct or add to anything he said. The session concluded with a thank you from the facilitator and the researcher's personal assistant and the participants were dismissed.

At the conclusion of the focus group meetings, two additional steps were taken. First the facilitator and the researcher's assistant spent several minutes summarizing and reflecting on what they had observed. During this time, the researcher's assistant took notes on their discussion. Then the researcher's assistant took the time to add to her notes from the meeting to maximize the data collection event. An identical process was used at each of the focus group meetings. In the two weeks following the meetings, the researcher's assistant transcribed them and submitted the manuscripts to the researcher for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The findings of the pre-test and post-test surveys and the focus group discussions were combined to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the expository preaching method at Crossroads. The data analysis for this project was multi-faceted. The process of collecting data provided data in itself. Since the entire congregation was invited to participate in the survey, the number of people who chose to participate gave a read on people's attitudes toward the project in general. Feedback given verbally and in writing throughout the sermon series also affected the analytical lens through which the researcher began to formulate insights. The researcher continued to make notes throughout the project, listening for the emergence of themes and patterns of silence and slippage (Sensing 197-201).

The pre-/post-test surveys provided quantitative data in response to the questions of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the participants. As soon as the results of the first survey had been gathered, the researcher began conducting statistical analysis, using the reports generated by Survey Monkey. These were used in assessing the deficits in knowledge, attitude, and behavior which the sermon series sought to address. All reports generated were coded with different colored highlighters. Deficits in knowledge were coded in yellow, deficits in attitude were coded in green, and deficits in behavior were coded in blue. The survey questions which were not color coded demonstrated congruence between the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the participants and that which is communicated in the book of Jonah. The data which was gathered from the initial analysis of the pre-test survey was then compiled in a Word document, reviewed using the Moschella's three-tier approach to reading data (Moschella 172-173; Sensing 196-197). The first aspect of analysis involved looking for themes of congruence and themes of strength. These themes were detailed in a research journal. The second aspect of analysis involved the researcher offering preliminary theories of interpretation of the data. The third aspect of analysis involved the researcher acknowledging how the initial data would influence the way the sermon series would be carried out and identifying assumptions about how the primary knowledge, attitudinal, and behavior deficits could be addressed in the expository sermon series. After the post-test surveys had been gathered, the same method of analysis was used to record and assess how the deficits had been addressed. The quotes from the open-ended question at the end of the post-test survey were compiled in a Word document and were analyzed with the rest of the qualitative data using the method described below.

The data collected from the focus groups offered two sources to analyze. The role of the focus group data collection method was to interpret the data gained from the surveys and

provide feedback about how the congregation had experienced the expository method utilized in the sermon series. The knowledge gains, attitudinal changes, and behavioral changes indicated by the surveys were already known by the time the focus groups gathered. Similarly, the lack of knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes were also already noted before the focus groups gathered. The focus groups offered interpretation of the analysis of the surveys and also offered new data to analyze. The researcher also analyzed his assistant's observational notes using Moschella's three-reading approach. The notes were read and reread several times. Repeated words or significant phrases, observable body language, and significant silences were noted. In addition, he applied Moschella's method to the notes taken from his assistant's meeting with the facilitator. After the transcripts from the focus groups had been returned, he also analyzed the transcripts using the approach described above. The transcripts were coded with the same highlighter colors as were the survey reports for the matters addressed in the surveys. In addition, data given regarding sermon design and structure were coded in pink, and data regarding sermon delivery were coded in purple. The three step approach was applied to all of the documents generated from the focus groups and field notes.

After this initial analysis, a second level of coding was conducted on all qualitative data. This involved utilizing Creswell's eight-step coding process (Creswell 192; Sensing 204–205). Emerging themes and interpretations were recorded in a journal and then organized in a Word document. The contents were then analyzed and coded for themes according to the benefits and criticism of expository preaching which were reported in the Literature Review.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

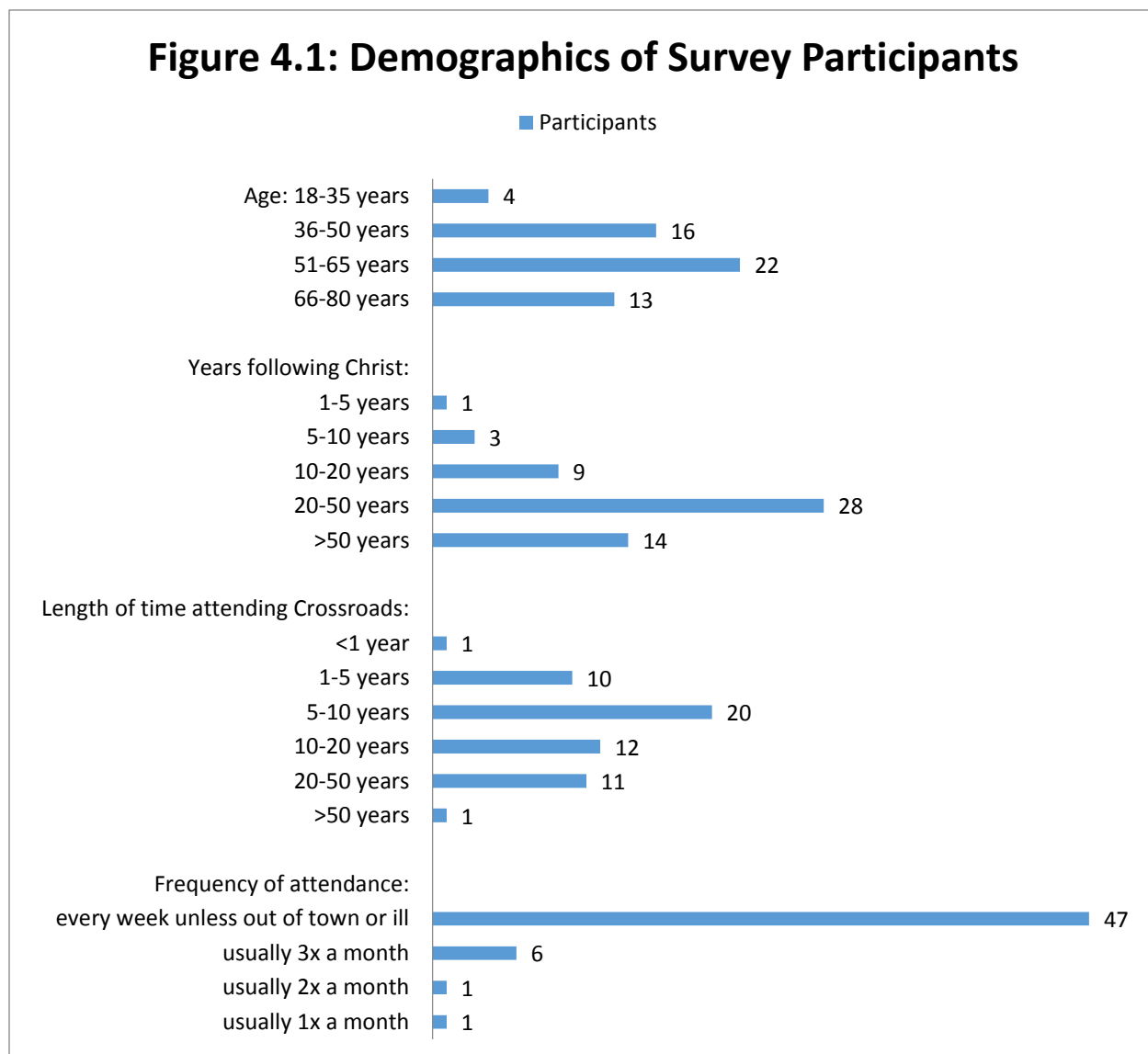
Expository preaching in various forms is a style of preaching which has been utilized throughout the history of the church. In recent years, expository preaching has received little attention in US seminaries that train pastors for mainline denominations even though pastors in conservative denominations continue to utilize it and speak of its effectiveness. There were indications that at least a segment of the population of Crossroads United Methodist Church had a hunger for expository preaching from their pastors. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes in the worship participants at Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois as a result of an expository sermon series on the book of Jonah that was presented over a five-week period.

This chapter describes the participants of the study. It shares the quantitative data collected from the pre- and post-test surveys, the qualitative data collected from the focus groups, the open-ended question on the post-test survey, and field notes. Finally, this chapter identifies five major findings gathered from the data.

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study were worship attenders at the two primary worship services at Crossroads. The pre- and post-test surveys were sent out to everyone on the Crossroads email list (approximately 1,100 people) and a link to the survey was posted in the Crossroads Facebook group. Everyone age eighteen and older was invited to participate. One hundred fifty-four people took the pre-test survey. Seventy-four people took the second survey. Of those seventy-four, fifty-five of them identified themselves with a four-digit code which allowed their post-tests to

be paired with their pre-tests. Thus, there were fifty-five valid participants in the surveys. The demographic makeup of these participants is represented in Figure 4.1. They were between 18-80 years old with over 63 percent between 51-80. Over three quarters of the respondents have been following Christ for over twenty years. Eighty percent have been attending Crossroads for at least five years, and the majority attend worship on a weekly or near weekly basis.



Everyone on the church email list age eighteen and older who had heard each of the sermons in the Jonah series was also invited to express interest in participating in the focus



groups. The hope was that at least sixteen people would express interest from each of the two main worship services. These would be divided into four focus groups with eight participants for each service. There were twelve people from each service who expressed interest, so there were only two focus groups, one for each worship service. Of the twelve who expressed interest, eight were chosen from each service through the random selection process described in chapter 3 and invited to attend. The two focus groups met on Sunday, April 8 at Crossroads. The group with participants from the 8:30am service met at 2:00 pm, and the group with participants from the 11:00 am service met at 7:30pm. On the day of the focus groups, six of the eight participants invited to the first focus group attended it. The other two were ill. Seven of the eight invited to the second focus group attended that meeting. Because of the need to provide a safe and confidential environment for sensitive discussion, there was no demographic information recorded about the attendees of the focus groups.

### **Research Question #1: Description of Evidence**

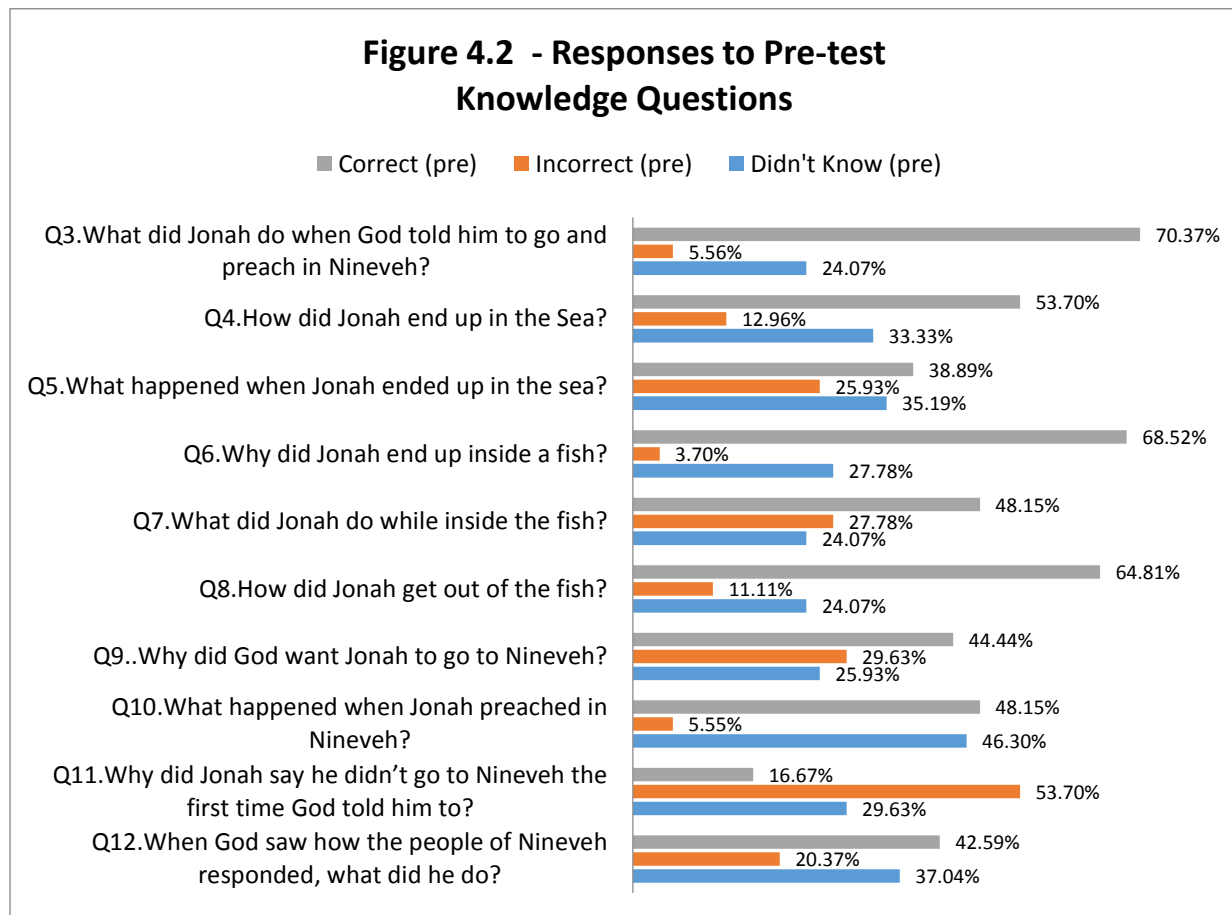
What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in regard to the book of Jonah prior to the sermon series?

The tool used for collecting the answer to this research question was the pre-test survey administered through Survey Monkey. In the survey,

- ❖ questions 3-12 tested the participants' knowledge of the content of Jonah,
- ❖ questions 13-22 tested how the participants' attitudes and beliefs compared to the attitudes and beliefs promoted in the book of Jonah, and
- ❖ questions 23-32 tested how the participants' behaviors compared to the behaviors promoted in the book of Jonah.

Each of these three categories will be discussed in turn.

The pre-test survey yielded significant observable data regarding the participants' knowledge of the content of Jonah prior to the sermon series. The results of the knowledge questions can be seen in Figure 4.2. This chart shows that, on average, 30 percent of the time participants indicated that they did not know the answer with any level of confidence, an average of 20 percent of the time they answered incorrectly, and only 50 percent of time did they answer correctly. The pre-test surveys also stimulated verbal feedback which was recorded in field notes. One longtime church member remarked after taking the survey that she realized that she did not know anything about the book of Jonah. Others made similar contents.



The pre-test data for the attitude questions (Q13-Q22) can be seen in Table 4.1. This shows that in eight of the ten questions over two thirds of the respondents were already in agreement with the beliefs and attitudes about God and others which are promoted in the book of

Jonah. In six of the ten questions, over three quarters of the respondents were already in agreement. The widest variance in responses came in response to Q21: “My preference is that those who have committed great acts of evil be severely punished rather than repent and be forgiven by God.” The mean for Q21 (3.76) was the furthest away from the biblical attitude (5) of any of the questions and the standard deviation (1.22) was also the highest.

**Table 4.1 – Responses to Pre-Test Attitude Questions**

		N	strongly agree (1)	somewhat agree (2)	don't know (3)	somewhat disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)	mean	standard deviation
Q13	I believe that God loves the most evil people in the world.	54	81.48%	12.96%	3.70%	1.85%	0.00%	1.26	0.81
Q14	I believe that God calls Christians to share the message of God with people of other religions.	54	83.33%	9.26%	0.00%	1.85%	5.56%	1.37	1.01
Q15	I believe that God cares about what actions I take, but not so much about how I feel about him and others.	54	1.85%	11.11%	3.70%	14.81%	68.52%	4.37	1.09
Q16	I believe that obedience to God is required for those who consider themselves Christians.	54	75.93%	20.37%	1.85%	0.00%	1.85%	1.31	0.69
Q17	I believe that God has power over nature and can manipulate it to serve his purposes.	54	77.78%	11.11%	9.26%	0.00%	1.85%	1.37	0.8
Q18	I believe that God is slow to anger and eager to forgive me when I make mistakes.	54	85.19%	11.11%	1.85%	1.85%	0.00%	1.2	0.56
Q19	I believe that God is slow to anger and eager to forgive even the most evil people in the world?	54	68.52%	22.22%	7.41%	1.85%	0.00%	1.43	0.71
Q20	I believe that it is necessary for a person to repent of known sins in order for God to forgive them.	54	74.07%	9.26%	5.56%	11.11%	0.00%	1.54	1.01
Q21	My preference is that those who have committed great acts of evil be severely punished rather than repent and be forgiven by God.	54	1.85%	20.37%	16.67%	22.22%	38.89%	3.76	1.22
Q22	I believe that God intends for Christians like me to take his message to the ends of the earth even though it could cost us greatly.	54	77.78%	16.67%	3.70%	1.85%	0.00%	1.3	0.63

The pre-test data for the behavior questions (Q23-Q32) can be seen in Table 4.2. In nine of the ten questions, over two thirds of the respondents indicated that they would at least “most likely” behave in the way that the book of Jonah promotes or that they “sometimes” do.

**Table 4.2 – Responses to Pre-test Behavior Questions**

		N	never (1)	not likely (2)	Most likely (3)	always (4)	mean	standard deviation	
Q23	If I learned, by studying the Scriptures, that God wanted me to take a certain action, I would follow through obediently.	54	0%	9.26%	85.19%	5.56%	2.96	0.38	
Q24	If I believed that God wanted me to leave my familiar, comfortable setting and serve him somewhere else, I would take steps to clarify God's call and then obey.	54	0%	27.78%	66.67%	5.56%	2.78	0.53	
Q25	If I learned by studying Scriptures, or sensed during prayer, that God wanted me to love an enemy, I would be motivated to try to love that person.	53	0%	3.77%	60.38%	35.85%	3.32	0.54	
		N	agree (1)	Disagree (2)	I don't know (3)	Mean	Standard deviation		
Q26	If God called me (or my family) to be a missionary to Islamic terrorists, I would disregard the idea completely.	54	24.07%	22.22%	53.70%	2.3	.83		
		N	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Always (4)	Mean	Standard deviation	
Q27	When a person (or group) attacks others (individual crime, group bombings, tribal genocide, etc.), I pray for both the victims and the perpetrators.	54	5.56%	14.81%	68.52%	11.11%	2.85	0.68	
Q29	I treat all people I meet on a daily basis (regardless of my feelings and opinions) with respect and kindness.	54	0%	0%	46.30%	53.70%	3.54	0.5	
Q30	I pray regularly for those who have hurt me or my loved ones.	54	3.70%	27.78%	55.56%	12.96%	2.78	0.71	
Q31	If I sense a friend or acquaintance is heading down a self-destructive path, I talk to them about God's love for them and offer to help.	54	5.56%	20.37%	62.96%	11.11%	2.8	0.7	
Q32	If I am angry at or feel bitter toward others, I pray that God would change my heart (feelings and attitudes).	54	1.85%	7.41%	64.81%	25.93%	3.15	0.62	
		N	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Always (4)	This has never happened to me. (5)	Mean	SD
Q28	If I sense God wants me to share his message with someone, I follow through regardless of how I feel	54	1.85%	14.81%	66.67%	5.56%	11.11%	3.09	0.0084

about the person.								
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In six out of those nine questions, fewer than 12 percent of respondents expressed that they would “always” or do “always” behave in accordance with the biblically mandated manner. The exceptions were questions 25, 29, and 32. In response to question 25, 35.85 percent of the respondents said that they would “always” be motivated to try to love an enemy if they learned or sensed that God wanted them to. In response to question 32, 25.93 percent responded that they “always” pray that God would change their heart when they are angry at or feel bitter toward others. Question 29 elicited the most positive response. Over 53 percent of respondents indicated that they “always” treat all people they meet on a daily basis with respect and kindness regardless of how they feel toward them. The other 46.3 percent indicated that they “sometimes” do. No one marked “never” or “seldom” as their answer on this question.

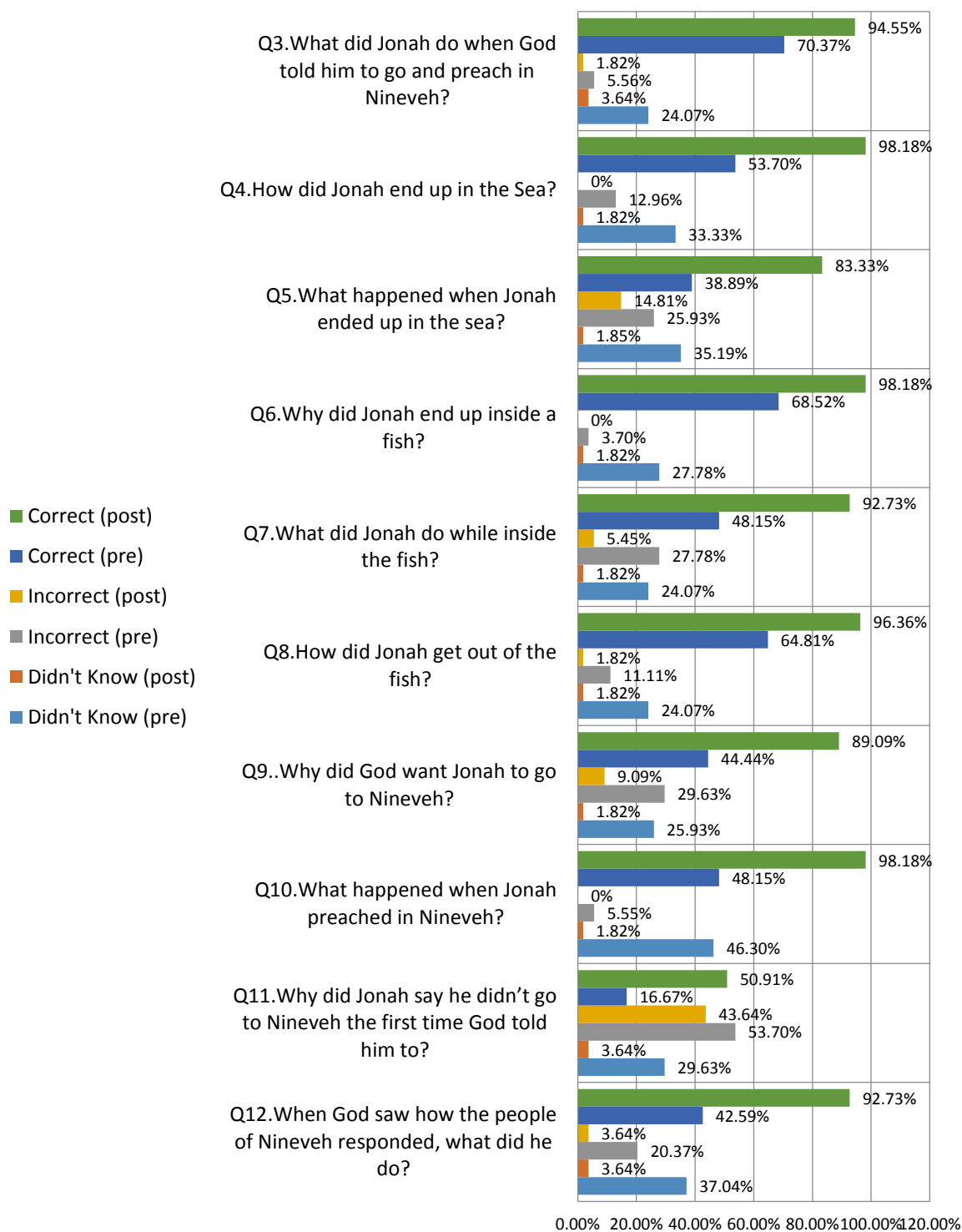
### **Research Question #2: Description of Evidence**

What were the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in regard to the book of Jonah after the sermon series?

#### **Knowledge**

The results of the knowledge questions (Q3- Q12) from the post-test survey are shown in Figure 4.3 where they are compared to the results from the pre-test. For every question, the post-test demonstrated an increase in knowledge among the respondents. The average increase in correct answers was 39.8 percent. The lowest increase was 24.18 percent (Q3). Two of the questions resulted in an over 50 percent increase in correct answers (Q10 and Q12). The number of respondents who answered the questions incorrectly decreased by 11.6 percent, but the number of respondents who answered “I Don’t Know” decreased by 28.37 percent. Figure 4.3 gives the impression that there is a direct correlation between the increase in correct answers in the post-test surveys and the decrease in “I Don’t Know” responses.

**Figure 4.3 - Comparison of Responses to Pre-test and Post-test Knowledge Questions**



There were several comments with regard to the increase in knowledge that took place in the lives of participants in the Jonah sermon series. One man in his seventies remarked several times that Jonah was “blowing his mind” because he “had no idea all this stuff was in there. I just thought it was about a guy getting swallowed by a fish” (field notes). Others made similar statements throughout the series (field notes).

In the responses to open-ended question on the post-test survey, people wrote:

- ❖ “I really enjoyed this sermon series. I did not know much about the book of Jonah.”
- ❖ “I learned so much from this sermon series! So much on which to meditate.”
- ❖ “I learned so much and enjoyed each of the five sermons!”
- ❖ “I... learned so much that I never knew was even in that tiny book.”

In the first focus group, Participant 5 commented:

It was interesting, and informative. I’ve read the book of Jonah before, but this went into a lot more depth and really more background on what was it all about and a lot of other points in the book of Jonah that I really didn’t think about when I read it the first time. There was a lot of good information in there in the series that I really hadn’t gleaned out of just reading the book by itself (FG1, 1: Focus Group 1, Participant 1).

In the second focus group, Participant 1 remarked:

Some of the stuff I’ve read the book of Jonah and I’ve probably read it 5 times in the last 5 years, but I had forgot about how, just some little stuff, like I forgot about how he was upset with God. I forgot it! I just read over that part, but when you really focus on that, and think ... he was really upset with God! He didn’t destroy the city! And it made him look bad (FG2, 8).

### **Attitudes/Beliefs**

The results from the attitude and belief questions (Q13- Q22) from the post-test survey are shown in Table 4.3 where they are compared to the results from the pre-test. The comparison reveals that for each of these questions, the mean of post-test responses moved closer to the attitudes and belief promoted in the book of Jonah than the mean found in the pre-test results. In addition, the standard deviation from the mean decreased for each question. This movement

**Table 4.3 – Comparison of Responses to Pre-Test/Post-test Attitude Questions**

						Pre-test responses in blue		Post-test responses in rose	
		N	strongly agree (1)	somewhat agree (2)	don't know (3)	somewhat disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)	mean	SD
Q13	I believe that God loves the most evil people in the world.	54	81.48%	12.96%	3.70%	1.85%	0.00%	1.26	0.81
		55	96.36%	0.00%	3.64%	0.00%	0.00%	1.07	0.37
Q14	I believe that God calls Christians to share the message of God with people of other religions.	54	83.33%	9.26%	0.00%	1.85%	5.56%	1.37	1.01
		55	89.09%	10.91%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.11	0.31
Q15	I believe that God cares about what actions I take, but not so much about how I feel about him and others.	54	1.85%	11.11%	3.70%	14.81%	68.52%	4.37	1.09
		55	5.45%	0.00%	3.64%	3.64%	87.27%	4.67	0.97
Q16	I believe that obedience to God is required for those who consider themselves Christians.	54	75.93%	20.37%	1.85%	0.00%	1.85%	1.31	0.69
		55	90.91%	5.45%	1.82%	1.82%	0.00%	1.15	0.52
Q17	I believe that God has power over nature and can manipulate it to serve his purposes.	54	77.78%	11.11%	9.26%	0.00%	1.85%	1.37	0.8
		54	90.74%	7.41%	1.85%	0.00%	0.00%	1.11	0.37
Q18	I believe that God is slow to anger and eager to forgive me when I make mistakes.	54	85.19%	11.11%	1.85%	1.85%	0.00%	1.2	0.56
		55	96.36%	1.82%	1.82%	0.00%	0.00%	1.05	0.30
Q19	I believe that God is slow to anger and eager to forgive even the most evil people in the world?	54	68.52%	22.22%	7.41%	1.85%	0.00%	1.43	0.71
		55	90.91%	7.27%	1.82%	0.00%	0.00%	1.11	0.37
Q20	I believe that it is necessary for a person to repent of known sins in order for God to forgive them.	54	74.07%	9.26%	5.56%	11.11%	0.00%	1.54	1.01
		55	85.45%	10.91%	0.00%	3.64%	0.00%	1.22	0.62
Q21	My preference is that those who have committed great acts of evil be severely punished rather than repent and be forgiven by God.	54	1.85%	20.37%	16.67%	22.22%	38.89%	3.76	1.22
		54	5.56%	5.56%	3.70%	25.93%	59.26%	4.28	1.13
Q22	I believe that God intends for Christians like me to take his message to the ends of the earth even though it could cost us greatly.	54	77.78%	16.67%	3.70%	1.85%	0.00%	1.3	0.63
		55	87.27%	9.09%	3.64%	0.00%	0.00%	1.16	0.46



toward of mean and standard deviation toward full agreement with the attitudes and beliefs is significant though not dramatic. The pre-test showed that there was already large-scale agreement prior to the sermon series. For eight of the ten questions, over two thirds of the respondents were already in agreement with the beliefs and attitudes promoted in the book of Jonah. In six of the ten questions, over three quarters of the respondents were already in agreement.

The qualitative data demonstrates that participants in the sermon series were asking questions and thinking reflectively with regard to their attitudes and beliefs, both of which were challenged by the book of Jonah. It should be noted that they do not necessarily correspond to the attitudes/beliefs represented in the survey questions. One couple texted the researcher midweek following one of the sermons and asked for a phone conversation. The conversation revealed that they were re-examining their assumptions about God because of the statement in Jonah 3:10 that “God changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened” (NLT). They were wrestling with what it means that God “changed his mind” in this situation, what that says about the character of God, and what it meant for their lives.

There were also comments about attitudinal growth from the open-ended question at the end of second survey which invited general comments about the sermon series. It should be noted that they do not necessarily correspond to the attitudes/beliefs represented in the survey questions.

- ❖ I appreciated learning how this book of the Bible shows God’s pursuit of a relationship with Jonah and with me. I learned that I can run away from what God wants me to do, but He will come and find me and get me to do it His way! I learned that God is loving and forgiving God who wants to forgive those who truly repent of their sins.

- ❖ A thought-provoking sermon series... it makes me look at myself deep inside regarding the thoughts I have of other people.
- ❖ Loved this series. I was inspired to think differently about evangelism, about how God calls, and about how God loves even our enemies.

The focus groups stimulated more feedback about growth related to attitudes and beliefs.

Participant 5 from the first focus group stated:

[O]ne of the things that impressed me that how our interaction with God affects other people. He said those sailors now worshipped God. That was one of the insights I really hadn't thought about. But yeah! All those people were saved not just only the Ninevites, but the sailors (FG1, 2).

Participant 2 from the first focus group reflected on the correlation between the sovereignty of God and the tornado that Washington had experienced:

And another thing Jason pointed out too in that series, which people generally, even believers, don't want to accept or maybe believe that God is sovereign and He can do anything. And He can do ... He's in control of EVERYTHING. Does he allow things to happen? Yes. He's in control; if He wants a big fish to swallow somebody, that's what will happen. If He wants a, you know, here again, the tornado changed my life. Was I the only one involved in that tornado? Obviously not! Did he allow that to happen? You can't say He allows one thing to happen ... good things to happen, but he doesn't allow upsetting things to happen. I guess that's how he changes us sometimes (FG1, 3).

Participant 4 from the first focus group spoke of how Jonah portrays God's love for those outside the nation of Israel and how that applies to the participant's own life.

So much of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is talking about basically the covenant and the gift of land and how it's used and it's geared toward Israelites, but yet this is something outside of that. And God loved them just as much as anybody. And that's an important lesson that we need to be and for me any changes I think more than anything is just to try to be more tolerant and understanding of differences because it doesn't matter because God loves the next person just as much as me. That's a valuable lesson that's trying to be taught here (FG1, 4).

Others made similar comments about how the book of Jonah calls us to reach out to people who are living outside the Christian faith to bring them to Christ (FG1, 6).

In the second focus group, participant 7 expressed that the sermon series challenged him to reflect on his own response to God's mercy.

I remember it was maybe part 5, he made a comment about Jonah being offended by God's mercy. And I remembered, and that's connected to your conviction, but I remembered thinking how often I offended. When God "lets people off easy". Or I think they should get their "due". But they don't; they get grace instead (FG2, 3-4).

Others responded that they also were challenged by this because they often struggle with being offended by God's mercy as well. Participant 4 commented that the series challenged the way he looked at other people.

I think for me with the beliefs and attitudes, he kept driving home how God is really pursuing a relationship with every single person. And the compassion that we need to show. And in the world that we live in now, and some of the things, like I used to a news buff but I don't even want to see. But it's challenging us to be compassionate to people

that we judge ... we don't mean to judge ... but we judge ... and that don't do things our way or the way we want ... so it really drove home to me about God really is pursuing EVERY SINGLE PERSON, and challenges me to think differently about people that maybe I'm not as compassionate about as I should be. Which is a challenge (FG2, 5).

## **Behavior**

The results from the attitude and belief questions (Q23- Q32) from the post-test survey are shown in Table 4.4 where they are compared to the results from the pre-test. The table demonstrates that for eight out of questions there was slight movement of the mean toward the response option which designated optimal openness to the behaviors promoted in the book of Jonah. Question 26 was a binary response question with an additional option of choosing "I don't know." For that question, the post-test survey showed that an additional 5.54percent of the respondents chose to move away from either binary response and choose "I don't know" on the post-test. The slight decrease in mean from 3.54 to 3.49 from pre-test to post-test on question 29 is noteworthy. This question was answered with the highest degree of agreement on both pre- and post-test surveys, but 4.61 percent fewer people were comfortable responding that they "always" treat all people they meet each day with respect and kindness regardless of their feelings and opinions.

Other survey data is also worth noting. For question 1, although the mean only increased from 2.96 to 3.07, the number of people who responded "not likely" to the statement "If I learned, by studying the Scriptures that God wanted me to take a certain action, I would follow through immediately" decreased from 9.26 percent to 1.85 percent. The number of people who said that they would "always" behave in a manner consistent with the statement increased from 5.56 percent to 9.26 percent. Question 24 experienced the same increase in "always" responses

**Table 4.4 – Comparison of Responses to Pre-Test/Post-test Behavior Questions**

Pre-test responses in blue

Post-test responses in rose

		N	never (1)	Not likely (2)	Most likely (3)	Always (4)	Mean	SD	
Q23	If I learned, by studying the Scriptures, that God wanted me to take a certain action, I would follow through obediently.	54	0%	9.26%	85.19%	5.56%	2.96	0.38	
		54	0%	1.85%	88.89%	9.26%	3.07	0.32	
Q24	If I believed that God wanted me to leave my familiar, comfortable setting and serve him somewhere else, I would take steps to clarify God's call and then obey.	53	0%	27.78%	66.67%	5.56%	2.78	0.53	
		55	1.85%	22.22%	66.67%	9.26%	2.83	0.60	
Q25	If I learned by studying Scriptures, or sensed during prayer, that God wanted me to love an enemy, I would be motivated to try to love that person.	54	0%	3.77%	60.38%	35.85%	3.32	0.54	
		54	0%	5.43%	60%	34.55%	3.29	0.56	
		N	agree (1)	Disagree (2)	I don't know (3)	Mean	SD		
Q26	If God called me (or my family) to be a missionary to Islamic terrorists, I would disregard the idea completely.	54	24.07%	22.22%	53.70%	2.3	0.83		
		54	22.22%	18.52%	59.26%	2.37	0.82		
		N	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Always (4)	Mean	SD	
Q27	When a person (or group) attacks others (individual crime, group bombings, tribal genocide, etc.), I pray for both the victims and the perpetrators.	54	5.56%	14.81%	68.52%	11.11%	2.85	0.68	
		55	5.45%	16.36%	54.55%	23.64%	2.96	0.79	
Q29	I treat all people I meet on a daily basis (regardless of my feelings and opinions) with respect and kindness.	54	0%	0%	46.30%	53.70%	3.54	0.5	
		55	0%	0%	50.91%	49.09%	3.49	0.5	
Q30	I pray regularly for those who have hurt me or my loved ones.	54	3.70%	27.78%	55.56%	12.96%	2.78	0.71	
		54	0%	11.11%	75.93%	12.96%	3.02	0.49	
Q31	If I sense a friend or acquaintance is heading down a self-destructive path, I talk to them about God's love for them and offer to help.	54	5.56%	20.37%	62.96%	11.11%	2.8	0.7	
		55	0%	10.91%	76.36%	12.96%	3.02	0.49	
Q32	If I am angry at or feel bitter toward others, I pray that God would change my heart (feelings and attitudes).	54	1.85%	7.41%	64.81%	25.93%	3.15	0.62	
		55	0%	3.64%	52.73%	43.64%	3.4	0.56	
		N	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Always (4)	This has never happened to me. (5)	Mean	SD
Q28	If I sense God wants me to share his message with someone, I follow through regardless of how I feel about the person.	54	1.85%	14.81%	66.67%	5.56%	11.11%	3.09	0.0084
		55	0%	7.27%	65.45%	16.36%	10.91%	3.31	.076

in the post-test survey. Question 27 went through the greatest shift in responses with the “always” response. The statement is “When a person (or group) attacks others..., I pray for both the victims and the perpetrators.” In the pre-test survey, the number of people who marked “sometimes” was 68.52 percent and those who marked “always” was 11.11 percent. In the post-test survey, the number of people who marked “sometimes” decreased to 54.55 percent and the number who marked “always” increased to 23.64 percent. Question 30 had the greatest shift in the “sometimes” category. The statement was “I pray regularly for those who have hurt me or my loved ones.” Those who marked “sometimes” increased over 20 percent from 55.56 percent to 75.93 percent and those who marked “seldom” or “never” decreased over 20 percent from 31.48 percent in the pre-test survey to 11.11 percent in the post-test survey. The post-test also showed an over 19 percent increase in those who indicated that they “always” pray that God would change their hearts if they are angry or feel bitter toward others.

From the qualitative data collected with regards to behavior, a few key themes emerged. One theme was that of obedience. In response to the open-ended question asking for general comments on the post-test survey, one participant responded “I am convicted to try to do what God asks me to do more frequently without letting my feelings get in the way.” During the first focus group, participant 3 commented,

And then, I don’t think that question was on the pretest about, “Would you go to a country where they have a different religion?” I was caught by surprise when I saw that question in the end. And really, I had thought about that some during the sermon, but when I was taking the post test, I really was hit by it. And I thought, “Yes I would, because if God is gonna call me to do something, he would equip me to do something.” (FG1, 6)

From the second focus group, participant 1 made this statement about the need for obedience:

The only changes in my life that I would make is on that survey that question about would you go to a Muslim country, or whatever as missionary, and I definitely would have just said “No”, “No way!”, but if I really felt led to, we have to go! Because I don’t like fish number 1 (\*\*laughter\*\*) so I probably would get on a boat go to Alaska, and fall in and a polar bear would eat me or something. (\*\*laughter\*\*). You’d be better off to do what you’re actually supposed to do. (FG2, 6).

Participant 6 from the second group told of the opportunity to apply the principle of obedience from the book of Jonah to a very relevant situation. The participant said:

Maybe I made a change, this sermon series spoke to me and challenged me and equipped me to make a different decision. I was asked to play a part of a ministry and it was out of my comfort zone. But I felt God saying, “I’m asking you to do this for me.” And my mind went right to, “If I say no, I’m turning and going towards Tarshish. And God is calling me to go to Nineveh.” It convicted me in that, and I’m glad I did it. I chose to be obedient, rather than give in to what I thought I wanted to do. This was within a couple of weeks after the sermon series ended that I had a chance to apply it. (GF2, 6)

Participant 5 had a similar story of obedience:

So for me, I think a lot of the change has come more in the little things. I needed someone to help in a ministry and instead of asking for a specific person to say yes, I asked Him to tell me those people. God gave me the name of a person, who said yes when I asked. I later found out how important it was to that person. If I had not asked and obeyed God, we would have all missed out. So it has really challenged me to ask some of those smaller questions. As far as I know I’m not going to a Muslim country tomorrow!

But I am being asked to do things God's way, and the only way that I'm going to know that is if I actually ask Him. And give him space to tell me. And then say OK. So that's where I feel like the changes are. (GF2, 7).

Another theme that emerged in the focus groups with regard to behavior had to do with sharing the message of Christ with outsiders. Although there were not reports that people had actually started doing it as a result of the survey, they did speak of the need to do it. Participant 5 from the first group said:

I thought God wants us all as Christians to witness, to do our best to bring other people in, people who are not like us, people we don't like ... I know that was something we are suppose to be doing, but it is still reinforcing the fact we need to witness and try to convert people who aren't like us and we don't like (FC 1, 4).

There was more discussion around being more effective witnesses in the community and those outside of normal Christian social circles. Participant 2 explained:

The other thing, too, when you talk about evangelizing or witnessing to others, I think when we talk about that or we think about that we automatically think of actually sitting down with somebody and talking about the Gospel with them, and that's one aspect. But the other aspect to what you were speaking about is the hardest part to do....To live that way so people who aren't believers see how you are. And that's the hardest part. Are you getting honked at the cashier somewhere? Are you complaining? Do you get involved in a group of friends or people and they start gossiping or complaining or whatever the case might be and you just can maybe hold off for a few minutes but the next thing you know you're right in there with them? That's the kind of thing I think, that every day stuff, that's hard to stay with the obedience part. (FG1, 5)



A final behavioral change which corresponds to question 27 of the pre-test and post-test surveys deals with praying for perpetrators of evil acts. There was one comment from participant 5 from the second focus group which gives the one qualitative example from the manuscripts.

The participant said:

That's what I took from it too. I feel like I've made a conscious effort now ... if something bad happens in the world, and I'm praying, I'm not just praying for the people who are affected, but I'm also praying for the people who DID it. And that is something that has changed due to this. And I find that's a lot easier to do than I would have expected. I just have to make a conscious effort to do it. (FG2, 5)

The results of the post-test survey, open-ended question, and focus groups show that changes took place in the participants in the Jonah sermon series at Crossroads. The changes in biblical knowledge were the most observable from the qualitative data. These changes are the most dramatic. The significant changes in attitudes and behaviors became apparent through the qualitative data and are more difficult to measure.

### **Research Question #3: Description of Evidence**

What elements of the sermon design and delivery assisted the participants in experiencing these changes?

There were two primary means for collecting the qualitative data for this research question, an open-ended question (Q33) at the end of the post-test survey and the focus groups. Table 4.5 shows both the open-question and the focus group questions. Almost all of the data pertaining to this research question came from the two focus group discussions. Focus group question 1 was open enough to gather diverse feedback, questions 2 through 4 primarily applied to Research Question #2, and questions 5 through 7 were directly tied to Research Question #3.

**Table 4:5 – Open-ended Question (33) from Post-test Survey and Focus Group Questions**

<b>Open-ended Question from Post-test Survey:</b>	
Q33	If you have any general comments about this sermon series which you would be willing to submit for the sake of this research, please share them below.
<b>Focus Group Questions:</b>	
FGQ1	What words would you use to describe your general feelings about this sermon series on the book of Jonah?
FGQ2	What are some new insights you learned from this sermon series?
FGQ3	How were your beliefs and attitudes challenged through this sermon series?
FGQ4	Did you feel led to make any changes in your life because of what you learned during this series?
FGQ5	What aspects of the sermon design did you find most helpful?
FGQ6	What suggestions would you make for improving the design and structure of these sermons?
FGQ7	How do you feel that a steady diet of sermon series structured this way would be received by the people of Crossroads?

There were several themes regarding helpful elements of the sermon design and delivery which emerged through analysis of the qualitative data. These themes were

- ❖ the verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter way of working through the Scripture passages (mentioned by five participants),
- ❖ the placement of the sermons within a sermon series (mentioned by six participants),
- ❖ the use of applications (mentioned by six participants),
- ❖ the use of outside Bible references (mentioned by five participants),
- ❖ the use of thorough explanation (mentioned by one participant), abundant information (mentioned by two participants), and reiteration (mentioned by two participants),
- ❖ the use of a conversational style of preaching (mentioned by two participants), and

- ❖ the use of challenging questions (mentioned by one participant).

### **Verse-by-Verse/Chapter-by-Chapter**

Six participants commented on this aspect of the sermon design. Three of them did so in response to the post-survey question 33, one offered feedback in the form of unsolicited feedback in a Facebook message, and two spoke during the first focus group. These were the responses to question 33:

- ❖ I really enjoyed this sermons series. I did not know much about the book of Jonah. I loved how Jason took it verse by verse. I learned more than way.
- ❖ I really enjoyed working my way through a book of the bible, versus hopping around by topic.
- ❖ I loved going chapter by chapter and digging into the Bible, versus a topical sermon. It felt like a Bible Study, which I really enjoyed it. I learned so much that I never knew was even in that tiny book!

Each of these respondents mentioned that they had positive feelings associated with this element of the sermon design. Two of them associated this element with increased learning. One of them associated this element with “Bible Study.” This association was made by several other participants as well.

The Facebook message came from a young woman in her thirties who recently started attending our church. She was baptized at our annual baptism service four weeks after the conclusion of the Jonah series. I sent her a message later in the day, saying, “It was honor to baptize you today! I know your heavenly father is filled with joy!” She responded:

It was a great day! Thank so much for all of the effort you put into all of the services. Every single one of them has touched me down to my soul! My favorite book of the

Bible is now “Jonah” because of your sermons! I just love the way you go verse by verse in the Bible and tear it apart so us sinners in the pew can grab the gospel! Keep up the fantastic work, you’re changing lives every day!

This feedback was unique in that it came from someone identifiable as new to the faith, and unsolicited, and four weeks after the sermon series had concluded.

The feedback on this element in the second focus group came in direct response to the question “What aspects of the sermon design did you find most helpful?” The facilitator started giving a brief summary of the expository preaching style. Participant 6 then responded, “I find it more understanding. It kept on more... I guess when it was broken down into short, smaller segments” (FG2, 7). Participant 5 gave this response:

I like the fact that he took little pieces of it and even in his sermon he would read the section of scripture and then he’d go and look at a couple of sentences at a time and pull information out of each sentence. A lot of it was how to interpret the scripture but it was not just dissecting it [to] just figure out what this thing is ... it was looking at it and thinking, “What does this mean to us?”(FG2, 7-8).

This participant also expressed a positive feeling toward this preaching method in addition to giving a succinct summary of expository preaching which in its essence is reading the text, explaining it, and applying it.

### **Sermon Series**

The second focus group immediately jumped into discussion of this element when asked the question, “What aspects of the sermon design did you find most helpful?” The following conversation ensued:

Participant 6: I think one of them is that it was a series. When it's multiple weeks, kinda building, it just makes me think about it more, process it, etc.

Participant 2: I agree. He made it a BOOK. It was almost like, "OK, we're gonna read this book." And do it together. I thought that was a good part of the design.

Participant 4: It kept building on that. Like I couldn't wait to get back the next week to see what happens. I want more, I want more! And it got deeper and deeper and deeper and more challenging.

The first focus group began discussing the sermon series element of the design in response to the question "How do you feel that a steady diet of sermon series structured this way would be received by the people of Crossroads?" The following is an excerpt from the transcript of that discussion.

Participant 1: I find that if I'm not here on one of those Sundays that he's giving a lesson, I right away go to Facebook where the sermon has been put online. I really depend on that.

\*\*Several people agreed.

Participant 6: I don't want to be left out.

\*\*Several people agreed with this too.

Participant 2: I try and keep up that way too. Even when we're on vacation.

Participant 5: You can miss a "one off" sermon, but if you're in the middle of the series, it's like ugh. It does make you want to come for the whole series. That does help. I think it's well received, particularly for the people that come on a regular basis. They know they're gonna be here for all of the series. I do not know about the people who come random Sundays, whether they would appreciate getting sermon number 1, 3 and 5.

Participant 3: I think you can get a lot from it even if you miss some of them.

**\*\*People agreed.**

The comments of both focus groups demonstrate that placing sermons in an expository sermon series is helpful for generating positive anticipation. The comments also suggest that perhaps this element increases frequency of worship attendance and encourages people to catch up on sermons they are not physically present to hear. However, in response to FGQ7, both focus groups also expressed caution about the overuse of sermon series in general and the use of overly lengthy sermon series. Participants from both groups expressed that four to six weeks is as long any sermon series should last.

### **Use of Applications**

The sermons in this series were designed in a very simple way in order to accentuate the expository nature of the project. They were few stories or illustrations, and the sermons were primarily reading the text and explaining it. The last part of each sermon included two to four applications, given in the form of bullet points (Application #1, Application #2, etc...). There were a couple comments regarding the applications in the first focus group and a discussion about them in the second focus group. In the first focus group, participant 2 responded to FGQ5 with these words:

Participant 2: Well it's more of a Bible study, kind of of a series. When he breaks it down like that. Not to digress from our topic here, but if you want dissection of scripture, have you ever watched John Piper? And how he goes through? It's an actual video type thing and he circles the words. One little line of scripture, he can dissect down to the .... It's quite interesting. I like that. We attended a church and their pastor does that. But we both walked away from that completely uninspired. Because it was too much of like sitting in

a class. What I would think in seminary class. But when Pastor Jason does it, it felt like you were really studying Jonah, but he gives you the life application to go with it. (FG1, 7)

For this participant, what made the Jonah sermon series feel less like an uninteresting lecture or boring sermon was the use of life application. Participant 5 added to these comments by saying, “A lot of it was how to interpret the scripture but it was not just dissecting it, just figure out what this thing is... it was looking at it and thinking, ‘What does this mean to us?’” (FG1, 7-8). One participant responded to Q33 on the post-test by writing, “Thank you, Pastor Jason, for making the Bible real and applicable!” This comment does not speak specifically to the application section of the sermons but expresses gratitude for application in general.

The use of applications was discussed by the second focus group in response to FGQ7 about what might improve the sermon series. Participant 7 begins the discussion about application and then participants 4 and 5 join in. The comments are lengthy but relevant, and the imagery is insightful.

Participant 7: I thought ....Maybe a different perspective on the application part. I do a lot with communication too, and most of the literature out there will say, “You gotta say something seven different ways before you can get people’s attention.” Then if you want them to DO something about it, you need to figure out a few more times. So I’m not saying repeating over and over exactly the same thing, but I do think for me to really learn something to want to do something about it, I need to hear it a variety of different ways. And I liked the way that he made the point, he told a story, then he got to the application parts. But that’s where I felt like those could have been developed a little bit more consistently throughout. So the first sermon, for example, I was looking back at my

notes and I thought he spent what I thought a helpful amount of time on the application section, so it wasn't just number 1: do this, number 2: do this, and number 3: do this. Because I've just been fed this gourmet meal on the Word of God and understanding something new and I ... how do I put this ... I want to sit and enjoy my dessert for a little while. I want to chew on it and I want to just let it sit there, but there were a few of the sermons that I felt like, were like ... OK No. 1 do this, no. 2 do this, no. 3 do this. And I was like ... what happened to my dessert? I missed it. It got put in front of me and then it got grabbed away. So part of that may well have been because there was so much information that he ran out of time. But I noticed there were a couple of sermons where he sat with the applications for a little bit longer. And those are the ones where I felt like I'm gonna do something different in my life because I had more time to think about what that application might look like. Which was different from a couple of the sermons where it ended up being kind of ... here's your applications: 1,2,3 and then we're out the door. I'm like, "Wait a minute". So that would be the one thing I thought about was a more consistent substance to the application questions.

Participant 5: So you felt like you were rushed at the end because we were close to time. Is that it?

Participant 7: I think so, yes. I think that happened several times, and it might have been because there was so much content earlier. So there was so much information but not necessarily a lot of time to land. And part of that is our job when we leave. And what I love about our grow group because we do some of that application piece. But I noticed some of them are more in depth and others were kind of the difference between having



your piece of cake or having one of those tiny brownie bites. I wanted the cake and not just a brownie bite. Does that make sense? \*\*several agreed\*\*

Participant 4: And I found that too, like when it was really making me think hard during it and feeding us so well with that, than more time on ... OK what am I supposed to do with it?

Participant 7: What does it look like?

Participant 4: Yes. What does that look like to me? And digesting it more and how do you apply that? Which you're right ... some of that is on us to go out and do it, but yeah. Sometimes it whipped through the end. But I was still swimming with what was being said! (FG2, 10)

These comments demonstrate that for some participants the applications are not only helpful, but also desirable, and they want more sermon time devoted to them. The researcher has already taken this information to heart in sermon design since reviewing these transcripts.

### **Outside Bible References**

Five participants in the focus groups made comments about the use of references of Bible passages outside the book of Jonah during the sermons. In the first focus group, when responding to FGQ2 about new insights gained from the sermons series, participants 3 and 5 spoke of this element.

Participant 3: I'm sure I've read the part about Jonah being a prophet in the time of Jeroboam II. I've read the whole Bible a few times and I never noticed that before. I just thought Jonah appears in the book of Jonah, he's some maybe mythical character. No, he's for real! He appears in other places too. One other place, plus the thing in the New

Testament about the sign of Jonah. I don't know that anybody I know other than Jason knew he was in there in 2 Kings. Surprised me!

Participant 5: The information is there, we just kinda gloss over it. Even if you read the Bible cover to cover, you don't always make the connection unless somebody points it out to you. I read Kings so long ago that when you read Jonah you don't remember that it was mentioned earlier. A lot of good information can be brought from other places and tie it all together. (FG1, 2)

In responding to FGQ5 about what aspects of the sermon design were the most helpful, participant 1 in the first focus group said, "And he was able to bring in other books of the Bible too to explain the points. That was... I enjoyed that. Because it makes you want to look at those more in depth." (FG1, 7)

In the second focus group, two participants commented on the use of outside biblical references. In responding to FGQ1, participant 3 said:

I used the word "refreshing". For a couple of reasons ... one, I had studied Jonah so long ago that I did not remember it. But it was refreshing because I was able to re-understand it. And I'm with you, very interesting. He did a good job of going to other parts of the Bible and helping us understand more of the history that goes with that. And I think he did a great job explaining that through that whole thing (FG2, 2).

In responding to FGQ2 about change in beliefs and attitudes, participant 1 remarked:

What I'd like to say is how he said that one sermon about how a lot of people think that this is another crazy story or can't possibly be true, and then he started naming off all these other stories that are just unbelievable. Things that happened in the Bible and its like, "Yeah, this isn't really all that crazy compared to some of the other stuff that he read

in the Bible.” I just loved that he just named off probably, I don’t know, 8 or 10 of them (FG2, 4).

Although the use of other biblical stories or references is not something that is only done in expository preaching, the comments above demonstrate that some participants appreciated it and found it helpful. They appreciated that the sermon helped draw connections they would not have seen otherwise. They also appreciated that the character of Jonah was placed into the grander biblical narrative.

### **Other elements**

There were a few elements of sermon design which were mentioned only one or two times in the focus groups but which are worth mentioning because they are aspects of the expository preaching method. Those elements are thorough explanation, extensive information, and reiteration. In the discussion about what was helpful about the sermon design, participant 1 in the second focus group made this remark about thorough explanation:

Participant 1: And with that ... so my word for that would be “thorough”. It was VERY thorough. I don’t think there was ANYTHING that he didn’t touch on. Some of the stuff I’ve read the book of Jonah and I’ve probably read it 5 times in the last 5 years, but I had forgot about how, just some little stuff, like I forgot about how he was upset with God. I forgot it! I just read over that part, but when you really focus on that, and think ... he was really upset with God! He didn’t destroy the city! And it made him look bad (FG2, 8).

In response to FGQ7 about suggested improvements, two participants made these commendations about the helpfulness of delivering vast amounts of information without spending too much time on one:

Participant 5: As far as the design of the sermon, he tells it to you and then moves on.

Some preachers will tell it to you 16 different ways. I got it the first time when you tell me. Move on instead of just keep hashing on the same thing. I appreciate the way he does it. You know what I'm talking about.... There's some preachers that will say, "And another example ..." I got it the first 40 times you said it!

Participant 1: I love that fact that he doesn't do that and so you get tons of material in a short amount of time where some preachers give you a little bit of material in a large amount of time (FG2, 9).

In response to the FGQ5 about what was most helpful, two participants discussed the value of reiteration. In this sermon series, that involved including a brief recap each week of what had happened in the previous week's messages.

Participant 6: Over the weeks, he was very good about doing it but not too much. But just kinda reiterating some of the points from the previous weeks. So it kept reminding me and I kept getting them down each week. So that was nice to have that little bit.

Participant 3: The problem is that you lose site of the first 3. So that little bit of summary ... it's almost like the way that he showed it more (FG2, 9).

These three elements of the expository preaching method would fall into the category of explanation rather than application. Their benefit would be most evident in the correct answers of the knowledge questions of the surveys.

### **Conversational Style**

This element of the sermon series is not directly tied to the expository preaching method. It deserves to be mentioned because effectiveness of this or any sermon series goes beyond the content of the message. It also depends on the way it is delivered and the way it is received. The

conversational style of delivery was discussed toward the end of the first focus group when FGQ6 about suggested improvements was asked. Participant 2 responded:

I'm not sure I feel qualified to answer number 6! I mean seriously? Speaking to the point today, another couple and I were talking about both Pastor Jason and Pastor Sarah and how they can just get up there and just knowing that they've rehearsed this. But they get up there on Sunday morning and it's like ... How do you DO that??? (someone interjected, "It's a talent!") And I wasn't raised that way. Back in the day, the pastor was behind the pulpit reading his notes. And they did. Pretty much, I mean yes they'd look up and acknowledge that you were there but that's how it was done. And it was very formal. That was more of the formal ... now today it feels like you're part of them and they're part of you, and that's a good thing.

Participant 5 responded by saying:

The preachers years ago used to stand behind the pulpit. They would read a sermon or whatever off of the notes on the lectern and that was the way they preached. One thing that helped is now they have wireless headsets and they can walk around, they walk from side to side, they can even walk down toward the audience. They can really make it more like a one way conversation as opposed to they're just talking down to you. It's like you're having a conversation. If you think about it they've been doing this for several years. They've had an opportunity to practice, so if this is their vocation, they've been taught in seminary how to speak to an audience and they both do it very well (FG1, 8-9).

Participant 2 mentioned two different preachers in the comments, Pastor Jason (the researcher) and Pastor Sarah (associate pastor at Crossroads). Jason uses the expository style among other preaching styles. Sarah preaches primarily in a non-expository narrative style. Jason scripts out

his sermons and rehearses them to internalize them. Sarah speaks entirely ad lib. Both use a more conversational style and neither utilizes the pulpit. This element which is not tied to any one style of sermon design has potential to influence effectiveness for preachers.

### **Challenging Questions**

This element was named specifically by participant 7 in the second focus group. This participant brought up the use of challenging questions as an effective element of the sermon series four times during the group meeting. Because many of this person's comments were quite long, only one segment is given below:

I noticed also with this series that he asked a lot more personal questions, more convicting and challenging, and I sorta mentioned that earlier, but I went back and looked and my notebook is really loaded! I'm glad I went back and looked at this. One of the questions he asked, "What would it look like if you completely surrendered to God?" He also asked, "Am I the same person, no matter who I'm with?" And that was when he was talking about how we're called to be ambassadors of Christ. And so, am I really taking that seriously, or do I pretend to be somebody else when I don't want to be an ambassador to those people. And then there's another one ... "Am I being a faithful follower of God to people who have and are building their own personal Ninevehs?" That's like, I don't have to go to a Muslim country ... what this question is asking me is, "Am I being faithful to X when I'm seeing them building their own personal Nineveh? And am I gonna speak the truth of God to them? Or the person sitting right next to me in church? So it was those kinds of questions that he asked throughout this series that I thought were very helpful. And why I felt like I grew. (p.8)

Some of the questions referred to were written into the manuscript and others were generated

spontaneously during sermon delivery. This element was not an intentional part of the sermon design nor is it exclusive to expository preaching, but this participant was very adamant they had an effect.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The research conducted for this project yielded clear data which yields significant findings regarding the effectiveness of expository preaching at Crossroads United Methodist Church. The findings may have relevance for any Christian church which is open to the use of expository preaching. These are the major findings which will be discussed in chapter 5.

- ❖ Expository preaching dramatically increases biblical literacy (knowledge) in the lives of those who are regularly exposed to it.
- ❖ Expository preaching has the potential to facilitate significant attitudinal change in the lives of those who are regularly exposed to it.
- ❖ Expository preaching has the potential to facilitate significant behavioral change in the lives of those who are regularly exposed to it when relevant applications are utilized.
- ❖ Expository preaching has the potential to provide a positive learning experience for mainline churches when relevant application, conversational delivery, and short sermon series are utilized.
- ❖ Using pre- and post-test surveys with the congregation increases the effectiveness of expository preaching in producing changes in the knowledge and behavior of participants.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

Expository preaching is a style of preaching that has been used effectively throughout Christian history. It is not commonly utilized in mainline churches though it is often used with great benefit in more conservative and Reformed churches. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes in the worship participants at Crossroads United Methodist Church in Washington, Illinois as a result of an expository sermon series on the book of Jonah that was presented over a five-week period. This study yielded five major findings. This chapter shares each of those findings through the lens of personal observation, the literature reviewed in chapter 2, and the biblical framework for this study. This chapter also discusses ministry implications from this study, limitations of the study, unexpected observations from the study, and recommendation for future practice of ministry and research.

#### Major Findings

**First Finding: Expository preaching dramatically increases biblical literacy (knowledge) in the lives of those who are regularly exposed to it.**

When I arrived at Crossroads three years ago, upon meeting people, my impression was that they were a fairly biblically literate congregation. I noticed that there were many people who carried Bibles with them to worship. I discovered that many have been participating in Bible studies, small groups, and Sunday School classes for several years. The church had somewhat of an inward focus and had been focusing for several years much more on Christian education than on reaching new people. I imagined that the majority of the people of Crossroads would know the content of the book of Jonah before this expository sermon series began. I was surprised



when, after taking the pre-test survey, many long-time congregants, even those who had been teachers in the church, began approaching me and making statements such as “I flunked your test!” and “I took your test and realized I don’t know anything about Jonah!” and “I guess I have a lot to learn! I thought Jonah was about a man getting swallowed by a big fish!” This feedback also indicated that people had previously assumed they were more biblically literate than they were. This may be much more common in our churches than we know. People assume they know biblical stories because they remember a few small pieces of information about them, not realizing how little they actually do know.

The data from the knowledge questions of the pre-test survey revealed that 30 percent of the time participants indicated that they did not know the answer with any level of confidence; 20 percent of the time they answered incorrectly; and only 50 percent of time did they answer correctly. When the data from knowledge questions of the post-test survey were reviewed, dramatic increases in knowledge were observed. Participants indicated that they did not know the answer an average of only 2.37 percent of the time. Participants answered incorrectly an average of only 8.03 percent of the time. Participants answered correctly an average of 89.42 percent of the time. This increase in biblical knowledge of the book of Jonah was the most observable finding of the study.

In the literature review, it was noted that one of the most often mentioned benefits of expository preaching for congregations is that increases biblical literacy. Allen (4), Koller (29), Richard (18), and Vines (34) all make this claim. Koller believed expository preaching to be the church’s “best answer to the challenge of widespread biblical literacy” (29). This study confirms that Koller’s conviction was true for Crossroads.

One biblical passage that addresses biblical literacy is Nehemiah 8 which tells of Ezra and his helpers reading the Book of the Law to the people who had returned from exile. This is the standard Old Testament text cited as a defense of expository preaching. The text says in verse 8, “They read from the book, the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading” (ESV). This was Ezra’s method of reeducating the people of God about the content of God’s Word and God’s will. These people may have been living on memories of the Scriptures which had been passed on to them orally in childhood. However, God wanted more for them and from them, and Ezra’s expository preaching and teaching made them literate in the ways of God. This project confirms that expository preaching does increase biblical literacy.

**Second Finding: Expository preaching has the potential to facilitate significant attitudinal change in the lives of those who are regularly exposed to it.**

One of the reasons that an expository sermon series on the book of Jonah was important for the people of Crossroads at this point in time is because of the relevance of some of the themes addressed in the book. Crossroads is primarily a comfortable, upper middle class congregation. They needed to be reminded about God’s desire to be in relationship with people very unlike themselves. As a church with little previous missions experience, they needed to be challenged to think about evangelism and taking God’s message to other nations. Preaching through Jonah offered the opportunity to challenge the congregation to think evangelistically and missionally.

Crossroads is also a community which went through a major catastrophe due to an EF4 tornado in November of 2013. Many of the people of the church lost their homes in the tornado. The church acted as a recovery center for the community in the aftermath. There is still

observable wear on the church building because of the tornado relief efforts. There are people in the congregation who have PTSD because of what they went through during the tornado. With this kind of history, thinking about God being sovereign over nature is a delicate subject. I was tempted to choose another book of the Bible to preach through because I feared that speaking of how God is sovereign over nature and has the ability to control the forces of nature might be more than the people of Crossroads could handle.

The book of Jonah describes how God uses his sovereignty in wise, loving, and redemptive ways. The people of Crossroads needed a pastoral and sensitive reintroduction to the concept of God's sovereignty. There are also many people in the congregation who would consider themselves devoted Christians but harbor attitudes of unforgiveness and bitterness toward former spouses and other church members. They needed to be challenged to move beyond these feelings, seeing that God is pursuing their healing just as he pursued Jonah's heart in Jonah 4. These were some of the attitudinal and belief themes addressed in Jonah which came up inevitably through this expository sermon series.

I made several observations before, during, and after the sermons series about this finding. The results of the pre-test surveys showed that participants were already in high agreement with the attitudes and beliefs promoted in the book of Jonah. For the attitude/belief questions, in eight of the ten questions over two thirds of the respondents were already in agreement. In six of the ten questions, over three quarters of the respondents were already in agreement. During the sermon series, I took field notes which recorded observations and personal feelings about the series. I recorded on three occasions that I was apprehensive before the sermons about the applications that I intended to present. On March 11, I was particularly apprehensive because I was challenging the church to consider its responsibility for overseas

missions and the spiritual state of those who do not know Christ. Knowing that this is a congregation that has demonstrated no sense of responsibility toward overseas missions, I felt I might meet resistance about pushing on this topic. After preaching that sermon, I received the least amount of feedback of any sermon in the series. However, that Sunday also happened to be the day that daylight savings time began so it seemed like many people were incredibly sleepy that morning. It's not possible to attribute with any confidence the lack of feedback to either daylight savings time or the content of the message, but it seemed relevant to note. The post-test survey results at the end of the sermon series did show that there was quantifiable attitudinal change as a result of the Jonah series. For each of the ten questions, the mean of post-test responses moved closer to the attitudes and belief promoted in the book of Jonah than the mean found in the pre-test results. In addition, the standard deviation from the mean decreased for each question.

There were also elements of the qualitative data that people's attitudes and beliefs had been challenged and even changed during the series. Someone in the first focus group reflected on the correlation between the sovereignty of God and the tornado that Washington had experienced:

And another thing Jason pointed out too in that series, which people generally, even believers, don't want to accept or maybe believe that God is sovereign and He can do anything. And He can do ... He's in control of EVERYTHING. Does he allow things to happen? Yes. He's in control; if He wants a big fish to swallow somebody, that's what will happen. If He wants a, you know, here again, the tornado changed my life. Was I the only one involved in that tornado? Obviously not! Did he allow that to happen? You

can't say He allows one thing to happen ... good things to happen, but he doesn't allow upsetting things to happen. I guess that's how he changes us sometimes (FG1, 3).

This is a description of someone applying the teaching of the sovereignty of God over creation to their personal story in a way that underscores both God's power and his providential care. Two more examples can be shown by the responses given to the open-ended question inviting general comments at the end of the post-test survey. One person remarked, "A thought-provoking sermon series... it makes me look at myself deep inside regarding the thoughts I have of other people." Another stated, "Loved this series. I was inspired to think differently about evangelism, about how God calls, and about how God loves even our enemies." These comments demonstrate people re-examining their own attitudes and beliefs in light of those presented in the book of Jonah.

A final example comes from a phone conversation that I had with a couple who had been processing their own beliefs about God because of Jonah 3:10 which says, "God... changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened" (NLT). The literature review reveals that one of the main themes of the book of Jonah is that God may at times change his mind and relent from bringing judgment in response to the repentance of humans (Limburg 34; Fretheim 23; LaCosse 1479). This couple was being forced to reexamine their own beliefs (which they considered the most biblical) in light of the clear exposition of the Bible itself.

In the literature review, it was noted that one of the key doctrines regarding expository preaching is the doctrine of the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. *Verbal* refers to the idea that the words of the Scriptures themselves are inspired by God (in the original manuscripts) and *plenary* refers to the idea that the entire cannon of Scripture—every book, chapter, verse, word—is inspired (Vines 50). Expository preaching, therefore, relies on the words of the texts

themselves to do much of the work in the heart of the listener. This is why, in most expository preaching, the eyes of the listener are drawn back to particular verses throughout the sermon.

The very words of the text itself, rather than an act of rhetoric or persuasion by the preacher, are what challenge people's beliefs and attitudes. This is exactly what was happening in the case of the couple grappling with Jonah 3:10.

Closely tied to the doctrine of plenary inspiration of Scripture is the belief by many expository preaching advocates that when what the Scriptures use the phrase "the word of God" and describe its effects, they are describing the Scriptures themselves. A key Bible passage which speaks to this is Hebrews 4:12-13 which states: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (NIV). The theology of expository preaching advocates that the Scriptures are a primary vehicle for changing people's beliefs and attitudes and expository preaching is a beneficial channel for facilitating that change. This study confirms that expository preaching does have great potential in this regard.

**Third Finding: Expository preaching has the potential to facilitate significant behavioral change in the lives of those who are regularly exposed to it when relevant applications are utilized.**

Prior to this project, I feared that behavioral change might be difficult to measure over the short period of time it would take to preach through the book of Jonah. The behavior questions were the most difficult to write for the pre-test and post-test surveys because I know that participants might not have the opportunity to act according to new behaviors during this time period. The test ended up including five questions based on hypothetical scenarios and five based on actual situations which a participant might encounter during the sermon series.

The quantitative data confirmed that behavioral change had taken place over the course of the sermon series. On the pre-test survey, in nine of the ten questions, over two thirds of the respondents indicated that they would at least “most likely” behave in the way that the book of

<b>Table 5:1 – Observable Behavioral Change</b>		<b>Pre-test responses in blue</b>				<b>Post-test responses in rose</b>	
		N	Never (1)	Seldom (2)	Sometimes (3)	Always (4)	Mean SD
Q27	When a person (or group) attacks others (individual crime, group bombings, tribal genocide, etc.), I pray for both the victims and the perpetrators.	54	5.56%	14.81%	68.52%	11.11%	2.85 0.68
		55	5.45%	16.36%	54.55%	23.64%	2.96 0.79
Q30	I pray regularly for those who have hurt me or my loved ones.	54	3.70%	27.78%	55.56%	12.96%	2.78 0.71
		54	0%	11.11%	75.93%	12.96%	3.02 0.49
Q31	If I sense a friend or acquaintance is heading down a self-destructive path, I talk to them about God's love for them and offer to help.	54	5.56%	20.37%	62.96%	11.11%	2.8 0.7
		55	0%	10.91%	76.36%	12.96%	3.02 0.49
Q32	If I am angry at or feel bitter toward others, I pray that God would change my heart (feelings and attitudes).	54	1.85%	7.41%	64.81%	25.93%	3.15 0.62
		55	0%	3.64%	52.73%	43.64%	3.4 0.56

Jonah promotes or that they “sometimes” do. In six out of those nine questions, fewer than 12 percent of respondents expressed that they would “always” or do “always” behave in accordance with the biblically mandated manner. The post-test survey showed movement toward either increased likelihood of behaving or actually behaving in accordance with the behaviors promoted within the book of Jonah for nine out of the ten questions. The increase in actual behavioral change is represented in Table 5.1 above.

One notable quote from participant 5 from the second focus group confirms the change that took place. The participant said:

That’s what I took from it too. I feel like I’ve made a conscious effort now ... if something bad happens in the world, and I’m praying, I’m not just praying for the people who are affected, but I’m also praying for the people who DID it. And that is something that has changed due to this. And I find that’s a lot easier to do than I would have expected. I just have to make a conscious effort to do it. (FG2, 5)

I pray that there are dozens or hundreds of others who have may have already experienced similar behavioral changes either through listening to the Jonah sermons in person or online.

The materials discussed in the literature review did not list behavioral change as one the benefits of expository preaching. However, there are biblical texts which suggest that this is one of the outcomes. As mentioned above, Ezra's preaching and teaching style explained in Nehemiah 8 is taken as the strongest Old Testament example which lays the foundation of the practice of expository preaching. In verses 13-17, a narrative is given of what happened as the result of one day of Ezra's expository ministry. It says:

<sup>13</sup> On the second day the heads of ancestral houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to the scribe Ezra in order to study the words of the law.

<sup>14</sup> And they found it written in the law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should live in booths during the festival of the seventh month, <sup>15</sup> and that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem as follows, "Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written." <sup>16</sup> So the people went out and brought them, and made booths for themselves, each on the roofs of their houses, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. <sup>17</sup> And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them; for from the days of Jeshua son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing (NRSV).

The result of Ezra "reading from the book,... the Law of God, clearly, and [giving] the sense, so that people understood the reading" (vs. 8 ESV) was the joyful obedience (behavioral change) of



God's people. Also noted in the literature review, one of the most important New Testament texts for advocates of expository preaching is 2 Timothy 3:16-17 which reads "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.<sup>17</sup> God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work" (NLT). This passage shows that creating behavioral change is one of the primary God-ordained uses of Scripture. Expository preaching is so tied to the words of Scripture that it allows the Scripture to do the work of teaching, preparing, and equipping people for righteous living (behavioral change) and every good work (behavioral change). This study shows that expository preaching has great potential to bring about behavioral change in people's lives.

**Fourth Finding: Expository preaching has the potential to provide a positive learning experience for mainline churches when relevant application, conversational delivery, and short sermon series are utilized.**

I was hoping that this sermon series needed for the completion of my doctorate would be a positive experience for the congregation. In the two previous churches, I was learning to use the expository preaching method through listening to sermons, reading books, learning from experts, and experimentation. In those churches, I received very positive feedback when utilizing expository preaching. Most of congregants had not been exposed to it and really enjoyed the learning experience. Since coming to Crossroads as the directing pastor in July 2015, I have utilized expository preaching and other styles, and my associate pastor has used primarily a narrative style. Most of the different styles of preaching which have been used at Crossroads since my arrival have received some positive feedback. This made me wonder whether it was

expository nature of my preaching which had solicited such good feedback at the previous church or if the feedback was because of other reasons.

The qualitative data collected from the post-test surveys, unsolicited feedback, and focus groups demonstrated that many of the respondents had a positive experience of the sermon series. I was struck by the number of them that tied the positive experience to the fact people felt like they were learning as they listened to the sermons. Table 5.2 shares comments given in the open-ended question asking for general comments at the end of the post-test survey where respondents specifically made this association. All of the comments reflect a positive experience with the sermon series. Comments 1-5 use the word “learn” and comment 6 implies learning.

<b>Table 5.2 – Comments From Post-test Survey Related to Participants Having a Positive Learning Experience</b>	
1	I loved going chapter by chapter and digging into the Bible, versus a topical sermon. It felt like a Bible Study, which I really enjoyed. I learned so much that I never knew was even in that tiny book!
2	I really enjoyed this sermon series. I did not know much about the book of Jonah. I loved how Pastor Jason took it verse by verse. I learned more this way!
3	I learned so much from this sermon series! So much on which to meditate. God's word is always amazing and Pastor Jason brought it to life.
4	This was one of the easiest Bible learning experiences I've ever had outside of direct Bible

	study groups. I learned that I am sort of a Jonah and I have lots to work on in my own life. And I thank Jason for all of the input and work he has done to make this so impactful.
5	I learned so much and enjoyed each of the five sermons! Great life applications for today.
6	Great sermons, so fun and informative to listen to for our whole family!

In the second focus group, there was discussion around the topic of what audience expository sermon series are best suited for. Participants shared that they personally desired more of this type of preaching but were concerned that people who were new to Christianity or exploring Christianity might not be able to handle this type of sermon. This was helpful feedback. However, during this time I receive unsolicited feedback from a young woman who had been attending our church under a year. Four weeks after the Jonah series concluded, she was baptized as a believer during our annual baptism service. I wrote her a message of congratulation on Facebook Messenger, and she responded with these words:

It was a great day! Thank so much for all of the effort you put into all of the services.

Every single one of them has touched me down to my soul! My favorite book of the

Bible is now "Jonah" because of your sermons! I just love the way you go verse by verse in the Bible and tear it apart so us sinners in the pew can grab the gospel!

The qualitative data shows that expository preaching does have potential to provide a positive learning experience for long-time Christians and those new to the faith.

There were additional insights from the qualitative data which need to be considered with regard to expository preaching being a positive learning experience. The first is that the necessity of relevant application of the text cannot be overstated. There were comments from the second

focus group that participants felt like they wanted more time spent on application during the series. I weighted this sermon series heavily on the side of explanation to emphasize the expository aspect of the project. I used just enough application to keep this sermon series from being a negative experience, but in the future I will be more certain not to neglect that aspect. One participant said that at a previous church that the pastor gave only explanation and it was extremely boring. I believe that explanation and application need to be carefully balanced for an expository preaching to be positive experience. The second insight is that conversational delivery is perceived positively. There was a dialogue in the first focus group as people were discussing my sermon delivery. They said the both the associate pastor and I use a conversational delivery style while being free of a pulpit or a manuscript, and compared us to previous styles they had experienced. One participant said,

Back in the day, the pastor was behind the pulpit reading his notes. And they did. Pretty much, I mean yes they'd look up and acknowledge that you were there but that's how it was done. And it was very formal. That was more of the formal ... now today it feels like you're part of them and they're part of you, and that's a good thing.

Another responded,

The preachers years ago used to stand behind the pulpit. They would read a sermon or whatever off of the notes on the lectern and that was the way they preached. One thing that helped is now they have wireless headsets and they can walk around, they walk from side to side, they can even walk down toward the audience. They can really make it more like a one-way conversation as opposed to they're just talking down to you. It's like you're having a conversation.

This insight about conversational delivery seems very significant. I have the feeling that this sermon series would not have been a positive learning experience if it had been neglected. The third insight has to do with series length. There were comments in both focus groups about how long a sermon series should last. In the past, I have done a few eight or nine week sermon series, and the focus group participants expressed that they believed four to six weeks is the longest that a sermon series should go. One of the reasons this Jonah series was positive was because it was not too long. In their books of preaching, John Stott and Tim Keller also advocate for expository sermon series which are shorter in length (Stott 217-18, Keller 41). This is contrary to the practice of many expository preachers who will take a year or more going through one book of the Bible. This Jonah series lasted five weeks. If it had gone longer, I do not believe it would have been as positive of an experience.

In the literature review, one of the benefits of expository preaching mentioned is that it has proven to elicit a strong positive response from congregations. One of the rare advocates for expository preaching among scholars within mainline denominations is Ronald Allen. Allen states that “Many in North America associate encounter with the Bible with encounter with the transcendent,” and that expository preaching gives the impression to the listener that the preacher is dealing with significant issues of God and life (Allen and Bartholomew 2). He notes the work of James Fish, a seminary administrator who has had the opportunity to experiment with many different preaching styles among different congregations while serving as an interim pastor. Fish found that expository preaching consistently drew the “strongest positive response from the congregation” (Fish 357; Allen and Bartholomew 2).

One of the often cited New Testament texts by advocates of expository preaching is 1 Timothy 4:13-14, where Paul writes:

<sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. <sup>15</sup> Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. <sup>16</sup> Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (ESV).

It is thought that what Paul is describing in verse 13 is actually expository preaching. Paul speaks of this as a gift, given by the elders, to Timothy, for the congregation (hearers). He tells Timothy to immerse himself in this task and to keep practicing and improving as an expository preacher so that all will see his progress and be blessed. The way this passage ties in with my fourth major finding is that expository preaching is something that has great potential to bless congregations as they absorb the Scriptures and the “teaching.” However, for it to be a positive experience, expository preachers may need to progress as communicators in ways that show sensitivity to delivery style, relevant application, and length of sermon series.

**Fifth Finding: Using pre- and post-test surveys with the congregation increases the effectiveness of expository preaching in producing changes in the knowledge and behaviors of participants.**

I had no expectation going into this sermon series that the data collection tools themselves would increase the effectiveness of the project, but the data demonstrates that they did. There is qualitative data which suggests that the pre-test survey and anticipation of the post-test survey prepared people for learning and transformation. The behavioral questions themselves created a change in behavior in at least one situation.

The knowledge questions on the pre-test survey revealed to participants that they had a lack of knowledge regarding the contents of the book of Jonah. As mentioned, the pre-test survey showed an average of 30 percent of the time where participants indicated that they did not know the answer with any level of confidence, an average of 20 percent of the time they answered incorrectly, and only 50 percent of time did they answer correctly. The results of the post-test survey indicated that participants did not know the answer an average of only 2.37 percent of time. Participants answered incorrectly an average of only 8.03 percent of the time. Participants answered correctly an average of 89.42 percent of the time. The comments I received after people had taken the pre-test survey indicated that people were surprised, maybe even embarrassed, at how little they know about the book of Jonah. They made comments such as “I flunked your test!” and “I took your test and realized I don’t know anything about Jonah!” and “I guess I have a lot to learn! I thought Jonah was about a man getting swallowed by a big fish!” It seemed that as people realized they did not have much knowledge about Jonah, it created a playful and competitive desire to listen diligently to the sermons so they could get the answers right on the post-test survey.

There was one comment that one participant made in the first focus group which uncovered this dynamic. The comment came in response to the question: What words would you use to describe your general feelings about this sermon series on the book of Jonah? The participant answered, “I thought it was inspirational and really held my attention. Jason usually DOES hold my attention! I think I was 100 percent focused during the first part of it because I knew I was going to have a test afterward.” It seems that the knowledge that another test was coming at the end made those who did not know the answers on the pre-test to listen with more focus and thus retain more biblical knowledge.

The behavior questions on the pre-test survey seemed to provoke reflection and even action in the lives of some participants. There were two comments in particular which spoke to this dynamic. The first one demonstrates reflection on behalf of the participant. From the first focus group:

“Would you go to a country where they have a different religion?” I was caught by surprise when I saw that question in the end. And really, I had thought about that some during the sermon, but when I was taking the post-test, I really was hit by it. And I thought, “Yes I would, because if God is gonna call me to do something, he would equip me to do something.” I would know the language, I would know the culture, etc. Or maybe He wants us to be kind to the phone telemarketers? That’s a challenge!

This participant was surprised by the question on the pre-test, thought about it during the sermons, was “hit by it” again on the post-test, and discovered an increased level of obedience to God and trust in God. This participant even went on to ponder how the scenario described in the question might have application to everyday life. This is an example of God working through questions posed on the pre-test and post-test survey in combination with the sermon series in order to bring about change in a person’s heart. The second example of a survey question working with the sermon series to bring about behavioral change comes from the second focus group. A participant said:

That’s what I took from it too. I feel like I’ve made a conscious effort now ... if something bad happens in the world, and I’m praying, I’m not just praying for the people who are affected, but I’m also praying for the people who DID it. And that is something that has changed due to this. And I find that’s a lot easier to do than I would have expected. I just have to make a conscious effort to do it.



This person is referring to the behavior described in Q27 of the pre-test and post-test surveys, which says: “When a person (or group) attacks others (individual crime, group bombings, tribal genocide, etc.), I pray for both the victims and the perpetrators.” The participant had to choose one of the following responses: “never,” “seldom,” “sometimes,” and “always.” It appears that by merely being provoked to consider Q27, this person chose to adopt the behavior described therein.

There is nothing in the literature review that speaks to this finding as it was an unexpected surprise. Biblically, one has to consider the numerous questions that Jesus utilized when teaching others. An example would be his conversation with his disciples in Matthew 16:

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

<sup>14</sup> “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

<sup>15</sup> Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being” (NLT).

Although we do not know at what point the Father revealed the knowledge of Jesus’ identity to Peter, the text does give the impression that Jesus was doing something very intentional through the questions he asked. Jesus responded to Peter’s answer as if it had been a sudden work of God in his heart, perhaps brought about by the Holy Spirit working through the questions. This study shows that employing pre-test and post-test surveys with expository sermons has the ability to enhance their effectiveness.

### **Ministry Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this project have ministry implications on multiple levels: for my personal ministry, for preachers who do not yet practice expository preaching, for preachers who regularly practice expository preaching already, and for those who train preachers.

There are several implications from this study for my personal ministry. This study was a validation of my perception that expository preaching can have positive effects in mainline churches. This is not just a style that can only be effectual in Reformed, Baptist, and Dispensational churches. I plan to continue to utilize expository preaching as one of the methods of preaching in my ministry. However, I am taking very seriously the discussions in the focus groups about how long sermon series should be. I gravitate toward six to ten-week sermon series and would love to go longer. I received valuable feedback from my own congregants that they feel that four to six weeks is as long as a series should last. I am already strategically incorporating this information into my preaching calendar.

I have also taken very seriously the discussion in the second focus group about the hunger for more application. I have already modified several sermons in order to spend more time on application since reading these comments. I also see the need to continue with the conversational style of preaching that I have developed. In order to achieve this delivery style, I usually put in four to six hours in preparation for delivery after the sermon is written. There have been times when I have put in slightly less and it has been effective. However, in the times when I have used a manuscript and stood behind a pulpit because of the lack of preparation time, I have gotten slightly negative feedback. Though I would like to cheat time spent on delivery preparation, I have learned that it is worth it to put in the extra time. I may also utilize pre-test

and post-test surveys on certain occasions in the future in order to increase learning during expository sermon series.

There are a few implications for preachers who do not yet use expository preaching. This study shows that it would behoove preachers to consider adding the expository method to their preaching toolbox. One of the reasons that few mainline preachers utilize expository preaching is because they have received no training in it. I had to train myself in the method by listening to sermons, reading books, and asking questions of those who use it. Expository preaching has brought me great joy and proven effective in my churches. In the literature review, I shared that advocates of expository preaching share four benefits that expository preaching offers preachers. It saves pastors time as they can build on background exegesis throughout the sermon series. It feeds the pastor's soul through the intense study of Scripture in the preparation process. It grants the pastor authority by using the authority of the words of Scripture. It holds the pastor accountable because the words of the text determine the content of the message. Even if mainline pastors have to train themselves on the expository method, there are many blessings that come with it both for the preacher and the congregation.

In addition, the expository method of designing a sermon can be used outside of a chapter-by-chapter series through a book of the Bible. It can be utilized by those who use the Revised Common Lectionary. It can be used when preparing messages on a particular topic. An expository sermon series could also be used during special seasons of the year such as Lent in order to take people into a deep study of a book or chapters of the Bible. Over the last decade I have had the opportunity to teach the expository preaching method to a number of younger pastors who have found the preparation process invigorating and the preaching event effective. I have already recommended *Preaching Verse by Verse* by Ronald Allen and Gilbert Bartholomew

to a number of pastors when they have asked for recommendations for books on preaching. Several other clergy have been interested in my project and asked about my findings. I look forward to helping interested preachers gain the knowledge they need to incorporate the expository method into their ministries. I hope God uses this project to opens the door to more opportunities to do so.

The implications for those who already utilize expository preaching have to do with sermon design and delivery. This study implies that perhaps shorter expository sermon series are better than long ones. Many practitioners of expository preaching will spend several months or years going verse-by-verse through a book of the Bible. This may be less effective than preaching expository sermons in shorter series. Creating shorter sermon series requires more creativity but might enhance effectiveness. This study also implies that application should never be neglected in expository preaching. Preaching should never be reduced to a boring lecture. People long to learn about the Scriptures but also know how it applies to their lives. This study also suggests that sermon delivery should not be neglected when using expository preaching. Preaching is definitely *more* than public speaking, but it is not *less* than public speaking. Too many sermons are so well written and yet poorly delivered. Expository preachers believe that the very words of the Bible have the ability to transform human lives. They should go the extra mile and make sure that they have internalized their messages sufficiently to deliver in a manner that is informed by the best research on effective public speaking.

A final implication for this study has to do with institutions that train pastors and preachers. Different methods of sermon design and delivery are taught in mainline seminaries and other training opportunities (License to Preach Schools, Course of Study classes, lay speaking courses), but I have yet to see an opportunity in the United Methodist Church for

preachers to learn how to utilize expository preaching. Every mainline denomination in the United States is in decline. Churches that are growing in numbers and conversions typically utilize either topical preaching or expository preaching. (The largest and fastest growing United Methodist congregation in my conference has grown from 200 to over 2,000 in the last twenty years and has consistently utilized expository preaching over that twenty year period of growth.) Of those two types of preaching, expository seems to depend on and utilize the Scriptures much more than topical preaching does. In addition, as the literature review demonstrates, expository preaching has a long rich history in the Christian Church.

It's time for preaching programs geared toward mainline preachers to at least teach expository preaching among the other sermon design options. The arguments I usually hear against expository preaching are that this type of preaching is usually found in more conservative or Calvinistic denominations, that this type of preaching is too closely tied to Bible study (which some say really ought to happen in adult Sunday School), and that this type of preaching is boring. In response to the first argument, it needs to be stated that this "guilty by association" argument should not be a deal breaker for expository preaching. The Methodist movement started by John Wesley came out of Church of England which was itself Calvinistic in theology. Methodists have a history of taking that which is helpful from other traditions and adapting it to our own theological understandings. In response to the second argument, it must be acknowledged that Sunday School is fast becoming a thing of the past in the United States. The vast majority of people who attend church services on a regular basis do not attend both Sunday School *and* worship. In addition, outside Bible studies which feature expository preaching and teaching are becoming popular among those who worship in services which do not feature expository preaching on Sunday mornings.

Methods of preaching need to be consistently reexamined in light of our changing times, and every biblical model of preaching which has proven to be effective for producing godly changes in human lives ought to be taught to preachers. In response to the third argument about expository preaching being boring, it needs to be acknowledged that every type of preaching has proven boring on multiple occasions over the years. Boring preaching is more likely tied to poor sermon design and delivery than to a certain style of sermon design. This study implies that expository preaching ought to be taught among the other styles of preaching that are taught in seminaries and institutions which train mainline pastors

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations that I experienced during this study. One had to do with survey design. If I had to do it again, I would have designed all ten of the behavior-related questions to be in the same Likert-style format. Had they all been in the same format, it would have assisted with data analysis and simplified the charting of the data for ease of comprehension. Another limitation with the surveys was that it seems that twenty-three people who took the pre-test survey did not remember the four-digit code they identified themselves by so that when they took the post-test survey, their results could not be paired to the pre-test. It was very disappointing that I could not use the data of twenty-three people who had taken the pretest, listened to all five sermons, and then mistakenly typed a different four-digit code on the post-test survey. I wish I had somehow reinforced the fact that people needed to write down their pre-test code so they could use in on the post-test if they wanted their surveys to be valid. Another limitation was that I did not ask a demographic question regarding the gender of the respondents. This would have provided additional insight.

A final limitation had to do with focus group participation. Because of the power dynamics between pastors and parishioners, I was unable to promote focus group participation in the way that most events at our church get promoted. We had to utilize a very careful soft-sell invitation for people to express interest. In the end, we did not have enough people express interest to have two full focus groups for each service so we only had one for each service. In addition, three of the people who were selected for focus group participation were unable to attend.

I do not believe that these limitations would affect the ability of this project to be generalized. Someone could very easily take the data collection tools and run the same experiment in a different church. One thing that might affect generalization could be relevance of the contents of Jonah to the needs of the congregation at a given time. Jonah was the appropriate book for Crossroads because of certain dynamics which needed attention in the congregation.

### **Unexpected Observations**

There were several unexpected observations which emerged from this project. The first has to do with the biblical illiteracy of the congregation. I was very surprised to find that longtime church members who had been respected spiritual teachers were illiterate regarding the content of Jonah. It causes me to assume that they are likely illiterate concerning what the Scriptures teach on many topics, including the more divisive issues of our times. The second surprise observation has to do with the enthusiasm of the congregation. It was very encouraging to see people really embrace this sermon series and treat it like a part of our journey together. This may have been in part because this series was part of my doctoral journey and they wanted to be helpful. They also seemed very enthusiastic about learning more about a classic biblical

story. People really seemed to embrace this project and want to talk to me about aspects of the sermon and project throughout the week.

Another surprise finding has to do with people's delight in the minutia of the biblical text. People loved hearing about the background of a Hebrew word, and pondering the meaning of a word or phrase in Scripture or discovering a previously hidden fact within the plotline of the story. They would speak to me about these matters after the sermon and really ponder them. They loved the teaching dimension of the sermons. Another surprise has to do with the comments on sermon series length which emerged in the focus groups. People loved that these sermons were structured within a series but later discussed how sermon series can be too long. They would likely have felt uncomfortable giving me this feedback otherwise but felt comfortable because of the confidential nature of the focus group setting. Another surprise finding had to do with my own experience of designing and delivering these messages. The content of the book of Jonah dictated the content of the sermons which meant I had to address some difficult topics. I was timid prior to giving the sermons but was still able to speak with the authority that comes from merely passing on the plain content and implications of the Scriptural passage. This is surely one of the most important aspects of expository preaching which was more of a felt effect within me than something that could be verified with data. A final surprise observation has to do with the effects of the pre-test and post-test surveys on the learning experience. This is described above in major finding number five.

### **Recommendations**

There are a few recommendations I would make regarding how to utilize this project and the research it provides.



1) One way that this study might be strengthened would be if the expository method had been used for the sermon design and delivery at one worship service and another style of sermon had been used with the same Scripture passage at the second service. Then the results could be compared to see which style was more effective for facilitating change in knowledge, attitude, and behavior. The complexity of that type of adjustment goes beyond what could have been achieved in my ministry setting at this time. If someone had the ability to use the same data collection tools but run the project in this recommended way, it would likely produce additional findings for the practice of ministry.

2) Similar to the recommendation above, one could vary the delivery styles rather than sermon design styles. At one worship service, the preacher could preach from behind a pulpit and read the text from a manuscript. At another service, the preacher could preach from the front of the platform with a less formal, conversational style, perhaps with notes placed in a Bible for reference. This would give data not only about the effectiveness of the expository sermon design but also on the method of delivery.

3) An area for additional research beyond this study could test the effectiveness of taking a group of preachers who normal preach in a non-expository style, training them in the method of expository sermon design, and then allowing them to run this intervention project or one similar to it within their own congregations. One of the difficulties in recreating this project in different settings could be that few mainline pastors have been trained in the expository style. A group could be trained using *Preaching Verse-by-Verse* by Ronald Allen and Gilbert Bartholomew and then try out expository preaching in their own settings to see if they experienced the same results as those gleaned from this project.

### **Postscript**

The journey from conception through completion of this Ministry Transformation Project has been unlike any other experience in my life. I came into this project with some very specific opinions about preaching and had the opportunity to put those opinions through a thorough examination. The opportunity to do deep research into the topic of expository preaching was a very enriching process. I learned so much about a style of preaching which had been so important in my own development.

Two events occurred in 2014-15 which caused setbacks in research: in October 2014, my mother passed away unexpectedly; and in February 2015, I found out that I would be reappointed to a much larger congregation in July of that year. Those events not only caused a lot of added complexity to my life emotionally, but they also put severe limitations on the time I had to put into my research. This resulted in the completion of this project being delayed by two years.

The upside of the new appointment was that it allowed the opportunity to test my biases toward expository preaching with an entirely new audience. The contents of this chapter have shared some of the valuable insights I have gained through the process. Working with an associate pastor who is a gifted biblical preacher who does not employ the expository method has given me firsthand exposure to new ways of crafting and delivering sermons. Over the past five years, I have gained a deeper and broader understanding of how to communicate the gospel in a variety of ways.

During the process of completing this project, I have enjoyed the honor and privilege of working with two dissertation coaches, both experts in their fields. Both of these coaches offered invaluable insight into academic writing, research design, and other areas of life and ministry. If anything of significance for others in ministry is gleaned from this dissertation, it is because of the coaching of both Dr. Ellen Marmon and Dr. Stacy Minger at different stages. I believe this

project has made me a more resilient and skilled minister of the gospel, and I will be eternally grateful to have been a part of the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE CONGREGATION**

Dear friends,

In order to fulfill the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree at Asbury Theological Seminary, I am conducting research at Crossroads pertaining to the effectiveness of a certain style of preaching as it relates to the book of Jonah. Approval for this research has been granted by the Pastor Parish Relations Committee at Crossroads. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary.

If you are an adult over the age of eighteen, you will be invited to participate in an online survey to help me gain information I need to complete this research. You will be asked to create a four-digit code to be used to identify yourself. You are the only one who will know your code number. From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, I will preach a five-week sermon series going through the book of Jonah. There will be another survey at the conclusion of the sermon series to assess any changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior which may have occurred as a result of the study. Just because you take the first survey that does not mean that you are required to take the second one. However, only the results of those who listen to all five Jonah sermons and complete both surveys can be considered valid for the research. The first survey will be distributed electronically on \_\_\_\_\_.

After the sermon series has been completed, you will also be invited to express interest in participating in a focus group to further discuss the sermon series for the research project. This will also be voluntary and the identity of those who participate will be known only to others who participate. Before participating in the surveys or the focus group, you will be asked to sign a consent agreement.

The documents generated from this research will be permanently deleted within twelve months after the project is completed. The insights gathered from this research will be shared with other seminary students at Asbury and others who might benefit from it.

Thank you for considering voluntarily participating in this research project.

In Christ,

Pastor Jason Woolever

## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY 1 CONSENT

Dear friend,

In order to fulfill the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree at Asbury Theological Seminary, I am conducting research pertaining to the effectiveness of a certain style of preaching as it relates to the book of Jonah. If you are an adult over the age of eighteen, I invite you to participate in this survey to help me gain the necessary information I need to complete this research. I am asking you to use only the last four digits of your social security number as identification on the below survey. Or you may choose another four digit code if you would like. The use of the code means that your name will not be attached to the survey. Your identity will be anonymous and I will keep all the results confidential. Once this research is complete within the next several months, I will destroy the surveys. If you feel stress at any point while participating in this survey, feel free to stop immediately. There will also be a very similar survey at the conclusion of this study to test what kind of effectiveness of the sermon series. Just because you take the first survey, that does not mean that you are required to take the second one. However, only the results of those who listen to all five Jonah sermons and complete both surveys can be considered valid for the research.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to email my assistant Angie Shaw at [ashaw@mtco.com](mailto:ashaw@mtco.com).

To indicate that you have read and understood these words of explanation, are over the age of 18, and are willing to participate, please provide a four digit code in the space below that will allow us to pair your first survey results with your second survey results. Also, please write down the four digit number you have chosen someplace so that you will remember it for the second survey.

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## **APPENDIX C**

### **SURVEY 2 CONSENT**

Dear friend,

In order to fulfill the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree at Asbury Theological Seminary, I am conducting research pertaining to the effectiveness of a certain style of preaching as it relates to the book of Jonah. If you are over the age of eighteen, I invite you to participate in this survey to help me gain the necessary information I need to complete this research. Please only fill out this survey if you took the first survey before the sermon series was preached and were able to watch or listen to all five of the sermons in the Jonah sermon series. If you feel stress at any point while participating in this survey, feel free to stop immediately.

To indicate that you have read these words of explanation, please check the box below and then re-enter the four digit code that will allow us to pair your second survey results with your first ones. Thank you for your willingness to be a part of this project which will help preachers become more effective in sermon design and delivery.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **FOCUS GROUP INVITATION**

Dear friend,

In order to fulfill the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree at Asbury Theological Seminary, I am conducting research pertaining to the effectiveness of a certain style of preaching as it relates to the book of Jonah. If we were able to listen to all five sermons in the Jonah sermon series and decided to participate in both surveys, I invite you to express interest in participating in a focus group discussion which will help gain feedback about different aspects of sermon design and delivery. These focus group discussions will be one-time hour long events, and audio-recorded. They will then be transcribed and your feedback will be used to gain insight which will be included in the findings of this project. Your feedback will be completely confidential. Your names will not be disclosed when the findings are reported. Your identities will only be known to a trained facilitator and my assistant, Angie Shaw. After the project is completed, the audio-recordings will be erased.

From those who express interest, sixteen people from the 8:30am worship service and eight people from the 11am worship service will be randomly selected by drawing names out of a bag. These sixteen will be invited to the focus group meeting and the others will be notified that their names were not drawn.

You should feel no obligation to participate in these focus groups, but should you choose to participate, your feedback will be very helpful in the aiding many preachers become the most effective they can be.

If you are willing and interested in helping with this research by participating in one of these focus group sessions, please email my assistant Angie Shaw at [ashaw@mtco.com](mailto:ashaw@mtco.com) and simply write in the body of the message, "I am willing and interested in being a part of the focus groups."

## APPENDIX E

### FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

I understand that my participation in this focus group discussion is entirely voluntary. I understand that this is for the purpose of helping Jason Woolever complete the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. I understand that the feedback I provide will be used to gather data to evaluate the effectiveness of the sermon design and delivery for the recent sermon series on the book of Jonah preached at Crossroads United Methodist Church. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone not present in this meeting. I understand that this is being audio recorded and will be transcribed to be analyzed for this study, and after the completion of this project the audio-recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

Signed\_\_\_\_\_

Dated\_\_\_\_\_



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