

Rod Casey

Homiletical Hack

Meet Jim Engel

PARS disease is a reality for communicators. It's a reason we think that most resignations take place on Monday mornings. And if that's not verifiable, most of us can identify with the temptation. Also known as the Monday morning blues, **post adrenaline rush syndrome (PARS)** is a painful infirmity of the soul. A PARS diagnosis robs us of the joy we wish we felt after weeks of sermon preparation, a creative element that engaged the congregation's right brain hemisphere, and a sermon that we confidently assumed to be persuasive. The message answered the four developmental questions: Why should they care? What assertion is the text proposing? What barrier/s is keeping them from “buying” it? What is the next step/s to take if they do? While the sermon should have persuaded them to Christ-iconic transformation in this area of their lives. Instead, a “ho hum, heard it all before” vibe seemed thick in the room. Even our spouse yawned when we asked them their feedback. “Jesus loves me this I know, but the congregation hates me so” is the preacher’s too familiar refrain. Is there a homiletical hack to help the church communicator inflicted with this dis-ease? Is there a homiletic physician to offer treatment for those of us afflicted by this disorder?

There is. Meet Dr. James F. Engel. He’s not a medical doctor, but a thinker and contributor in the areas of communication and missiology. Jim has his PhD in marketing and taught for 18 years at Wheaton College and then Eastern College after that. The good doctor is a pioneer in Consumer Behavior and co-authored a book by that same name. His “Engel Scale” is at the of intersection

of marketing, missiology, and communication. Though he died in 2016, imagine a consultation with him regarding your PARS diagnosis.

Dr. Engel sits down in the chair across from you and puts his feet up on the corner of your desk. He then invites you to take three deep breaths. Once you've relaxed, he asks you how you feel about yesterday's message? After you're done ranting how little your hard work at preaching matters, he asks if he can draw on your whiteboard across the room where he picks up the wide-tipped, dry erase marker from the tray and draws a rough drawing that resembles a poorly drawn football field.

Next, he draws hash marks across the same line with a 50-yard line down the middle and minus eight on the far left and a plus eight on the far right. Then, minus six, plus six, minus four, plus four, minus two, plus two correspondingly until it looks like this from left to right.



He names the hash marks: unaware, apathetic, informed, interested, convinced, new convert, maturing, et cetera, teaching. Dr. Engel sits back down and explains to you the contribution he and his academic peers made to the missionary enterprise that resulted in encouraging them in their seemingly fruitless labor among the unreached people, groups of the world who held worldviews so very different from theirs. Success is not to be understood only in the listener adopting the assertion that you and the biblical author made in yesterday's sermon. If they lowered even one defense, you ought to consider that a win. Then he continues, Baseball games

are won a base at a time. A bunt and a single and an occasional steal get the job done and are the warp and woof of baseball lore.

How Dr. Jim describes the stages is not the point, the evolving sequence that happens when we finally “buy” a principle, precept or practices of a kingdom ethic that we previously rejected or ignored is the point. While the Engel Scale’s application is specific to the evangelistic process, it has value when considering any pericope’s big idea, central truth or subject complement statement. minus eight: no awareness. minus seven: aware, minus six: interested. minus five: aware of the basic facts. minus four: grasp its relevance. minus three: awareness of need. minus two: want to. minus one: repentance and faith, zero: buy it, persuaded, convinced, or allegiance. Plus one: reflect on it. Plus two: discuss it. Plus three: schedule it. Plus four: share it with others. Dr. Engel wants you to know that this is a modified version of his original presentation as presented in his published work, but that this adaptation has merit for your preaching repertoire. If you attempted to argue that you don't have to make the Bible relevant, it already is; then Dr. Engel will prescribe the following pills for you to take. He's made them chewable, so you can digest them slowly:

Acts 13:43

... many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and *urged* them to continue in the grace of God.

Acts 17:25-27

And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the

boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

Acts 26:17b-18

I am sending you to them to *open* their eyes and *turn* them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may *receive* forgiveness

II Corinthians 5:11

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to *persuade* others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.

The kind of persuasiveness that Paul rejects is the kind, the Sophists peddled which were words without substance and arguments made of oratorical beauty only. Simply put, a frame without a picture.

With this said, Dr. Engel stands to his feet and puts the prescriptions on the edge of your desk. He leans forward on both hands and with a look that's like the best grandpa ever, he says, "I know it's hard to preach each week. It's obvious that you care deeply about the spiritual growth in Christ like behavior of your people. But remember they're His people, not yours. You're the under shepherd. He's the Good Shepherd. He's the Master Teacher. You're the apprentice. He continues, "Transformation takes time. Metamorphosis is painstakingly tortoise like. Stay at it. Don't stop. Keep urging, learn it, live it, teach it. Your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

"Thank you, I think I see things clearer now," you mutter. "I needed that. It's a homiletical hack I can make good use of. I'm starting to feel better already. It was nice to meet you, Jim Engel.

James F. Engel and Hugo Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest? A Communication Strategy for the Church and World Evangelization, Contemporary evangelical perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

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“The Preacher as Persuader.” *Walvoord: A Tribute*. Edited by Donald K. Campbell. Chicago: Moody Press, 1982. Pp. 289-99.

“On Eloquence,” Sermon by John Piper. *Desiring God*.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-the-place-of-eloquence-in-christian-preaching>

*Rod is the director of the Theological Education Initiative in central Missouri, a study center providing theological resources for area church and campus leaders. He has taught preaching at both Bethel (St. Paul) and A.W. Tozer Theological Seminaries, as well as for rightonmission.org.