

ABSTRACT

HOW A PASTOR READS THE LOCAL CULTURE IN ITS IMMEDIATE CONTEXT IN ORDER TO PRESENT THE GOOD NEWS

by

Devon Smith

The purpose of this research project was to find out how effective ministers today read their local culture in order to bridge the gap between the sermon and the hearers. Two primary goals drove this project. The first goal was to study how effective communicators throughout the history of the Church have engaged their culture with the biblical message. The second goal was to interview twenty cross-denominational, cross-gender, and cross-cultural pastors in order to find the methods they used. The results were compiled to reveal the top five methods pastors use to read their culture and four primary ways pastors use to engage their culture with the gospel.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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In Partial Fulfillment
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by

Devon Michael Smith

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The job of the biblical communicators is to help point and reorient people to God. The Christian communicator bears witness to the truth by calling attention to and announcing God's thoughts towards society and humanity. Augustine once wrote that "wherever Christ the head is, there is his body" (Augustine, Saint Augustine 2). When communicators bear witness to the fullness of God by living out the Christian life in the context of culture, they show God's desire and power to connect humanity to himself. This witness allows others to join in on the conversation of salvation and hope.

The Bible was written as a dialogue of how God works in the lives of people. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this reveals the transforming power of God in every situation of life. God is always at work. People need to hear how the truth has personally transformed the communicator.

Since the main thrust of this research was to learn how the communicator reads and understands their culture in order to connect man to God,¹ I do not spend much time talking about the structure or the delivery of the sermon. The scope of this project, is instead, how the communicator connects the reality of life with the truth of the Bible as they mediate the conversation between God and humanity through history and the Holy Spirit.

Everyone born was born into a relationship. No one was born in a vacuum and as

¹ Relevancy is a term with many interpretations and is used in many contexts. Many evangelicals have a problem with this term. Not only because of the definition, but also how it has been used and consequently become known. The mere definition of relevancy means to connect, regard, or reference (hyperdictionary.com). What evangelicals have heard is selling out at the cost of conviction. To the culture, relevant means to become like "us." Both sides take their respected understanding from their experience and defined categories, forgoing what each one really means. Since either side does not fully understand the definitions of what is meant when the term is used. The word relevant was left out of the project because of the misunderstanding it continues to cause.

a result each culture has tried to teach the meaning of life based on how they understand and define life. God has revealed to humanity the reality that they were created in his image (Gen. 1:27). Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 demonstrates that he never intended Christian communicators to remove themselves from the culture. Jesus places the responsibility on God to keep and protect all Christians from the world. Jesus knew that effective communicators are those who understand the lifestyles, struggles, fears and triumphs in light of the grand scheme of history. The admonishment from Jesus is to remain in culture but not to be tainted by it.

The Bible is clear that to be lukewarm is to deny God. He would rather be hated than to be a "convenience." This research project was written to find out how those pastors who are faithful to their calling exegete their culture in order to present the gospel. These pastors are the ones who understand their commission from Jesus and who engage their culture in the demonstration of the Spirit's power. Not in the power, eloquence, or wisdom of man. After all, "apart from the historic events of Christ's incarnation, atonement, and bodily resurrection there is nothing to preach and no gospel!" (Larson 37).

If Hebrews 13:8 is true when it says, "Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same," then God has never been nor ever will be irrelevant. If Colossians 1:16 is true when it says that in him, through him, and for him all things were made, then Jesus has always been and will always be. If the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-8 came true concerning Emmanuel—God with us, then God not only understands the needs of humankind, he was born in a specific culture and communicated truth to those around him. If 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 is true when it says that Christians are Christ's ambassadors with the

ministry of reconciliation, then the communicators do not have to connect God to humanity; he has done that. They merely demonstrate to the watching world the power of the incarnate Christ to change hearts and lives.

I am committed to learn the methods of how pastors exegete their culture in order to present the Good news of Jesus Christ. In other words, to find out how the biblical preacher meets people where they are in the circumstances of life and connect them to the transforming power of God. I am trying to find out what they read, how they spend their time, how they stay in the world but not of the world, how the Spirit of God rests on them to enable them to carry out the message of the Bible in order to understand their culture.

The Problem and Its Context

One of the main complaints from non-Christians and Christians alike is that the message does not make sense in daily life. Comments such as, “It doesn’t connect,” “The sermons are boring,” “The pastor is too dry,” “The message was hard to follow,” “I laughed, but, now what?” are heard every day. These statements or questions religion can never answer. Only a relationship can satisfy the deeper answers.

According to the Bible, life makes sense in the context of a historical, theological, and practical context with a divine purpose in mind. This connection of life and the Bible must be made in order for life change to occur.

Living and preaching in a Wesleyan tradition, I personally know pastors who have a commitment to not water down the gospel to conform to culture. These pastors are faithful to preach their understanding of the gospel week in and week out; however, in the name of purity, they have ostracized the world and, consequently, separated themselves. The world laughs at their straight-laced, condemning, and misplaced comments and

dismiss them as being judgmental and out of touch with real life.

People, whether preachers or laity, find answers to life with the connection of truth to real-life issues. The pastor has to realize that “we are not responsible whether people eat or not, but we are responsible for how we set the table” (Barber). James understood this very notion when he said in Acts 15:19, “[I]t is my judgment that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

Delivery and Structure

According to David S. Cunningham, several reasons exist as to why a connection is made between life and truth. First, the delivery and structure of the sermon must be succinct and clear so that people may have a fair opportunity to meet Jesus—for whom he really is. People critique in this manner because sermons fail to move people from one place to the other. That is, the audience must come to accept or to recognize certain conclusions (or premises) that it had not previously accepted or recognized (45). The problem is not with the truth but with the structure of the sermon and how it is said. If the hearers cannot follow the structure, then they cannot respond to the truth being conveyed.

John Wesley was converted through the reading of the preface to Martin Luther’s book on Romans. This work is hardly a dynamic piece by today’s standards, but it has a solid structure. Wesley’s heart was “strangely warmed.” His life was transformed by a paragraph in the context of structure. The fellowship of believers and the witness of the Moravians began to make sense. The written words helped him to understand what was being communicated through the actions of the church.

Identifying Life with Truth

The second reason for a disconnect between life and truth is a failure to find an

identifying image or story. People identify with things around them and need tangible illustrations to help them relate their lives in the light of God's truth. These identifying things can be anything from personal testimonies, visible transformations, anecdotes, or illustrations. In order for this application to occur, communicators need to understand key concepts and principles from both the culture and the Bible.

For the Christian communicator, those principles must be applied in order to help people live in Scripture and see the world through God's revelation. Language helps move people along in their thought, process and application connects word and life together. The connection of language and application gives people a chance to move from the visible to the invisible and sometimes from mystery to reality. As Augustine says, "[A]ll teaching is teaching of either things or signs, but things are learnt through signs.... [S]igns are those things which are employed to signify something" (Saint Augustine 8-9).

That "something" to which Augustine is referring is found in application of the truth. Truth transcends culture and social barriers. Isolating one-self from the culture and failing to understand society in order to help people relate to God is not only irresponsible but also selfish with the gospel. People need to see that the Bible works. Therefore, this project was geared towards the methods that pastors use to exegete their culture in order to present the good news.

Background Issues

Biblical communicators are not called to run from the culture, but to engage it. Today, society is changing in one fashion or another every day; therefore, the communicator must learn the nuisances of the culture by learning how to communicate in the twenty-first century as they did in the 90s, 80s, or 70s. According to the pollster

George Barna, “we are living in an age that has seen more change then any other in the history of the world” (Church Attendance).

The primary responsibility of the Christian communicator is to bring people into the conversation of salvation and to help them hear what God has to say about a topic, situation, or action. They do this by preaching the entirety of the Scriptures. The communicator is allowed to participate in this dialogue because God has ordained the office of preaching.

Preaching takes more than skill and sensitivity in order to bring the word to the people. It also takes the witness of the people and the moving of the Holy Spirit. The communicator must first understand truth being communicated in the Bible while seeking to understand the context of the culture. This synergy will help bridge the gap and connect people to God.

Personal

“God has no grandchildren” has been a saying in my family since I can remember. When the finality and the complexity of this quote began to make sense to me, the implications of the truth became terrifying as well. Only God incarnate in the form of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save the world. No other options for a “savior” exist. As a result, if each generation did not fulfill the great commission Jesus gave the church in Matthew 28:18-20, then the church would cease to exist.

Biblical

God allowed Israel to be led off to captivity because they prostituted themselves out to other cultures. As they began to adopt pagan beliefs, they forgot about God and began to look and act like the cultures around them. God does not want his Church

looking like the world. He wants his Church to look like him. Paul leaves no ambiguity when he writes in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23 that not everything is permissible and, therefore, should not be used for freedom to engage in any desired activity. That freedom given in Christ is the freedom to help others discover God for themselves. The Bible gives instructions for looking like God.

The Church. Jesus is the one who named the Church and gave it purpose. Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Christ,” to which Jesus replied, “On this rock [this statement] I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). The Greek word for Church means “called out” ones. The name of the Church reveals the mission of the church. That mission is twofold. First, the Church is to be the visible representation of Christ on earth. Just as the Hebrew people were meant to show humanity God’s purpose of redemption through a specific people group, so, too, the New Testament Church is to show the world God’s transforming power. Second, the Church is to live that transforming power out in the context and community of believers to a watching world. The admonition to the Church from Jesus is simple; to experience his love and live it out. When the mission becomes real, the Church becomes the means by which people walk across the bridge built by Christ.

The prayer. Jesus offered up a prayer in John 17:15 saying for anyone who would come to him that God “would not take them from out of the world, but that God would protect them from the evil one.” Clearly Jesus never intended Christian communicators to be isolated from the culture around them. God created the process of birth that gives individuals their identities through social structure and nationality. Jesus learned to embrace his personhood in light of Scripture and to have faith that God would

keep him. He is praying the same thing for his Church.

Jesus intentions for his disciples were revealed in John 17:18 when he prayed, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” Jesus frequently talked about his heavenly purpose was to do the will of God. He makes his purpose known to his disciples (including preachers) that the daunting task of participating with him in fulfilling God’s will is also to do God’s will.

Jesus, the ultimate example of one who interacts with culture, asked God to protect all who would call his name as savior and give them boldness to proclaim this message. Jesus knew in order for communicators to be effective they must understand the lifestyles, struggles, fears, and triumphs of the ones they are trying to reach. In order to speak to the people, the admonition is to study culture but not to marry it and to remain in the culture but not be tainted by it.

The Church is to remain faithful to Christ, regardless of how much pressure the culture exerts on the Church. Jesus gives the authority and power to do so. Jesus also prayed in John 17 that God would keep the Church from the evil one. Accordingly to Gods faithfulness, humanity can expect him to honor the prayer of his Son, Jesus, completely with no reserves. After all, to be called out is to be called into holiness. The Church is to be holy as he is holy (Matt. 5:48).

Cultural

The way decisions are made, lives are lived, children are raised, and ultimately how reality is defined is found in the experience of the local culture. For instance, in America, “our children have received some of the best education in the world to convince her or him that ‘the highest purpose of your life is consumption. You have no other

purpose than to produce and to consume,’ almost nothing is natural” (Willimon 213). The communicator must be able to determine the shallow and deeper meanings of culture in order to communicate God’s word, regardless of where they live. The Christian communicator must be willing to think like missionaries in a foreign land in order to determine the message of the culture.

God communicates through culture not in spite of it (Matt. 13:33-35). He understood that culture helps produce people’s thoughts and attitudes as it helps shape societies worldview and gives answers to life in light of their understanding of reality. Even a cursory view of the parables and teachings of Jesus show how he communicated the timeless principles of God through the circumstances of the day.

As a Christian, learning to live in the local culture as God’s spokesman is a challenge. Just as it was for Paul (and the other disciples), it cost him his life. Living in the culture means taking influences of the culture and using their illustrations and their education to fill in the unanswered questions with God’s message—much like Paul did in Acts 17 on Mars Hill. Although Paul’s example on Mars Hill is considered further in Chapter 2, one should note that one of the many lessons learned from him is that communicators can either run from the culture in which they live or they can learn to observe and think like missionaries. Wise communicators will use the culture as a springboard and source of insight and information to connect spiritual truths to make a difference. The communicators participate in the Incarnation through the Church.

Worldly

Each religion has its own definition of being human in light of personal interpretation of creation and sin and suffering. Each part of humankind tries to make

sense out of experience, tradition, reason, and (their own) Scriptures. As each religion believes and teaches something different as to the reality of life, those beliefs and teachings are communicated to their followers.

As evangelicals, a worldview only has validity as it finds itself in light of truth and the revelation of God. The evangelical must learn to contest anything that is not revealed in scripture as false teachings. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and therefore becomes the revelation of what is worldly and what is Godly.

Purpose of Study

In 1991 church attendance was at 49 percent of the population. In 2004 church attendance had declined to 43 percent of the population (Barna, Church Attendance).

While church attendance in North America has been decreasing, the interest of “spiritual” things is increasing (Beeber). Many have cited the reason that they no longer go to church is because there is a disconnect between the sermons and the people. This study was an exploratory study of how communicators bridged the word and culture. This was accomplished by identifying methodologies pastors use to exegete their culture in order to present the good news.

Research Questions

The following four research questions guided the study.

Research Question #1

How does a pastor read and understand the message of the Bible?

Research Question #2

How does a pastor intentionally read and stay current with society in order to exegete the local culture?

Research Question #3

How does a pastor combine the two worlds in a sermon?

Research Question #4

What discovery of patterns, principles, or methodologies can be observed from those pastors who connect the biblical text with the local culture in their preaching?

Definition of Terms

Definitions of terms were established based on communication, research, and the advice of the dissertation committee.

Bridge does not mean a physical structure but a new and fresh way of communicating the contents of the Bible to a contemporary society/culture. Bridge is used in a metaphorical sense because it means something anyone can cross.

Contextualization attempts to communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context. Contextualization means presenting Christianity in such a way that meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture (Whiteman, "Contextualization" 2).

Communication refers to a two-way street mentality where a giver and a receiver of the message reside. According to communication theorists, the process involves a reciprocal exchange of signals that inform, instruct, or persuade, based upon shared meanings, the relationship between sender and receiver, and the setting in which the communication takes place (i.e., context).

Culture is the creation of humanity. Nevertheless, culture is more than an endless list of categories. "Culture consists of patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-

meaningful systems that help shape the frame of reference that people have learned” (Spradley and McCurdy, Cultural Experience 58). Donald McGavran says, “[T]hey are the creations of human societies, families, kindreds, clans, tribes, and classes of people who live together long enough to develop a distinct language and way of life” (10). Culture gives context and meaning as to why a person says or acts the way they do. Culture is “the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior” (Spradley Participant Observations 6).

Incarnational refers to God and his ability to identify with humanity. The spoken word became living, according to John 1:1-2 and 14, and dwelt among humanity. God is ever present and always moving in his people. The Incarnation of Jesus reveals the order of God and the distinct and perfect relationship between God and humanity (Goldsworthy 66). “[T]he way that God is in himself, is reflected in the way he has created all things, and is reflected in the way he relates to the creation” (65).

Missionary comes from the Latin word *mitto*, which means “to send.” It is the equivalent of the Greek word *apostello*, which also means to send. The root meaning of the two words is identical. A missionary is someone called and sent by God (Gal. 1:1) with the priority to preach the kingdom of God and to meet other forms of human need all in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). To attempt to become a missionary without the help of the Holy Spirit is not only unbiblical, but irresponsible and impossible. The authority of a missionary does not lie in the office of the missionary but in the one who calls. A missionary, then, must be willing to learn the customs and cultural patterns of a specific people group in order to interact and relate.

Description of Project

The project consisted of a personal interview, an audio taped sermon, a Web-based survey, and in some cases a participant observation designed to gather top methodologies pastors use to exegete their culture.

Subjects

The criteria for determining the participants were threefold. First, they had to be in a growing church. Second, the church had to be known for their outreach, and third, they had to be evangelical.

The subjects were compiled by using a research reflection team made of five laity and one associate pastor. All six members of this group were asked to submit names of whom they thought met this criterion. Fifty-four names were submitted, and twenty were selected from a randomly generated system. Sixteen interviews were from the pastors themselves and the other four were from associate pastors at the local church.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The method of research was a semi-structured study of selected pastors consisting of a three-part assessment instrumentation. A pretest was administered in order to gain feedback and suggestions to ensure the viability of the research. In some cases, after the three-part assessment was collected, a participant observation was initiated to discern more information from the subjects.

Pretest. Five pastors who were willing to donate an hour of their time took this pretest survey. The pastors who were selected ranged from a highly computer literacy to a those having only a nominal computer literacy. Each pastor was asked to take the survey over the Internet, just as the response population would take. After the group of

five pastors came together and evaluated the whole process concerns and trouble areas were noted. The pretest brought valuable feedback, which resulted in a complete reworking of the method in which the questions were submitted. The pretest also brought clarity and focus to the questions which brought a simpler Web-based data submission.

Researcher-designed questionnaire. The first of the two-part assessment was given as a researcher-designed questionnaire and was initiated to the response population, which laid a foundation for the research project. After explaining the project, the research population was asked if they would participate in a twenty-minute Web-based survey. Every pastor interviewed choose the Web-based survey over the mail-based survey and no pastor refused to take the Web-based survey.

Web-based survey. The second part of the assessment, with corrections based on the pretest survey, consisted of a two-part, seventeen-question, Web-based survey (see Appendix C). The first part of the questionnaire was designed to give information concerning the local context of the church. The second part of the survey was open-ended and was designed to give the response population an opportunity to express, in their own words, their ability to read and understand their local culture.

Sermon. The third assessment instrument used was an evaluation of a previously preached sermon that helped to make the connection between the second and third assessments. The responses were then recorded, leading to the discovery and compilation of the methodologies pastors use to reach their culture. When subjects were asked for a sermon, they wanted to know why. I told them, “I know what you told me you did, I want to see if you actually do what you say you do.”

Participant observation. After the interview process, participant observation is

how “skilled ethnographers often gather most of their data through many casual, friendly conversations” (Spradley, Participant Observation 58). These conversations take place in varying venues. The structure is not important as long as the content is part of the conversation. “They may interview people without their awareness, merely carrying on a friendly conversation while including a few ethnographic questions” (58). The purpose of the participant-observations was to gather data directly from the subjects without putting words in their mouth.

Delimitations

A number of factors limited the study. The population that was targeted was determined by recommendations and/or personal knowledge of the subjects. The population sample interviewed may not have been representative of the most current and viable pastors reaching their culture. In some instances, distance was a factor. Of the twenty interviewed, only six were face-to-face (personal) interviews. This limited my observation of how the respondents answered the questions and the a personal observation of how people responded to the pastor during the sermon.

Theological Reflection and Conclusions

The wisdom of God’s word has been revealed in many forms, but the meaning is still the same. His word is living and active (Heb. 4:13). At the heart of his word is the certainty that he has designed it to accomplish what he set out to accomplish. “Preach the good news,... bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom from the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isa. 61:1-2a). Jesus called this reality lived out in community, the Church.

The communicator is involved in a long discussion between God and man and

learns to draw others into the same conversation. The conversation consists of salvation for everyone (Eph. 1:5), a restored image (in light of salvation) that God created in humanity before the Fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1-3), and how to live in the fullness of salvation in Christ (Col. 1-3). This communication is evident in how “Christianity can be neutral to the vast majority of cultural components and still transcends time, people, places and events” (McGavran 32).

The role of the communicator is not to force or to help God say something that he has already said. The communicator’s role is to participate in the Incarnational role of Jesus by being in the church and living out the character witness of a testimony bearing this transforming power of Jesus Christ. When this transforming power occurs, communicators bring together a way of understanding so that the world in which they live may know and understand the world of God.

The Church becomes the bridge of God to the world that he laid down in Christ. Jesus is ultimate reality and the final word of God (Heb. 1). When Jesus reveals himself to his disciples, he awakens faith. He shows himself to his disciples and lets them know that he is building the Church. “What is he, himself? The head of the church.... [T]he disciples did not yet see it. He showed them its head; he promised them the body” (Augustine “Peace Be to You”). The bridge is necessary because of the gap that sin created. This gap is bridged in the person of Jesus Christ and becomes a reality in the people of God. “Wherever Christ the head is, there is his body” (Augustine, Saint Augustine 2).

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 establishes the biblical, theological, historical, pastoral, and cultural

context for the study. The research design is presented in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 reports research findings. Chapter 5 provides summary and interpretation of the research findings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The changing culture in America has led to more antagonistic views of what being a Christian in society means. Society is more Christophobic than homophobic (Seamands) and church attendance in North America is declining. Change is inevitable and pastors need to stay current with the trends and outcomes of their local culture. Society is changing and redefining itself in light of new technology and advancements every three years. The church isn't receiving and dealing with change very well. "The culture is cycling every three years while the church is cycling every forty years" (Barna "Reaching the Post-Modern People"). For every one cycle of the church, society has gone through a new fad (cycle) thirteen times. The church in North America is now in a post-Christian society (Garlow, 5 Pillars).

Declining attendance and a biblical disconnect has not always been the case. History records stories of growth and prosperity of the message of Christ. History also records stories of men and women who have given their lives for the Christian message. Throughout history biblical communicators have connected humanity to God in a contextualized indigenous manner. This approach of indigenous Christianity must continue.

Biblical Precedent for Preaching

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the believers gathered and baptized them with the fire of boldness. When the Church set out on its mission to the world, the field that lay immediately before it was the Roman Empire (Kidd 1). The

expansion of the Roman Empire unified the centers of the world in a Hellenistic culture. Four things happened when this unity occurred: (1) the fusion of races, (2) the unity of language, (3) the union of cities in a great monarchy, and, (4) the religious toleration and comprehension of the conquered world (7). The Hellenization of the Western world produced roads, universal coins circulated throughout the known world, and a unifying language. Hellenism also broke down local traditions and supplied a common language with a common culture to the ordinary person. Hellenization of the Western world did one more thing. It opened up Christianity to the litmus test of authenticity. Whether or not Christ could indeed be communicated and transmitted unbounded by culture was a test on which the future of Christianity hinged.

The spoken Word (John 1:1) came down from heaven and gave his Church the mandate to go into the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20) and to preach the good news. Not until the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8) did the Church come alive with boldness and passion to fulfill the Great Commission. Even as the Church came alive, it continued to transmit the significance of Jesus in a strictly Jewish sense. This method continued until an anonymous group of Jewish believers talked to Greeks (pagans) about Jesus in Acts 11:20. Acts 11:19 says that “those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.”

Antioch

This unknown group took the process of understanding Jesus to a completely different level. They presented him as Lord, not as Messiah. Greek-speaking Antiochian Gentiles would not have understood Messiah, but they would have understood the term

kyrios, or Lord. In their eastern Mediterranean culture, Lord was used all the time to refer to different cult divinities. “This daring piece of cross-cultural translation, this spectacular theft of symbols, was transformative for Christian history” (Walls 146). It opened the way for a truly authentic Hellenistic understanding of Jesus, which would later pave the way for the conversion of heathens and Gentiles into the Church. Antioch would eventually be the launching point for the now famous three missionary journeys. Antioch was also the place where the new disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Athens

Acts 11:20 shows what can happen when the message is contextualized, Acts 17:24-31 shows Christian communicators how to contextualize the good news. Using Paul’s visit to the Areopagus as an example, this method of contextualization comes alive and is made clear to the reader.

Paul’s journey to Areopagus really began in Acts 17:1 when he was on his way to Thessalonica. While in Thessalonica, as the custom was, he began to reason with the Jews. While preaching in the synagogues, Jewish people became persuaded and became Christians, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks. The Jews who were not converted became jealous. As a result, Paul, Silas and Timothy needed to leave in order to avoid major conflict. They went to Berea where, again, Paul went to the synagogues and preached. Once again, many Jews and Gentiles became Christians. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard of Paul’s presence in Berea, they went to Berea where they caused a great stir. Paul left and went to Athens.

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy (17:16) to arrive in Athens, he

became provoked by the idols that he saw lining the streets in Athens. The Greek word says that his spirit was aroused within him by both anger and grief that caused a desire in him to convert them. He was motivated to go to the synagogues and to the marketplace, which was the center for public life to share the gospel. While in the marketplace, a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Acts 17:21) who spent their days doing nothing but talking and listening to the latest and greatest ideas overheard him. This new teaching they heard from Paul in the marketplace caught their attention, and they wanted to know more, as they thought Paul was proclaiming strange divinities. They took him to a meeting on the Areopagus where they asked him to explain more of what he was saying in the marketplace.

Mars Hill Confrontation

The Areopagus, Hill of Ares, northwest of the Acropolis in Athens (Acts 17:19, 22) is to be understood here less as a place, where speakers were permitted to hold forth freely and listeners were always at hand, than as the council that met on the hill. “In Roman era the most important governmental body in Athens; among its many functions was the supervision of education, particularly of controlling the many visiting lecturers, and it is not improbable that Paul was brought before it for this reason” (Arndt and Gingrich 105).

The Areopagus is where Paul proclaimed to the Epicureans and the Stoics (17:17) this unknown God. Whereas at Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:2,11) Paul reasoned with the Jews. The difference between “proclaiming” to these people and “reasoning” with the Jews in the synagogues is the difference between an earned right and a given right. The philosophers gave Paul permission to share what he was preaching in the marketplace.

They had overheard him talking of something they had never heard before.

Paul was a “proclaimer of foreign divinities, “Socrates was tried and sentenced to death for similar charges 300 years earlier” (Soards 96). The people of the day expected that Paul would share this new information with them. The Jewish people knew the teachings that Paul was presenting. The text reveals that Paul reasoned with them. In the synagogues among fellow Jewish believers, he had a common ground by virtue of sharing the same Jewish heritage, but at the Areopagus, he was asked to share with the Epicureans and the Stoics.

The argument that ensued was a brilliant contextualized proclamation of the good news and a new idea: the resurrection. Paul’s delivery had every mark of an orator as he stood in the center of the Areopagus. He used their language, train and flow of thought, and their understanding of reality to present the claims of the Bible. This method was so effective that “some have even said that it was the best speech that Paul ever delivered” (Wagner 110). Although his apologetic was just getting started and lasted only several minutes when he was dismissed, it stands as an example for all who are ready to reach people in the blindness of their understanding and to bring them the truth.

“I perceive that you are religious” (Acts 17:22b). Paul started off positively. He praised his audience and affirmed them for being open to religious teachings. Though some may see his introduction as being sarcastic, I think that he affirmed them for trying to understand spiritual things. Affirmation is one of the fastest ways to break down barriers in order to communicate. “He honestly commended them for their search for religious things” (Adams 31).

“I passed by and saw a plaque to the UNKNOWN GOD. It is him that I declare

to you” (Acts 17:23b). A fascinating thing about this statement is that by writing this statement to the “unknown God,” the Athenians had confessed their ignorance and their need for instruction. “This put his audience in the position of acknowledged ignorance and the need for information” (Adams 31). Their minds must have been pricked, but they chose to call Paul names. When they first heard Paul in the marketplace, they referred to him as a babbler or seed picker. Slang for parasite or ignorant plagiarist. They probably were thinking that he was not only proclaiming a strange god but foreign demons, as well (Horton 206). “By this declaration, he skillfully evaded the possible charge of introducing ‘strange gods’” (Adams 30). Paul needed to bridge a gap between what they perceived he was claiming and what he was actually proclaiming in a way they would understand. After gaining their attention, he immediately began his proclamation with eight truth statements of this God versus their gods or worldview. He began with a point of connection from their culture to bring to the forefront what he was saying. Their “unknown God” was a token name given to make sure that all gods were honored. Not only did this explain a visible God but a personal God as well. This statement was in contrast to their polytheistic worship as it declared that there is only one God.

“He made the whole world and everything in it” (Acts 17:24a), was not something the Epicureans or the Stoics endorsed. Their teaching taught that the gods were very impersonal and not concerned with humanity. This statement declares God’s character and his desire to reveal himself to the world. Paul’s statement told them that this God “I am talking about” is in your midst already.

“God ... does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is he worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:24b-25a) revealed to them God is

not bound by space and time. Not only is he transcendent, he is also revealed. “It also informs the audience that God is the Lord of the created order and is not capable of being domesticated by humans” (Soards 94). The real stretch for them would have been the next statement.

One learns in Acts 17:25b that God “gives to all, life, breath and all things.” God is the only giver of life and as a result he has “made man from one blood; He designed a variety of human cultures” (Wagner 113). This statement would have flown in the face of Epicurus who said pleasure is the end of all things and gods do not interfere with the lives of people. Zeno of Citium, founder of the Stoics, taught “self-sufficiency was the goal of life” (Horton 206). Because of that teaching, the concept of a god who was personal and intimate was hard to comprehend. A god such as Paul was proclaiming was probably something they had never considered before. Paul’s God is the true source of life and breath. Paul was making a rhetorical statement—how could he need us to survive. In the next verse, Paul moves from God’s character to how he interacts with humans. This change in speech marks a dramatic shift in his speech:

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. (206-07)

The Stoics believed in a creative power, but the laws of nature and conscience were edified more than the concept of a personal deity. The Epicureans taught that the gods do not intervene or participate in human affairs. What Paul was proclaiming was not only a personal God, but one that worked in the lives of people everywhere. “God made

all people from one blood; He designed a variety of human cultures ... so that human beings could have fellowship with him and enjoy him forever” (Wagner 113). God was the one who appointed humanity’s dwelling and placed them where he wanted them. This statement also recalls Paul’s words in 14:16-17, which implies that humans could seek and find God (Soards 98). Paul is telling them that not only is God real, but he is personal.

In order to bridge the gap between transcended revelation and human philosophy, Paul needed to confront the people with the truth. Paul takes a cue from one of the audiences own philosophers. He shifts from declaring truth and how the philosophers have erred in understanding that truth to a responsibility on the side of the hearer. He possibly quotes from Minos or Epimedeides of Crete (Horton 208). They taught that “in him we live and move and have our being,... we are also some of his offspring” (Acts 17:28). This statement was almost correct, but, they did not have the fullness of what was written. “Revelation takes us where observation alone cannot go” (Willimon 143). Paul uses their pagan thought as a launching pad to offer a fuller revelation of what they have observed. “Paul hopes to move them toward faith by way of the natural world” (143).

“Since we are his offspring, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising” (Acts 17:28-29). Paul was connecting the dots, so to speak, by helping them to reason through what they had perceived and yet not really considered. Paul was trying to get them to realize that if humanity is the offspring of the divine, than they could not devise him. Humanity could not shape God, if we were from him. All of this idolatry showed ignorance of what God was really like. Paul understood what idolatry could do as this was a dominate theme in

the life of Israel throughout the Old Testament.

“[T]ruly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Paul is telling them that they are now responsible for what they have heard. God was merciful in the past, but now he is going to keep them accountable for what Paul has just told them. All the logic and flow of thought with which they had been reasoning is now before them and they now have a choice to either reject or accept Paul’s argument. Only they can decide what they will do with the information that had been given to them.

“He has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance to this by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). This God whom Paul had just explained by skillfully and craftily showing the people his nature throughout their faulty philosophy is the one to whom they will be accountable. He has appointed the judgment of the world through one man, and he guaranteed it through raising Jesus from the dead. No one can escape from the judgment.

When Paul mentioned the resurrection from the dead, the listeners laughed at him. This distinct laughter definitely changed the atmosphere of the listeners. “The resurrection is completely contrary to our observations of the way the world works. In nature things die, decay and decline” (Willimon 144).

The listeners broke into Paul’s speech and “refused to believe that God could show wrath, and they did not believe in miracles, either” (Horton 209). Their comment, “we will hear you again on this matter.” Acts 17:32b reveals that they were finished listening to Paul. They dismissed Paul from their presence. In other words, “Paul, don’t call us, we’ll call you!” (Wagner 115).

Paul did not just touch on the emotional highs of the Christian faith, nor was he trying to get them to see Christianity from his perspective. He presented them with the facts of the faith. Paul was a brilliant man who knew the culture and the people with whom he was dealing. Even though he knew that they might not agree on creation, the human condition, or the resurrection, he pressed on anyway with the truth of Scripture. “Appeals to reason and observations of the natural world can only be taken so far in the proclamation of the Gospel. Eventually revelation must be invoked and the scandal of faith to reason and experience made plain” (Willimon 144).

Paul did something else that day: Using biblical revelation to combat human wisdom and the human longing of the heart, he answered some of the most basic fundamental questions that humanity has been asking since time began. According to Chuck Colson, three such longings of the human heart come up in every worldview and every worldview must answer them in order to be viable. Paul addressed and answered all three of them in his proclamation (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Paul’s Interaction with Culture

Question	Answer	Location
Where did we come from?	God	vss. 24-25
What is wrong with Society?	Sin	vss. 30
What should we do to fix it?	Repent, resurrection	vss. 30-33

Application of Mars Hill

The richness of this text is gleaned from Paul’s encounter. Everything about this discourse is calm, grave, cool, and argumentative (Adams 29). Even though he was moved with anger, he did not let that come out in his proclamation of the gospel. Paul

was not idle on his stance on the gospel. He was so burdened with what he saw in Athens that he was compelled to tell the truth and bring to light the false teachings they were condoning. He could not wait any longer for Timothy and Silas to come from Berea. He went to the center of public life and began to reason with all who would listen. He was compelled by the gospel and understood well that he was responsible to share the gospel with whoever would listen. “Paul could stand personal criticism, but it was blasphemy against his God to which he reacted so strongly” (Adams 29). God’s message had become so much a part of him that he could not help but share the truth that the Spirit had given him.

The second discovery in this passage shows that a distinction must be made between a given right to speak and an earned right to speak. If permission is given, as Paul was given in 17:19, then a freeness and/or a boldness flows out of that given right to answer their questions (regardless of how taunting or mocking the crowd can be). Paul proclaimed the gospel and understood that “the bulk of evangelistic work, time, energy and money should be expended among the receptive” (Wagner 89). He did not stay in Athens. Those who brought Paul to Areopagus called him a babbler or a “seed picker.” They sneered and joked at him and cut him off as he got to the resurrection. In spite of this, he was able to stay faithful to the chance he had been given. He took full advantage of the right given him. If the right to speak has not been given, then the right to be heard must be earned. Paul understood this concept very well. If permission is given, one must proclaim the gospel. Until someone grants permission to hear the gospel, the approach must be one of reason and clarity of focus.

Third, in order to apply the word to the hearers, more needs to be proclaimed than

just logic and wisdom. The words must resound with purpose and love and be able to be understood by the people to whom the message is being delivered.

Fourth, Paul shows that in some cases to be a popular crowd preacher and a faithful preacher at the same time will not work to promote the gospel. Paul had a decision to make when he was asked what he believed. His first call was to be faithful to the message and this message could not be watered down. In fact, 2 Corinthians 11:25-33 relates how faithful he was to his call. He suffered tremendous beatings, shipwrecks, and mockery on account of the proclamation of the gospel. A few philosophers were not going to stop him from sharing the truth. W. M. Godbey, a Methodist preacher from the late nineteenth century wrote, “Why can’t we conquer the world for Christ? Because our churches have ceased to be the embattled host, shouting the war-cry, and bidding defiance to the world, the flesh and the devil” (48). Preaching is the rudder that sets the sail for the church and moves it in the right direction. Weak preaching leads to weak people, and watered down preaching leads to atheists or agnostics, at best.

Fifth, one must know and understand the culture in order to connect. First Peter 3:15 says to “sanctify the Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Paul gave this testimony as to what he believed. When his argument is read in Acts 17, a man who was current with thoughts and trends and could relate to his audience is made plan. He did such a great job that the philosophers were with him until he got to the resurrection. At such time their minds could not grasp something as significant as God involving himself in nature. One could argue that he was not as current as he should have been; however, no matter how versed, studied, or eloquent the communicator is, faith of the listener is

intrinsic to salvation. Paul is not responsible for the decision of the listener. He is, however, responsible for how he presents the material.

Sixth, anytime communicators can use something from their culture as a starting point to communicate God's word, they should do it. Paul used words and phrases from the culture in which he was ministering allowing him to have a legitimate argument while he was giving them truth. The obvious came out in his argument. If humans are made in the image of god, then they cannot possibly create god. Therefore, idols are justifiably wrong.

Theological Precedent for Preaching

God has chosen the office of preaching to proclaim and reveal his word. David L. Larson says that most Christians predicate their theology on just the New Testament, forgetting that preaching has a genealogy, just as the Savior did (20). Christ and the apostles were heirs to a legacy in communication. The tradition of preaching is found in God himself. The God of the Bible is a speaking God. Genesis 1 reveals that "God spoke," "God saw," and "God called." Thus, God has always been in conversation within the mysterious counsels of the Godhead. As human beings created in his image, people are communicating beings (21).

The Old Testament also shows that God is a revealing God. He revealed himself in Genesis, inviting humanity to participate with him in so far as he would reveal himself to humanity. Preaching can be called a "word-event," which comes from the Hebrew word *debar*. *Debar* is mentioned 394 times in the Old Testament referring to the revelation of God. Words in the Old Testament were seen as actions and God's word as power. "[I]t could rightly be said that 'God's written voice' or 'God's voice was put to

print’ as he revealed himself, his nature, and his plan for all mankind in the form of language” (Larson 21).

Two dominant Greek words reflect and give a foundation for preaching in the New Testament—*kerygma* and *didache*. *Kerygma* is the “preaching” of or “proclamation by a herald” about God’s action for the salvation by which the church was called into existence. This proclamation announces to all people everywhere as the grounds for faith and hope. *Didache*, embodies an ethical ideal for the corporate and individual life (J. Kerr 19-20). The meanings of the two words can be found in the context in which it was used. *Didache* means “instruction” or “teaching.” *Kerygma* was used to declare the message that challenged the non-Christian world while *didache*, or teaching, implemented the preaching. “It was the application of the preaching to life, the enforcing of the ethical and moral implications of the *Kerygma*” (20).

The Second Helvetic Confession boldly says, “*Praedictaio verbi dei est verbum dei* [The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God]” (Anderson). That is to say when a sermon is delivered it is God’s word, and because it is God’s word, it should demonstrate the “living and powerful” word of God (Heb. 4:12). God not only acts, but he speaks to humanity. God speaking is the prolegomena of preaching (Larson 21).

Communication, as human speech, is done best through words that serve as an instrument for divine communication. Paul writes to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 2:4) that his message of preaching (*kerygma*) was not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power. The context of this passage was to show God’s proclamation in its entirety and the fullness of it was adequate for glorifying God and convincing people, even without a certain eloquence. In God’s economy, persuasive

words are not necessary to change hearts. Changing hearts is the work of the Holy Spirit. Not only did Paul live in the power of the Holy Spirit, but he demonstrated this belief and continued to remind others “not to preach ourselves, but Christ as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5). He knew that words were not the power behind salvation. God’s power came alive in the *kerygma* of God’s truth. Paul demonstrated God’s power and how it could be done in his discourse in Acts 17 when he connects with the Athenians on Mars Hill. Nothing eloquent was in his words, and even though not everyone responded because of the perceived foolishness of the cross, some responded to what they heard.

Paul’s use of the word *didache* in 1 Timothy 2:7 shows that not only was he a preacher (*kerygma*), penetrating the secular world with God’s truth, but Paul was also a teacher (*didache*) or an instructor to those who became believers. God never meant for humanity to come to him for salvation without the benefit of knowing him. God, as Father, desires to make himself known; that is why he communicates and reveals himself. The names ascribe to him due to his mighty acts shows who he is.

Most religions do have a provision for salvation. God’s provision through Israel is unique in that it is based on a covenant between God and human kind. God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, spoke in a very unambiguous way to show salvation. He moved through history showing that he is indeed a God who speaks and reveals. He is always ready to communicate the divine word by his Spirit living in the preacher who is a product of the culture and who has received the revealed word that he uses to communicate to their culture. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes that “when the Church gives to prayer and preaching their true biblical priority, she is able, under God, to meet the challenge of every generation (qtd. in Larson 15).

Historical Precedent for Preaching

Throughout the life of the church, people have always tried to communicate the ideas and images that have been captured in the Bible. Try as they may, “great preaching is not self-sustaining” (H. Kerr 54). The words being spoken are not merely words on only a human level, but rather God’s words to humanity through the median of communication. The east has much to teach because of their “deep sense of continuity with the past” (Kurewa 59).

The context of this project relates to North American preachers. In order to appreciate and understand fully this project, the major figures who played a role in the development and advancement of the Western church are mentioned. This section begins with the most notable leaders in the early Church and ends with current preachers. Nevertheless, a brief historical look at the Eastern church is necessary since Pentecost came to the Eastern church.

Biblical preaching is not just about changing the culture but also about a personal transformation that occurs in the communicator. To change a culture with force and power is trite compared to allowing God to change a culture by the Holy Spirit communicating through a willing communicator. Biblical expositors must be open to be changed by the message they are presenting (Rom. 12:1-2), otherwise they have nothing to say that is different from the world.

The scope of this study was not to trace good preachers through the ages but to trace major players throughout the history of the Church who have effectively connected the truths of the Bible to the culture in which they lived. These are the preachers worth noting and following into the next century. They still speak to people today.

The Early Church Fathers (ca. AD 54- 430)

The beginning of the New Testament Church began after the resurrection of Jesus. This period of history (AD 54- 430) marks the beginning of the Church as it started out as a fledging mass of converted Jews, Gentiles, and heathens who were tortured for their new faith. This was Christianity, and it would eventually spread throughout the whole world. From its birth on the day of Pentecost until Augustine (the Bishop of Hippo) died in AD 430, the Church suffered tremendous persecution, yet it continued to flourish in many ways.

The Church, at first, was thought to be just another sect of Judaism. As Christianity began to spread, the Jewish people severed any relationship to Christianity. Nero, the emperor of Rome, persecuted Christians until martyrdom did, in fact, become the seed blood of the church. Persecution continued on and off until 374 when Constantine made Christianity the official national religion.

What was so unique about the first Christians was their ability to create and sustain a unique culture. They developed a way of life that would shape their character in the image of God. They were determined to be a culture, a quite public and political culture, even if it killed them and their children (Clapp 82). Not much is known about the Church fathers of this time frame. What is known is that they wrote in Greek, read the Septuagint, and were influenced by Greek tradition. Justin Martyr, Ignatious, and Origen are mostly considered patristic fathers, and they were the ones who shaped polity, church life, and gave what is known as the creeds.

John of Antioch a.k.a. Chrysostom. John of Antioch, surnamed Chrysostom or golden mouth, was so effective in his connection with culture that even 150 years after

his death, his sermons were still ministering in Antioch and in Constantinople. “As a speaker, he was without peer, the greatest preacher and biblical commentator of the Greek church” (Lischer 57). As a preacher he was not afraid of sentiment and though he spoke from the pulpit he would often leave the bishop’s throne and choose the “ambo” or pulpit (on the ground) because it was closer to the people. In his second sermon at Antioch this is apparent. “I have addressed you only on one day and from that day I have loved you as much as if I had been brought up among you” (qtd. in H. Kerr 179).

In his sermons he would address moral issues, not skirting the political for the popular. “His style was direct” (Larson 83). His sermon “On the Statues” was preached after mobs overturned statues of the royal family in protest against new taxes. “This sermon earned him a large following” (Wilson 42) as he would not be afraid to speak to the kings and queens against the injustice of the people. He would speak “passionately from the pulpit and he would rebuke private and public immorality” (Lischer 57). His constant bias was for the poor, and his preaching assumes the authority of the church. He would often urge personal and family study and application of the word. For Chrysostom, “the importance of preaching derives from devotion to exegesis of the text, forceful proclamation and an exemplary hermeneutical principle” (Larson 84). He believed that if he could not get the meaning of the text out to the people, then the exposition of the word was in vain. God’s word had to connect to the listeners and change their lives. Much has been said about Chrysostom and his preaching including the following:

[Chrysostom was] steeped in the classics, polished as an orator, but fashioned as a disciple of Christ,... [h]e had virtually memorized the scriptures and preached systematically and consecutively through book after book of the Bible. He condemned empty oratory but used the finest skills of his age opening the word of God. (Larson 80)

At the time Chrysostom was trained in sermon preparation it was considered thievery to steal material from other preachers. His sermons and the engagement of culture was so effective that three hundred years after his death at the Trullo Council held in 692, the council reversed and directed preachers not to compose their sermons but to model themselves on Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil. Even today some Orthodox churches still use one of Chrysostom's homilies on Easter Sunday (Wilson 42).

St. Patrick. Perhaps one of the most influential persons of this era was St. Patrick. According to Mary Cagney, the carrying off of St. Patrick into slavery in AD 430 set into motion events that would change all of Europe. Unfortunately, the legends and myths have distorted and marred his real image of one of the greatest missionaries of all time who reached far beyond his own age and people (Dargan 121).

St. Patrick was sold into slavery when he was sixteen and was soon converted to Christianity by witnessing God's power in nature. While in captivity in he learned the Gaelic language and customs, of the people and began to think about ways to reach the people who took him captive. He escaped his captors when he was twenty-four and at the age of forty-six, "longer than the average life expectancy of the day" (Hunter Celtic Way 86). Patrick returned to Ireland with backing from the Church of England and from the Papacy with an apostolic team in AD 432 (86). By his death, all North Ireland had become substantially Christian and the rest of Ireland had followed two to three generations later. Patrick reached the Irish through their own Gaelic language and through the music, arts, and other forms of their culture. "Patrick's movement, geographically beyond the controlling reach of Rome, had reinvented Indigenous Christianity" (86).

Augustine. Augustine (ca. AD 354-430), who died as the Bishop of Hippo, is viewed as one of the most important men in the history of the Church. “Both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism pay tribute to the contribution of Augustine to the cause of Christianity” (Cairns 146). He was converted while reading Romans 13:13-14. This verse filled his soul when the other philosophies of the day had left him empty. Immediately he gave up the ways of the world and became known as one of the greatest Church fathers leaving behind one hundred books, 683 sermons, and two hundred letters (146). He was “a master of the spoken word and he had the ability and training to produce verbal fireworks ... with sudden meteorites” (Larson 88). He believed vehemently in the authority of the Bible and would preach without manuscript or notes for as long as an hour.

Augustine’s ministry came during some of the most trying times the world had known up to that point. Augustine came onto the scene during a time of widespread cultural decay and a time when the old classical world was doomed to failure by the approaching barbarians. Augustine found a way to communicate to this cultural context so that the people would listen. “It is our contention that Augustine’s contextualizing synthesis of biblical truth and classical rhetoric is a defining hour for preaching” (Larson 87).

Augustine’s advice for preaching is found in his book *On Christian Doctrine* (see Saint Augustine), and some consider it to be the first and the most influential homeiletical textbook in Christian history (Wilson 60). Augustine advocates an environment in which “people can feed on the good bread of the Lord” (60). For Augustine, he sees the gospel as a river where an elephant can swim and a little child can wade across. In other words,

the gospel is complete for anyone. The gospel can never be exhausted or put to shame. Augustine underscores the primary principle of interpretation, seeing every part in relation to the teaching of Scripture as a whole as relating to God's redeeming love for humanity and humanities response to God (Larson 93).

Augustine was able to find a clear distinction between the culture and how to communicate to the culture. "He admonished people to look toward the 'City of God' a spiritual civilization, because the old classical civilization was passing" (Cairns 146). He wrote his book, City of God, in response to the Romans who made the claim that Rome had fallen because they had forsaken the old classical Roman religion and had adopted Christianity. Protestants look to him as the forerunner of the Reformation because of his ideas on salvation from original and actual sin (Cairns 149). "Augustine said the purpose of preaching is to delight, persuade, and to instruct" (Wilson 105).

The Middle Ages (ca. AD 430-1517)

The Middle Ages has been referred to as many things in the History of the Christian Church. Depending on the perspective, it is either referred to as the Dark Ages or the medieval era of history. This era was a rather tough time of creeds, papal succession, and corruption. Even though the Middle Ages was a difficult time in the life of the church, it survived because of faithful saints who made a stand against their culture with the message of the Bible. In the early period (AD 200) of the Eastern church a marked change was noticed in the preaching as it left its simple, unadorned form and took to itself the helps of knowledge and rhetoric. The West that seemed a likely candidate for ruin from the heathen hordes of the north was saved by the preaching. While the Eastern church changed its style of preaching, the Western church committed to reach the

ordinary person and “used the missionary zeal to subdue these people and make them the greatest elements of its strength” (J. Kerr 56).

This medieval period begins in AD 430 with the death of Augustine and ends in AD 1517, the year that Martin Luther posted his theses on the door at the Diet of Worms. This long medieval period reveals an almost total eclipse of preaching (H. Kerr 54). Those who did engage their culture may have been few, but they were effective as history bears witness to their work.

When Rome fell on 24 August 410, the Church in the West suffered the blows of that fall. The siege of Rome by Alaric the Goth was felt around the known world. Jerome, who was in Bethlehem said, “[T]he city which has taken the whole world, is itself taken!” (qtd. in Garlow, How God Saved 63). This decline of Rome inevitably affected the face of the Western church, as well. The Western church inherited the structure of the Roman Empire, seen in the dioceses and parishes (of today). Soon, the secular influence of the day began to penetrate into the life of the church and corrupt the message.

In order to understand the history of the role of preaching in the life of the church during the Middle Ages of the Western church, the thought of the day must be understood as it developed during that time. Three theological attitudes developed that tended to determine both the worship and theological reflections of the era (Kurewa 58). These attitudes effected preaching as well.

Anselm of Canterbury became known as the founder of *scholasticism*. It was a system set up so that the schoolman and scholars of the day tended to give the theological interpretations of the day. Anselm, who deviated from his father’s desire for him to be a politician, became a monk. His teaching abilities caused the school located at his

monastery to become a prominent place of learning, and scholasticism found its prominent place among scholars. Scholasticism was the only way that the church explained problems of life and their context, and it started to develop in the universities as the dominant thought of all the sciences during this time. *Mysticism* was “the experience of the Scholastic method” (Garlow How God Saved 58). This was the field or lens that the believer saw through to live out and apply personal devotions of prayer, spiritual disciplines in order to meet the demands of the ascetic life. Finally, *biblicalism* was an attempt to use the Bible as the basis for a practical Christianity. This last influence would eventually lead the way for the Reformation (59).

During this time period, the parish (or church) became the unit around which all pastoral activities took place, such as daily mass, baptisms, marriages, and burials. Each parish had a resident priest or priests trained by his dioceses and who gave instruction to the parishioners on how to live. The content of the sermons were drawn from the early Church fathers, and priests were often “vigorously engaged in reproduction work, mainly by simply translating or copying sermons of the fathers and reading them to the congregation” (Brilioth 70). Preaching, in this perspective, became a regurgitation of the past. Preaching in this manner left no connection with the culture and, consequently, very little recordable history of how the message (church) impacted society.

God raised up a faithful remnant. They were mystics who discovered the presence of God in a very emotive way and maintained the passion of Christ (Garlow, How God Saved 106). The mystics have frequently been referred to as a refreshing breeze. Though they were often wrong as theologians, they pursued a heart for God in the midst of a corrupt time in the history of the Church. Those whom history would also remember as

mystics would soon pave the way for the Reformation period. They recognized the Catholic Church as only one entity and one vehicle into the work of God. The one entity, known as the Catholic Church, was losing touch with the common people.

Bernard of Clairvaux. One mystic was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). He was a man of action. He is regarded as one of the most influential spiritual leaders of the Middle Ages (Garlow, How God Saved 108). He founded the Cistercian Abbey at Clairvaux, France, in 1115:

Bernard demonstrated both an exceptional grasp of the Bible and a profound command of language, unparalleled among any who lived in his time frame. We can still experience his particular blend of biblical knowledge, deep piety and writing skills when we sing his hymns: “Oh Sacred Head, Now Wounded” and “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” written 850 years ago. (109)

Martin Luther said of him, “He preached Christ most charmingly. I follow him wherever he preached Christ, and I pray to Christ in the faith in which he prayed to Christ” (qtd. in Houston 19-20). Bernard of Clairvaux was the first to divide his discourse into sections. He would take his text and communicate his text with his message of Scripture. Like a skilled physician, he was able to analyze the hidden sores of humanity and apply grace. He said, “To know Jesus and him crucified was the sum of his philosophy” (20). He let the Bible shape his beliefs and was able to speak to the major influence of the day, which happened to be the Catholic Church. He “inveighed against the doctrine of papal infallibility, monastic corruption, the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary, and the atrocities against the Jews” (Larson 108).

Francis of Assisi. Another great impact that the Church had on the culture during the Middle Ages was the rise of the friars. During the eleventh through the fourteenth

centuries, the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and the Augustinians emerged as a result of the emptiness that wealth brought. At a time when the Church was readily allowing the culture influence its actions, the friars emerged to challenge this mentality and as well as to give a solution. When Francis of Assisi began wandering the countryside and preaching in the town squares in 1209, he departed from the pattern of contemplative, structured religious life in order to reach the ordinary person. Francis of Assisi formed what became known as the friars. The difference between the order that he formed and the others was in his challenge: “whether they ought to live among men, or betake themselves to solitary places” (Gertz par. 10). He refused to be tied to a monastery, as other monks were. His passion for the gospel and for the common people who needed to hear it was too great, and his choice was to serve them.

The impact of this movement rippled throughout the history of the Church. During the darkest days of the Church, the friars saved the Western church from destruction. History records friars like Berthold of Regensburg (1220-1272) who drew crowds as he preached in the open field for five to six hours a day without a break. Berthold of Regensburg said that “lectures are to instruct the intellect, but preaching is to educate the heart” (Larson 122). His mission is found in his famous dedication:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy. (122)

Reformation and Counter Reformation (ca. 1517-1791)

Martin Luther posted an indictment against the Catholic Church at Wittenberg

Castle Church on 31 October 1517 known as the 95 Theses. This indictment began the revival of biblical preaching and initiated the Reformation period (Broadus 113-14). The reformation age lasts until the death of John Wesley in 1791. During this time “the communicators greatest task was to set forth the doctrinal and moral teachings of the word of God, therefore the greatest part of the reformation preaching was expository” (Perry 49). This period brought a time of revival and a biblical freedom in preaching.

Martin Luther. Martin Luther grew up in a strict disciplinarian home. At the age of thirty three, while reading Romans 1:17, he was convinced that only faith in Christ could make one just before God. From that time on, *sola fide*, or justification by faith, and *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone, become the main points of his theological system (Cairns 290). Not long after his conversion, he was confronted with the sale of indulgences, and he decided to make a public protest of the matter. He wrote a letter to the Archbishop of Mainz and criticized him for selling indulgences to fund the buildings of St. Peter’s Square. Luther was so committed to God’s word that when he was excommunicated in January 1521 for this challenge, he said, “I am bound in conscience and held fast to the word of God.... [E]ven if I were to lose my body and my life on account of it, I cannot depart from the true Word of God” (qtd. in Stott 25).

“Luther had a powerful intellect, rich in sensibility, imagination and swelling passion—a man juicy with humor, delighting in music and in children” (Broadus 118). He believed in the common person, and he believed that his message was for the common people. He translated the New Testament into the German language while he was held in seclusion by his friends. His desire was to get the bible and the sermons to the common person. “Until Luther, the mass had been said in Latin, mass did not have a sermon and

mass consisted of much repetition” (Garlow, How God Saved 144). Luther incorporated congregational singing into the church in the vernacular of the people.

In Luther’s day, “preaching had become a time for dry dogmatics and scholastic speculations. It occupied a subordinate place in public worship” (Mcgraw 28). Since Luther believed that the Bible should be understood by every person, he gave much-needed instruction to the role of preaching as “he gloried in being a preacher to the common people” (Broadus 123). He said that a good preacher should have these priorities and virtues:

First, to teach systematically; secondly, he should have a ready wit; thirdly, he should be eloquent; fourthly, he should have a good voice; fifthly, a good memory; sixthly, he should know when to stop preaching; seventhly, he should be sure of his doctrine; eighthly, he should venture and engage body and blood, wealth, and honor in serving the word; ninthly, he should suffer himself to be mocked and jeered by everyone. (Mcgraw 27)

Luther also instructed his preachers that “a sermon must be delivered slowly and without screaming. A good preacher will stop when people are anxious to hear more of him and think the best is still coming” (Nuelson 223).

Luther himself declared that a foolish preacher is one who does not know how to adapt himself to his audience and to the occasion (223). He would use illustrations and stories from almost any conceivable source, and this is how he contextualized his message. The illustrations and stories were indispensable means of communicating God’s word plainly. “Of all the offices and achievements—as a scholar, theologian, author, and leader, we must not forget that he was first and foremost a preacher” (Dargan 389). He would argue that illustrations facilitated spiritual growth and theological education, especially for the average listener. “They would rather see a well-drawn picture than a

well written book,” Luther said (Willhite and Gibson 34).

Luther believed the sermon should be simple and understandable by all. Children were a great barometer, for Luther, as to whether or not a sermon was simple:

[A] true, pious and faithful preacher shall look to the children and servants, and to the poor, simple masses, who need instruction.... [H]e must accommodate himself to them as a nursing mother does to her infant,... [s]o preachers should also act; they should be simple in their sermons. (Willhite and Gibson 33)

Luther repeatedly taught that the aim of preaching is the spiritual good of the hearers. Therefore, in order for preaching to be understood by all, it was essential that the preacher should be well-trained and skillful speaker and a master of the art of public address (Perry 40). Luther was so effective that all of history has followed in his footsteps and more books have been written about him than about any other figure in all of Christian history; with the exception of Jesus Christ (Garlow, How God Saved 147).

John Calvin. John Calvin, who has been called a common man, had the ability to communicate effectively to the common person. He is considered one of the most influential persons during the sixteenth century, and some of his works are still well revered today. He was well educated and was pursuing a degree in law at the insistence of his father. After his father died, he turned himself to the classics and eventually Christianity. His words, “what is the use in seeking information from the pagan philosophers when they contradict each other?” brought him to seek God (Garlow, How God Saved 147).

He is regarded as the greatest systematic theologian and disciplinarian of all the reformers. At the age of twenty-six, his work Institutes of Christian Religion or Institutes are still considered a “Mount Everest” of systematic theology (Garlow, How God Saved

159). His views on preaching followed his theology. He gave preaching the central place in worship. “Every word weighed a pound!” was Beza’s words describing Calvin (160). “He taught that it must be in spirit an exposition and application of the word of God. They were acute, clear, reasoned, and sound” (Perry 49). His strength of preaching lay in his “saturation of the Word of God....[H]is unusual memory span and powers of retention” (Mcgraw 46). Calvin thought that God’s word had been committed to the preachers like the royal scepter of God under which all creatures bow their heads and bend their knees. “Calvin helped to lay the foundation for modern day criticism and preaching, employing several humanist principles from Erasmus and others” (Wilson 103).

His sermons are simple and can be understood by the listeners. In addition, they are filled with rich images that are focused and maintain a point. Calvin also shows the importance of exhortation. “He does not assume that hearing the truth is enough” (Wilson 105). The change in actions is what Calvin saw as a successful sermon and he believe that there could be no doubt as to the expectations of the action desired.

John Wesley (1703-1791). John Wesley was born in England during the beginning of the seventeenth century. Wesley’s strength was in his ability to manage and lead laity. Many believe that his administration and training saved England from following France in their civil war. Though Wesley is less remembered for his preaching than George Whitefield, many people gathered to hear him speak. On his first occasion of field preaching on 2 April 1739, he preached to over three thousand persons on a Monday and by June of that same year he preached to nearly fourteen thousand people. “His preaching held crowds” (Wilson 130). John Wesley was able to interject the Bible where

life and need came hand in hand.

Almost less than a year before his first field preaching event, he “felt his heart strangely warmed” while listening to Luther’s preface to the book of Romans. He experienced this justification by faith and found the peace for which he himself was looking. He immediately began to preach this doctrine of justification by faith. As a result, he was barred from puritan pulpits and considered a radical. He continued nonetheless as he believed that “the world is my parish” (Garlow, How God Saved 190).

Wesley, an educated Oxford man, had many obstacles to overcome when he began to preach to the masses. The issue when dealing with the masses, as he called them, was the life of the person. Wesley’s heart was for the ordinary person.

In 1749 Wesley published a penny tract entitled Directions Concerning Pronunciation and Gesture (Doughty 191). Its purpose was to help preachers understand how to speak so as to be heard without difficulty and with pleasure. He was concerned with how others heard the gospel and did not want them to experience unnecessary barriers. “His one aim transcended every causal or temporary one, and that was to ‘save souls’” (192).

Modern Era (ca. 1789-1914)

During modernity, preaching contained better exegesis of Scripture, but less regard for its authority. The evangelical view of Christianity was dominant for both the preacher and the listener, but the message was adapted more to the people. Social reforms and evangelistic missions began to be a competing message from the pulpit. This social reform caused the church to lose its influence in society, and soon the church lost its emphasis on the authority on which it was built. People were free to explore other options

which led to a rise in such discovers as sociology, medicine, technology, and psychology. Consequently, a rise in the social aspect of connecting preaching with the world became the dominate theme of this era.

Charles Finney (1792-1875). Some historians estimate that before the second awakening church membership dropped to between 5 and 7 percent of the population (Garlow, How God Saved 231). The second awakening was not a single movement but a result of several independent movements of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people all around. Charles Finney is one who is associated with the second awakening of the Church that lasted from 1800-1835.

Finney, a lawyer, would have heard many court cases including the use of the Bible and the inclusion of Scripture. Curious, he decided that he would purchase a Bible to study it for himself. On 10 October 1821, he went alone in the woods with God where he was given a “mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost.” He said later that the Holy Spirit went through him “like a wave of electricity” (Garlow, How God Saved 232). Two years later he quit his practice and became an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church. Immediately revivals broke out in small communities, and by 1825 the word of his crusades had spread.

Finney became well known for his new techniques. He would send out prayer teams who would go several days before his crusade and pray specifically for God’s moving. He was also known for his protracted meetings, colloquial language in preaching, unseasonable hours for services, and naming individuals in prayer and public worship. He also created what was called the “anxious bench.” The bench was a place where he invited those who were wrestling with following Christ to move to the front

seats of the auditorium where they would be persuaded by God's attorney who was arguing a case for Christ (241). His preaching caught the attention of many:

All through the earlier part of my ministry, I used to meet from ministers a great many rebuffs and reproofs, particularly in respect to my manner of preaching.... They would reprove me for illustrating my ideas by reference to the common ideas of men.... They said that I let down the dignity of the pulpit,... that I talked like a lawyer,... that I said "hell" with such an emphasis as often to shock people.... Furthermore I urged people with such vehemence as if they might not have a moment to live. (qtd. in Coutts 22)

As Finney grew older, his theology began and preaching began to change. His preaching began to take on the perfectibility of human nature and society. This noted change in action put Finney in line with the nineteenth century holiness movement that came from Wesley. He believed that true holiness was social holiness. He also believed in social reform where individual converts could make a profound difference in the culture at large. He believed the ordinary person should do something about their newfound faith and engage their culture. Although, Finney himself became known for his involvement in the antislavery movement, women's rights, and the temperance movement, he was always considered a brilliant orator, preacher, organizer, and debater (Garlow, How God Saved 242).

Today (ca. 1914-Present)

Life was considered optimistic until the outbreak of the world wars. "Spiritually and culturally, it is still a divided world in spite of all of the work of organizations and individuals to make it one world" (Perry 71).

Martin Luther King, Jr. The social crises of segregation in the 1960's united many voices in the pulpits of the land. "The preacher of the divine message found that he had much to relate to human need and life situation" (Perry 73). Martin Luther King, Jr.

considered himself an ordinary person with an extraordinary message. He was often criticized for what people thought was a promotion of the social gospel, but his preaching connected the heart of God to the people of God. In reading his, “I have a dream” speech, can see the ability of the preacher of this time to connect with culture. He was able to set a sense of urgency with the message in the form of highly energetic oratory arguments. He was able to turn preaching into a battering ram to pummel the walls of segregation.

His preaching has its roots in the black oral tradition of heartfelt religion that brings to the forefront, among many other things, the emotional aspect of the topic. “African-American preaching that has its roots in oral culture is one of the most powerful forms of preaching today” (Wilson 176). The reason this kind of preaching is so popular is because it creates a response in the people because the people recognize the familiar and expect to participate (176).

Billy Graham. Billy Graham is, without a doubt, the most well-known evangelist the world has ever seen. His ministry has never been matched. Attracting large crowds in stadiums, parks, and other locations around the world, God has used him to speak to hundreds of millions of people. Some estimate that his “Old Fashioned Gospel Hour” reached ten million listeners on a Sunday evening.

His influence has been felt in all areas of the world. “He remains one of the single most influential Christian leaders in the world today. Perhaps even second in influence to the Pope” (Garlow, How God Saved 316). In America, beginning with Dwight Eisenhower to the present, every president has sought his spiritual advice.

His preaching style can be defined as confrontational, completely dedicated to the pure word of God. After a time of doubt in his own life, he became convinced that that

Bible was the true word of God. As a result his popular phrase, “the Bible says,” has echoed off his lips in every sermon he has preached. People flocked to him, not only because of his credibility, but also because of his succinct delivery of the Bible to his listeners.

Lessons Learned from Historical Voices

Interestingly enough, those who have impacted their culture the most have been saved right out of their own culture. Augustine had an illegitimate son when he lived a lavish lifestyle focused on himself. This emptiness brought him to his knees and led him to say, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

Francis of Assisi was born a wealthy cloth merchant’s son in Assisi. At the age of twenty, he went on a military adventure and became a prisoner of war after a border dispute. One year later this experience, combined with a severe illness, caused him to reevaluate his life. Becoming disillusioned with money and wealth, he went to Rome and traded places for one day with a beggar outside of St. Peter’s Basilica. He was so moved by his experience that hugged a leper and even kissed his sores.

Martin Luther was born a miner’s son. He was encouraged by his father to become an attorney he began studying law when he was old enough. His career as a lawyer came to an end when on 2 July 1505 he was knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightening. He cried out to St. Anne to help me and I will become a monk. Two weeks later he left school and joined the Augustinian monastery. Six years later, with no joy of religious faith and guilty for his sins, he got the chance of a lifetime to travel to Rome. While there he became disillusioned with the lack of true piety and faith. He saw priests who were far from pious, flaunting wealth and being lethargic in the faith. In 1513-1514

he began to study “God’s righteousness” and made a discovery that changed the face of the world. In 1515 he began to lecture on Romans and “justification by faith.” In 1517 he posted his indictment on the Catholic Church.

Wesley was twenty-nine when he felt that his heart was “strangely warmed.” Born a pastor’s son, he was educated at Oxford. After his conversion he began to preach the saving grace of Jesus to those at Oxford and was kicked out. The awareness that he must preach the gospel in a manner that works led him to the fields to preach. He considered field preaching to be anathema, but he did it anyway because he knew it reached the people who needed to hear the gospel.

Cultural Precedents for Preaching

The biblical and theological precedents show one how to bridge the gap between the world in which we live and the world of the Bible. The historical precedents also teach that the bridge can be built and the cultural precedents demonstrate how to construct the bridge. The ability to bridge the cultural gap begins with a definition and moves to an understanding of the local culture.

Culture Unpacked

In the early sixteenth century, the word culture referred to people and societies. By the mid-eighteenth century, many prominent theologians used the term synonymously with the word “civilization” (Clapp 60). Because Western civilization found its roots in modernity, to be civilized was to be cultured by a Western sensibility. If a person was not western, he or she was uncultured.

The Literary critic Raymond Williams says that culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English Language (Clapp 59). Sociologists inform us that

culture can be known by the people in the culture. A caution is given, though, not to “define cultural narrowly by taking into view some special phase of human social organization and achievement” (Niebuhr 31). Culture is what man has come to “superimpose on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs customs, social organizations, inherited artifacts, technical processes and values.” (32).

Attributes of Culture

Attributes are features that make up a culture and help to define and allow a culture to exist. Three primary attributes of culture help to give it definition (Whiteman, “Lecture on the Attributes”).

First, culture is learned. Culture does not have a genetic code that keeps it alive. Culture is kept alive on the basis of the entire human-made environment. Culture indoctrinates individuals. Their actions, assumptions, values, and behavior are determined by the culture around them. Culture carries unwritten expectations and determines how humanity thinks, acts, speaks, communicates, and views the world.

Second, culture is shared. People carry in their minds shared models that enable them to perceive, relate to, and interpret the world around them. It is a mental map of life imprinted on the mind and allows for navigating through society. Culture shock happens when the mental map no longer guides people and everything that they are experiencing is becomes new in a new environment.

Third, culture is acquired as a member of society, and it is always changing. Culture is defined by society and that means that it is always changing as the society develops and grows. Without society culture would not exist and without culture society could not exist.

These three attributes come together in an example of the Harold Conklin people in the Philippines (acquired). Colors are perceived by culture. For the Hano'o people, they only have three words to describe a rainbow (learned): light, wet, and dark; whereas, English has seven colors to define a rainbow. In the Hano'o's worldview, culture brings order out of chaos (shared).

Analysis of Culture

An analysis of culture determines how people live and move through culture. Whiteman believes that there are four ways that an individual participates in culture and this participation makes up a culture (Culture "Lecture on the Attributes").

Universals are habits, ideas and conditioned emotional responses that are common to all sane adult members of the society.

Specialties include those elements of culture that are shared by the members of certain socially recognized categories of individuals but not shared by the total population. (e.g., men and women, children and adults, different professions).

Alternatives include cultural traits shared by certain individuals but not all members of society or even all members of a socially recognized group. Within in these groups lie different techniques for achieving the same end or solving the same problems. Examples include denominations, transportation, etc.

Individual Peculiarities is the result of childhood experiences (e.g., abnormal fear of fire, craftsman's skillful technique) that affect the behavior of the individual.

Culture as a System

Culture functions as a system. Three categories joined together make up this system. All three categories are coequal and fully integrated as a guide for living in

society. Each of them affects the other. The three categories are social relations, economy and technology, and ideology (or beliefs and ideas) (see Appendix A). The goal of the Christian communicator is to learn the mental map of the people to whom the communicator is speaking.

Signals of a Culture

Each culture, person, and/or society emits a “signal.” A signal is defined as an indication, gesture, or hint that exposes and gives insight into a belief system or area of struggle of the one giving off the signal. Connecting to the culture is determined by how well the receiver can tune into the frequency being emitted. Understanding these symbols is best accomplished through listening and observing. Most signals fall into three categories (Willhite and Gibson 90-92).

The first signal is the most obvious. So obvious, in fact, that even the media and other secular outlets understand the ramifications of the moral and theological content of the signal. These signals reach a large part of the population in and out of the church. Anybody living in the culture can understand what is being communicated with minimal thought. Movie series like Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter that focus on good and evil are ranked as the second, fifth, sixth, and seventh most popular film (“WorldwideBoxOffice”). Every year or two, the culture rides a new wave of different topics, and the list goes on and on. One needs only to open their eyes to discover what the wave of the day is.

The second signal does not reach as many people as the first signal. Nevertheless this signal has an effect on a number of people in a more general way. The popular culture of the day is influenced by not only what goes on in the media but also what

happens on a local scale. The media technologies of the Internet and satellites give a constant twenty-four hour a day, seven days a week access to the world. This means a local incident can affect a community two thousand miles away. Members of a youth group in the Appalachian hills may have been just as devastated by the 1994 suicide of grunge rocker Kurt Cobain as teens in a big-city suburb. A general rule of thumb is, “The broader the audience touched by a signal, the more likely it can be used effectively in the pulpit” (Willhite and Gibson 91). USAToday had an article on the marketing strategy of Anheuser-Busch’s advertisement of the “Real Men of Genius”:

We’ve always had our goal to have talk value around our ads. If you can exponentially increase talk value beyond (TV and radio), you have something that becomes part of the culture... [W]hen you achieve that, you’ve got ... a powerful selling tool. (Howard)

The third signal is important because it has not exploded into the public’s consciousness—yet. Often a specific whisper of things to come can be heard echoing through various avenues of the culture. Issues that are now hushed tones soon can become shouts heard around the world:

No one can paint a picture of being lost better than someone who is lost and cannot see the way.... In many ways, the world is its own critic. The keenest indictments against the world comes from the pages of its journalists, commentators, artist’s, and comics. The funny pages of a newspaper can convey the most scathing of social criticism, showing how the world’s attempts to solve its own problems often come up short. (Brooks 126)

Related to this third signal are three questions that can help expose the whisper and give the communicator an idea of what to look for when exegeting culture (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Whispers Identified

Question	Reveals
How do they spend their time?	Actualized priorities
How do they spend their money?	What is important
How do they make their decisions?	Moral code

The Precedent for the “Good News”

Building the bridge is a partnership with the Holy Spirit. Communicators understand that the Holy Spirit gives the words of life and opens hearts. Their job is merely to be faithful to the task at hand.

The word gospel simply means “good news.” If the good news is truly the good news, then the task before Christian communicators is to find out what the good news is to their local culture and share it. For instance, to a homeless person, the good news is that Jesus will provide for every need. However, to the person who lives in suburbia, United States of America, the good news is that in order to find life one must give up things.

As communicators learn to exegete culture, they will learn what the good news is. They must deliver it in its entirety and not according to their own social status or what the people want to hear. The truth is transcendent and life changing. To treat truth like a puppet is to prostitute the gospel.

Paul knew that the good news in Athens (Acts 17:24-32) was that a person could know and have a personal relationship with God. He understood the deeper meanings and proceeded according to that which they were looking, not what they wanted to hear.

Connecting the content of the Christian faith where people live is the challenge

before communicators. In the last several years, the culture in America has “sent the church scurrying to redefine its ministry and message for a new social order” (Duffet 44). A major lesson that the church should learn from Middle Ages is that that a new and fresh approach must be initiated for each age of history.

Although people may not seem to have a use or a desire to go to church two-thirds of the unchurched indicate a possibility of becoming active in the church again (Duffet 44). The connection of the good news in the local culture can be made when communicators realize that at life’s most fundamental level, seekers are looking for some anchor or foundation for their lives. If the church is going to relate, it must learn the answer the questions that society is asking.

Contextualization

When considering how Jesus was able to connect to the people around him, one must note that he did so by using their language and customs, not by being contrary to them. He was able to make the mundane relevant, the muddy clear, and the abstract real. He understood God’s truth and was able to apply the message to the culture, restate it, and give it full application. For instance, the essential principle of the golden rule, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matt. 7:12), is found in Leviticus 19:8. The golden rule was not wholly new to the world. Confucius, Isocrates, and others had taught the negative side of it. Jesus states it as a positive precept, thus making the rule much more comprehensive and more widely important (Broadus 24).

Good contextualization is essential to the message every time the good news is communicated across language or culture barriers. It captures in method and perspective the challenge of relating the gospel to the local culture. What was once called adaptation,

accommodation, and indigenization has been called contextualization. “This term is deeper, fuller, and more dynamic and more adequate to describe the message. Essentially, contextualization is concerned with how the Gospel and culture relate to one another across geographic space and down through time” (Whiteman, “Contextualization” 2).

Three functions of contextualization. Darrell Whiteman offers three functions of contextualization. First, contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and actions in order to establish the message and the church in ways that make sense to the people in the local cultural context (“Contextualization” 2-3).

Second, good contextualization offends, but for the right reasons. “When the gospel is presented in word and deed and the fellowship of believers is organized along appropriately cultural patterns, then people will most likely be confronted with the offense of the Gospel” (Whiteman, “Contextualization” 2). A good contextualized gospel message has more force because it is communicated in and through the culture as it exposes shortcomings (sin), the tendency toward evil, oppressive structures, and behavior patterns, leading toward conversion. Likewise, bad contextualization also offends, but for the wrong reasons. A lack of understanding results in an offense to a way of life, a turn off to the real Jesus, and a bad view of the communicator. This kind of contextualization seldom reaches people at their deepest need. In fact, bad contextualization is the reason why people think the church is irrelevant.

Third, contextualization expands the knowledge of the kingdom of God because it develops expressions of the gospel in ways the universal Church has neither experienced nor understood before (Whiteman, “Contextualization” 4). The result is a fuller view and deeper understanding of God as he relates to all persons. Humanity is able to understand

him better as he reveals himself.

Two Views of Culture

The advances of anthropology have brought humanity to a place where a better understanding has able to take place between people. These two ways consist of a high view and a low view and they are transcendent of culture. At the heart of this is the connection of a philosophy that guides mankind.

Low view. The low view of culture despises a group of people because their ways are not the perceived norm. Such mentality is known as ethnocentrism and leads from judgment to bigotry, racism, and, eventually, hatred.

High view. A high view of culture recognizes that humans think differently and process logic differently and, consequently, understand and process reality in a different way. In order for Christian communicators to connect to culture, they must understand the meanings, symbols, and messages behind the thoughts before engaging in communication. “The purpose of the proclaimer is to connect with the listener as a conduit, not a celebrity” (Willhite and Gibson 126).

The high view of culture guides the missionary and the pastor successfully to understand to whom they are trying to communicate. The “high view of culture ... regards each culture as reasonable given the specific circumstances in which it has developed” (McGavran 67). The difference between the two is that estimating the components of a culture as “reasonable given those circumstances is not the same as judging them” (67-68).

Form and Meaning

“‘Form’ and ‘meaning’ are important key terms in understanding how Christian

advocates can use cultural understanding to communicate the gospel more effectively” (Hunter, Radical Outreach 82). Form refers to the visible way of observing a specific culture’s customs and products. Hunter finds sacred forms. If the meaning is dropped and the form is still used, it is considered nominalism. Form is the skin, or the visible manifestation of the meaning, as it is transmitted through culture. In effective ministry, especially evangelism, the pastor Communicates the gospel’s meaning through forms that are culturally indigenous rather than culturally foreign, to the target population (82). Hunter lists four options available to communicators based on many generations of cross-cultural mission experiences (82-84; see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3. Communicated Form

Option #1	Indigenous meanings	+	Indigenous forms	=	Traditional Christianity
Option #2	Indigenous meanings	+	Foreign forms	=	Syncretism
Option #3	Foreign Christian meanings	+	Foreign forms	=	Foreign Christianity
Option #4	Foreign Christian meanings	+	Indigenous Forms	=	Indigenous Christianity

Option number one employs indigenous forms to communicate indigenous meanings. In this case nothing changes as the people’s traditional religion, worldview, and lifestyle remain intact.

Option number two persuades people to adopt “foreign forms,” such as Western Christian art, architecture, saints, and holidays without changing meanings, which can be interpreted as transcendence. This outcome leads to syncretism. Even though the Apostle Paul was a Judeo-Christian, he founded a pagan-Christian Church. Paul’s struggle

throughout the letters he wrote was to protect these churches from Christo-paganism or syncretism (Allmen 37). Syncretism occurs when the forms appear to a Christian “outsider” as Christian but to the nationals, the old meanings of the traditional religion are retained. An example would be an old prayer to a god or goddess that might be a new prayer to God.

Option number three communicates foreign meanings through foreign Christian forms. The first generation may well understand what is meant, but the second and third generations typically slide into syncretism. Hunter compares these different scenarios to many churches that are trying to make seventh-century European Christianity work in twenty-first century America. This is model for foreign Christianity results in a big disconnect.

Option number four is the preferred option, and communicates the foreign gospel through indigenous forms. The fact that Christianity can become indigenous is girded in the reality that Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfill. The people, to whom the gospel is being communicated, usually find that the good news is congruent with some of their beliefs and aspirations. Option number four leads to a place of connection where the Bible actually makes sense and answers or affirms a part of their culture. Put in a very simple chart, it would look like table 2.3.

The power is not in the communicators because the communicators allow the Holy Spirit to work through them to connect the message with the culture. An indigenous approach is the best approach as it allows the gospel to impact the culture according to God’s plan.

Role of the Communicator in Preaching the Good News

The communicators are also a product of a culture. The more they stay in a culture, the more inculcated they become. Jesus prayer was that communicators would not be removed from the culture but would remain in the culture with the aid of the Holy Spirit to communicate to the culture.

Through the struggles of life God has chosen to transmit his truth. According to Warren W. Wiersbe a difference between a literal language and a literal meaning exists. Literal meaning takes the statement from John 15 (Jesus says that he is the vine) and makes sense out of it in light of a figurative statement that has a literal meaning. No one would believe that he is actually the vine. While the language is not literal, the language has a meaning that Jesus is trying to convey. These kinds of statements are used all throughout the Scriptures (87). The language conveys a thought that God is trying to get across through Symbols and concepts we can understand.

Communicators are to be artists, meaning that they have a responsibility to craft sermons in a way that others can understand (Lowry 11). The role of the communicator is to identify with the culture they are trying to reach. “As human beings we are part of the society we seek to serve” (Duffet 9).

Incarnational

Incarnational ministry is based upon the model given from the Word who became flesh and dwelt on this earth with his creation (John.1:1, 14). This indigenous approach is modeled after Jesus. This approach is authorized by the Jerusalem Council and modeled by the apostle’s ministries and mandated in 1 Corinthians. “This incarnational model enabled the faith’s spread to many peoples across the Mediterranean world” (Hunter,

Radical Outreach 84).

At the heart of incarnational ministry is trinitarian theology. “Communication that reveals rather than conceals the truth of God’s nature and purpose, mirrors the relational life of God among us both in context and delivery” (Baucum 16). To communicate trinitarian theology results in communion (rather than more information). The incarnation is the culmination of a history of God’s full self-disclosure.

Missional

“The office of preaching has not been invented by man. It has been entrusted to us” (Stott 136). The entrusted message means that the communicator has been called to share in this sacred office. A missionary is someone called and sent by God (Gal. 1:1) with the priority to preach the kingdom of God and meet other forms of human need, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

The authority of a missionary does not lie in the office of the missionary but in the one who calls. A missionary then must be willing to learn the customs and cultural patterns of a specific people group in order to interact and relate.

Personal

Scripture did not arrive directly from some heavenly culture. Rather, Scripture bears the fingerprints, smell, sweat, and struggle of faith communities trying to live their lives. “In preaching a text, we begin with truth as a picture (sight), which then becomes a mirror (insight), which then becomes a window (vision). We preach the truths beyond the pictures in the text, not the pictures themselves” (Wiersbe 87).

A warning for the Christian communicator exists to beware of the tendency to spiritualize or over-spiritualize the contents of the Bible or to depend on propositional

truth. The significance comes in the demonstration of Jesus. He used his power and authority to package spiritual truth in cultural terms (see 1 Cor. 2:12-13). The tellers of biblical stories are creative artists. Thus most biblical narratives have a historical concern as well as literary features. They aim to inculcate a worldview and to relate history, but they also use the conventions of art to do so (Goldingay 31-32).

Communicating between Cultures

Words cause things to happen. “With words we govern men” (Larson 21) “For it has been true throughout human history that whatever we have not wanted to hear, we have done our best to silence” (Carter 201). Language cracks the way to the heart, and it helps to open the soul and mind in order to communicate the deeper things of God.

“Language is the outer shell of a much more fundamental diversity of thought and practice into which the Christian message must be translated” (Walls 146). Speaking the common language of the people does not in itself produce the communication of the good news. The translation of words does not occur when an unknown word becomes understandable in the vocabulary of the people, but when an idea or a thought about Christ is illuminated by something already in the consciousness of the people. Words connect to real life because the Holy Spirit makes the connection.

The Exchange of the Good News

What makes biblical preaching biblical is a chance to hear what God has to say about a subject matter that has already been presented from a secular standpoint. Biblical preaching addresses the pain, concerns, and questions of culture while connecting and exchanging these perceived issues in the culture for the good news of Jesus Christ.

Preaching is unique to Christianity. In the history of the world there has been little

to resemble preaching in the ancient religions. The priests of Egypt, Chaldea and Greece had their mysteries, but they were for the initiated. The philosophers had their schools, but they were for the select. No other group of people thought about going out to the masses in order to teach them moral and religious truth (J. Kerr 14).

Biblical Examples

The good news is good. Culture, on the other hand, can be good, bad, or neutral. Culture defines what are good or bad actions. Jesus understood this concept as he has basically embraced the culture to which he communicated and worked. He did not communicate in spite of the culture. Jesus communicated God's values and precepts through a particular set of cultural ideals. Through these perceptions, needs, and hopes, the kingdom of God came alive. Jesus connected people to himself at their greatest point of need.

A poignant example is when the Pharisees brought a woman who was caught in adultery to Jesus (John 8:2-11). They asked his opinion regarding what should be done to her. He responded in John 8:7 that "[h]e who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." Jesus almost certainly saved her life. His words cut to the heart of the matter and revealed the truth of the situation. They had no other choice but to drop their stones and leave.

Another example comes from the Apostle Paul. Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 mentions the concern over eating meat offered to idols. This illustration is hard to understand in North America because meat is not offered to idols as an act of Worship.

Paul was careful not to give a simple answer to this illustration, but one of the connections to be made is found in the freedom the good news brings. Idols are worthless

and have no power. Idols are worthless pieces of man's imagination. Since the person, or culture, that ascribes worth to the idol is part of the culture, then as Jesus comes into the culture, he redeems the culture by redirecting the worship from idols to himself. Once Jesus redirects culture to himself, it may be okay to do what was common as an unbeliever. The reason being that Jesus has redirected the behavior and worship to himself by redeeming and transforming the culture (as long as it does not go against the directives in the Bible). As a believer, then, meat is okay to eat because there is no power or curse in the meat. Everything has been rightly put in its place as it is subject to God.

Jesus also shows his ability to redeem actions in culture in John 9:6. Jesus spits on the ground and makes mud with his saliva out of the dirt. He puts it on the eyes of a blind man and tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The significance is found in John 9: 4 when Jesus replied that "this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." While one commentary says that this act of spitting on the ground and making mud as a means to open eyes was an act of magic of the day, I believe the real point he was making was to debunk a faulty rule system. He healed on the Sabbath. By doing so, Jesus let all those around him know that he has the ultimate power. Jesus can do what others can do, but everything is subjective to him. Although this act may have also been done in response to the rabbis who believed that sin caused people to be born blind, it was a miracle of redirecting faulty belief. Once again, Jesus corrected their faulty thinking by teaching that God will move and act in a way that will bring glory to his name, regardless of what people thinks about him.

The proof of the power of connecting in culture is seen by what happens to those who witness the redemption of life in a way that they can understand. Luke 7:16-17 tells

how: “They were all filled with awe and praised God. ‘A great prophet has appeared among us,’ they said. ‘God has come to help his people.’ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.” People got excited and since people live in homogenous structures with other people, others are going to hear the good news, when it happens, communicated by a local.

Bridge Complete

The bridge is completed when the Holy Spirit opens the heart of the listener through the words of the communicator. Hearers understand and make a decision to put their faith in Christ. In sum, hearers decide to cross the bridge. A change in worldview has been initiated and soon, this worldview will become their new reality. The change is inward, and they will begin to learn the meaning of living in the culture but not of the culture in which they were converted.

Under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, they begin to live a scriptural Christianity founded on Scripture not just a cultural transformation as evidenced by Paul. Paul’s reaction to the proposal that the new converts in Antioch should adopt the lifestyle of Jewish believers by becoming circumcised according to the Torah and instructed in the duties of the covenant people was “indignation verging on incoherence” (Walls 147).

Paul’s stance led to a quick distinction between becoming a proselyte and a convert of the Christian faith. Maintaining a proselyte would have led to fixed norms of the Christian faith to be practiced by all Christians regardless of ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Had Gentile believers been required to become proselytes, no reason would have existed as to why address the issue of meat offered idols from a pagan friend. No pagan would have invited a proselyte to his house and no Torah-keeping Jew would have

accepted (Walls 148). Becoming a proselyte involves a form of naturalization incorporated into a different environment. It is a new nationality and identity by forsaking the one previous to becoming a proselyte.

The Corinthian epistles show the emergence of a new lifestyle among Hellenistic Gentile Christians. This epistles demonstrates that one does not need to have any affiliation with Judaism to become a Jew. They had become converts despite their background. To become a convert is to turn or to have a change of direction and that means turning who a person is into a new direction for Christ:

It is not a matter of substituting something new for something old—that is proselytizing, a method that the early church could have adopted but deliberately chose to jettison. Nor is conversion a matter of adding something new to something old, as a supplement or synthesis. (Walls 148)

Risk, tension and controversy are essential to the process of conversion. A conversion challenges people to think in terms of social identity and Christian identity. This causes distributing, challenging and altering the conventions of that life from the heart. The freedom is founded by the Holy Spirit in the believers life, not from a prescribed set of rules and regulations.

Summary

Preaching, or regular religious instruction, is peculiar to Christianity because God has chosen preaching, and he is active in the lives of people everywhere. “One of the goals of preaching is to help people meet themselves in the Bible and discover the contemporary significance of that ancient book” (Wiersbe 79). Preaching at its very core is God sharing his heart with his people, and it declares his desire to make himself known. “Biblical preaching means proclaiming the truth of the Bible *the way the Bible*

[emphasis mine] presents it” (83). Martin Luther says, “[F]or the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him” (qtd. in Lischer 115).

William H. Willimon believes that Paul’s discourse on Mars Hill (Acts 17) is a model for communicating in this postmodern world. The modernity of yesterday no longer exists because of the changing of society. “No one alive today has witnessed such a significant shift in our concept of the local church pastor as we are presently undergoing” (Nelson 11).

In order for preaching to be effective, it must take into account its audience and what they are saying. “Preaching should be public because it must be delivered not to one, but to many; if it were given to a single man, it would be teaching” (Lischer 7). Taking the time to prepare daily in order to preach is useless if the masses do not understand the message. “There are two kinds of preachers; the one who has something to say but does not know how to say it, and the other who knows how to say it but has nothing to say” (Lowry 72).

Steve Sjogren tells the story when he started doing random acts of kindness in the community. On one occasion he was offering a free car wash to the community. He was sharing the gospel with a person while he was washing the man’s car. When this man asked how he might be saved. Sjogren responded back to the man to “[a]sk the God of the car wash to come into your life. He loves you unconditionally”. The man did because of the connection of theology and life. “Theological meaning must always be embodied in images drawn from life” (Wiersbe 41).

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Problem and Purpose of the Study

God's personal revelation about himself, his ways, and his plan was not limited to a specific point in time, nor was his revelation limited to one specific people group or one specific culture. What each people group, or culture, had in common was that God wanted to know and to be known by them. The Bible, God's written revelation to all people everywhere, reveals his desire to be known by them.

His revelation was concise, understandable, and contemporary. People understood what was being conveyed by how God communicated it. Simply put, God's truth was given to people using their own understanding of such things as symbols, sign language, body language, and verbal language. Each form has changed as history changes, however, the human condition has not, and neither has God's desire to speak and relate to each culture.

Even though God has not given any more written revelation since the bible was canonized, the truth contained in the Bible is just as real and inspirational today as it was when it was penned by the author(s) (Isa. 40:8). The method being studied is how that truth is transmitted from one generation to another and from one culture to another through the form known as preaching.

Postmodernism has brought society to a place where modernity failed. Modernity taught that the place for preaching is to illumine the soul and the listeners place is that they are sharp enough to draw conclusions and their own application from what was being said. Postmodernism has shown that truth is connected in more ways than just

illuminating the human condition.

Preaching is more than a communication of shared ideals. Preaching is a communication between God and humanity. More specifically, it is what God has to say about a specific subject. The communicator becomes like Philip, who, was sent by the Holy Spirit to share the good news with the Ethiopian on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. The biblical communicator is sent to this world to do the same. Acts explains that unless someone explains to gospel people will not understand what is being communicated (Acts 9:31). In order to facilitate that understanding, the communicator must not only understand what God is saying, but, the life experiences of the people as well.

This research project is a discovery of how biblical communicators exegete their local culture in order to present the Gospel to a local culture. The message that God longs to communicate to this world is continued in the thread of conversation that leads communicators into a deeper level of connection as they leave the surface façade and move deeper into the ideals, hopes, dreams and language espoused by the culture. The task is great, but the Holy Spirit's enabling power is sufficient.

Research Questions

The first research question identifies the pastor's ability to understand the biblical text. The second research question is set to discern what is being communicated by the culture in its immediate context by the signals it is emitting through signs, media, gestures, stories and worldviews. The third and fourth research questions focus on the application of that understanding to reveal the methods employed to reach the local culture.

Research Question #1

How does a pastor read and understand the message of the Bible?

This research question helped find out how preachers arrive at a specific biblical doctrine. Are they diligent communicators to the task at hand? Do they take seriously their commitment to understand God's book? Do they study the Bible constantly? In general, this question is meant to show how they study the Bible and stay true to their understanding of the biblical text.

Research Question #2

How does a pastor intentionally read and stay current with society in order to exegete the local culture?

The underlying premise of this research project is that not only should pastors be immersed in the biblical text, but, they should know and recognize major thought flows and patterns of their local culture. Learning how to exegete their culture well is crucial in order to connect the biblical text and the culture together.

How this question is answered will indeed determine the heart of communicators and their ability to relate to people. When Jesus prayed his high priestly prayer in John 17, his intention was that God would protect his Church and help them to be salt and light. In other words, God would protect them from the world but not take them from the world. If Jesus wanted his Church to be taken from the world, he would not have given the Great Commission. The Great Commission can only be tempered by an understanding of why people do what they do in relation to their cultural makeup.

God's word was designed to be contextualized in any and every culture. When contextualization occurs, it is called indigenous Christianity. Indigenous Christianity is

the communication of Christ through the local customs and language of a specific people group. The end result of a contextualized gospel is the movement of God in the lives of people to transform them—not to conform them.

Research Question #3

How does the pastor combine the two worlds in a sermon?

Proclaimers of God's word understands biblical communication to be different because it gives God, through the Holy Spirit working in communicators, a chance to say what they want about a topic or certain message. The understanding of the two worlds should merge to communicate meaning and worth in a form called the sermon. Each sermon will be different according to the sender, receiver, and the topic. Nevertheless, the ability to communicate biblical truth in a way that connects and resonates to the receivers of the message was the critical aspect of this question because, in the end, the only method that consistently has been understood is the method that connects.

Connection is an intentional rhetorical strategy that demonstrates how the teaching of Scripture text illumines some aspect of contemporary life (Duffett 73). Communicators will know when connection is made because they will hear phrases such as "that message spoke to me," or "I was challenged by that word," or in the words of Hadden W. Robinson "that didn't seem like thirty minutes!"

Research Question #4

What discovery of patterns, principles, or methodologies can be observed from those pastors who connect the biblical text with the local culture in their preaching?

The literature review in Chapter 2 helped to show how those who have been faithful to understand and immerse themselves in the meaning of the Bible have been

able to communicate to the deepest need of the society to whom they were speaking. The answer to this question probes the mysteries of how God works through the personality, background, and social distinctive of pastors in order to transmute his word to the world. Since words do not have meaning except that they are connected to something, so, too, the sermon is not connected to meaningless words.

Subjects

The nature of this project looked at churches that were growing numerically and how the church influences society. The location was not important to this study nor was the denomination. What was important was how they were making a difference in the community. Thus, inner-city, rural, suburban, and city settings were included in this criterion. The method used to determine who should be considered was a random selection based on word of mouth, a visible connection in the community, and/or a personal knowledge of their connection with the local culture.

Variables

Variables include the composite assessment of personal interviews, and a recorded audio sermon/manuscript sermon. Findings were further analyzed by reflection, size, length of tenure, church setting, and finally their personal commitment to reach the lost. Another important variable was the context of the communicator. The context was critical in understanding how much they were willing to connect with the culture. Their context and attitude towards the culture reveals their personal and theological convictions of life and of the Bible and how they were able to bridge the gap between the two.

Research Methods

The research method employed for this project was a qualitative research done in

a descriptive and evaluative manner. Qualitative research is defined by “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss 10-11). Since “methodologies cannot be true or false, only more or less useful” (Silverman 2) the result of this qualitative research was a compilation of the data in a nonmathematical process of interpretation and then organizing it into a theoretical explanatory scheme.

Anselm L. Strauss gives several valid reasons exist for doing qualitative research. One of which is pertinent for this project and it is the nature of the research problem (11). “Qualitative methods can be used to explore substantive areas about which little is known or about which much is known to gain novel understandings” (Stern 20-23).

Instrumentation and Research Methodology

This project consisted of an evaluative study in the form of a researcher-designed questionnaire. The project utilized a pretest evaluation to set the format for the actual survey. After the viability of the survey had been determined through compiling and taking into account the pretest population, the survey was initiated.

Two elements were identified in the historical section of the literature review. The first was the ability of the population sample to exegete their culture. The second element was how they communicators bridged the gap between the biblical text and their culture in order to communicate God’s word effectively. During the second part of the primary instrumentation of a Web-based survey, the population sample was given the opportunity to share in their own words how they read their culture.

Methods to Promote Reliability

According to Robert D. Reece, members of a group are often unaware of what

they are doing. Asking participants what they are doing is often inadequate. Researchers must observe the events (74). In order to promote liability, the research started from fifty-four pastors. After the interview process was completed. Five pastors were identified as subjects who had something to say and caught my attention. After a second interview of those subjects only four remained. Over the course of twelve months several on-site visits and numerous interviews produced the data.

Personal contact. After the subjects were selected, the first step was to contact them in order to inform them of the project. In most cases this contact consisted of setting up an appointment with their secretaries. Using this first contact to build rapport and get permission to use them in this project, the conversation was generally brief and pleasant. The second contact was the phone call that generally lasted twenty-five minutes. This personal interview consisted of a few brief questions geared toward an understanding of who they are and the local context of their ministries (see Appendix B). Special consideration was taken of any special statements or circumstances pertaining to the questionnaire.

Personal interview. The questionnaire focus helped participants to answer honestly and reveal themselves in a non threatening way. The research allowed for an unbiased discovery of the practices of pastors and how they connect to their culture. The researcher-designed survey generated the necessary information to give a thorough assessment of the answers given. The survey was developed with the end result of finding the top methodologies of pastors who exegetes their local culture in order to present the good news. Stated in another way, to discover how pastors relate to their culture. The most difficult part of this questionnaire was wording the questions in such a way as to not

give away the sought after answers. I wanted the respondents to answer the questions from their own perspective, not mine. In the end, the questions did reveal deeper and more profound insights into the life and study of communicators.

Web-based questionnaire. After the population completed the personal interview, they were informed of a written survey that would help give context to their ministry. They were informed that this survey would take about twenty minutes of their time. They were also asked how they would like to take the survey—Web-based or through the mail. Every one of the subjects choose to take the Web-based survey and no one felt uncomfortable giving out their e-mail address.

The anonymous survey consisted of two parts. The first part was called an *Identity Part* and consisted of ten questions that asked for ministry details and focused on the local church, the pastor, and the context of the ministry. The second part was called the *Questionnaire Part* and consisted of nine questions related to how pastors understand the Bible, exegete their local culture, and bridge the gap between the two (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Question and Purpose Table

Question	Purpose
Question #1	This reveals what methods the communicator employs to understand fully the biblical content of what they are preaching.
Question #2	To see how their understanding of scripture has changed in their ministry.
Question #3	What they are doing personally and if they are making an attempt the read the local congregation.
Question #4	How they do ministry and the different techniques they use.
Question #5	To see if they recognize what culture is indeed saying
Question #6	Do they separate out American values and Christian values...if they don't think that they are then this question opens them up to explore how
Question #7	This will reveal if they identified difference in cultures
Question #8	This determines whether or not they have a one size fits all approach to culture and God.
Question #9	Shows if they are reaching their community

The questions were open ended and they were designed to reveal the population samples ministry in their own words. Open-ended questions can be meaningful due to the interviewer probing for clarity beyond incomplete answers (Fowler 57).

After they completed the questionnaire, they were asked if they wanted to receive the results of the whole project. After the project was completed they were sent the results via e-mail.

Listening to the sermon. The second part of the research consisted of collecting and coding a previously preached sermon from the subjects (see Appendix E). In four cases an audio taped sermon was not available, and I had to read a sermon from a manuscript. Five sermons were heard in person. Ten sermons were listened to via the Internet and one on was an actual audiotape sent to me.

The impetus for this method was to gain practical insight as to how a connection was made to the listeners. Only one sermon was heard because, generally speaking, guests will give the church only one opportunity to connect the Bible to life. If guests do not connect the message with life, chances are they will not return. Special note was made as to whether or not an actual connection existed and if a connection was made, how. The length of the sermon was considered as well as the passage of Scripture that was used. Finally, any notable features of the sermon as far as uniqueness, special circumstances, outcome, and response or deviation from the norm was noted and considered.

Participant observation. On-site visits added to the credibility of the research because I could see the raw data for myself. I was not being told what they do but was actually able to observe the fullness of what the subject told me in the interview process. This participant observation consisted of different locations and different times of the year. In some cases two or more personal visits to listen to the service produced a rich discovery of raw data that did not come up during the personal interviews or the Web-based surveys.

Questionnaire pretest. The Web-based survey was first given as a pretest to five pastors according to the same manner the survey would be given. These five pastors were asked to give one hour of their time to take the survey and discuss their experience. We met together first as a group. Then they were dismissed to take the survey with the only instructions being to write down the time they took to answer the questions. We gathered back together and they were given a questionnaire to complete (see Appendix D). This questionnaire was designed to give feedback concerning the ease of use of the Web site,

difficulty of the questions, and anything else that would be helpful to critique the overall test experience. Their answers were discussed, and corrections were made based on their feedback.

Methods to Promote Trustworthiness

“Enculturation is the natural process of learning a particular culture” (Spradley and McCurdy, Cultural Experience 47). When people are currently involved in a cultural scene, they use their knowledge to guide their actions. In order to promote trustworthiness, I gathered the research from several different formats as these diverse methods of compiling data helped to distill the information better.

Multiple meetings. The research was not only conducted at the place of worship, but subsequent interviews were held at coffee shops, restaurants, or any place the subject felt comfortable. Spradley writes that when a subject is in their own environment, they are more likely to share from their experience with their guard down and just reflect on the questions (Participant Observation 47). In most cases an agenda was not found. The subjects engaged in conversation as they felt comfortable. If topics relating to the research were introduced, then they were explored further. Most meetings did not last more than an hour.

Varying education degrees. Not every subject had attained the same educational level, nor did they have the same background. Therefore, when the same words, phrases, or concepts were used, a special notation was made. In several cases I intentionally engaged them in their choice of words.

Data Collection

The subjects who met the criteria were contacted via phone inviting their

participation. After each interview the subject was asked to take a Web-based survey and to submit a sermon. If the answers generated interest, subsequent interviews were initiated to engage them in a nonthreatening way. This data collection led to a triangulation of research consisting of personal interviews, participant observation, and evaluated sermons. “Generally speaking, primary sources [in qualitative research] are those data which are unpublished and which the researcher has gathered from the people or organization directly” (Myers).

Sermon

The sermon helped to reveal not only the intent that many pastors have of actually connecting the Bible to the people, but it showed the reality of how they actually did what they said they would do. This prerecorded sermon provided the primary connection between the pastor and the culture.

Web-Based Survey

In order to utilize the technology available, the Web-based survey was an effort I made to help facilitate the ease and use of the current technology. The Web-based survey allowed the research population to give completely anonymous answers without fear. When the survey was finished, the respondents submitted their answers, and they were collected via a Web-based database. The responses were gathered and coded accordingly.

Personal Interaction

Building rapport and trust is a complex process. Interaction is critical to the success of the interview. Careful note was taken not to come across as a threat but to listen and observe. The personal interaction in the form of participant observations added validity to the research. I was able to hear and see in a data raw environment what they

were talking about during the personal interviews.

Data Analysis

This exploratory study was a compilation of data through grounded theory in qualitative research. The population pretest gave the project the validity to proceed with the subjects and the compilation of the data was done according to the research method of coding. Coding is the analysis of data based on categories of words that the subjects gave after multiple interviews.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The most readily accessible and most tangible result of whether or not a pastor is able to communicate God's truth is not necessarily found in what the communicator can relay. The connection between how a pastor communicates and what the people hear is evident primarily in the conversion, discipleship, and growth of new converts to Christianity. Only when one "look[s] into what *our* [emphasis mine] practices produce in the called people of God as they are sent out on a mission to live as light and salt in their communities" can one tell if the message is being understood (Kimball 15).

The purpose of the dissertation was to learn what pastors in growing churches are doing to reach the culture. Four research questions guided this project: How does a pastor read and understand the message of the Bible? How does a pastor intentionally read and stay current with society in order to exegete the local culture? How does the pastor combine the two worlds in a sermon? What discovery of patterns, principles, or methodologies can be observed from those pastors who connect the biblical text with the local culture in their preaching?

Profile of the Subjects

The criteria for identifying a pastor to research were threefold. First, the pastor had to be evangelical. Second, the pastor had to be in a church that was known for its outreach, and third, those researched consisted of a diversity of denomination, gender, and church location. Fifty-four candidates for this research were identified, and, ultimately, twenty were interviewed through a randomly selected system.

Church Size

The size of the church ranged from the smallest, a rural Lutheran ELCA church in Ohio that has doubled in two years from thirty five to seventy to the largest, a nondenominational church of eight thousand in Arizona (see Figure 4.1).

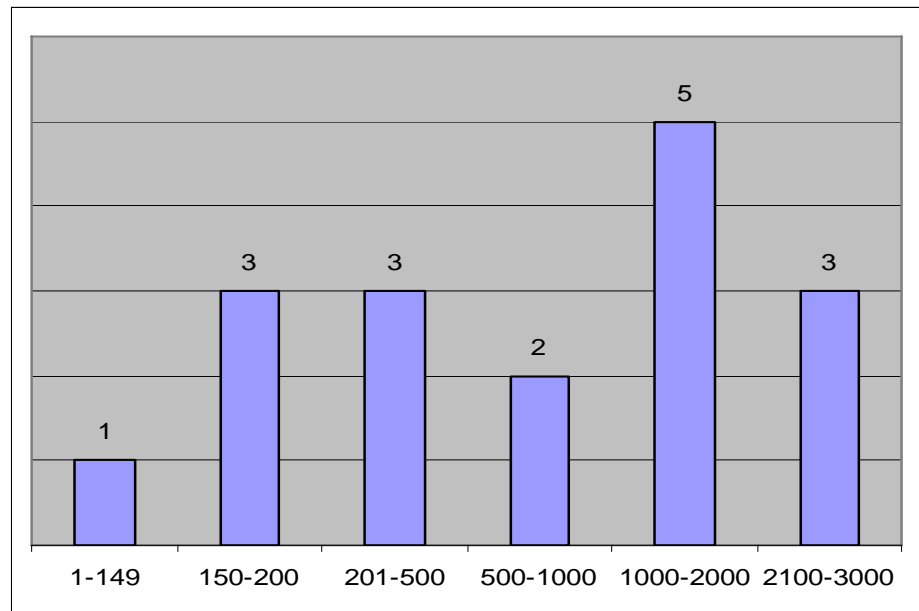


Figure 4.1. Church size.

A large portion of the researched churches was in the category of one thousand to two thousand in size. All of the churches, with the exception of one, had seen conversion growth in the last year. One church had just gone through a church split and continued to grow in spite of the problems.

Church Setting

The church setting of the Pastor fell into one of four categories: *Rural*, country setting, *Inner City*, poverty or run down section of town, *City*, in the middle of major city

and *Suburban*, growing edges of a major metropolitan area (see Figure 4.2).

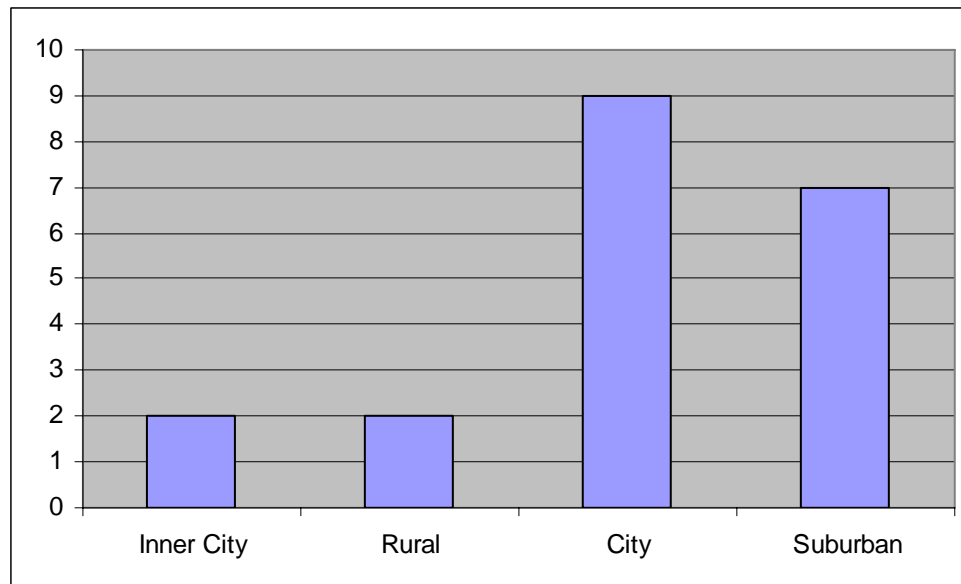


Figure 4.2. Church setting.

Pastoral Tenure

In addition to the setting and the size, an additional profile that may have contributed to the growth and the understanding of the culture around the church was tenure or longevity of the pastors. Those who were researched seemed to be very satisfied with their ministry and testified to the fact that they thought tenure was a critical factor in reaching the lost and ultimately the growth of the church. In some cases, this insight also included the longevity and consistency of the staff (see Figure 4.3).

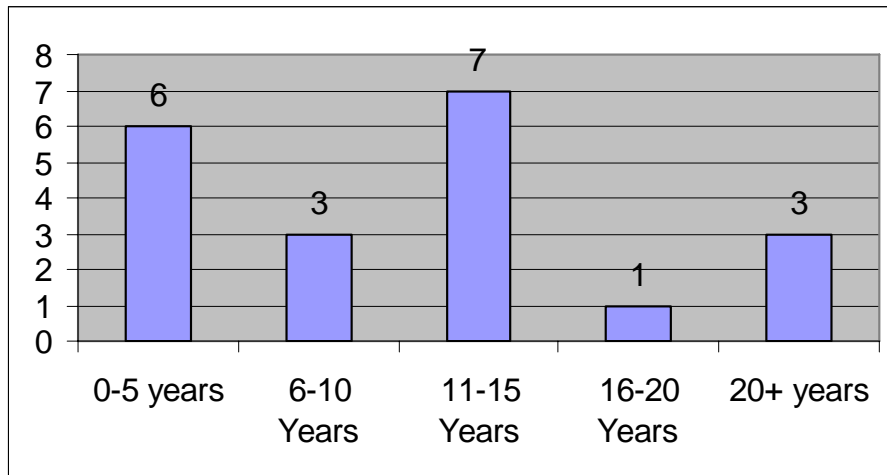


Figure 4.3. Church tenure.

Data Collection

The researcher-designed questionnaire and survey served as the primary source of data collection for the qualitative research and gave the interviewed subjects the freedom to share how they connected to the culture. The sermons served as the primary measure of how well the communicators built the bridge of communication. Only one tape was used in order to simulate the first time overall impression of a visitor. Church growth statistics tell us that a visitor will only give the church one chance. If something does not connect or spark interest in that one visit, then chances are there will be no return visit.

The merger between the personal interviews, survey-based questions, taped sermons and personal interaction produced five methodologies that pastors use to exegete their culture.

Top Methodologies Used to Exegete Culture

The coding and categorizing of words produced four top methodologies communicators used in order to exegete their culture.

Prayer

At first, prayer seemed to be an unusual method for exegeting culture, but upon further reflection and interaction with the subjects, prayer became one of the primary ways that they were able to understand culture. The category of prayer could be divided into three distinct classes.

Prayer of communion. In the case of 51 percent of the population sample, prayer was a clear basis for their relationship with God and ultimately with others. The reality that God works through prayer was apparent in their preaching and teaching and in the actual interview process. They mentioned prayer all the time. Their prayer life opened them to a better relationship with their congregation. “I spend as much time with God as I can. If I don’t know God, how do I expect my congregation to know him?”

The interviews revealed a strong prayer life and, thus, a deeper communion with God. In the case of 33 percent, a definite witness to the power of answered prayer was evident in their answers. “God really helped us,” they would say, or “we had been praying for a person for a long time and God finally answered our prayer.” The communicators prayed for everything. Prayer is to them the way to find God’s will and to prepare them for reaching the lost. Prayer helps them develop a relationship with God, which ultimately funnels down to helping them understand the thoughts, customs, and nuances of the culture.

Prayer of preparation. One growing church of four to five hundred in a town of six thousand has experienced explosive growth. The pastor attributes the growth of the church to his ability to identify and understand the local culture and to bridge the gap in the pulpit through prayer during sermon preparation.

I recognize that God is sovereign. God calls people. I spend a lot of time with the Lord. Ample time, deep time with the Lord all week long praying.... “God speak through me to them in a way that will connect.” I don’t ever know but God will take what I am saying and will use it like a guided missile to penetrate and use it to the person who needs it. I don’t think it would happen if I didn’t pray.

Another pastor said that “after praying she would then begin her sermon preparation.” Another said that in order to approach the text in the context in which it was written he would “do a bunch of exegetical work, pray, and try to put myself in the same position.”

Prayer of connection. The interviewees prayed in order to identify with the lost. One pastor said that she was “always praying to see how she could connect with the people.” They prayed for the lost and expected God to work. In several cases of the interview, what came to life were the times when they would pray for a specific name and God would bring that person to them personally. They would see them on the street or in the grocery store and were able to ask them about their life. Needless to say, this solidified their commitment to the office of prayer.

Through reflective prayer they were asking for the Holy Spirit to help them understand the culture they were called to reach. Many of them would spend deep time “asking God what is the hidden meaning behind the things I see.” The answers to these prayers gave them sermon ideas, teaching moments, and, more importantly, ways to help humanity relate to God.

Building Relationships

All of the subjects spoke of unique and various ways they connected with the culture. Yet, each of them mentioned a specific way of connecting with the lost through

building relationships. Every pastor interviewed made an effort to get to know the person and to discover the motives for their actions. The pastors did this by establishing rapport, respect and friendship. “I love people for who they are, first. I get to know them first before I tell them about Jesus.”

The pastors went to great efforts to frequent a place of business or to be involved in an activity with those in their community. Whether a restaurant, bar, movie, little league, barbershop, small groups, hunting, fishing, hospital calls, jails, treatment centers, gym, etc., their main goal was to be around as many people as possible. Among those researched 35 percent named specific outreach events held at their church that are geared specifically to the lost. One church hosted a bikers Sunday. Another church was constantly trying to determine new ways to open their building to their community in order the develop relationships with others. One pastor even uses an acronym for this—“D.R.I.V.E.”: D-evotion (to God); R-reading (always reading the culture); I-nvesting in key relationships (through various avenues); V-ision (always sharing what God is doing); and, E-xercising (taking care of myself);

Several mentioned how they “used the interests of their children at neighborhood and public functions to build relationships with the lost.” Another went into detail how he would frequent a place of business just to build relationships. The same pastor said, “[I] would intentionally go to the store when I knew Susie was working.” He would take other people from his church and introduce them to her. He seized this opportunity to build relationships and to connect people to each other.

Another pastor said that she “learned to do more e-mail ministry, which includes listening and spiritual direction with her people in the last few years.” One pastor in a

church that has seen explosive growth said that he would spend time with them to get to know them first. He would not “sell them the church or talk about it.” He was interested in them and who they are and wanted get to know them apart from the church.

Being relational meant going to where the people are and not waiting for them to come to the communicator. When asked what he does, one pastor reflected by telling me that he goes to a specific restaurant: “I don’t even think the food is very good, but she is on my heart.” Others did not go personally but relied on the media to help them. Of those interviewed, five pastors, or 20 percent, had specific audio or video venues playing on secular stations. Meeting culture where they are helped them to establish trust before a crisis happened. They felt that people would begin to trust them as they heard their voice and saw how they were connecting with the culture.

Personality of the pastor. Building and developing key relationship had a great deal to do with the personality of the pastor and how they personally understood and interacted with people. Listening to the sermons revealed the insight of this research. One could see and hear the passion and emotions of their personality really come to life. A wide range of emotion from compassion and empathy to laughter and excitement were evident in their lives.

The personality of the pastors became an obvious strength to aid in the advancement of the gospel. Not only was an obvious connection made between the hearers and the pastors during the sermons, but one could listen to them all day long. Also, the personality of the pastors (who they were in the interview) came out in the sermon. I did not hear a “sermon voice” contrived in the message. In every interview conducted, whether face to face or on the phone, one could hear the sense of warmth and

genuineness from the pastors. They loved their people.

Pastors of large churches are busy. Looking at Figure 4.1 (p. 85), one can tell that a large part of the interviews were conducted in churches with over one thousand in attendance. In some cases, I had some difficulty arranging for the meeting for the phone interviews. When the interview finally occurred, I could hear and feel the warmth and passion for the subject at hand. One pastor even went so far as to say “people just like me.” In the audio-taped sermons, one could hear the warmth and authenticity of what was being communicated. In most instances even the sermons that were taped were captivating to listen to. My assumption was that the live audience would have been just as captivated.

During the personal interviews if a person they knew entered the room they would talk to them. On one occasion, the owner of a restaurant (that we were eating), came to greet the pastor. There was an obvious exchange of warmth that transferred to me, the interviewer. I went back to the restaurant even after our interview because of the relationship that was established with the owner that day.

Interaction with Culture

“Stay current with culture and you stay current with their lives” was the message of one suburban pastor. An avid observation and in some cases a consumption of the culture was a large part of those who wanted to reach the lost. Even the pastor who was honest and said that he did not do anything to reach the lost (even though they baptized 117 people last year) had connections outside the church.

As with most of those researched for this project, they did not seem to be completely against certain aspects of the culture around them. One pastor did not have a

problem with the good (not sinful) things in the culture. In fact, he would go to the movies and participate in various popular events. In his own words, he realized that his culture is the “soup that he swims in” and refuses to “rip on culture.” As he has grown up in it, he has learned to embrace those things that are worthy of embracing and throw away and reject the things that are not godly. His understanding of the culture gives him the authority to speak to the people in regards to things of God because he understands both of them. This interaction had several facets.

Mind-set. Reaching a lost world begins with an intentional inward driven passion—mind-set. Most of those interviewed began with a philosophy of ministry grounded in the Great Commission. This mind-set was also theologically tied to what Jesus said in Matthew that the law and the prophets could be summed up in two ways; love God and love others. The researched population consisted of a genuine love for the lost. In fact one pastor said, “Principle number one, if you want to reach them, you have to love them.”

This mind-set came out in 82 percent of those researched. The mind-set gave clarity, vision, and focus to their ministries. This mind-set allowed them to pursue actively different areas to connect with the lost. Because of this mind-set, the research population actually and intentionally found themselves in situations that led to the natural conversation of the gospel.

The research showed the great pains the pastors went through in order build up, not berate or belittle the culture (or the person) with whom they were speaking. Instead, the pastor strived to show how the weaknesses of the culture could be turned into strengths by the truth and to show how the strengths could be strengthened even more.

For instance, one pastor mentioned that when he hears or witnesses something that makes him cry, he asks the question, “What nerve did it strike?” and more importantly, “What truth is being conveyed?” In daily living when an event or action triggers a deep emotion the pastor immediately begins to relate the experience to biblical truth.

Those who were researched answered the questions from an evangelical sound point of view. They seemed to comprehend and understand fully well the human condition of sin and suffering and the need to be saved from this condition. Reaching the lost were the first things on their mind in terms of connecting life to the everyday gospel. “They need to be shown how to connect to God’s power.... Don’t tell them, show them.”

Observation. Most of the interviewed pastors read secular magazines and newspapers, watched television, and spent time in various cultural activities learning and asking questions of people. One pastor commented, “You don’t have to go far in order to see what the culture is reading.” While some pastors were intentional about reaching the culture and would get together with a specific group of people to ask them questions others felt that they could learn more if they were unintentional. They just “soaked in the local culture and people” by going to football games, being visible in the community, and hanging around people with their eyes open and their ears shut. A pastor that has seen her church double in two years says that she “[h]ang[s] out with them, eat[s] with them, ...[has] fun with them. But mostly, hear their stories!” One pastor said, “I am most valuable when I am unintentional about observing. I just absorb culture.”

When they were with people, they asked open-ended questions that included such things as, “what do you watch?” “Why do you like it?” With what person do you identify in this movie and why?” “What kinds of things make you cry and why?” One pastor

believed that the things that make people cry are the things that touch a bit of truth. He intentionally asks what truth is being conveyed and how he may use it.

Scrutiny. The historical and theological difference between those reaching their culture and those not reaching it is found in being able to dissect why people are doing what they are doing. “The Spirit gives us the freedom to do what is right, not what we would like to do.” They understood that just because they saw an event does not mean that they agreed with it. Because of this they had the freedom to find culture references that not only connected but also allowed them the ability to communicate biblical truths. They were constantly looking for why people did what they did and how they could communicate the Bible to them. “There are stories all around me. I just need to identify them with the Gospel and have eyes open for it.”

Understanding of God’s Word

Reaching the lost is not without purpose. The reason pastors are reaching out is because they understand what God is saying. They know what is right and wrong in culture because of what God says, not the culture. “Scripture is more true than I imagined.” One pastor said, “If a particular church is not relevant doesn’t mean Christianity is not relevant. Poor communication of the “Good News” make[s] churches irrelevant.”

Personally. Another said, “[M]ost importantly I think about what the Holy Spirit is saying to me in the text.” A suburban pastor said, “Okay, God, you are speaking all over the place.” He will write down what God is saying to him and then engage the culture based on what God has said to him. In fact, the same pastor said that people will come to him and say, “[Y]ou are so cutting edge. [H]ow do you do it?” He responds to

them by telling them that he takes Scripture seriously, which echoes a pastor when he says to his congregation repeatedly, “Christ is all you need. It is about living grace.”

Corporately. Understanding God means helping others understand him in his fullness:

We all live in sermons. There are stories all around us. I find that many people come have Christian traits, but usually there are serious holes in their belief system. I point to the Bible, God, and Jesus as the authority, and myself as the one who helps them see what the Bible teaches.

One’s passion came out when she said, “[T]o know deeply the love of Christ that changes our lives forever! Isn’t that what we all need?” That is why she does what she does. The amazing testimony is that she is bi-vocational and a seminary graduate. Money is not the issue for her; connecting people to Jesus Christ is.

Top Methodologies Used to Bridge the Two Worlds

In addition to the top methodologies that pastors use to exegete Scripture three primary ways were identified that the communicator uses to communicate God’s truth.

Personal Witness

To be personally transformed was the only principal or methodology that did not really surface in the personal interviews but was revealed in the returned survey-based questionnaires and the participant observations. A personal story is the most powerful and persuasive testimony to show the unchurched the power of God because it does two things. First, it shows that the testimony is on display all the time everywhere the pastor goes. Since God’s power has been at work in the lives of communicators it will work in the lives of everyone, everywhere. One pastor simply stated, “Describe how the Spirit changed your life. Describe how your daily time with God makes a difference.”

The personal victory shows people that they can live a transformed life that Jesus taught and is indicative of the teachings of the Bible. Perhaps the words of one pastor would be clarification to this, “Transparency in the pulpit has helped me tremendously to relate to those who think the Scriptures don’t relate.”

Second, to be personally transformed shows the power of God to pull humanity from its self and to open their eyes to the real needs and hurts of the people. This fact helps people to see the wrong in culture and to meet people where they are with the truth of the Bible. One pastor commented that “Scripture is more true than I ever imagined.... it really is living and active because the living and active word inhabits us.” Testimonies show the things tried and failed in one’s own power and the victory achieved from God. In short, the communicators can speak to culture because they have been in it and have found a way of escape. God has transformed them, personally. They now have something to say and to share.

Expository Preaching

Preaching was at the top of the list as one of the major forms of helping people understand God’s love. “I am constantly amazed at how God’s word always [has] something to say to us in every place and time.” An ELCA pastor made this statement in the context of how she uses the Lectionary. The type of preaching to which most interviewed pastors referred was not just the method of expository preaching but how they preached a specific book of the Bible in its entirety. “First of all, be careful not to use a bully pulpit. One way to avoid this is to have a preaching menu based on the text rather than a hobby horse topic or ‘hot topic’ that just came up.”

One of the first pastor interviewed said that “I am less worried about

communicating the redaction theory, etc. and more concerned about extracting the truths for today and applying them.” The type of preaching referred to is not just taking a theme, event, or idea from the popular thought of the day but using a book of the Bible and walking through it methodically, carefully and prayerfully, preaching the truths contained in the book. Most of the interviewed subjects used the word expository, which in the context of the interview meant book-by-book and not theme-by-theme. Expository preaching was crucial in bridging the gap between the two worlds because it allowed God to speak to the whole person without seemingly targeting people for something they were doing. “[P]eople will begin to fight you rather than feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit if you pick and choose your topics to address the stuff you see from week to week.” Another pastor shared “[S]cripture is thorough. You would be amazed at how many things are addressed as you teach through the texts.”

Confronting The communicators were not afraid to confront certain issues with biblical preaching, but as mentioned most did it through the Scriptures and not from a soap box. “The best part about being a biblical preacher is that you don’t have to make the Bible say something. It will on its own.” “We teach the Scriptures and let the Spirit convict. And we are trusting the Spirit of God to change you.” One pastor in his sermon said, “If Christ is not at the center of your life, than Satan is.”

Another pastor said that he is “less worried about communicating the redaction theory and more concerned about extracting truths for today and applying them.” This quote gives the methodology that 47 percent said they followed. They do their best to understand the culture. When they speak they let the Bible do so in its own words.

The manner in which they confront the culture did not really come out in the

interviews. The sermons showed their obvious distaste of certain aspects of the culture. In one sermon preached on “The Final Exam from James 4” the pastor shared how each persons are responsible for their own actions. No one can get into heaven except through their own choices.

In the interview process, quite a number referred to sensitive topics such as sexual immorality and political issues. Not one of them shared how they confronted these (and other) certain topics faced in culture. Nevertheless, by the answers they gave, the pastors seemed like they were willing to address whatever the Holy Spirit placed on their hearts. In the interviews they seemed to indicate they were willing and able to confront culture, but in the sermons I did not really notice how.

Engaging. One communicator wrote on his survey, “[T]here is no motion without emotion.” He, like other pastors researched, strives to connect to the people on an emotional level. How they do that is to offer their best interpretation through their own experience(s) and to invite the listeners to participate in that experience. By using one of their own personal experiences, they are able to show that they are human and that they struggle in the same manner as everyone else.

In some cases, listening to a taped sermon revealed an object lesson that was used in conjunction with the sermon. This connecting point was meant to conjure up memories and, in some cases, emotions tied to that memory. The synergy created from these object lessons allowed communicators to connect a principle or truth to the situation. The object lessons produced a poignant impact that was meant to drive deeper into the spirit than just words alone could ever do.

Connecting. In order to engage the lost the pastor must find a way to connect the

truth to culture outside of the Sunday sermon. About 30 percent of those interviewed used a form of communication outside of the church that takes them straight to the marketplace (as Paul did in Acts) where people live, work, and play. Whether connecting with the culture on by using a one-minute spot on a radio commercial or a whole sermon on cable TV, they shared how the add has “softened the people’s perceptions about the church and when they have a struggle they come to us.”

If they use radio, than they take a felt need they have observed from the culture, congregation, or their own personal lives and give a biblical truth to it. According to those interviewed, the spot was upbeat, personal, and insightful. Their goal was not to preach the gospel in one minute but to introduce the audience to God and his ways in a consistent informative manner. By going to the culture in a neutral way, the pastors were communicating to the listeners that if they ever had a need, the church was there to help them.

If the message is shown via TV, they are always one week behind so that they can edit it down to the exact minute. One pastor testified that he was “[A]mazed at how many people are just flipping through their channels and hear me preaching on TV.” Another pastor commented on how many people recognize his face when they see him in the stores. Sometimes they even come up to talk to him. These pastors with this outreach said it has given credence and value to their contact with the unchurched in their community.

Equipping Others

Of the four categories of churches identified and contacted—rural, inner-city, city, and suburban churches—each one of them had an equipping ministry. When the pastors were asked how they identified with the culture around them, the answers varied.

In one case, one of them said, “I confess that I have not been very good at this; I do not [reach out very well].” In other cases, the pastor responded that because his church was so big he had to spend a majority of his time outside of administrative issues, staff development, and sermon writing. This pastor said that he did not have time to reach the lost, but they equipped the laity for this task.

In all situations, though, a heavy push was instituted in the church for giving laity the tools that they need in order to teach people about God. Both large and small churches were intentional about helping people reach their culture. In the equipping process, the laity are taught how to seize every opportunity to share their faith. These churches have become intentional models of practical ministry. As a result of reaching out they have become intentional, because “evangelism is a consequence, not a cause” They have realized on the way to becoming relational that people are the best ways to reach other people just like them.

Intentional evangelism is especially true as it relates to their personal sphere of influence. The pastors see that part of their responsibility is to give them the tools to share their faith and to bring others into the kingdom. One pastor’s motto was, “Let the Bible unite us and the priorities [of reaching the lost] strengthen us.”

Acts of Service

One pastor showed a conviction of serving others by saying “deep within the heart of a pastor is the desire to serve.” Of the twenty pastors that were interviewed a majority mentioned how they served the community in one fashion or another. One pastor told me that “his current secretary started coming to the church because she heard of a church that was meeting the needs of people.” That same pastor shared how his

church gave away over 1,200 bicycles in the last year. This outreach all started when God spoke to him one day when he fixed a bicycle up that he found in the dumpster. He said, “I am convinced that if we reach people that no one likes, God will bring us people that everyone likes.”

Summary of Significant Findings

The end result of how a pastor relates to culture is the difference between a lifestyle and a style. One builds on the truth in a sensitive way, and the other appeals to the culture in order to try to connect to it. Style refers to a methodology or an approach to ministry. Within this style is a strategy of designing ministry around a methodology in order to attract a specific group of people. This may mean removing offensive icons or stumbling blocks to worship or rethinking why they do what they do.

Lifestyle means being sensitive to spiritual seekers and building on the truth. A lifestyle does not mean dumbing down the message, rather, it means considering where individuals are in their walk and connecting them to God at their own level of understanding and pace. A lifestyle of reaching the lost does not consist of mocking or belittling the culture but in appreciating and being perceptive as to where the needs are and understanding them to communicate the gospel.

The data from the research overwhelmingly pointed to the fact that the population sample could only communicate as the Holy Spirit changed them. Most communicated in a fashion what one pastor succinctly stated, “Christianity is a relationship not a simple religion. Before we can speak to their need, we must get our own act together.”

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Twenty pastors were the focus of this study. The pastors had their own insight into how they personally related to their own culture. Some of the pastors gave more value to the process than did others. The tenure, education, and passion helped each pastor to sort through the culture. These tools were discovered to be helpful in practical life for me as well.

Each pastor brought value that led to the model communication spectrum (see Figure 5.2 p. 109). The research was compared to the literature review in Chapter 2 and an application was made to Paul in Acts 17 as well as a comparison to the historical figures also mentioned in the literature review. In the end, the Church is God's hands and feet. He serves and communicates through the Church. When the Church becomes a sanctuary for an unbelieving world, it is placed in a position where it can change and influence and ultimately change culture. "The church needs to become a refuge *for* [emphasis mine] the world, not *from* [emphasis mine]" (McManus 65).

Evaluation of Data

Four research questions guided this study.

Research Question #1

How does a pastor read and understand the message of the Bible?

About half of the research population was educated beyond a four-year degree. While they leaned on their theological education and training, they were not locked into it. Education was never an excuse to them. Their past training was, however, the primary way they understood what God was saying. One pastor said that his "understanding of

Scripture has not changed since he began preaching.” Another said that “it all fits. It makes sense as a whole.”

The majority of pastors related that what brought a change in their understanding were the books of trusted denominational and church leaders that they read. Some said that they did not think their theology changed that much, but what did change was their resolve to engage the Bible in the local culture. Most of those researched understood that they were called to reach their culture and that became stronger and clearer as they developed in their own understanding.

Research Question #2

How does a pastor intentionally read and stay current with society in order to exegete the local culture?

The research showed how the communicator made a personal decision to be sensitive to the local customs and culture. They chose to be sensitive so they did not appear to be too antagonistic or condescending. This mind-set allowed them to reach out and observe honestly. This mind-set allowed them to catch the subtle nuances of the culture, but it also gave them a right and an opportunity to communicate God’s truth.

This task requires both an exegetical and hermeneutical process. Bible translators must bring the skills of the theologian together with that of anthropologist and linguist to ensure a proper understanding and effective communication of truth. They must decode Scripture to understand the nature of the entire sociolinguistic context and then “recode” in the new context so receptors understand (Duffet 142).

Research Question #3

How does the pastor combine the two worlds in a sermon?

Communicators reach out to the people around them through careful research of the Bible and the culture. As they come into the fullness of God, they seek to move people in the same way. They connect the world to God through observation, engagement, relationships, and stories. As they preach, they do so with the awareness that God's word is "living and active." The sermons give witness to a living and active God in a form driven by images and stories. In a large majority of the sermons a dominant image existed. In several sermons, an object lesson was being lived out or illustrated in person. One church had a live interview with a counselor; another had an object lesson the pastor was doing as he was preaching. Still another had a picture of what the pastor was illustrating on the screen as he was preaching.

Research Question #4

What discovery of patterns, principles, or methodologies can be observed from those pastors who connect the biblical text with the local culture in their preaching?

The top methodologies and principles can be best illustrated by two models that were produced as a result of this research. The first model was a lifestyle model (see Figure 5.1) and the second was an illustration of how the communicator combines theology with practical life (see Figure 5.2).

Interpretation of the Data

The data was condensed to make the following observations, figures, and insights into how communicators are reaching their culture and building a bridge between God and humanity.

A Lifestyle Model

A model to demonstrate the answer to this question could best be addressed by a

mind-set that leads to a lifestyle of balance and faith. A lifestyle is what those researched have shown to be the most effective way to build a bridge and ultimately reach the lost with the gospel. Figure 5.1 is a model of those who have been changed by the truth.

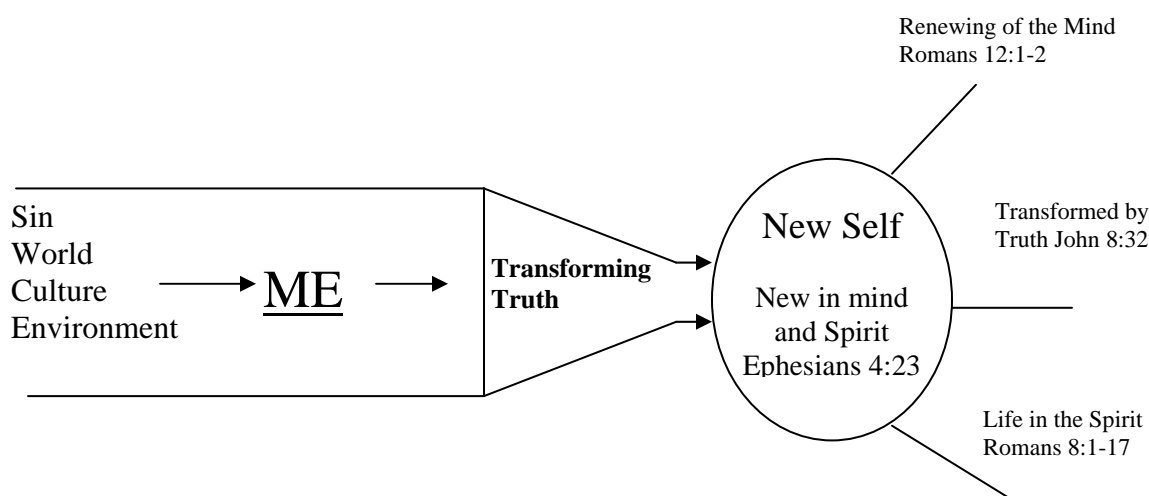


Figure 5.1. Transforming truth.

All the effects of the world, sin, culture, and the environment make people who they are. As they are confronted with the truth and yield to the truth (conversion), they are transformed by the truth and become a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). According to Ephesians 4:23-24, that person is made new in the attitude of their minds and that new self created to be like God is in true righteousness and holiness. Now, they are to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:1-2) and to put off the sinful lusts of the flesh and be controlled by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-17).

However, a caution must be made. Just knowing and looking like truth is not being completely faithful to the reality and person of truth. Jesus says in John 8:32 that “you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” The communicator’s job is not

only to know the truth but also to communicate the truth so that it sets people free. Communication on this level is transforming and life changing because those communicating have already been changed by the truth—a personal testimony. Even marketers use personal testimonies to catch the attention of those they are trying to reach, So much so that when people see a pastor who does not bear witness to the fullness of God, they see a disconnect between truth and reality.

Almost every single pastor interviewed longed to connect truth on this level. I could hear their desire to do so in their responses to the questions and this yearning came out in their sermons. They longed to make a difference in the lives of their hearers. They longed to connect the practical with the theological side of life.

Living on the Communication Spectrum

The communication spectrum is a personally coined diagram to bring a visual representation of the fruits of this research (see Figure 5.2) as well as answering research question #4. Living in the communication spectrum forces the communicator to come to grips with the reality that people are at different stages in their walk with God; however, “nobody is far from grace” (Peterson 7). No matter where they are, they are never too far from God. Communicating on this spectrum means understanding that the communicator is to engage people where they are but never in a way that “dumbs” down the gospel. Preaching is accomplished when the communicator bears witness to the reality of the gospel in the personality of the pastor. “Truth is communicated through personality” (Dunnam).

Learning to live on the communication spectrum means helping people understand that they cannot live without God. Life does not exist without God. “They

must not forget what it means to be a human being and how to communicate like a human being” (Gilliland 166). The word, according to Hebrews 4:12, is sharper than any two-edged sword, and it penetrates everything with which it comes into contact—culture and people. God’s word can speak to culture because it is not bound by culture, and yet it makes sense because it is able to fulfill the longing of every culture (Whiteman, “Lecture on the Attributes of Culture”).

The Bible is a transforming agent. This transformation takes place when people are engaged by God’s word. When communicators learn how to identify with the culture by building relationships, praying for them, observing and serving the culture, they earn the right to speak to the culture. When the communicator earns the right to speak to the culture, then like Paul in Acts 17, they are able to engage the culture with the very things the culture cannot explain but have acquired a witness. For the philosophers in Paul’s time, the unknown god revealed a mystery of the real God. To the local culture, the disconnect and a skewed view lived out in the things that one of the subjects mentioned as “pornography, neglect, profanity, drug use, serial monogamy, living together, etc.”, might give the communicators something to share.

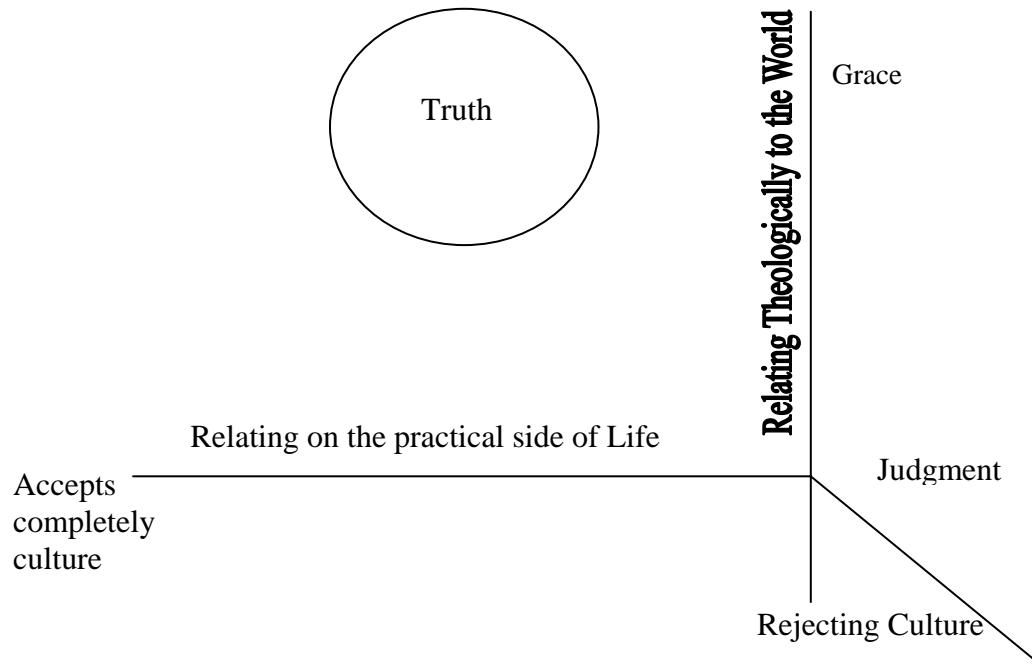


Figure 5.2. Communication spectrum.

A communication/connection problem exists between the biblical communicators and hearers when preachers cannot find their way on the communication spectrum. The merging of the Bible, communicators, and the culture must intersect at a point that brings clarity. When this clarity occurs transforming truth occurs, lives are changed and culture is changed. The building of this bridge show that not only is the church not to remain the same, it is not allowed to remain the same (McManus 87).

Communication Spectrum Explained

The research revealed two categories of how pastors relate in culture. The first is in a practical way—how. One pastor said that “[e]very person is a story—a very interesting story. Find out what makes them laugh and cry. Find and address their real needs.” Another said, “[E]very sermon should conclude with ‘here’s what God wants me

to do.’ We try to show God’s unconditional love to everyone who comes through the doors.” The second is theological—God. One of the subjects said that “Scripture is more true than I ever imagined, true in an existential sort of way. It really is living and active.” This living and active word of God changes and molds people to his image, not mans.

Three categories make up the communication spectrum. The first is truth and refers to the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The second is how communicators relate to the culture in a practical ways, and the third is how communicators relate to the world in a theological way.

Truth. The first category is God—he never changes and is represented by a circle (see Figure 5.3). This circle is constant and is in the middle of the spectrum. The goal of the communicator is to connect people to God. People change when they come into contact with the truth. God does not change. That connection can be in the form of many things. An interviewed subject who preaches out a Lectionary said, “I am constantly amazed at how God’s word always [has] something to say to us in every place and time. I am aware of that as I begin working on a prescribed text from the Revised Common Lectionary.”

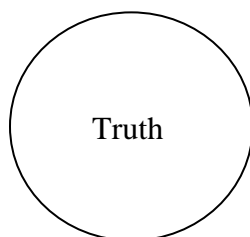


Figure 5.3. Truth.

Relating Theologically

In Figure 5.4, the vertical line on the grid represents the second category of how the communicator interacts with the culture in a theological way. Two sides are represented by the line. Grace, which says anything is acceptable. Judgment, which says nothing is acceptable. Relating theologically is how the pastor has understood life in terms of what Wesley called the quadrilateral of Scripture, experience, tradition, and reason.



Figure 5.4. Theological identification.

The grace side of the model is how man deals with God's grace. Moving too far towards the grace section can lead to an over acceptance of culture and a persons actions. Grace says anything is acceptable and refuses to call sin, sin. This communication makes a mockery out of God because it views his truth as all loving and encompassing. The communicators who stay to far on this side forget (or have not understood) that the nature of holiness requires judgment for sin and accountability for actions. Communicators in this category water down the gospel to fit the ears of the listeners and in an effort to gain an audience, loses them because the communicator has nothing to say to those that they have not already heard.

Judgment is at the bottom of the line. Judgment reveals those who reach a negative conclusion on everything in light of their interpretation of Scripture and their

perceived narrowness of the transforming power of God. Judgment, which holds such a fundamental view of Scripture, views life through a strict interpretation of tradition, Scripture, and experience. Those who judge refuse to allow any room for mistake in light of where people are and why they do what they do. The culture does not want anything to do with them because the only thing they have to offer is criticism and judgment. Likely, they are so immersed in the way they think church ought to be done (tradition) that they see through no other lens than their own interpretation.

Relating Practically

In Figure 5.5, the horizontal line represents the third category. This figure represents how the communicator interacts and identifies with the culture on an everyday practical level; including everything in regards to language, speech, dress, and actions.

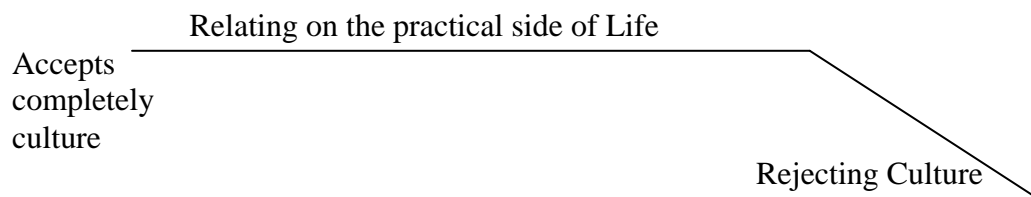


Figure 5.5. Relating practically.

On the left side of the spectrum are the ones who accept completely the culture around them. Those who live on this side of the line usually stay immersed in the culture. Those who are completely immersed in culture look so much like their culture that they have lost their effectiveness. These communicators are the ones who are doing whatever necessary to gain the approval of people to the peril of the message. Not only do they

dress like, act like, and talk like the culture, but there is nothing distinctive about their actions to suggest an inward transformation has occurred. They cannot take a stand on what is right or wrong because they themselves have not taken a stand. In fact, not only is the culture turned off by their charades, but their actions lead to the concepts and sayings that all Christians are hypocrites.

Conversely, the ones on the other side of the line who reject the culture want nothing to do with culture, or so they say. They are slow in understanding the changes of the world. Because they tend to have a lower view of culture, they tend to have a complete disregard for the things that make up the culture. Communicators tend to reject completely the lifestyles, manners, and customs of what make up the culture. As a result, they miss out on opportunities to connect biblical principles to everyday life.

Connecting Life to the Truth

The role of communicators is to live on the communication spectrum and to connect life (people) to truth (God). This connection is called Christ and he is the wisdom of God. As pastors grow and are transformed by God, they have something to say. One pastor in a bilingual church wrote, “[T]he more I read, live and teach it, the better it fits together, the better the New Testament explains the Old, and vice versa.” A pastor in a large upper middle class congregation said, “Transparency in the pulpit has helped me tremendously to relate to those who think the Scriptures don’t relate.”

Relating Incarnationally

The Incarnation is the model for which this communication and transformation occurs. Jesus came to his world and revealed the Father to his creation. That revelation shows the long-suffering nature of Jesus to know and to be known. The revelation also

shows humanity that God is the balance between judgment and grace and acceptance and rejection of culture. This balance is found by the truth. Truth is represented by the circle in the middle of Figure 5.2 (p. 109). Truth transforms, not great rhetoric or programs. Therefore, communicators must learn to connect at the truth level in order for transformation to occur. The Incarnation in humanity brings together life and truth and allows the Church to be the mouth of Jesus as he speaks through them and with them.

The Church as the way. The Church, also known as the body or bride of Christ (Eph. 4), is the visible representation of the bridge God built to reach out to humanity. The Church becomes the manifest presence of God in the world. In the book of Acts, the people of God were known as those who taught and showed people how to walk in “the way” (Acts 16:17; 18:25-26). The way is known as the way of Jesus.

Using Philip as an example (Acts 8:26-40), those who taught others in the way bore witness to the power and majesty of God. One pastor said, “[W]e do not teach the congregation that you should do this or you should do that. We teach the Scriptures and let the Spirit convict.” Conviction takes place, because the Holy Spirit has been moving, not because of anything a person can do. Guilt comes from people.

The Church as the bridge. The Holy Spirit manifests himself in the body of Christ and shows how the message connects and changes lives. “All teaching is teaching of either things or signs, but things are learnt through signs” (Augustine, Saint Augustine 8). The Church shows the way of Christ through the signs it lives out before the world. They become the bridge to show God’s will. This connection reveals the Church to be the purpose of creation. It points people to God by the signs it emits. To be a means of God’s grace is to allow people to come into the fullness of God. Where this connection occurs

may be different for each person or each culture, however, communicators must be praying in order to understand where this connection can be made.

Sidney Greidanus reminds communicators that the goal is not to make the Bible connect; it already does. They are to determine where and how the Bible connects to contemporary realities (157). Being the bridge means learning why people do what they do and answering such questions as “What is intrinsic to that culture?” “What makes up their relationships?” “Why do they talk the way they talk?” “Why do they read the things they read, and why do they do the things they do?”

Culture becomes the language of the people and biblical communicators must learn to decode and decipher what is actually being said. Communicators must learn how to help people hear from God. Just as Isaiah said in 61:1-2a, “Preach the good news,... bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Historical Finding

Throughout this whole research project and upon reflection of the answers of the research population, I could not help to be drawn back to the early Church fathers and church historians to hear their voices still speaking today. They still have something to teach people living today.

The Past Still Speaks

Church fathers from the past still speak about reaching their culture. .

John of Antioch (AD 54). Chrysostom, or “golden mouth,” is known as one of the best orators of his age. Chrysostom spoke directly and passionately. His sermons were still read nearly 150 years after his death. Chrysostom believed that the “importance

of preaching derives from devotion to exegesis of the text, forceful proclamation, and exemplary hermeneutical principle[s]” (Larson 84). He virtually memorized the Scriptures and preached systematically and consecutively through book after book of the Bible (80). Chrysostom shows a commitment to exegetical preaching.

St. Patrick (AD 430). When Patrick was carried off into slavery in AD 430, he set in motion the events that would change all of Europe. He escaped slavery, and by the time he turned forty-six years of age, his love for the people drew him back to Ireland. He reached the people through their own customs, language, arts, and other forms of culture (Hunter, Celtic Way 86). St. Patrick shows the need to engage people in their own world.

Martin Luther (1483-1546). When Luther started the Protestant Reformation in 1517, he did so as a protest against the Catholic Church for basically interpreting Scripture at their leisure and refusing to give it to the common people. He became known as one of the most influential people in the history of the Church for his ability to take the Scriptures to the common person. His secret was that Luther knew how to speak to the culture because he knew what the Bible said about it. He was personally transformed by God and experienced the truth of the Bible.

John Wesley (1703-1791). Wesley understood and studied Scripture so well that if a person misquoted the Scriptures in English, he could correct them in the original language. In Wesley’s own words, he became a man of one book. He read it, digested it, translated, it and grounded his theology in it. “What so ever men know or can know concerning [doctrine] must be drawn from the oracles of God” (qtd. in Collins 8). His commitment to spread scriptural holiness to the common person and in relationships of small groups changed the face of England. He did this by equipping others to reach their

world.

The Word Still Speaks

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). God is not irrelevant because he never changes. God holds all things together, and if he ever ceased to think about his creation, they would cease to exist:

God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. That is because he made us in Christ, holds us together in Christ and has redeemed all mankind by Christ. The reunion and the reconciliation of the world to God has been accomplished in Christ. He sustains and keeps everything. No one can connect God to man, he has already done that. (Pasquarello)

Major Findings

The major findings of the research revealed the freedom of the population sample to walk in the power of the Spirit and to be liberated from the guilt and burden that can sometimes come from living in a secular culture. Freedom is defined as the means that the person would learn how to use the thoughts, customs and desires of the culture to communicate truth. Communicators do not have to help God say anything. He has said it already. The communicators' role is to be faithful to the office of the biblical preacher.

Connecting Versus Relevancy

This project started out to determine how pastors who are in growing churches are relevant to culture. Through research and study, I determined that relevancy is not the goal of the Christian communicator. Relevancy has become indefinable as it relates to how Christians communicate with the lost. Relevancy in culture can change as fast as the Internet changes or as fast as the next car off the lot or clothing designer can design clothes. Relevancy can lose its meaning for one person and gain still another meaning for someone else.

Taking Culture and the Bible Seriously

To connect truth to life, communicators must do two things. First they must take culture seriously. They need to learn how to observe and engage the culture with analysis, critique, confirmation, and confrontation from the perspective of God who longs to speak and connect to every tribe and nation.

Second, they must take the Bible seriously. God is serious when he speaks. When God is speaking to people about life, he is doing so in order to help them make sense out of the senseless. When the Bible is taken seriously, it changes people and thus the direction of history.

Limitations of the Findings

People change and things change. Hearing how pastors deal with one topic versus another may be completely different for each pastor. The taped sermon may have been a message from a pastor who is passionate about something and not indicative of a normal Sunday. Perhaps it was from a sermon from a pastor who really tried to connect but was not necessarily very passionate about the subject and the message did not come out very well.

Listening to just one tape of pastors is not a great barometer of what they do every Sunday to connect to their audience; however, it must be sufficient since church growth specialists say that most visitors will only give the church one opportunity. The research population may have been at the top of their game or at the bottom of it when the tape was heard.

Time and Distance

Time was a factor in preventing me from listening to multiple tapes to get a more

complete view of what pastors do on a regular basis. Not being in the service personally prevented me from being able to see what the audience's response to the sermon was. I could only make a guess on what the mood of the day was based on the response from the responses I heard.

Population Sample

While the method of gathering the list of pastors to be interviewed for the exploratory study was word of mouth, there is a chance that it might have been tainted with preconceived notions of what was meant by "connecting with the culture." The goal of this study was to find out how a pastor exegete's culture in order to present the good news based on "growth" of the church. No doubt other great churches exist and are growing. These churches were not considered.

Finally, the pastor may have had a preconceived idea of the questions that were going to be asked and aimed the conversation towards that end. Although the questions were meant to be vague in nature, the title of the project may have helped to give them insight into what was going to be asked. This insight may have added to answering questions as they thought they were doing, not what the pastors are actually doing.

Unexpected Findings

Both positive and negative unexpected findings were discovered during the research.

Positive Unexpected Findings

The first unexpected finding was in the actual responses to the questions. Of course, I expected to find that since no two pastors are alike, no two answers would be alike, either. Two discoveries made during this project linked to the research. First, not one

pastor answered the question the same. As a result, this not only showed the individuality of the person, but also the uniqueness that God has gifted each person. Second, the real reward came in the indirect heartfelt answers to the questions. The answers revealed the struggles and victories of the pastors and the desire they now have to reach the lost. The interviews were far more valuable than I could have imagined as they have helped me understand how to speak to and exegete my own culture.

Negative Unexpected Findings

The second unexpected finding was the lack of pastors who were willing to participate in the survey. In some cases, I was a bit shocked that they would not or could not take less than thirty minutes to give feedback and insight into what they are doing. While their secretaries were willing to book the appointment, the secretary often would call back within a week and offer an apology to say the pastors were too busy and would not reschedule. As a result the research lasted several months longer than anticipated.

Contributions to Research Methodology

The greatest contribution this study makes to the overall community of faith is to validate the consistency of the historical presentation of the gospel through the means of preaching. The Protestant Reformation was, in essence, getting the word back to the people in a way they could understand. The message of the Bible has not lost its value and preaching has not lost its luster. The preachers who taint the truth through preconceived notions have failed. The message has not failed.

Summary

The historical record speaks for itself. Biblical preachers who have found the balance between being in and being of culture are still making an impact. History has

been changed due to their persistent engagement of the Word of God both in their lives and with whom they are speaking.

Four research questions guided this project that led to a discovery of freedom and connection in an area clouded with suspicion and doubt. Not only are people born into a culture, but wise communicators will learn to embrace and learn the innuendos of culture in order to help connect people to God. Communicators who walk in the Spirit are the ones who will be able to reach their culture.

Today is a day where pulpits see more science, philosophy, polite literature, poetry, and pop psychology than scripture. This is an era where pastors seem content to glean sermon titles from the cover of current periodicals and preach toward events and reason with the world, then to preach Scriptures. This project has shown from a practical and theological perspective why it not only does not have to be this way, but emphatically why it should not be this way. Since the church is called by Jesus, it is not allowed to look like anything but him.

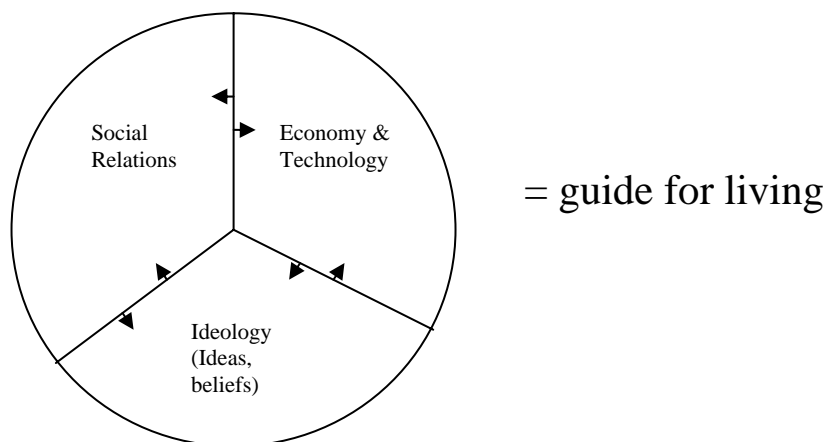
Further Studies

This study has taken into account the lifestyle and mind-set of the church from a pastor's perspective. The research has yielded a great deal of information into the methods and personality of how pastors communicate the gospel, but it is only half of the picture. A follow-up to the study would be to interview the target population (unchurched) and discover in their own words what they think about the church and how they perceive the overall ministry of preaching.

APPENDIX A

How Culture Functions as a System

Parts are all integrated together—a “machine”



Jesus operated in and spoke to all areas. Jesus began in economy as he addressed money more than anything else.

APPENDIX B

Personal Interview First Contact A Check list

Time_____ Date:_____

Name of pastor: _____

Church Name: _____

Church location: _____

○ Brief description of project:

○ May I interview you? Yes/no

Tell me about your church: _____

How do you identify with the culture around your church? _____

How is it different now than when you first began as the pastor of the church? _____

○ How would you like to fill out the questionnaire? Web site/mail

If mail what is your address? _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If web site what is your e-mail address _____

○ How may I get a copy of a prerecorded sermon? _____

○ Would you like the have the results of this project? Mail or web site link.

Overall receptivity to the project (1 low and 10 high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Overall receptivity to the survey (1 low and 10 high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Start of conversation _____

End of conversation _____

APPENDIX C**The Bridge-Builder Survey**

Bridge-Builder Survey

Thank you for your time and willingness to fill out this survey. Your answers are greatly appreciated. I realize that time is important to you, so every effort has been made to facilitate a quick questionnaire. This survey should take approximately 15 minutes, and it consists of two parts. The first part is the context of your ministry, and the second part is an opportunity to tell me about how you minister.

Rest assured that your responses are completely anonymous, and you will not have to disclose any information that you feel uncomfortable with.

[Click to begin survey](#)

Bridge-Builder Survey

Part 1: Ministry Context

- [1] Years at Current Church:
- [2] Current Denomination:
- Other Denomination:
- [3] Current Church Context:
- [4] Income Class:
- [5] Ethnicity:
- Ethnicity Blend:
- Other Ethnicity:
- [6] Gender:
- [7] Age Range:

[Continue >](#)

Bridge-Builder Survey

Part 2: Ministry Approach

- [1] People read the Bible in different ways. How do you approach the text so that you are able to understand it in its context?

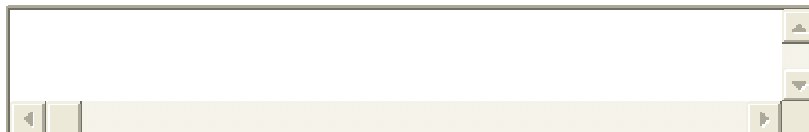
- [2] How has your understanding of Scripture changed since you began preaching?

- [3] Some studies show that people stay away from church because they think the church is not relevant to their lives. Do you recognize this as an issue, and how do you stay current with your congregation's lives?

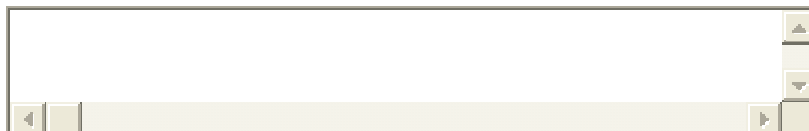
- [4] One theory of ministry is that the pastor must understand Scripture and his or her people in order to bring the two together. Since most pastors are trained to interpret Scripture, what advice would you give new pastors about ways to get to know their congregation?

- [5] In the ministry of Jesus, we find examples of how he affirmed people's culture, but we also find instances of Jesus confronting the categories that people have of defining reality. Can you give me an example of something you saw in your congregation that needed to be confronted with biblical teaching?

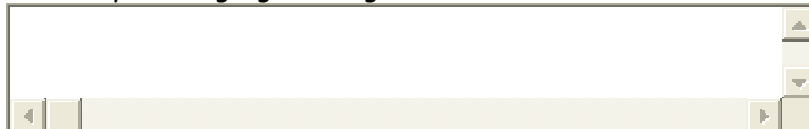
- [6] Some people say that America, either historically or currently, is a Christian nation. Do you find that the newcomers in your congregation exhibit these Christian values, or do you find yourself using Scripture to correct their values or improve on them?



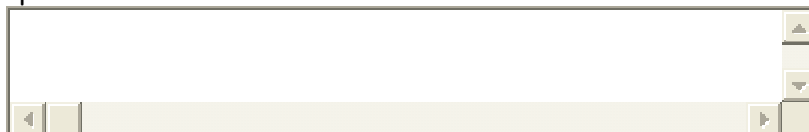
- [7] If you pastored more than one church, did you find that the views and values of the congregations were different? If so, how?



- [8] What is your congregation's greatest need?



- [9] What is your community's greatest need, and how can the church speak to that need?



Continue >

Bridge-Builder Survey

Your answers have been sent. Again, thank you for your time. These questions will allow me to understand the methods that you use to read your culture.

Would you like to know when the results are posted on this Web site? If yes, please leave your e-mail address so we may contact you.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Email Address:

Add Email

If you have any questions you may contact me, [Devon Smith](#)

Thank you and God Bless

If e-mail was clicked yes, and they submitted an e-mail address, then they were linked to this screen.

Bridge-Builder Survey

Thank You.

E-mail Added.

APPENDIX D

Bridge-Builder Pretest

How long did it take you to take the test? _____

Was the Web site easy to navigate? (1 low and 10 high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Did the questions make sense to you? (1 low and 10 high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Were the Questions difficult to answer? (1 low and 10 high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If so Why:

Where you able to discern what was asked in relation to how a pastor reads and communicates to culture? (1 low and 10 high)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Was it hard to understand how to send your response? _____

If so, Why?

Any suggestion:

APPENDIX E

Sermon Critic

Preacher: _____ Title of Sermon: _____

Date preached: _____ Location: _____

Passage: _____ VideoTape/ AudioTape

How long: _____ Type of Sermon: _____

Did it connect? Yes/No

Was it obvious it connected with the audience? Yes/No

How or how not _____

Notable features of sermon: _____

How did the sermon end? _____

Was there a bridge built between the message and the culture? Yes/No

Explain _____

Other: _____

APPENDIX F

List of Churches Contacted

Church	Location	Denomination	Church type	Church Size
Christ Church of Flagstaff	Flagstaff, AZ	Nondenominational	City	700
Denver 1st Church	Denver, CO	Nazarene	Suburban	2109
Eastern Hills Wesleyan	Williamsville, NY	Wesleyan	Suburban	3000
Exciting Southside Baptist	Martin, TN	Baptist	Rural	400
Foothills Bible Church	Littleton, CO	Nondenominational	Suburban	2000
Ginghamsburg Church	Tipp City, OH	UMC	Suburban	2400
Here's Life Inner City	New York, NY	Nondenominational	Inner City	
Hoffmantown	Albuquerque, NM	Southern Baptist	City	2000
Lookout Mountain Com.	Golden, CO	Presbyterian	Suburban	1000
New Creation	Cedar Rapids, IA	UMC	City	250-300
Northwood Church	Keller, TX	Baptist	Suburban	1300
Pinellas Park WC	Pinellas Park, FL	Wesleyan	Suburban	550
Rio Vista	Albuquerque, NM	Nazarene	City	200
Sandia Presbyterian	Albuquerque, NM	Presbyterian	City	1200
Scottsdale Bible Church	Scottsdale, AZ	Nondenominational	Suburban	8000
Trinity Lutheran Church	Monroeville, OH	Lutheran ELCA	Rural	70
Verde Valley Christian	Cottonwood, AZ	Christian Church	City	400
Impact Houston	Houston, TX	Non-denominational	Inner City	600

APPENDIX G

E-Mail Letter to Pastors

Dear Pastor,

Thank you for your time in taking this survey. I am indebted to you.

Here is the address for the Web site.

<http://www.westwindchurch.org/bridgebuilder/survey.php> Just click and you are ready to go. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes. At the end, there is a chance for you to respond whether or not you are interested in the results.

There is no right or wrong answer. Just answer the first things that come to your mind and remember this is an effort to understand how you learn how to identify and communicate with your people.

May God continue to bless you as you do his will.

Devon Smith
DMIN Candidate, Asbury Theological Seminary.

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