

LEARNER-SENSITIVE PREACHING: ENHANCING THE  
CLARITY AND RELEVANCE OF SERMONS  
FOR AN EMERGING GENERATION

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A Doctoral Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Talbot School of Theology  
Biola University

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

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by  
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Personal Statement

As an Associate Pastor of a growing church in the college community of Columbia, Missouri, I cared deeply about communicating the ageless truths of Scripture in as compelling a way as possible to an ever-increasing number of people in this generation who have not heard them. Now, as the Director of the “Theological Education Initiative” that provides resources for next generation church and campus leaders the need remains. The practice of preaching remains a key component in the process of spiritual maturity. Growing believers and pre-Christians need messages that are clear in their meaning and relevant to their lives. The oral/aural format that is the homiletical standard is not sufficient for capturing the attention *of* and communicating God’s truth *to* an increasingly post-modern, media-saturated culture. I believe that employing creative teaching tools that employ multi-sensory ministry can enhance the clarity and relevance of a preacher's message, thus increasing spiritual transformation in adults. These tools take into consideration the learning styles of adults. These tools engage the mind and imagination. The purpose of this doctoral project is to give preachers a new perspective on the potential of messages to change lives in this generation and the practical steps to get it done.

Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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I'm in love with the same girl I kissed first. I've known her since I was fourteen. I still can't believe she's not only my wife, but also my best friend. Julie and my daughters, Miriam and Hannah, have been incredibly supportive throughout this long ordeal. When I suffered from "typogenic fever" they reminded me to get back to work. I'm blessed with in-laws and siblings who cheer me on in my life pursuits.

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Woodcrest Chapel has been the laboratory for discovering and implementing the

concepts proposed in this project. My thanks to everyone who has prayed for me, encouraged me and protected my time throughout this D.Min. endeavor. Pieter Van Waarde and Chris Mitchell are the embodiment of these principles. Much of what these pages contain is the result of observing them. They are incredible communicators and I am privileged to be considered a partner in their ministry. Beth Bramstedt is the “glue” that keeps us from tearing apart at the seams. That was true for this project as well. Her editing made this a better paper. I’m grateful to the staff for their love. I’m especially thankful to the members of the CFT, Maris, Bill, Tina and Kathy for enduring my ravings on the need for experiential discipleship and for covering my work while I’ve been out. I am indebted to the board of directors for their constant support. Woodcrest members, Chris Fender and Joel Poor, provided needed assistance with the research conducted. They were quite patient with this “statistically-challenged” writer.

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Few know the contribution that Joe Schumacher makes to the kingdom. He “gets the learner-sensitive thing” like few do and sacrifices a lot to make it a reality. His failure is to realize how much he inspires the rest of us to be faithful to our calling.

Finally, my thanks to Hy-Vee Diner for the #2, over medium with sausage, white toast and coffee. It provides a quality experiential environment for me to hang with my friends. Don, Masood and Randy (when he can come) know just what I mean.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE DOCTORAL PROJECT

Preaching has been a ministry standard used by church leaders to disciple those entrusted to their care. As early in biblical history as the day that Ezra stood and read the Torah to the returning exiles of Israel (Ezra 8-9), ministers have stood and proclaimed the "Word of God" to those willing to hear. Peter reminded his readers that it was through the "eternal, living word of God (that)...was preached to you" that their new life in Christ had come to them (I Peter 1:23-25). As a mentor, the Apostle Paul encouraged his young friend Timothy to "preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage- with patience and careful instruction" (II Timothy 4:2).

Church leaders, though sometimes questioning its effectiveness, should continue to use preaching as an instrument in the discipling of adults. The sermon preached should be clear. The listener should understand its meaning. It should be the preacher's attempt to have the hearer say, "I know what this means." Also, the messages preached should be relevant. They should matter to the hearers. The preacher should work hard to give a message that gives maximum opportunity for the hearer to say, "I 'buy it' and I know how this applies to my life." Clear and relevant messages give the disciple the best chance of living out the admonition of James 1:22. It is a message to obey, not just to be heard.

Achieving clarity and relevance in a sermon can be a difficult task, particularly if we consider the various learning needs of adults. Educational and psychological studies

validate that adult learning preferences are diverse. Research in learning preferences have been considered for the Christian Education and Children's Ministry departments, but the recognition of these for the adult learner has, for the most part, failed to impact the world of preaching. On this subject, Ralph and Gregg Lewis write:

But often homiletics holds rigidly to the mistaken notion that if we just preach the Word, people will hear and lives will be changed. Not necessarily true. Yes, people need to hear the words we preach. Yet couldn't our preaching be more effective, more educationally sound, if we could get our listeners not only to hear, but also to see and do what we're talking about?<sup>1</sup>

Preachers desiring to communicate with an emerging generation will do well to give attention to factors that govern adult learning.

The learning needs of adults are also affected by certain cultural realities. These external factors that are impacting adults today must be considered to communicate clearly and relevantly to an emerging generation. One example is that of postmodern philosophy. Graham Johnston writes concerning the influence of postmodernism on preaching, "What proved effective in communicating the gospel to a modern audience may not work in a postmodern culture."<sup>2</sup> Postmodern influence on adult learning needs must be considered in order to communicate clearly and relevantly to contemporary adults.

Consideration of cultural factors influencing adults should include the world of

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1989), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Graham M. Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 18.

technology. "Surfing" the web, satellite communication, and a steady diet of television has assuredly forced change in the way the congregations receive the messages they hear at church. Television viewing has undoubtedly impacted the attention span of adults.<sup>3</sup> What are the implications of this for the standard thirty-minute Sunday morning homily? It seems irresponsible for church leaders, and particularly preachers, who care deeply about the spiritual growth of disciples to ignore the cultural factors that affect the learning needs of their constituents.

However, adapting homiletic methodology for the reasons above is not without its risks or its critics. Some argue that considering these influences will create a strategy that "waters down" the message and unnecessarily accommodates the culture at a loss to the "hard truth" that people so desperately need to hear. However, this reasoning is misguided. The gospel's power is in the message not in the medium. The challenge is to consider what mediums of culture may be employed by church leaders to communicate the life-changing message of God while preserving the message that remains changeless.

This is a healthy tension that responsible church communicators must face no matter how difficult the task. Exegeting Scripture and exegeting culture are equally essential. Educator Perry Downs agrees when he writes, "Competent Christian education requires theological insight and understanding people both psychologically and

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<sup>3</sup> Johnston, 58.

culturally."<sup>4</sup>

These things being true, faithful preachers must consider how the development and delivery of sermons will need to be altered in order to enhance the sermon's clarity and relevance for a generation whose learning needs have been impacted by these cultural realities. The task may not be easy, but the potential life change in disciples makes the effort worthwhile.

#### The Statement of the Problem

Clear and relevant messages are a key component in the spiritual maturing of adults. Preaching has a long history in the process of growing disciples to full maturity. However, in light of the many changes in contemporary society, knowing how to connect Scripture to life is not easily accomplished. Directly stated the problem is this: Preachers lack knowledge and the skills necessary to produce clear and relevant messages for adults whose learning expectations and the cultural factors influencing them are different from the generation of people preachers were trained to persuade.

Preachers reading this manuscript may argue that they this is not the case; that they know their people and how best to communicate to them. This reasoning, even if true, fails to account for the hearers who exist outside of the church walls and are in need of its life-changing message. Preaching that appeals only to those within the walls of that

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<sup>4</sup> Perry G. Downs, *Teaching for Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 29.

church is preaching to a too narrowly defined context of hearers.<sup>5</sup> Biblical preaching should reach into the marketplace of ideas. Its influence should be felt in the community. The truth of its message will have bearing on the culture in which it exists. It must be truth that is lived, not merely known. Failing to understand adult learning needs and the cultural factors influencing them results in a homiletic that is inadequate for reaching the next generation in the marketplace in which they live and discipling them into full maturity.

Too often, preachers fail to motivate sermon hearers to engage with the content being preached. The hearers are conflicted with the crises that they are experiencing in twenty first century life, while the preacher is declaring the virtues of first century admonitions. Unless the hearers can connect the virtues extolled to the crisis they are experiencing they will not engage with the content shared, no matter how true it is.

Adults need the teaching that biblical messages provide in order to grow spiritually. Speech communication should not be sacrificed on the altar of image-rich forms. Training the mind is essential for Christian maturity.<sup>6</sup> And, the world of words is essential for doing so. Our Lord exhorted, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). A truth-based belief system demands that preachers commit to the development of the disciples' minds that

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<sup>5</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1997), 21-22.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

biblical preaching methodology provides. Preaching truth in a manner consistent with the principles of biblical preaching must continue to be a “front burner” issue for preaching to an emerging generation of adult learners. But properly understood, ‘preaching truth’ (cognitive learning) and imagination are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The mere giving of information is not enough. It is the work of preachers to work hard at giving the propositions meaning and application in as persuasive a way as possible. While they are utterly dependent upon the Spirit of God for life change, this reality does not negate their responsibility to diligently study and apply the best of available resources to motivate Christlikeness. These resources include tools that appeal to more than just the mind, but to the imaginations and emotions of the hearers as well.

The vast majority of preaching is oral/auditory. The effectiveness of this format when used exclusively may be questioned in any generation, but it is especially suspect in the emerging one. A local church pastor, David Fisher, states, "Traditional preaching-- logical, linear, rational and monological discourse-- does not work well in the land of 'Babel' (a land gutted with words). Most homiletic techniques seem ill-suited for this twenty-first<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>7</sup> Research suggests that at best only about 35% of what’s taught in a typical sermon is retained; the rest is lost almost immediately.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> David Fisher, "Biblical Preaching in Babel," *Pastoral Integrity Journal* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 15.

<sup>8</sup> David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 211.

Homiletic education has left many pastors unprepared to develop messages that capture and keep the attention of contemporary adults for the length of the sermon. News bites run along the bottom of television screens that are already split in half. Television actors are "talking" faster than they used to talk. Naturally, people speak at the rate of about a 150 words per minute.<sup>9</sup> The actors of the TV show "Moonlighting" took the speed of dialogue to an unprecedented 228 words per minute back in the 1980s. The sitcom "Gilmore Girls", airing on the WB television network, was timed at no less than 300 words per minute. These examples beg the question, "What is the impact of this contemporary phenomenon on an emerging generation of listeners to sermons on any given Sunday morning at church?"

Writing on the value of using journalistic techniques in preaching to increase interest, authors Galli and Larson state, "Preachers who have studied homiletics in seminary quickly find out once in the church pulpit that homiletical and hermeneutical precision does not necessarily make for captivating sermons."<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly there is a lack of knowledge about the learning needs of adults that, if known, would motivate preachers to move beyond the lecture method of sermon delivery.

Another problem that preachers face is a lack of awareness of the culture of their audience. The demands of a ministry schedule and the desire to "avoid evil" seems to

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<sup>9</sup> Josh Mankiewicz, "Speed TV," *Dateline NBC, New York* (Livingston, NJ: Burrelle's Information Services, May 14, 2003), 18-22.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching That Connects* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 11.

mandate isolation and ignorance of society's conversations. Inadvertently, preachers slip into a subculture of "Christianese". Meanwhile, they become less capable of communicating to the society that they say they desire to reach.

Many cultural factors have impacted the learning expectations of adults. Postmodern philosophy, technology and experience-oriented environments are three that preachers may fail to understand. Such misunderstanding leads to a diminished impact on the learning and growth of contemporary adults.

Postmodernism is an influence that must be reckoned with by preachers wanting to impact this generation. The dismantling of absolute truth, the renewed emphasis on spirituality and the value of "tolerance" are three of its effects on sermon hearers.

Technology has made information easily accessible. The speed at which people can get answers is significantly less than a generation ago. Colors, visuals, graphs and movement are the order of the day in most every information venue. The impact of technology on an emerging generation of adult learners must not be neglected.

Environments today are experience-oriented. Restaurants are thematic, not just dining facilities. From food to haircuts, customer services are multi-sensory and thematic. The Rainforest Café (restaurant), Sports Clips (hair salon) and Dave & Buster's (video games) are a few examples. The expectation of adults for purchases goes beyond the quality of the commodity. It now includes expectations regarding the experience received while buying it. Warning businesses that refuse to accept this cultural reality, authors Pine and Gilmore in their book *The Experience Economy* write, "Those businesses that relegate themselves to the diminishing world of goods and services will

be rendered irrelevant. To avoid this fate, you (customer service providers) must learn to stage a rich, compelling experience."<sup>11</sup> Customer service means total customer satisfaction for many company strategies. The church is not excluded from the expectations that these environments create for the attendees of their weekend services. Church leaders who ignore them may well be “rendered irrelevant” to the culture outside of its four walls. This possibility is unacceptable for evangelical church leaders.

Knowledge of the impact of the cultural reality alone is not sufficient. A remedy will include skills necessary for developing and delivering messages with enhanced clarity and relevance.

Homiletics has concentrated its efforts in the preferences of Western tradition. That tradition has reveled in the world of "words, speech, analysis, theory, theology, abstraction, arguments and propositions."<sup>12</sup> Assuming that cultural factors warrant, new competencies will be required to communicate effectively to adult learners. These competencies will force church communicators to go beyond a literary world and embrace the world of the audiovisual as well. David Buttrick makes this case:

We preach at a time when one cultural epoch seems to be crumbling and new forms of social understanding are forming; we preach “between the ages”. In such a moment, preaching will have to disassociate the gospel from previous cultural understandings and recast faith in new thought forms.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis and Lewis, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Buttrick, 32.

But how is this accomplished? What skills will need to be employed to "recast faith" for an emerging generation of adult learners?

The demand for enhancing culturally-sensitive language in sermons far exceeds what most church communicators can conceive. The idea of competing with Disney entertainment or Madison Avenue advertising is unrealistic at best; therefore, the "do what we've always done" will suffice. But, it will not suffice. Not if preachers are committed to communicating to an increasingly unchurched population. "Doing what we've always done" will not reach an emerging generation. It will not communicate a clear and relevant message.

The challenge for the preacher who hopes to enhance a message's clarity and relevance may be the need for a new process. Yet, a new process will mean change, and change is seldom easy. The problems associated with necessary change are many and varied, but the option of spiritual stagnation is simply unacceptable.

#### The Need for the Project

It is the purpose of this project to enhance the clarity and relevance of messages by teaching church communicators three things: an understanding of the core learning needs of adults, an awareness of the cultural factors that are shaping these learning needs, and what is needed to preach effectively to this generation of disciples. Preachers with these insights and skills will better serve the congregation they are called to lead. This section of the introduction will consist of a series of three if/then statements to show the need for this project.

First, if preachers understand the way that hearers of their messages best process information, then they will better serve their hearers with methods that will enhance the clarity and relevance of their sermons. In order to do so, preachers must understand the need for their communication to appeal to the members of their congregation holistically.

The souls of men and women are made up of mind, emotions and will. The appeal of a sermon to only one of these parts is incomplete. Cognitive communication is the standard for most homileticians. Others understand the need to appeal to behavior (the will). And, a few may embrace the affective (emotional) need of learners effectively. But, sermons for an emerging generation should appeal to all three parts.

The motives that govern behavior are usually emotional. Regardless of what people believe, what they feel is more important to decision-making than what they think. Even if a learner knows the meaning of what is preached and the intended behavior, she/he may still fail to live out the truth because he does not buy it on an affective level. The preacher who fails to address the affective/emotional barriers hindering application has failed to persuade.

Preachers should also understand that sermon hearers also have differences in the ways they like to receive information; i.e., their learning modality. By understanding the hearers learning preferences the preacher can design methods that accommodate their learners for the purpose of enhancing their learning. These learning preferences include learning by doing, seeing, touching, speaking, as well as by hearing. The wise communicator will recognize these diverse learning styles and ask about the implications.

The individual whose learning preference is by doing (kinesthetic) may be less

motivated to listen if the appeal of the sermon is only to knowledge. The person whose learning preference is by touch (tactile) needs something in his/her hands to process the information given. The visual learner desires pictures, so the sermon without stories and pictures will fall short of its intended outcome.<sup>14</sup> Preachers need practical teaching on these learning preferences in order to heighten the impact of their messages.

Second, if preachers learn the cultural factors that affect the learning needs of adults, then that awareness will heighten their sensitivity to what keeps adults from hearing a messages' meaning and applying it to life. Postmodernism, technology and experiential environments are three factors that impact the way adults learn. Preachers need a foundational understanding of the impact of these factors on their constituents.

In his book *Postmodern Times*, Gene Veith writes, "This emerging worldview challenges Christianity in different ways from the old modernism. Postmodern Christians will have to confront the views of postmodern non-Christians."<sup>15</sup> Clearly postmodernism's impact cannot be ignored. Faithful preachers will seek to understand its implications on the preaching process.

Television and technology are another cultural reality whose influence on adult learning cannot be ignored. The words of author and homiletician Calvin Miller should be noted: "Pulpit language must now be done in 'television words.' Only in this

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis and Lewis, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Gene E. Veith Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 29.

vernacular can the sermon shed its yesteryear image."<sup>16</sup> Communication today is more than multi-sensory; it is also multi-layered with multiple messages and images being available to peruse at once. Electronic media is the language of the culture, and to ignore it is a death sentence for communicating a Biblical message.<sup>17</sup>

Experiences are also the order of the day. The "economy" of our nation is becoming significantly more experiential.<sup>18</sup> For example, a child's birthday party experience can be bought at a local McDonald's or a Chuck E. Cheese restaurant. Dining out is no longer only about the quality of the food, it is also about the sights and sounds of the environment (e.g., The Rainforest Café). The message of the church is certainly more important than the choice of a restaurant. Author Timothy Turner comments on the implication for message delivery saying, "Often we must begin (the sermon) on the feeling and experience level in order to involve an entire generation of persons for whom experience is the acid test."<sup>19</sup> The cultural influence of an entertainment/experience "economy" must be reckoned with by today's church communicator.

Third, if preachers learn how to develop and deliver sermons that accommodate the learning needs of adults, then the clarity and relevance of their messages will be

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<sup>16</sup> Calvin Miller, *Marketplace Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 37.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Slaughter, *Out on the Edge: A Wake-Up Call for Church Leaders on the Edge of the Media Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 63.

<sup>18</sup> Pine and Gilmore, 11-15.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy A. Turner, *Preaching to Programmed People* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995), 97.

enhanced. Preachers, however, need more than theory about adult learning needs and the cultural influences affecting them. They need skills to employ that accommodate the impact of this theory on the process of message development and delivery. The skills needed are a homiletic methodology that includes multi-sensory methods.

Implementation of this methodology assumes a preacher who is willing and confidence philosophically as to its value.

How can the strengths of the homiletical process be protected while accommodating the expectations of learner sensitivity? This is a challenging assignment. This work seeks to answer this question and provide the necessary tools for willing preachers.

#### The Rationale for the Project

Having immature and theologically illiterate disciples is an unacceptable condition for biblical preachers. The familiar admonition of the Apostle Paul "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that...(they) become mature" is the benchmark to strive to achieve (Ephesians 4:11-13). Research by the Barna Group revealed the unacceptable state of discipleship in the church. Below are a few of the startling statistics:<sup>20</sup>

1. A minority of adult and teen believers contends that absolute moral truth

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<sup>20</sup> George Barna, "Discipleship Insights Revealed in New Book by George Barna" *Barna Research Online*, Nov. 2002. [magazine on-line]; accessed 11 Dec. 2002. Available from <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=76&Reference=D>.

exists.

2. Less than one out of every ten believers possesses a biblical worldview as the basis for his/her decision-making or behavior.
3. When given thirteen basic teachings from the Bible, only 1% of adult believers firmly embraced all thirteen as being biblical perspectives.

Barna concludes these facts by saying, "Our surveys among pastors showed that they dismissed such views as excuses and as inaccurate, but the bottom line remains unchanged: most Christians are simply not making progress in their personal spiritual development."<sup>21</sup> While the solutions to this problem will be many and varied, clear and relevant preaching can help. This project seeks to help the preacher enhance the clarity and relevance of messages preached by providing an understanding of adult learning needs, the cultural factors that are influencing them and a set of skills to produce messages sensitive to the understanding gained. Preachers taught these needs, factors and skills have an advantage in maturing the next generation of disciples.

Biblical preaching inherently focuses on the text preached—and this is right and good. Preaching for the emerging church, however, must give increased attention to how the message is heard by the learners. This means that preachers must understand the learning needs of the adults to whom they are seeking to communicate.

Much has been done in secular and Christian education to understand how people learn; however, little has been applied to the field of homiletics. One area of concern for

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

this project is to help make that application. Teaching preachers how people use various senses to process information is an application this project can address. Teaching preachers how the two hemispheres of the brain process information received will enhance their ability to create clear and relevant messages. An understanding of universal adult learning needs can add a dimension to the preacher's repertoire of effectiveness. Adult learners want information "they can use now. They want connections to everyday life."<sup>22</sup> These explanations are a contribution that this project seeks to make.

Preachers can learn how certain cultural factors are impacting the needs of adults to whom they are ministering. Postmodern philosophy, technology and experiential environmental offerings should not be ignored. This project seeks to contribute to preachers who hope to enhance the clarity and relevance of their sermons by providing a basic description of these cultural factors.

Finally, this project seeks to address the issue that naturally arises from an understanding of adult learning needs and the impact of cultural factors on them. The issue is how to actually prepare and preach messages that are sensitive to the needs and factors learned. This project will address how the process of message development and delivery happens as a result of what is learned.

The expositor must continue to care deeply about an accurate interpretation of the central truth being taught. Biblical faithfulness cannot be compromised in the pursuit of

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learner sensitivity. Integrity to the text must be accompanied by a love for the learner and a passion to communicate the message in as compelling and persuasive a way as possible.

Undoubtedly, this process will result in an increased use of multi-sensory teaching methods. Creative tools like visual aids, personal stories, "man on the street" interviews, group discussions, film clips and music hits from pop culture are a few of the potential offerings of learner-sensitive sermons. These offerings appropriately accommodate the learning expectations of an emerging generation and heighten the potential for spiritual growth. The desired result of training communicators in the art of learner-sensitive preaching is more than enhanced clarity and relevance. Ultimately, it is the transformation of the beliefs, values and behaviors of the hearers and the accompanying quality of life God desires that makes the effort rewarding.

### Necessary Definitions for the Project

#### **Biblical Preaching**

The assertion of a proposition or central truth that is consistent with an evangelical theology and the homiletic methodology set forth by Haddon Robinson in his book, *Biblical Preaching*.

#### **Central Truth**

The main idea of a sermon, composed of a subject and a complement. The

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<sup>22</sup> Roberta Hestenes, "Teaching So Adults Listen" *Leadership* XVIII, no. 2

subject answers the question, "What are we talking about?" The complement answers the question, "What are we saying about what we are talking about?"<sup>23</sup>

### **Christian Formation**

The process by which the Holy Spirit, in cooperation with a willing individual, transforms the heart and behavior of the individual to the character qualities of Christ.

### **Culture**

The totality of events, stories, images, celebrities, values and behaviors that characterize the society in which a group of people live.

### **Emerging Generation**

This term describes a group of people who can generally be characterized as frustrated by society's answers for meaning, culturally aware, distrustful of the institutional church and spiritually curious. Whether they are already in church, returning to church, or coming to church for the first time, these church attendees are unlikely to give credibility to the preacher until it has been earned. Learner-sensitivity goes a long way to gain the credibility needed to persuade the emerging generation.

### **Learner-Sensitive Preaching**

The use of multi-sensory methods to assist the homiletic methodology of "biblical

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(Spring 1996): 102.

<sup>23</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*. 2<sup>d</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 41-43.

preaching” for the purpose of engaging the learning needs and expectations of hearers in an effort to persuade them to adopt the beliefs and practices of the message presented.

### **Multi-sensory Methods**

Teaching methods that engage a variety of the five senses, utilizing technology, creative arts and other interactive teaching tools.

### **Sensitive**

Limiting personal freedom in order to not unnecessarily offend the preferences of those whom God has called one to serve by seeking to communicate with them in language consistent with their cultural understanding.

### **Sermon Hearers**

Adult learners who attend a church group meeting that includes a sermon for the purpose of Christian formation.

### **Research Methodology for the Project**

The research for this project will seek to validate a correlation between growth in Christlikeness, the satisfaction of weekend service attendees and a church's use of learner-sensitive preaching principles and methods (as defined by this project). This writer will seek to identify churches of various affiliations in multiple locations. One half of the churches surveyed are not users of learner-sensitive methods in their weekend services and the other half are frequent users of learner-sensitive methods in their weekend services.

Each church will be sent thirty surveys asking respondents to give their opinions on issues relevant to this topic. Each survey will consist of thirty questions. The survey will seek to measure two things. The first part of the survey will measure Christ-likeness. The second part of the survey will seek to measure congregational satisfaction with the weekend services.

The research will be limited to evangelical churches, the majority of which are Baptist in doctrine.

#### The Intended Outcome for the Project

The writer's purpose is to produce a book manuscript to be published at a later date. The project format will include fictional examples, illustrations and appropriate Scriptures. The manuscript will be presented in an informal, readable and popular style. By writing in this manner it is hoped that the reader can identify with the tensions of others and learn helpful principles while doing so.

This material may also be developed into a workshop format for presentation to church leaders in an appropriate venue. The intended outcome for this project is to assist church leaders who are asking how they can increase the impact of their preaching in the primary discipleship environment of most churches, the weekend service.

A potential benefit for the reader of this project is that the congregation becomes more engaged in the truths that the preacher is presenting. People who are actively engaged in the presentation are more likely to ask themselves questions about the

subject's impact on their lives. Questions like:<sup>24</sup>

1. Do I understand what is being said?
2. Do I believe that what is being said is true?
3. Do I see how this truth can apply to my life?

If hearers are more engaged, the likelihood of Christian formation increases.

Another potential benefit for the readers is watching their congregation become more like Christ. Preachers want their congregations to be challenged and changed by the truths they preach. Hopefully, the preacher who gains and employs the tools that this project presents will be able to measure spiritual progress in the adults to whom they minister.

Another potential benefit for the reader who embraces the principles of learner-sensitive preaching is attendance and baptism growth. It is the assumption of this writer that God wants His church to grow. God gives life. God gives life to His creation (Genesis 1-2). Plants, animals, oceans and humans all receive life from God. This same God gives life to the lost through redemption. The church, of which God is the head, is to be a source of the life God gives (Colossians 1:5-6). The church should experience spiritual and numerical growth. The two are linked. It is this writer's contention that enhancing the clarity and relevance of a sermon has a potential benefit of increasing the attendance and the number of adult baptisms. Regardless, preachers will have done their best to "rightly divide" and apply the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15).

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 140.

### The Method of Evaluation

Upon completion, the doctoral project manuscript will be given to three outside evaluators for the purpose of reading and evaluation. The guidelines for this process as directed in the *Talbot School of Theology Student Handbook* and the Doctor of Ministry program will be followed. The readers will provide evaluation in one or more of the following areas. First, evaluation is to be made as to the usefulness of the content in a practical ministry context. Second, evaluation is to be made concerning the author's writing in light of the project's potential for publication. And finally, evaluation of the author's grammar, punctuation, and adherence to other technical guidelines is to be evaluated.

### Summary

The communicator who questions the impact of biblical preaching on its hearers will do well to consider the implications of learner-sensitive preaching. Preachers committed to communicating with an emerging generation of disciples need to give careful attention to adult learning needs, cultural factors influencing them and necessary changes to the sermon development/delivery process.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK MANUSCRIPT

"Why don't you join me?" Greg said to Bill as he pushed through the door of the restaurant early one Thursday morning.

"Are you sure? You're not expecting someone?" asked Bill.

"No, I come here to the far corner of this diner to get away from people, not to meet with them," Greg said with a smile. "But I'd like the company of a fellow pastor. I won't have to explain my whining."

Greg and Bill had related casually through the quarterly luncheon of an evangelical pastors' fellowship. Greg McGinnis was the pastor of New Community Church, a congregation located near the heart of the city. Before becoming the lead pastor of New Community, Greg had served as Minister of Adult Education for that same congregation. After the previous pastor died unexpectedly of an aneurysm, Greg began the difficult process of successfully transitioning from being an Associate Pastor to his current role as Lead Pastor. He had been at his new post for the past eight years.

Though both had just passed the age of forty, Bill was a newcomer to ministry life. He made a career shift in his mid-thirties, attending seminary and serving a denominational internship before accepting his current call as the senior pastor of Heartland Baptist Church, situated in a suburban neighborhood on a busy street, just two and a half years ago. The conversation that morning began with a few pleasantries

before the conversation dramatically shifted to serious. Greg began his question suddenly and then slowly "drew it out" for full effect, "So Bill...how's it going, how is ministry treating you these days, r-e-a-l-l-y?" "Not bad, I guess..." Bill said as he slumped down in the booth. Then quickly added, "To be honest, I'm struggling. Are you sure you wouldn't mind hearing me out? I could sure use a shoulder to cry on." Without waiting for Greg to answer, Bill continued, "I sense that my preaching just isn't as effective with our congregation as it used to be. I don't know what the disconnect is, but the 'A' I got in homiletics class isn't the grade I think my congregation would give me. I'm tempted to blame and label them 'unspiritual,' but I don't think it's that easy. My gut tells me it's something more. Can you help?"

Greg knew that the frustration Bill confessed that day was more common than most were willing to admit. He could see something different about the preaching dynamics these days, but believed that few knew what it was. Greg wondered if maybe some things he was considering might help.

"I don't presume to be all-knowing on this matter," Greg said. ""But I've actually been thinking quite a lot about what it will take for preaching to communicate clearly and relevantly to an emerging generation of listeners. If you were willing, I'd love to have somebody hear me out on the ideas swirling around in my head. Actually, I'm experimenting with some of the implications of these ideas in my own church and the results are quite positive."

Without hesitation Bill remarked, "I'm interested. How soon can we get started?"

"Right now," Greg stated as he reached for his Uniball Gel pen and one of the

thick paper napkins that the waitress had left on the corner of the table. "I'm coining a phrase to describe these ideas. I call it 'learner-sensitive preaching,'" said Greg as he wrote the phrase across the top. "Excuse me, ma'am, we could use a pot of coffee. We're going to be renting this table for awhile." For the next hour, Greg gave Bill an overview of what he meant by learner-sensitive preaching.

Learner-sensitive preaching values everything that has defined what is known as biblical preaching.<sup>1</sup> It values the study of the passage(s) of Scripture, the outlining of the biblical concepts into a central truth (also known as the "big idea"), submitting the material to three developmental questions (What does it mean? Is it true? So what?), and the work of designing an introduction and conclusion with supporting materials that complete the process of message development. While learner-sensitive preaching values this process of expository preaching, it goes beyond it to enhance the impact of its messages. It seeks to exegete the culture with the same fervor that an expositor mines the sacred writings for detail and understanding. Understanding the culture means an enhanced understanding of the mindset of adult learners. An understanding of the adult learner in the congregation helps to insure a sermon that is clear in its meaning. Better knowing the world of the adult learner enhances the opportunity for the preacher to persuade the hearers to accept or act on the proposition being promoted. A learner-sensitive methodology will better illustrate the point and give the hearer a picture of the intended outcome.

Another way to get a handle on this concept is to clarify what learner-sensitive

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson,, 21.

preaching is not. Learner-sensitive preaching is not learner-*driven* preaching. The learners' needs and expectations do not trump the process and practice of biblical preaching. Instead, it supplements biblical preaching. Actually, it makes biblical preaching more biblical.

“What do you mean by that?” asked Bill.

“Actually, just hang with me and I’ll explain it in due time,” responded Greg.

Learner-sensitive preaching is not about the luring of large masses of people and overwhelming them with intense sounds and special effects. Its motivation is not to be cool, regardless of how loudly the critics protest. The motivation is life-change. It is the formation of Christ-likeness in the beliefs, values and behaviors of every willing individual.

Learner-sensitive preaching is biblically sound, yet empathetic to the unique learning needs of an emerging generation of adults. Learner-sensitive preaching expects that the sermon will manifest itself in the daily lives of the hearers. It is unashamedly a teaching process that asks how these truths can be lived out in daily life.

Having considered that learner-sensitive preaching is biblical preaching and is not merely motivated by luring larger crowds, Pastor Greg then turned his attention to *how* one could grow in the principles of learner-sensitive preaching.

There are three things that learner-sensitive preachers possess that enable them to enhance the clarity and relevance of sermons preached:

1. An understanding of *adult learning needs*
2. A comprehension of *cultural factors* that are influencing the learning needs

and expectations of an emerging generation of adults

3. A knowledge of the necessary components for implementing a learner-sensitive *homiletic methodology*

Learning the principles surrounding these three themes could make a significant difference for an emerging generation of hearers.

"I'm excited to hear what you're telling me," Bill told Greg as he concluded his informal presentation that morning. "I'd love to hear more."

Greg tipped the bottom of his cup to the sky and finished off the java remaining before replying, "I love meddling in other people's business. If you think I could be of help, I'd love to try. But, remember what we're talking about here seems radical. The truth may set us free, but first it might make us miserable. There's a lot of grief associated with change and this change is likely to be no different. But an emerging generation of adult learners deserves our best effort, and they need the kind of multi-sensory experience that learner-sensitive preaching mandates."

"Did you say multi-sensory?" Bill asked. "What do you mean by that?"

"I'm getting ahead of myself," commented Greg. "We'll come to that in time. For now, let's make a date for next week, same time, same place?"

"Works for me," Bill said. "See you next week...and, thanks. I think this is exactly what I'm needing to get and keep my congregation's attention."

## OVERVIEW OF SECTION ONE

### ADULT LEARNING NEEDS

The following Thursday, Bill Kirkland sat waiting anxiously in the same booth that he and Pastor Greg had occupied the week before. Greg had stopped to speak to an elderly couple sitting near the door who attend his church. Bill took the time to review the "napkin notes" from the week before. "Learner-sensitive preaching is biblical preaching '+," he read. "Plus" meant a renewed emphasis on the part of preachers to know their audience and adjust their methods of communication in order to be more clear about what is being said in the message and more relevant to the listeners' common experiences. Bill reminded himself of the three major themes of learner-sensitive preaching: *Adult Learning Needs*, *Cultural Factors* and essential ingredients for change needed in *Homiletic Methodology*.

"Hey, sorry to keep you waiting," Greg commented as he slipped into the booth. "They wanted to express their distaste for the use of a discussion question I used Sunday during my message. They wanted me to know it was out of their comfort zone."

"What do you mean by a discussion question?" Bill asked. And then with a smile said, "What new heresy are you promoting now?"

"Good one... after introducing our subject for the sermon, I asked everyone to consider a question. The question was, 'Does your family have any traditions that

someone new would find a little weird?' I did a message on the ordinances of communion and baptism. These are family traditions that newcomers might find strange until they are told the history and meaning of the ordinance. I asked the congregation to discuss the question with someone near them if they felt comfortable; otherwise, I ask them to make a few notes or just ponder on their own. It's one of those changes I'm experimenting with in an attempt to be more sensitive to adult learner needs," said Greg.

"Good transition. Let's get started on that one. It's the first one you've got listed here," Bill said as he looked down at the napkin he had kept from the week before. "Tell me what you meant when you wrote 'learner-sensitive preachers understand the learning needs of adults.'"

For the next few minutes or so, Greg gave his inquisitive friend a cursory introduction to the three components to understanding adult learning needs. He shared that the components for an understanding of adult learning needs are: *Holistic Learning*, *Learning Preferences* and *Crisis Learning*.

## CHAPTER 1

### HOLISTIC LEARNING

"Okay then, let's get started. I'm ready. I refuse to continue preaching the way I am. The results are too discouraging," Bill said. "What's holistic learning?"

"I thought you'd never ask," replied Greg enthusiastically. "Holistic learning recognizes that man is made up of various parts," he explained. "Preachers too often fail to account for these parts when they are developing their sermons. They may appeal to one or more parts but failing to address one part increases the chance of leaving the learner almost persuaded to adopt the proposition proposed. And, almost persuaded in Christian formation is unacceptable. The stakes have eternal implications."

"Okay, okay, are you going to have an altar call, or are you going to explain the various parts of holistic learning?" asked Bill.

Chuckling, Greg explained that the parts of people include mind, body, emotions and will. Too often, preaching fails to appeal to one or more of these parts of the contemporary learner. For example, if the sermon tells the learner how to act without explaining why that behavior is a better course than another, it is unlikely the hearer will be persuaded to adopt the suggested action. Or, if the sermon is emotionally stimulating and tells the learners why and what to believe about a subject, while trusting the hearers to apply the sermon on their own, they may very well fail to make the application; thus, the potential impact is lost.

"Let me see if I can illustrate further," said Greg. "Recently I was preaching on the eighth commandment, 'No Lying.' I was encouraging the hearers to tell the truth, to let their yes, be yes and their no, be no. I suggested that lying hurts trust. Trust is essential for relational intimacy and we all desire relational connection. Makes sense so far, doesn't it? I'm preaching reasonable truth. The problem, Bill, is that the hearers are hearing a subconscious voice saying, 'Good advice, even biblical, but you don't live with my spouse. I can't tell her the truth; she'd blow a gasket. You don't know how angry she gets and I can't live with that.' So no matter how true my preaching is, I have failed to address the part of the hearer that carries the greater weight as to whether Christian formation will happen. I have failed to address his emotions."

Without missing a beat Greg went on, "In that same series on the commandments I was exhorting the congregation to honor your parents. Again, a true and biblical proposition, but what does it look like when my parents are elderly, or especially when they were jerks in the past and are demanding in the present? I couldn't help but hear some of my hearers thinking aloud, 'What does this mean? I can't obey this.' Or, 'my situation is an exception.' I could not preach this truth for life change without addressing the rational and emotional barriers hindering this truth from being embraced."

Bill poured another cup of coffee and waited anxiously for Greg to continue. He knew he needed what he was hearing. Greg turned the napkin over and wrote the four parts of man down the page while leaving space for notes between each one. He wrote:<sup>1</sup>

1. Mind

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<sup>1</sup> Issler and Habermas, 29-42.

2. Body
3. Emotions
4. Will

Then he explained them one at a time.

Learner-sensitive preaching appeals to the mind. This means that the sermon has a subject and a complement. The subject is what the speaker is talking about. And the complement is what the preacher is saying about what he is talking about. The mind demands logic. The cognitive part of man demands order and understanding. What is said should mean something.

To make a cognitive connection with the learner, the preacher must first make the learner aware of the proposition being proposed. Next, the learner must have the concept explained. This orientation to the issues surrounding the concept helps the learner understand why knowledge of the proposition matters. When the learner gets the significance of an explained concept, he is well on his way to effective communication to the mind. However, the final piece in communicating to the mind is helping the learner grasp how the concept being learned helps in making decisions on Monday morning that are compatible with a Christian worldview.

When the mind of a learner grasps the concept taught, the learner says, "This proposition is reasonable." However, thinking a concept is reasonable is inadequate for Christian formation. Adequate development in Christlikeness must also include the body.

Learner sensitive preaching must give learners clear direction on how to manage

their bodies as a result of the proposed teaching. The Bible clearly assumes that truth known is truth applied. The world of reality is both material and immaterial. The material world is as spiritual as the immaterial. The cultural mandate of Genesis to manage the earth matters to God. Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices is a spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).

Behavior is a critical component for healthy spirituality.<sup>2</sup> Learner-sensitive preaching does not fail to address the specific ways that hearers deal with one another in speech and deed. It cares about the way the earth is treated. The excesses of behavior, such as unrepressed anger, neglecting the poor and needless environmental destruction, is called out. The learner-sensitive preacher does not merely assume or hope that the learner will make an application. They all tell the learner what to do as a result of the concept proposed.

Then the body of the learner says, "I will behave in a way that is consistent with the truth that I know to be reasonable." However, preaching that addresses mind and body is inadequate for development in Christlikeness. The holistic learning needs of adults are not addressed until the preacher comprehends the emotive/affective part of the adult learner.

Emotions play a significant role in whether learners are willing to adopt the proposition preached or not. Feelings of fear, loneliness and shame are three examples of emotions that loom large in the emerging generation of adults. Each of these three is a powerful emotion that may serve as an internal hurdle to embracing Christ like character

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<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 106-107.

qualities.

Here is an example of how this may play out... A preacher is saying that God is like a loving father. He was a father to the people of Israel and He longs to be a father to people today as well. In fact, Jesus said that we could approach him as a child calling him "Abba," which is equivalent to the endearing term "Daddy." No problem, unless the adult learner's father was a manipulating, controlling, abusive alcoholic. Then the learner understands cognitively that God is like a father and he desires that his children will come to him in prayer. The hindrance is that the fear, anger or shame felt is too overwhelming to take effect. The heartfelt view of God is a wilderness away from the one the preacher desired them to see.

Preaching that is sensitive to the emotive part of humans recognizes that there are competing values that exist in the hearts of the men and women listening that are the result of their sin tendencies and their experiences in life outside of Christ. The adult learner knows that she should be baptized, but the threat of public embarrassment prevents an affirmative response. Seeing that elderly parents have adequate food, clothing and shelter is the appropriate response of a disciple, but the anger the learner feels for the real neglect they experienced as a child overwhelms the best of intentions. Unless the preacher acknowledges the emotions that are sabotaging the proposed proposition, the learner feels justified in dismissing the concept as irrelevant for him.

Preaching that hopes to impact the emotive part of the hearer does not judge these emotions as good or bad, right or wrong. It simply acknowledges their existence and their power over the learner. These emotions are the "nerve endings" of the soul and they

are beneficial in identifying the things that are really important to adults, whether or not the adult learner is willing to admit it.

The emotions of the adult learner say, "The proposition I am hearing is not only reasonable. I know how to behave as well. And, it connects with me at a deep level, in spite of the competing values that may tempt me otherwise." As is true with the other parts of people, an appeal to the emotions alone, however, are insufficient for development in Christ-likeness. Emotional appeal void of proposition and behavioral expectations is merely amusement, but proposition and behavioral expectations void of emotional appeal fail to neglect a powerful tool in the arsenal of transformational life change. Beyond this, one final part remains.

The last part of people that the learner-sensitive preacher must identify is what is known as the dispositional part, i.e., the will. The will is that part of a person that measures one's tendencies to act. It is the "chooser" that is necessary to move the learner from former thinking and acting to new and different thinking and behaving. Sermons that appeal to the will do not fail to *invite* the learner to assess her wishes, desires, inclinations, and habits and then *choose* a direction different from the one previously taken. Slowly but surely, choice-by-choice, the old patterns of living are broken and new default habits are being formed. This is the "putting off and putting on" theme that is popular in the epistles of Paul.

Preaching that addresses the learning needs of adults holistically must appeal to the will. Otherwise, the learner may say, "I think this proposition is true. I feel this proposition would bring me more peace. I know how to behave differently as a result of

what I have heard." Yet the learner will not experience Christ-likeness. The learner must be challenged to choose to adopt or reject (ignoring is rejecting) the truth that the preacher is proposing. The learner must be asked, "What is keeping you from believing and/or behaving differently as a result of what you have learned today?"<sup>3</sup> The learner-sensitive preacher seeks to address the stated hindrances and works to persuade the learner to adopt the central truth proposed as his own.

"That makes a lot of sense," Bill said as Greg put his pen on the table and pushed the outline he had been scribbling away from him. "I think my own preaching suffers from cognitive overload. I love the work of message development that involves word studies and grappling with the struggles of the first time readers of the text. Even the work of developing a sermon outline with a catchy headline for the central truth I find exciting. But, when you were talking about the internal hindrances that keep a hearer from buying the truth proposed, I knew I was in trouble. The terms and ideas are not new, but the application of them to preaching is. You've given me a lot to think about, Greg. Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course, what is it?" Greg answered.

"Well, I was wondering...where did you get this? I mean, how did it come together for you?" asked Bill.

"Good question," replied Greg. "I majored in Christian education in Bible College years ago. I really benefited from classes such as "How to Teach Children," "Age-Appropriate Learning" and "Teaching Methods of Christ." I used the principles I

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<sup>3</sup> Downs, 18-19.

learned in those Christian education classes for years, teaching church teachers how to evaluate curriculum, and how to gain the attention of youth in age-appropriate ways. I encouraged them to study the model of the Master Teacher, Jesus. You probably know I was the Minister of Education at my current church before assuming my current responsibilities as Senior."

"I didn't know that. You've been the lead pastor since I've been in town," remarked Bill.

Greg continued, "When I took the position, I had preaching and teaching responsibilities that I obviously had not previously held. I liked it, but I began to experience some of the same problems in the weekend services that you've mentioned: inattentiveness, lack of retention and declining attendance. The previous pastor was a natural storyteller and had a strong relational connection with the people because of his many years there. Those were advantages I didn't have. I was developing and delivering sermons according to typical homiletic design, but it just didn't seem to be enough. So, I sat in my office and thought about what I would do if I were trying to solve this kind of problem in the junior high class. And, bam, it hit me," Greg said with great emphasis. "Adults have learning needs, too. It was so simple and yet I wasn't sure if anyone else had seen it or if it was just me that had missed it. So, there you have it! Obviously, there are a thousand more experiences involved, but what I've told you is the core idea."

"Man, that's interesting! I'm glad I asked," replied Bill. "You've given me some things today that I can implement in my sermon this coming weekend. And, if you're good with it, we'll meet again next Thursday?"

"Sure, I'll be here. Like I told you before, this gives me a chance to organize and verbalize my thinking on this topic. Next week, we'll talk about learning preferences. Are you familiar with them, Bill?"

"I think so," Bill responded. "Is that like verbal, kinesthetic and some other stuff...to be honest, I've heard of them, but I've never thought much about it, and certainly not how it relates to preaching. I'll look forward to next week."

"Next week it is."

## CHAPTER 2

### LEARNING PREFERENCES

“Preachers would do well to give some attention to educational learning theories,” Greg told Bill as he arrived at the table to begin their appointed time together.

“Good morning to you, too,” Bill kidded as he took Greg’s hand to shake it. “I guess you’re anxious to get started on this subject, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I suppose I am,” replied Greg. “It’s a subject that I feel quite passionate about.”

“Well, let me get breakfast and some coffee ordered and I’ll be ready to go,” said Bill as he waved the table hostess towards him. “Okay, I’m ready. Teach me, rabbi.”

“What I was saying,” continued Greg, “Is that preachers should give some time to understanding educational theories about how people learn. Educational psychology holds that individuals have differing learning strengths and learning preferences. These are thought to be the result of unique personalities and both positive and negative educational experiences. Educational researchers have offered various models to describe these differences.<sup>1</sup> The one that best helps preachers be more sensitive to

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<sup>1</sup> See Issler and Habermas, 117-118, for a descriptive overview of these learning models.

learners has been developed by researchers Rita and Kenneth Dunn.”<sup>3</sup>

“This model is in many ways a composite of the other prominent views. But before I give you an overview, give me a chance to make my case as to why I think it’s important for preachers to acknowledge.”

“I’m all ears,” said Bill.

“Assuming people do have preferences about how they best learn, it makes sense that teachers have preferences as to how they like to teach,” suggested Greg. “Usually those preferences are consistent with their own learning style. Doesn’t that sound accurate?”

“It does,” said Bill. “But, the teacher’s style does not necessarily accommodate the diverse preferences of the learners.”

“Exactly,” responded Greg. “Therefore, in order to accommodate various learning preferences, teachers, or in our case preachers, should become aware of the various learning preferences in order to create environments and use methods that have the potential to increase the chances that those being taught will understand and buy into the propositional truths being taught.”

“Every learner possesses the potential to learn in any of the environments proposed. However, the theory suggests that learners often develop dominant and secondary preferences about how they like to receive information.”

“Learners are able to accommodate environments and methods other than those preferred, assuming that the motivation is sufficient for them to persevere. In fact, it is

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<sup>3</sup> Dunn and Dunn, 1-17.

suggested that the best learning occurs when learners are challenged to stretch beyond their preferred ways of learning.”<sup>4</sup>

“As I’ve already said,” Greg went on, “An emerging generation needs sermons that are clear and relevant. What better way to insure this outcome than by understanding the diversity of their learning needs. With that in mind, let me get back to the model developed by the Dunn’s.”

“Please go on,” replied Bill.

“This model uses five categories to describe the factors that affect learning,” said Greg as he once again took the paper napkin from under his fork and began writing the following headings.

#### Environmental

Learners differ in their preferences regarding environmental factors. These factors include issues related to sound, lighting, temperature and the design of the furniture in the room.

Some learners prefer to work in total silence. Others achieve better results with music playing or people talking in the background.

Lighting is another environmental factor that educators should consider. Some learners prefer working in a room that is dark, while others prefer a well-lit room.

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<sup>4</sup> Issler and Habermas, 119.

Variations in temperature accommodate various learners. This involves what the learner is experiencing both inside and outside the room. People respond differently to the weather or to the season of year.

The design of the room is another environmental consideration for the communicator. Some prefer structured and predictable furniture placement, while others like a more casual and random design.

Obviously, with preferences at opposite ends of a continuum it is impossible to accommodate every learner environmentally. However, knowledge of these factors allows communicators to vary the environments in order to tap into the learner's most productive mode, at least for a part of the instructional time.<sup>5</sup>

#### Emotional

Emotionality is another category to describe the preferences of learners. These include the learner's propensity for motivation, responsibility, persistence and spontaneity.

Some learners are self-motivated. They take initiative for hearing the material presented and applying it to life. Other learners are not. Unless the communicator makes the message relevant for them, these learners will be distracted and will not learn what is being taught.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Some learners are less willing to conform when asked than others. These learners take responsibility when they believe themselves to be the initiators of action. Church communicators should consider the responsibility preferences of his audience.

Persistent learners finish what they start. They like to complete an assignment before beginning another. Learners who measure low on the persistence scale prefer to do many things at once. Learners with low persistence should be given information and application in shorter segments.

Some learners prefer spontaneity to structure. Other learners, on the other hand, are drained by choice and prefer the safety of being told what to do and how to do it.

### Sociological

Sociological preferences are also a consideration in how people learn best. The sociological preferences include introvert/extrovert, interaction with authority figures and preference for a variety of interaction with peers and authority figures.

Some prefer to work alone. These individuals typically fall onto the introverted side of the personality scale, deriving emotional energy from self-process.

Extroverts, however, prefer a partner or a team process to completing a learning task. This may involve discussing solutions or even strategizing and working together to complete an assigned project. As to how preachers can take advantage of this factor is uncertain, but one way is by encouraging participation from the congregation by writing answers down. For the extroverts, the preacher can invite those desiring to do so to discuss their answers with others around them.

Some learners prefer a high degree of authority oversight while learning, while others resist authority involvement. The authority figure in the sermon is the preacher. It is likely that authority that has not been earned will not be well received by the emerging generation of learners. Too many of authorities of their past, parents included, have failed to live up to their promises and some have suffered various forms of abuse at their hands. The wise church leader will earn the right to be heard rather than expect or demand it.

Variety of learning methods is another sociological factor worth considering. While some prefer to do what has already been done, variety maximizes the opportunity for the learners to be stretched out of their preferences and into new learning opportunities. Variety is a valuable weapon for learning in the teaching arsenal.

### Physiological

Physical characteristics include energy, mobility and time of day. These physiological factors consider the body's limits and potential.

Some learners have vast amounts of energy and others significantly less. A good preacher will ask, "Is the learning environment unknowingly taxing either one? Is there something to be done to heighten the physical movements during a sermon in order to accommodate the energy of an emerging generation?"

Mobility is another factor. This is another way to talk about the kinesthetic learner, which will be presented later. While for some, disability or age may be a cause for decreased mobility; some learners learn best when actively participating in something. One way preachers may accommodate this preference is to allow mobile learners to

watch the activity of those on the platform. For example, the bodily movement/gestures of the preacher, a potter working clay during a sermon on the topic of surrender, a dance, a drama or serving as an usher may accommodate the learning preferences of the highly mobile.

“Are you a morning person or do you consider yourself a night owl” is a question people ask of each other. To do so, recognizes that every individual has an optimal time of day for learning. Preachers might ask themselves whether their service time(s) can offer an option(s) to accommodate an emerging generation of learners that might be better served on a Saturday or Sunday night rather than exclusively on Sunday morning.

“These physical characteristics also include sensory perception,” Greg said. “You know, what you mentioned last week when I brought up this topic.”

“You’re going to have to help me out, Greg. I’m not following you,” Bill replied while scratching his head as if trying to make himself remember.

“Remember when I mentioned learning styles and you gave me the terms verbal and kinesthetic?” asked Greg.

“Oh yeah, now I remember,” Bill said.

“Well, you were close. Let me explain them,” Greg said. “These styles of learning preferences were developed by educational researchers Barbe and Swassing.<sup>6</sup> I think of them as the enhancers of learning. They are the ways that help us remember what we are learning.<sup>7</sup> Again, Bill, no one is exclusively one. We learn through all of

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<sup>6</sup> Barbe and Swassing, 1.

our senses, but educational psychology tells us that we have natural and/or learned preferences as to the senses with which we prefer to take in information.”

“For example, the auditory learner learns best when hearing verbal sounds and forming the words in his/her mind. Auditory learners may need to hear themselves say something in order to best process the information they are receiving. They are known to read aloud to themselves or repeat instructions back verbally to make sure that they have them.”

Greg went on to explain the next sensory perception, “The visual learner needs association of information by watching or seeing with his eyes. Pictures and images work well with this group. Storytelling is especially effective to give the visual learner a picture of what the concept being taught looks like in real life. When imagination is released for the visual learner he can picture the information in real time. Encouraging the visual learner to take notes or to highlight with colors during the sermon is another way to accommodate visual preferences.”

“The next sense that learners use to remember information is kinesthetically. The kinesthetic learner uses their major muscles by becoming physically involved with what’s being learned. The accommodating preacher can invite the kinesthetic learner to live out the proposed proposition by describing how people act when they are doing it. Illustrations for this group should be filled with action. Action-filled video clips also

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<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, *The Way They Learn* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishers, 1994), 90.

meet the needs of a kinesthetic learner. The length of a service without a break must also be a consideration when considering the needs of a kinesthetic learner.”

“A subset of the kinesthetic learning style is the tactile learner. This type of learner uses touch to their skin and their hands as a primary learning tool.<sup>8</sup> Physical, nonverbal gestures communicate to this kind of learner as more than words spoken. Smell and taste are also sensory tools that can be used to communicate to learners kinesthetically.”

“The effective communicator,” Greg continued, “Is the one who can appeal to a variety of the five senses and by doing so, enhance the message’s impact on its hearers.” Greg went on to explain the next factor.

### Psychological

There are psychological factors that affect the preferences of learners. For example, some are analytic and some are global. Analytic learners need details, focus and organization. They prefer to do one thing at a time. They prefer to finish something before moving on to something else. Learners whose dominant psychological style is analytic need logic to be persuaded.

The global learner, on the other hand, prefers to see the big picture. They like to see all the options available. They are sensitive to people’s feelings and like to get others involved in activities. Details often fail the learner whose dominant psychological

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<sup>8</sup> Linksman,, 26-27.

inclination is global. Explanation without seeing relationship connections frustrates them.<sup>9</sup>

“Let me say it again,” Greg told Bill as he finished describing the five categories of learning preferences. “No one is purely one particular style. What is suggested is that learners, by bent and experiences, have preferred ways of receiving information. Obviously, no communicator can accommodate all learning preferences at once. Rarely can a communicator accommodate several preferences at a time. But, an awareness of learner preferences can open the communicator to the variety of methods needed to accommodate many learning preferences over the course of time. The reality of educational theory concerning these preferences should motivate you to carefully consider the principles I’ll be suggesting as we meet in the following weeks.”

“To be honest Greg, I get stuck on the idea of accommodating listener preferences. It sounds so, well, ‘accommodating.’ I trust the work of biblical preaching to give the Holy Spirit the environment needed to convict and comfort. I don’t want to compromise on that,” admitted Bill.

“So, in your mind, it sounds as if the idea of accommodating learning preferences and remaining committed to the integrity of biblical preaching are mutually exclusive. Is that it?” Greg asked. “That in order to do one, you have to give up ground on the other?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m hearing.”

“I realize that the two concepts are in tension, but they are not mutually exclusive. And when they do conflict, biblical preaching must not be compromised. However, I

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<sup>9</sup> Tobias,, 109-111.

think that what is sometimes meant when it is said that ‘the gospel is an offense’ is that unless preachers are offending people, then they are not preaching. We should be clear, it is the gospel that is the offense, not preachers. We are the messengers and when the sermon’s truths make hearers uncomfortable or angry, so be it. We should expect it. But, learner-sensitive preachers should avoid contributing to an unnecessary offense by letting our own agendas get in the way of the propositional truths being preached,” concluded Greg.

“One more thing,” Greg added before allowing Bill to respond. “The people for whom Christ died deserve our best efforts to communicate clearly and relevantly his message of grace. Knowing them and studying how best to communicate to them seems like a reasonable sacrifice. If educational researchers can help me do that better, then so be it. I’ll ‘spoil the Egyptians’ on my way to the Promised Land.”

“You’ve given me some things to mull over,” Bill said after a long pause. “What you’re suggesting is another grid to put my sermons through. You’ve also been clear that you believe that the grid of biblical preaching can and should also remain in place as well. I did ask for this, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did,” responded Greg smiling. “So I’ll expect you here again next week to fulfill your commitments. I’m going to make a learner-sensitive preacher out of you yet.”

## CHAPTER 3

### CRISIS LEARNING

“You don’t know much about fishing, do you?” asked Bill sarcastically after Greg had questioned him about the chances of catching a large mouth bass with a bare hook.

“Actually, I don’t,” responded Greg. “But I was hoping you’d agree with me that you’ve got to have bait to motivate fish to bite. Fish get hooked because they have a need to eat whatever is tied to it. Wiggly worms get a lot of attention from hungry fish. Is this discussion about worms making you hungry? Do you want to order?”

“Let’s do,” responded Bill. “But first, get to your point!”

“Too many preachers fail to ask themselves what every successful fisherman asks. They fail to ask what bait will hook their hearers.”

“Preachers may think that since their seminary professors only needed an open Bible and syllabus notes to teach them effectively, then the same should be true for their learners as well. This line of thinking assumes that what was good enough for his training in discipleship should be sufficient for everyone else. ‘My Bible teachers didn’t cater to me and I learned the material presented just fine. Accommodate learning needs? Give me a break!’ I can hear their arguments now,” continued Greg.

“This assumption does not account for the motivational differences between the

environments of academia and weekend church services.<sup>2</sup> Students pay tuition and usually give their professors high trust in their expertise of the subject being taught. They typically need the course offered to graduate. Often, their future livelihood depends on learning the material presented. This in and of itself gives the learner sufficient motivation to conquer whatever is being communicated. In addition, the classroom lecture is only one of several ways that students are getting the content covered. Often, discussion groups and other assignments are required outside of the classroom that facilitate the student's learning," Greg went on without a breath, and explained the difference between this motivation and that of a church attendee.

"These same learning motivations are missing for the typical attendee of a weekend church service. Their motivations for attending may be fueled by feelings of obligation, wanting to appease a spouse or to set a good example for their kids. If the content of the sermon fails to motivate the hearer to learn; then their worry about the stock market, their mother's failing health and the threat of the company being bought out by another will win out over the sermon's competing message. It can hardly be said that the preacher communicated anything of value unless the sermon hearers find the subject of that sermon relevant to the quality of their lives.<sup>3</sup> However, if the communicator taps into areas of life that the hearers deem helpful, then their motivation for learning is significantly enhanced.

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<sup>2</sup> Issler and Habermas, 204-205.

<sup>3</sup>Wayne V. McDill, *The Moment of Truth* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999), 53.

“So, how do I do that?” Bill asked.

“The learner is highly motivated to engage the sermon’s subject when it addresses life crises that the learner is experiencing. These crises may be obvious, such as an impending divorce or the death of a friend. But, other life crises are less dramatic to the outside observer but are equally intense for the person experiencing them. Examples include relational conflict with an employee, worry over a child’s schooling or the security of the world post-September 11. The learner is highly motivated to engage the proposition proposed when the preacher speaks to the concerns that are on the hearts of the hearers and does so from a theological perspective. These same preachers actively look for opportunities to address problems as they surface in the text.”<sup>4 5</sup>

“When preachers speak to the crises that hold learners hostage, the learners are highly motivated to engage the sermon’s content, Greg continued. Identifying common themes that constitute inner crises will help the preacher identify issues the sermons should address. The internal conflicts of people in the pew include an unsatisfied longing, human rationality, human morality, alienation and an awareness of human mortality.”

“That sounds like quite a list,” Bill said. “Can you explain each one separately?”

“The first internal conflict is to consider what longings are unmet for the hearers. Do they desire to be married, yet can’t find a mate? Do they want children but remain infertile? What about unresolved issues with adult siblings or a longing to hear a father

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<sup>4</sup> Johnston,, 150-151.

<sup>5</sup> Downs, 64, 192, 194.

say, “I’m really proud of you”? Sermons related to unsatisfied longings can surface the kinds of crises that will gain and keep the attention of an emerging generation of learners.”

“Another internal conflict that will motivate adult learners to listen attentively is related to rational consistency. When competing ideas appear equally valid this creates internal tension. A spouse is supposed to love her husband with irrational love while giving him natural consequences for his irresponsible choices. Teens should obey their parents unless commanded to do something illegal or morally wrong. God is omnipotent and loving, yet fails to intercede when a child lies dying in the intensive care unit of a local hospital. These examples appear rationally inconsistent and preachers who speak to these crises of belief are assured a hearing.”

“Human morality is another theme that bears conflict for sermon hearers. Is it wrong to get something for nothing? If it feels so good, how can it be bad? Is truth relative to the best interests of the majority or absolute and its authority held in deity beyond our own? How will adhering to the Ten Commandments enhance a community’s quality of life? These questions strike at the core of human relationships.”

“Alienation also creates conflict. People have a God-given need to be connected. When alienation results, people want resolution. This alienation may occur with a parent, a friend or a neighbor. People are also alienated from God and motivated to connect, though they may not know how or even realize how much they need it. Learner-sensitive preachers speak to issues related to alienation and give the hearers answers to resolve these conflicts.”

“Another internal conflict of people is an awareness of human mortality. Disease, surgery, aging and the death of someone close remind adult learners that everyone dies. Fear of mortality can motivate adult learners to consider the preacher’s message concerning eternity and preparation for it. Life is fragile and when this crisis strikes close to the adult learner, he/she will have the motivation necessary to reprioritize in light of eternity.”

“Preachers who teach to these kinds of external and internal adult crises will significantly enhance the motivation of the audience members to learn. And, the preacher has not taught if the hearer hasn’t learned.

“I can tell by your face that you’re struggling with something I’ve said,” Greg told Bill as he filled his cup with fresh coffee from the thermos the waitress left on the edge of their table.

“Was I that obvious?” Bill responded. “I’m hearing you say that Scripture’s effectiveness is dependent on the preacher to make its meaning relevant to an audience. Is that what you mean?”

“The Scripture is inspired and relevant to the needs of any audience. I’m not suggesting that the Bible is less inspired,” said Greg. “But, preachers who think it’s their responsibility to teach content and God’s responsibility to make it relevant to adult needs are misguided.<sup>6</sup> Remember Paul’s question in Romans 10:14, ‘How shall they hear without a preacher?’ The need of the hearers must be held in equal tension with the content of the proposition. All of the Bible is equally inspired, but it is not all equally

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson, 238-241.

edifying. The emerging generation of sermon hearers are not ready to trust the Bible without first testing its message for life's challenges.<sup>7</sup> Communicators desiring to preach to an emerging generation will understand the implications of Jesus admonition to 'feed my lambs' is much more than the standard 'teach the truth.' Truth is embodied in a person, the person of Jesus (John 14:6) and when that person ministered here on earth his model of preaching met the crises that people were experiencing. His message was never separated from the needs of the people and never should ours! I feel strongly about this," Greg said as he leaned back and breathed a heavy sigh.

"I'll need to wrestle with this for awhile. The implications of what you've suggested are subtle, but monumental nonetheless," answered Bill. "But let's assume for a moment that I buy into your *crisis learning* paradigm, how can I better understand the crises that my hearers are experiencing as they attend our weekend church service(s)?"

"Good question," said Greg. "Let me see if I can be of help. I think the key component is listening. Learner-sensitive preachers know the joys and conflicts of their congregation because they have heard from them through concentrated and empathic listening." In a style characteristic of Greg's teaching, he reached for a napkin and with his broad tip pen he titled four suggestions for Bill to help in getting to know his audience's needs.

### Surveys

One way a preacher can identify the struggles and challenges that his

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<sup>7</sup> Johnston, 87-89.

congregation is facing is by inviting them to complete anonymous surveys. These surveys allow thought out responses to the conflicts and crises that the people are experiencing in daily life. In his book, *The 7 Laws of the Learner*, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson offers the following list<sup>8</sup> to get started:

1. The biggest problem I struggle with at work is...
2. Whenever my spouse and I get into arguments, it's usually about...
3. When I get angry with God, it's usually because...
4. If someone could give me one piece of advice about how to raise my kids, it would be about...
5. Probably the area of my spiritual life that causes me the most problems is...
6. Rate your Christian walk on a scale of 1-10. The one area in my Christian life where I stumble the most is...
7. The sin I seem to wrestle with and rarely have victory over is...

Candid responses to a list similar to this one will go a long way in providing preachers understanding of their congregation in order to identify crises that will motivate sermon hearers to learn.

### Counseling

Of course, ministers must never violate appropriate confidentiality of pastoral counseling. However, empathic listening to the hearts of those who come to the pastors' study for help will allow the preacher to know the kinds of hurts and conflicts that the counselee represents.

Composite scenarios can be developed by the preacher of bits and pieces from the stories told in the counseling room. When these scenarios are told as a part of the sermon, the listeners will feel understood by the communicator and they will be

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<sup>8</sup> Wilkinson, 258.

motivated to follow the advice given. Careful attention should be given to assure that the privacy of the individuals involved is absolutely protected.

### Informal Interviews

Much can be learned about the crises of life through informal interviews. Preachers can learn a lot by observing and listening. The essence of preaching relevant sermons is not telling, but listening.<sup>9</sup> Ask people how they are really doing and be quiet. Ask them again and insist that you really want to know. If they trust you enough to tell you, they may provide a wealth of information about their external and internal conflicts, which if addressed in a sermon would motivate them to listen.

### Personal Experiences

Every preacher has a trunk full of personal experiences from which to draw on for addressing life crises in sermons. Care must be taken to share personal examples that do not undermine trust in the communicator. Learners are not motivated to learn from those who are in the middle of trying to figure it out for themselves. They expect the driver of the bus to know how to get where they want to go. If the driver is turned around looking backwards for long, the riders lose confidence in his ability to take them there.

The crises that the preacher has navigated, however, become signposts on life's roadmap. Pointing to these personal experiences and sharing vulnerably about them connect the audience to preacher like few things can. Though often quite painful, these experiences give preachers credibility with their learners and aid in the work of bringing

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<sup>9</sup> Miller, *Marketplace Preaching*, 20.

Scripture to life.

“I think I’m doing some of this already,” said Bill. “But, I could do more. I know I’m not spending as much time on considering the learners’ needs as I am on the content of the sermon. By the way, I don’t think the way that I’m currently developing my sermons is sufficient for meeting the learning motivations you’re suggesting should be met.”

“We’ll come to that later,” answered Greg. “But first, we need to spend some time considering cultural factors that are influencing the learning needs we’ve considered these past three weeks. We’ll get started on that next week.”

## OVERVIEW OF SECTION TWO

### CULTURAL FACTORS

"Something is starting to shift in my preaching," Bill said to Greg as he was sliding into his seat across the table the following Thursday morning. "I'm not sure exactly what, but some things are different. I can feel it. Did I say the word 'feel'? Wow, I am changing. That is a shift."

"Yep, you said 'feel'. I heard it. Perhaps I am starting to get to you," said Greg laughing. "So tell me, how do you 'feel' about what we've talked about so far?"

"I feel nervous. I'm on a journey to preaching sermons that are clearer and more relevant. But, I don't know what's ahead. I can't see very far in front of me, and my guide--that would be you, hasn't been this way before either. But, I can't go back. The life-change that preaching produces is too important. To borrow a cliché, I'm seeing my preaching these days with a 'view from the pew.' I'm a lot more conscious of the needs and expectations of the adults who give an hour or so of their time each weekend for church. I'm still just as concerned about the content as ever, but I'm now increasingly more focused on the way the sermon is being received as well."

"I shared the information about holistic learning with our staff. I told them about the need to consider all parts (mind, body, emotions and will) of men and women when communicating. I'm now discussing my message topic with them during our staff meeting on Wednesday mornings so they can give me feedback on applications and

internal hindrances the congregation may have to what I'm suggesting. One of the biggest surprises for me is the insight I'm getting about these from a female perspective. That's another obvious difference that I'm afraid I've too often neglected."

"The talk we had about learning preferences a couple of weeks ago was fascinating. My youngest son is showing a lot of traits as an auditory learner. His spelling dramatically improves when he says the words aloud and we force him to use them in a sentence. And, his teachers are after him about talking too much in school. I've just never thought about people needing to hear themselves say what they're needing to learn."

"I've asked an interior designer and a stage manager (both attendees of our church) who work for a local theater company to get together and give me suggestions about what we could do to the front of the auditorium for a stronger appeal to the visuals among us. You won't believe what I did this past week for the tactile learners. It was radical!" Bill exclaimed.

"What did you do that was so radical?" Greg replied mockingly.

"I'm glad you asked," retorted Bill. "Remember I told you I was doing a series on the book of James. This past week, I was doing the chapter about the dangers of the tongue and the damage done in stretching the truth. So, in the middle of the sermon when I was making the point about how falsehood, flattery and exaggeration hurt us. I threw bags of rubber bands out into the congregation, asked people to pass them around, put them on their wrists, 'stretch' them out and let go! You could hear snaps and 'ouches' all over the auditorium. I've run into people all week who still have that rubber band on

as a reminder. My wife already fears what I might think of to involve the kinesthetic learners. Anything done in the sanctuary involving major muscle groups makes her quake at the thought of the following deacon's meeting."

"Hey man, slow down a little, huh? I told you these thoughts were new and mostly untried," said Greg. "I don't want you getting fired and your wife blaming me. I hate to think what you might do with the discussion we had last week."

"Well lucky for you and my congregation, I'm still trying to wrap my mind around that one. But, I can tell you the one application from that session for me is the need for increased narrative and storytelling in my preaching," replied Bill. "Enough about what we've already discussed, let's talk about the next major theme of learner-sensitive preaching. Let's see, you called it the *cultural factors*," said Bill looking at the napkin that he still had from the first week they met. "Go ahead, remind me again how fast the world is changing and how out of touch I am with the world around me. As if you haven't depressed me enough already."

"Well, let me again be clear about my motivation," Greg said soberly. "There are a few churches and parachurch ministries that are pushing the envelope of creative communication, but I fear they can't tell you why they believe their approach is impacting congregations positively. That's what I'm trying to do. I'm willing to 'spoil the Egyptians', if need be, for understanding and ideas that can help the church communicate Scripture clearly and relevantly for an emerging generation. I'm wanting to understand why the messages of the world that are competing for the souls of the men and women in my congregation are often more effective than the messages of the church. What are the

internal and external factors that make the difference between them hearing me, I mean really hearing me, or not?"

"The internal forces, we've covered. The external forces are the cultural factors. The people of our congregations are influenced by them everyday in ways we cannot fully understand. But, undoubtedly, the impact is significantly affecting their learning needs and expectations. The cultural factors to be considered include: *Postmodernism, Technology and Experiential Environments.*"

## CHAPTER 4

### POSTMODERNISM

"To tell you the truth," said Bill, "whenever the topic of postmodernism comes up my mind just kind of glazes over. The discussion feels too much like Y2K did. The information is cumbersome and the predictions sound dire. I'm not sure what do with it anyway. The world predicted sounds so far removed from anything that's ever been dealt with before."

"Well, maybe not," replied Greg. "Maybe not so different from anything before."

"What do you mean?" Bill asked.

"Actually, there are several interesting similarities between the Roman world that the early church ministered to and the postmodern one we are now facing," answered Greg. "Let me explain..."

Greg unfolded another paper napkin and wrote across the top, "The World of the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> One by one he shared these insights:

#### A Single Dominant Superpower

Like the United States today, the Roman Empire was unmatched in its military and economic strength. The sprawl of roads that all led to Rome took the rule of Roman law to remote locations. Participation in world trade, arts, entertainment and

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis and Lewis, 17-18.

Religious and philosophical debates necessarily included the influence of Rome. All of this unified the world in an unprecedented way.

#### A World Trade Language

The universal use of the Greek language made the import and export of commodities to most societies in that world a reality. A common language made the export of the prevailing philosophies possible as well. Today, English is the language that makes this globe a small world after all.

#### Universal Human Experience

The major events of the Roman Empire were "broadcast" throughout the known world. Travel to and around Asia Minor and the land east of the Mediterranean Sea was common. This created a universal human experience not unlike what is true today with the advent of media. Royal weddings, major soccer games and car bombings in the Middle East are shared with the collective whole.

#### Technological Advances

The phrase "all roads lead to Rome" expresses the wonder that engineering technology had on travel. It significantly affected the culture of the world that is read of in the New Testament. Certainly the changes associated with these advances created an excitement and uncertainty not unlike that which many feel today. The internet is a "superhighway" which gives the world a global connection. Events around the world are viewed as they are happening on television news stations like CNN. Satellite imaging allows for simultaneous conversations of people separated by thousands of miles.

### Rise in Societal Diseases

The Roman culture increasingly viewed children as a burden. The family unit was shattered. The brutal games of the coliseum are well known and the demand of the populace for constant entertainment reflects their souls' emptiness. Sexual promiscuity, drug use and a rise in the practice of the occult were rampant.

### Modernism

"So you see Bill, as I said, maybe the world in which Jesus and the early apostles ministered in and to was not as different from our own as we might think," said Greg.

"The similarities are pretty remarkable."

"I never thought of it that way," replied Bill. "Perhaps, there is more help available for ministry in this new generation than I've imagined. Your point is that Jesus and the early church leaders faced a world similar to ours. But, can you help me understand the core ideas of postmodernism? Frankly I'm fuzzy from all the rhetoric I read about."

"Sure, let me see if I can help," Greg answered. "To understand postmodernism one must first understand modernism. To be post-something means that you have experienced the something that you are now beyond. For instance, post-adolescence means that an individual has gone through puberty, learning to drive, a first date and other life experiences typically associated with adolescent life. They were fully adolescent and now they are post-adolescent. Postmodernism is to have experienced

modernism.<sup>2</sup> It is not separate from it. Therefore, let's begin with seeking to understand some core ideas of modernism." Greg went on to explain.

### Rationalism

The theme of the medieval period that preceded modernity may be summarized as mystical. There was recognition that there was much that man could not know. God was viewed as the Author of a divine story of which man was just a part. Man needed faith in order to make some sense of the world in which he lived. Mystery was commonly accepted as normal in matters of science and theology.

With the invention of the printing press, Columbus' discovery of the New World and the scientific revolution led by Galileo and Copernicus, the world became more knowable and less mysterious. Observation became the rule of the day and the physical sciences were declared supreme. The result was that rationalism was viewed as supreme. Reality, and therefore life, was reduced to the empirical.

### Deism

Since rationalism ruled, theology was only needed to explain that which rational minds could not.<sup>3</sup> This rationale reduced God to a distant, cosmic deity. Enlightened modernists perceived of God as merely getting it all going, but remaining impersonal and uninvolved in everyday life. Darwinism went further by explaining that God was not even necessary to get things started. Throughout the modern period faith and reason

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<sup>2</sup> McLaren, 18-19.

were intrinsically opposed to one another.

### Utilitarianism

The third component to understanding the modern period is utilitarianism.<sup>4</sup>

Enlightened rationalists understood the universe as a closed system of cause and effect. The deist's God, though endowed by moral absolutes, became less critical and finally disregarded in the closed system of the universe. Issues of good and evil were explained in light of the closed system. What is good for the system is what is declared by utilitarianism. What is inefficient is deemed wrong. Morality is defined by practicality, the effect upon the majority. This is the essence of utilitarianism.

Theft is deemed wrong not because it violates the morality of the divine, but because it wreaks havoc on the economic system of the populace. Economic efficiency justified slavery. Abortion was justified against the backdrop of an overly crowded planet. Utilitarianism answered moral dilemmas without the need for God. Utilitarianism birthed materialism.

### Postmodernism

Dissenters of modernism are the precursors of postmodern thinking. They reacted to the inadequate results of rationalism, deism and utilitarianism/materialism. These reactions may be summed up in two categories. They are:

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<sup>3</sup> Veith, 32-33.

### Romanticism

The first category is romanticism is a reaction to the cold reality of utilitarianism. Romanticism refuses to think that what is efficient is all that is good. The romantic sees God not as distant and above, but close at hand. For some, even pantheistic. Everything is god and god is everything. In this new reality, self-fulfillment, not economic efficiency, became the ultimate measure of good.

Romanticism denies original depravity. Children are born as "blank slates." Environments of negativity and restriction corrupt the innocent. What matters most is happiness, the individual fulfillment of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Internal introspection and the satisfaction of felt needs describe the focus of the romantic. In other words, what feels good is morally good. For the postmodern, the quality of one's life is determined by his/her self-satisfaction. This thinking is rooted in romanticism.

### Existentialism

The second category is existentialism. For the existentialist, there is no meaning outside of life.<sup>5</sup> Natural laws and the order of the universe exist, but without meaning. Responding to basic instincts is deemed essential for the existentialist's mental health. "Obey your thirst," ironically proposes NBA star Kobe Bryant in an advertisement for Mountain Dew, having admitted sexual infidelity and publicly apologizing to his wife after being accused of sexual assault. The only meaning to be found, touts the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

existentialist, is the meaning that each person individually determines. Truth cannot be forced upon another. Each must determine it for herself. All truth is equally valid. The face of evil is anyone who "claims" to know the truth for another. For example, reproductive rights trump all empirical data concerning fetal development. Right to privacy justifies sexual deviancy. Decency laws threaten the existentialist's personal choice and are deemed as censorship.

"I think it's fair to assume that the dismantling of absolute truth is essentially complete.<sup>6</sup> Relativism is now the mainstay of American popular culture.

#### Characteristics of a Postmodern Mindset

"So you see," concluded Greg, "Postmodernism stands firmly on the shoulders of existential philosophy."

"Let me get this straight... you're saying that postmodernism is the result of reactions to modernism. Is that right?" asked Bill.

"In a nutshell, yes!" Greg answered.

"Can you explain the key components of postmodernism succinctly, then?" inquired Bill.

"It's not as easy to summarize the postmodern era as it was the modern. There are several reasons. First, it's too early to do so with confidence. Second, it's more fragmented. Third, the very nature of postmodernity resists the idea of definition and stereotyping. However, what I can do is describe for you some of the common characteristics of a postmodern mindset. This might be particularly helpful for you in

identifying some of the results of this cultural factor on the learning needs of your congregation," Greg said. "If you have time..."

Bill leaned forward in his seat before responding enthusiastically, "I'll make time. Grab that pen of yours and let's go!"

For the next ten minutes Greg listed his observations on eight distinctive characteristics of an emerging generation of adult learners. Greg made applications to preaching as often as possible. He wrote as he explained:

#### Skeptical of Definitive Answers

Postmoderns are wary of definitive answers. They prefer to hear that "it has been my experience" instead of "this is true for everyone." Because they lack an understanding of the nature of the truth's source, they view with skepticism anyone who would claim to know it for others.<sup>7</sup> Preachers desiring to be sensitive to this reality of learners need not abandon truth, but should adapt their style of communicating it.

"I'm going to offer suggestions on how to do just that when we turn our attention to issues related to homiletic methodology," Greg said. "Can you wait until then?"

"I suppose I can," replied Bill.

#### Hungry for Relational Connection

This generation of learners is hungry for relational connection.<sup>8</sup> They want to know others and be known by others. Their broken, dysfunctional families have failed to

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<sup>6</sup> Veith, 16-18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 96-98.

give them security about who they are and where they belong in the world. Technology has kept them entertained, but dissatisfied relationally.

The effective preacher for this emerging population must invite the learners into a collective journey, one that should be taken together with the audience. Both preachers and hearers can speak with vulnerability about their own struggles. Preachers should bless and encourage the hearers as a loving parent does their own children.

### Spiritually Curious

The good news about the adult learners of postmodernism is that they are spiritually curious.<sup>9</sup> They are willing to consider the immaterial as personal power. Unlike their predecessors, who demanded empirical evidence for their belief, the postmodern mind embraces mystery and transcendence.

However, they are willing to look beyond the confines of Christianity in order to find it. Even better said, they would prefer to look elsewhere, particularly to eastern philosophy, for answers to their spiritual questions.

### Culturally Aware

The language of the postmodern is that of popular culture. They are culturally aware. Situations from TV shows like *Seinfeld* or *Friends* are commonly referred to in casual conversation. Bart Simpson coined slang that has become a part of the fabric of normal conversation. The language of the masses rarely originates any longer in the

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<sup>8</sup> Sweet, 115-116.

hallowed halls of higher education or from the institutional church; instead, it comes from the pens of Hollywood writers and from the street talk of urban gangs.

The learner-sensitive preacher must become a student of pop culture in order to better speak the language of the target group. To do so increases the chances of being heard by a new generation of listeners.

#### Value Authenticity

Another characteristic of postmodern learners is that they value authenticity. They have zero tolerance for hypocrisy. They like things a little raw. They appreciate a person admitting faults. The preacher who does not have it all together is respected as being real, which, for the postmodern, is more authentic and better than being right.

#### Expect Excellence

Coming on the heels of the value of authenticity is the postmoderns expectations regarding excellence. Being real does not give presenters an easy out. Postmoderns still expect excellence. It must be authentic excellence, not slick excellence, but excellence nonetheless.

#### Distrusting of the Institutional Church

For postmoderns, the institutional church smacks of much that existentialists reject. The institutional church feels like a cookie-cutter, one size fits all kind of faith. It may seem to postmoderns that the church is unwilling to accept responsibility for its part in the world's desperate condition. The emerging generation may misunderstand the

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<sup>9</sup> Johnston, 119-120.

intentions of the institutional church, but its trust in it is quite low.

### Disillusioned with Society's Solutions

Society's solutions have proved inadequate for the postmodern. Materialism, unrestrained lust and utilitarianism have failed to create the utopian experience promised. This creates an opening for the authentic message of Christ's gospel.

"The learner-sensitive preacher has an opportunity to speak into this void. If he gains a hearing, that is," Greg said as he laid aside his pen and the napkin he had been writing on. "The preacher that understands these characteristics of the postmodern generation significantly increases his chances of being heard. As you can see, the effects of postmodern thinking on adult learners is real and must be considered by church communicators seeking to disciple their hearers toward Christlikeness."

"Based on what you've described, I can see how some of my preaching mannerisms and clichés are inherently offensive to the listeners influenced by postmodernism," Bill admitted. "I'm going to put this week's sermon through the grid of these eight characteristics. I'm sure I'll need a few edits. Now, let's talk about *Technology*."

## CHAPTER 5

### TECHNOLOGY

"It would seem to me that *Technology* must certainly be a major influence on the learning expectations of an emerging generation hearing our sermons," continued Bill. "The Bible asks, 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' I'd like to add, 'And how is the preacher to be heard by people who begin their day by pressing the power button on their remote controls and hearing the words "You've Got Mail" coming from their personal computers?'"

"You're right!" said Greg. "The tsunami of technological advances has unquestionably impacted the way the men and women of our congregations send and receive information. I won't overwhelm you further by answering the question, 'How much time do the hearers of our sermons spend watching TV and surfing the net, and how much money is spent every year on first run/rented major motion pictures?' I think those statistics have been dramatized sufficiently.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say, they spend a lot."

"I think the better question to ask is, 'What should a learner-sensitive preacher consider regarding adult learning needs in light of technology's impact on an emerging generation?' Or to say it in other words, 'What are the critical applications to sermon delivery that every preacher should employ given technology's influence on

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Turner, *Preaching to Programmed People*, 14-15.

contemporary culture?' Are you up for that discussion right now or would you rather wait until we get together next week? I can do it either way, Bill. Your call."

"I'm ready. I don't have to be at the church office until ten," Bill responded excitedly.

Greg leaned his back against the wall and put his feet up in the seat of the booth where he was sitting. "I've never verbalized what I think about this subject before now," said Greg. "Let me see if I can summarize." After a lengthy pause and a long sip of his coffee, Greg launched into his hastily prepared outline. "First, in light of technology's impact as a cultural factor, learner-sensitive preachers should consider how they can quicken the rate of speed at which their sermons are spoken." On the back of the napkin he wrote the words, "Rate of Speed." Next, he wrote the numerals, "4 to 6." "Secondly," replied Greg, "Learner-sensitive preachers should seek to incorporate four to six 'moves,' with a transition every four to six minutes they preach. I'll explain further in a moment. Third, learner-sensitive preachers will consider how to employ the technology (that people use everyday to get information) in their weekly sermons." On the bottom of the napkin he wrote, "Tech Use."

Greg turned the napkin toward Bill, put the tip of his pen on his first point, and prepared himself to explain what he meant by **Rate of Speed**. With his free hand he reached into his briefcase and grabbed a transcript of the NBC News program "*Dateline*," which aired on May 14, 2003.<sup>2</sup> He then proceeded to tell Bill the gist of the booklet's

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<sup>2</sup> Mankiewicz,, 18-22.

content.

The average person typically speaks at a rate of 150 words per minute. During the 1980's, the television show *Moonlighting*, starring Bruce Willis and Cybil Shepherd, surprised the TV critics with lightning-speed speech timed at an average of 228 words per minute. In 2003, a popular television drama airing on the WB channel called the *Gilmore Girls* was timed with dialogue averaging over 300 words per minute.

From the *Lone Ranger* and *The Wild, Wild West* to *The Late Show* and the *The West Wing*, television actors are speaking faster than they used to speak. One of the producers interviewed confessed that with over 500 channels to choose from and most people possessing a quick finger on the remote, executive producers and moviemakers can ill afford a second to risk the audience getting bored. The competition just will not allow it.

News anchors are responding similarly. With split screens and multiple sound bites, the speed of TV is staggering. Constant movement and multiple words are cultural norms.

The question begging to be asked should be clear, "What is the impact of this phenomenon on the adult learner listening to the preacher's sermon on any given Sunday at church?" Is it reasonable to think that standard speech is sufficient to keep attention for a homily lasting thirty minutes or more? The rate of comprehension, which equals hearing plus processing, is more than three times greater than the average rate of speech. Boredom, distractions and learners finishing sentences before they are spoken is the likely result for preachers failing to take this recommendation to heart.

Preachers who are sensitive to learners should seek to quicken the rate of speed at which they speak.<sup>3</sup> Not doing so may mean the difference between being heard or putting your hearers to sleep. This can be accomplished by doing several things.

First, an accurate assessment should be made of the preacher's own words per minute average. With the help of a voice recording, the number of words should be counted given the number of minutes spoken. From that, an average can be derived.

Next, word processing software will give the preacher a word count of his sermon manuscript. The preacher should mark off about 175-190 words and practice reading them aloud within a minute. This will give the communicator a feel for what an enhanced rate of speech will sound like in his own hearing.

Finally, preachers who take seriously their rate of speech as a potential deterrent to keeping their audience's attention will seek feedback. Several confidants, but especially those of the emerging generation, should be informed of this concern. Their candid feedback will inform the learner-sensitive preacher as to whether or not his rate of speech is keeping pace with the expectations, albeit subconscious, of an emerging generation of learners influenced by the cultural factor of technology. However, the rate of speed at which a preacher speaks is not all that should concern the learner-sensitive communicator. The number of "moves" within the sermon itself is also helpful for holding the attention of a congregation affected by today's technology.

Greg went on to explain that David Buttrick, in his book *Homiletic*, writes of how

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<sup>3</sup> Jeff Miller, "Boring Your Church at the Speed of Sound." *Preaching* 18, no. 5 (March- April 2003): 23-24.

in the past preachers spoke of making "points." Buttrick suggests that it is better to think of sermons as made of a series of "moves" or "language modules" that are indicative of a more conversational tone than suggested in the traditional homiletic model. It might be helpful to think of these "moves" as the "legs" of a trip. The central truth is the destination. The moves of the sermon are the itinerary ("legs") of the first day, second day, etc. The sermon may be thought of as a kind of spiritual journey from here to where the adult learners need to be.

There is a good indication that the attention span of adults is limited to four to six minutes.<sup>4</sup> A typical sermon should consist of four to six of these "legs" linked together by the sermon's central truth. After each "leg of the journey" there is a natural transition (a rest stop) before travelling on to the next "leg" of the sermon. Learner-sensitive preachers are aware of how technological advances have affected the adult expectations for regular "breaks" within a thirty-minute message. Learner-sensitive preachers should employ the **4 to 6 principle**. Four to six "moves" per sermon with a new move after every four to six minutes of speaking.

"Wow," said Bill. "Can you explain this further?"

"I'll sure try," replied Greg.

After the work of preparing a biblical sermon has passed the expositional outline stage and the preacher has a working central truth, the learner-sensitive preacher considers the imaginary dialogue between the preacher and the adult learners. The preacher might ask himself a series of questions that include; "What are adult learners

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<sup>4</sup> Buttrick, 26.

saying to themselves when they hear this subject introduced? What is the proposition that Scripture is proposing? What are the hindrances that will keep them from believing this is true or from applying this proposition to life? What are the benefits if the learners buy this proposition and live it out? These kinds of questions equip the preacher with needed answers to develop the "itinerary" for the sermon's journey.

It is obvious that these questions move the preacher beyond the act of giving information and into the business of persuasion. The preacher at this level of communication is beyond a focus on the content being delivered or a focus on self. Instead, he is audience-focused, the essence of effective communication.

"This is fascinating," replied Bill. "Please, keep going."

A good "move" has at least four components: a statement of the subject and complement (topic sentence) of the move that is tied to the central truth, an explanation of the "move's" topic sentence, an image of the topic sentence "fleshed out" in everyday life, and a concluding thought that summarizes the move and hints toward the following one.<sup>5</sup> Four to six of these moves per sermon accommodate the attention span of contemporary adults affected by the cultural factor of technology.

"I think I'm following you," said Bill. "But can you give me an example of what this looks like?"

"I think so," replied Greg as he paused to think. "Okay, here's an example from my sermon just this past weekend. The big idea of the sermon was that marital sexuality is good for the community, it's good for people and it honors God. I introduced the topic

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 43-52.

sentence of the 'move' by saying, 'God is the author of sex. He delights in it. Contrary to what we might think, he thinks it's good.' Then, I addressed what I imagined reluctant learners were thinking or feeling as I introduced the topic. I imagined them saying to themselves that God doesn't really like sex. He stands outside bedroom doors wondering what's going on in there. I then talked about the fact that many of us (and that of those around us) live as if God had no part in our sexuality. Then I quoted the pop song *Follow Me*, by the band Uncle Kracker, 'I'm not worried 'bout the ring you wear, 'Cuz as long as no one knows than nobody can care. You're feelin' guilty and I'm well aware... Follow me everything is all right.' I concluded that 'move' by saying that everything is not all right-- a spouse is betrayed and children are being fought over in divorce court-- but God has a better plan and we find it in I Corinthians 6, verses 12-20."

"Another method for accommodating technology's impact on adult learning is using technology in sermon delivery," Greg said. Are you ready for me to go on?"

"Yes, please continue," Bill said.

The third thing that learner-sensitive preachers should consider as a result of technology's impact on adult learning needs is the use of technology (**Tech Use**) to assist in communicating the sermon's central truth. The learner-sensitive preacher will ask, "Is there a way that I can deliver this sermon using various technological methods to enhance my oral presentation of the proposed proposition?" The answer may include one or more of the following possibilities.

One way preachers may use technology to support the central truth is by using computer graphics to enhance the presentation of it. This use of technology has already

found its place in replacing hymnbooks with the words of the congregation's songs being projected on screens across the front of many of today's church auditoriums. And in some of those churches, the sermon outline and related Scriptures visually enhance the spoken sermon through presentations using a computer software program like Powerpoint. This is an obvious and legitimate use of computer graphics resulting from technology's impact on adult learning needs. However, there are two cautions to consider with implementation.

Merely using computer graphics to enhance the words of the worship service fails to utilize the power of image alone as a tool in the communicator's toolbox. Learner-sensitive preachers should seek to employ computer graphics in such a way as to let the visual "image" stand complementary to the spoken message. Image-driven technology can capture the attention of and teach the listeners in a way that word-driven technology will not.<sup>6</sup>

"I'm with you so far," Bill explained. "But tell me more about image-driven technology."

"Sure," replied Greg. "What I mean is that we should learn to trust a picture or pictures to communicate what preachers have typically insisted words must say. A picture really can be worth a thousand words. However, I think many preachers feel uncomfortable allowing proposition to be communicated visually rather than orally."

Another caution concerning computer graphic use in preaching is giving away the preacher's "moves" before having a chance to make them. The audience may find that

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they can get the meaning of the sermon without having to listen at all. Thus, boredom results. When this happens the very reason for using computer graphics-- to enhance attention-- is sabotaged. Instead, preachers should carefully consider how the use of computer graphics reinforce through restatement what has already been said and insures that the use of this technological method truly enhances the sermon's clarity and relevance rather than distracting from it.

Greg continued.

Another way preachers may use technology to support the central truth is through the use of lighting. Effective lighting can draw focus to its intended subject, create a mood and enhance the visual impact. The church should consider its benefits.

Lighting technology can help draw the attention of the audience toward its desired subject. Lowering the lights in the congregation can help minimize distractions. Lighting the platform well prevents a preacher's facial expressions and body gestures from being lost in the shadows. Lighting technology also has the capacity to help create a mood that assists the preacher in persuading the congregation to a desired response. Various colors can reflect or help create the "attitude" of that day's sermon.

For the visual learner, lighting is a critical component for enhancing the visual impact. Attention to lighting technology by learner-sensitive preachers assures that learners can experience the life-changing message unhindered and with maximum aesthetic opportunity.

"That's a lot to think about," interrupted Bill. "My wife can hardly get me to

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<sup>6</sup>Len Wilson, *The Wired Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 28-30.

change a light bulb and you're suggesting I become acquainted with lighting technology to enhance my sermons. That's not an easy sell for someone as technologically-challenged as I am."

"Yes and no," said Greg. "Yes, you do have to more effectively utilize what technology can do, but no, I didn't say you had to do it. The work of learner-sensitive preaching cannot be accomplished alone. It is in its very nature a team effort. But, we'll come to that later. For now, trust me, I'm not suggesting we can or should do all this ourselves. There's one more element I'd like to explore."

The third way preachers may use technology to support the central truth is through the use of video. Video can illustrate or affirm the validity of the preacher's propositional statements through interviews, clips from the stories of major motion pictures or footage from current events in and around the community. This footage will typically include narrative and/or music as part of its presentation. An example of this would be using a previously held baptism as a way to teach about that ordinance of the local church. A testimony from the person(s) baptized about the experience and what it meant to their own spiritual journey, as well as its impact on family and friends who witnessed it, would give clarity and relevance to the sermon's listeners about its benefits. Effective preachers in the future will undoubtedly closely align themselves with the art of video to dialogue with their audiences about the stuff life is made of in much the same way that the producers of documentary films, music videos and motion pictures do currently.

"Okay, let me review what you've said are the take-away points that preachers

should consider in light of technology's impact on an emerging generation's learning needs," said Bill as he tapped his head to joggle his memory loose. "First, I must consider increasing the rate of speed at which I speak. Second, my sermon should be developed in four to six 'moves' with a commercial break every four to six minutes."

"I said 'transitions', you said 'a commercial break'," Greg corrected laughing.

"Whatever," said Bill. "Same idea. And finally, you suggested that I consider how to get better at using the media of computer graphics, lighting and video themselves, with a team of course, as a way to enhance my sermons' clarity and relevance. Do I have it about right before I stick this fork in my eye from being overwhelmed?"

"Take it easy buddy," Greg said sarcastically as he pulled the utensil from Bill's hand. "I'm not done yet. There's plenty more for us to consider before contemplating something drastic. When we get together next time we'll talk about the cultural factor called *Experiential Environments* and its influence on adult expectations of the environments they attend. I'm out next week for a Leadership Network conference in Denver, but I'll see you in two weeks."

Bill rolled his eyes as he took a deep breath and said, "I can hardly wait."

## CHAPTER 6

### EXPERIENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS

"How was your trip to Denver?" asked Bill as he stepped out of his car. "Did you learn anything new?"

"What I learned definitely affirmed the things I was already thinking. It's a new day for church leaders; that's for sure," responded Greg as they stepped into the diner at the corner of Fourth and Broadway that had become their classroom over the past few months.

As they took their seats at the corner booth and picked up a menu to order breakfast, Bill spoke up and said, "Go on, tell me more."

"The authors of *The Experience Economy*<sup>1</sup> were there as guest speakers. This book was the first to help me begin to verbalize some of the principles we've been discussing. It was written to help companies realize that customer expectations are different than they have been in the past. These authors suggest that people want and expect 'ing' in the events and activities of their daily lives," Greg stated.

"Whoa! Back up and try again," said Bill. "They want to what?"

"I said they want to 'ing' the activities and events of their lives. Authors Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore note that for pleasure people do 'ing' things like skiing, skating, hunting

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<sup>1</sup> Pine & Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, ix – xii.

and camping. They propose that in ever-increasing ways people want and expect the daily purchases and routines of their lives to be 'ing-ed' by having an experience that engages the senses and builds a theme around the sale or service offered, as well as provides a quality product.<sup>2</sup> Companies that get it understand that their customers want 'ing'. They want a driving experience. They want a shopping experience. They want a dining experience. Their furniture purchasing includes a sitting experience. Successful companies 'ing' their product or service," Greg continued.

"Churches that understand adult learning needs will do more than 'teach truth.' They will create learning experiences. Learning experiences that are participatory and image-rich. They will involve movement, discussion, food and activities."

"Maybe the best way to explain the idea of *experiential environments* is with an illustration that the authors used during a workshop I attended last week," said Greg. "When our grandmothers wanted to celebrate our parents' birthdays, they gathered commodities like flour, eggs and sugar and baked a birthday cake. Our parents celebrated our birthdays with the purchase of goods. They bought a cake in a box, thanks to someone named Betty Crocker, along with canned icing and topped it with sprinkles. Along the way the economy graduated to services and birthday cakes could be bought already made at Kroger's or, better yet, Baskin Robbins. Are you still with me, Bill?"

"I am. Commodities, goods and services are the labels to describe the progression of economic value. In each instance the price for the consumer increased dramatically. But the offering was relevant to the customer's needs and expectations and therefore, the

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<sup>2</sup> Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 36-37.

consumer was willing to pay it. Is the next economic offering 'experiences?'" guessed Bill.

"Yes. Pine and Gilmore say that the present economy is one of experiences. As parents ourselves we tend to buy a birthday experience. Is that not the case?" asked Greg.

"My wife and I do it all the time," said Bill as his eyes brightened, revealing his enthusiasm. "Because my kids are young, we buy our birthday experiences at the McDonald's on North Market Street. They provide the cake, an energetic hostess and a large indoor playground. My wife writes the check and the best part of all, we leave the clean up with them."

"Even if it costs more?" questioned Greg.

"Our time is valuable and our kids are worth it. I get it! McDonald's has 'ing-ed' my child's birthday. They have provided a lot more than fast food. They have offered a birthday party experience. And, my wife and I are willing to pay a premium price for that experiential environment for our children's birthday parties, aren't we? After a pause that seemed to last several minutes Bill concluded, "Preaching might be impacted by this cultural phenomenon, you know."

"No kidding!" said Greg sarcastically. "Another example is this cup of coffee we're drinking. Do you think we're paying only for the commodity of the coffee beans and the privilege of someone fixing it for us? We're paying a premium price for the experience of sitting in a corner booth with memorabilia leftover from the hippie generation hanging on the walls around us."

"You're not suggesting a cover charge for hearing our sermons, are you?" inquired Bill. "I don't think the deacons will go for that."

"Just hang on. I'll get to the implications for preaching soon. But before we get to that, give me a chance to explain something Pine and Gilmore present in their materials. They call it the 'realms of experience.' Simply put, there are continua of experiential involvement.<sup>3</sup> Here's a question to introduce this concept. Is the audience participant merely observing and passive in the experience happening, such as would be true if one were merely watching TV, or is the participant in some way immersed and active in the experience, becoming a determiner of the experience's outcome? The expectations of an emerging generation of experience-seekers are that they will be immersed and active in the things to which they give themselves to, whether it be for purposes of entertainment or self-improvement. To each environment there are varying degrees of audience involvement or 'realms of experience.' 'The Blue Man Group' is an example of an audience that is active and immersed in the experience created."

"Are those the guys whose head and hands are covered with blue stuff and beat the large drums?" interrupted Bill. "I've seen them on Jay Leno."

"Yep. That's them," replied Greg. "I think attending one of their performances should be a mandatory requirement for every preacher. Their show has a message, yet words are never spoken throughout the entire performance by the primary communicators. The 'blue men' come into the audience and choose people to come on stage and help determine that show's unique shape. Interruptions are fodder for

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<sup>3</sup> Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, 29-31.

communication, albeit non-verbal, and welcomed as opportunities for building community among the audience guests. It's a lesson in creative communication. I can't possibly do the show justice by describing it, you really must 'experience' it!"

"It certainly sounds like it," said Bill. "But until I do, can you give me some idea of your thinking on the implications of *experiential environments* on preaching for a new generation of adult learners?"

"Well, I'll try. But first let me paint my face blue for full effect," joked Greg. "Actually, I just need to take a quick break. I'll be right back."

When Greg returned he reached once again for his ink pen and the thick tri-fold paper that doubled as a napkin. On it he wrote...**Presentation Assessment.** "The first implication of the economy of experiential environments on adult learning expectations is assessing the environment of the central truth of the sermon. All I mean by this," said Greg, "Is everything I've already been saying about learner-sensitive preaching since we've been meeting. We need to be sensitive to the variety of learning styles. We should seek to include technology as a tool for effective communication. Essentially, assessing one's use of creativity through the arts and ways to appropriately increase audience participation is what I mean by presentation assessment."

Next, Greg took his pen and wrote the words, **Environmental Assessment.** "I think the second implication of experiential environments as a cultural factor on preaching to an emerging generation is to take an environmental assessment. This means that the preacher, in cooperation with the church's leadership team, should carefully consider the facility and the surroundings where the sermons are delivered. Is the

environment in sync with the stated values of the organization? Does the subtle ambience set a mood that invites the attendee to hear the proposed proposition free from unnecessary distractions? What hospitality welcomes the adult learners and communicates to them that guests can feel at home and any question is safe? These are the kinds of inquiries that a healthy environmental assessment should include,” Greg said emphatically.

Bill started to interrupt, but Greg continued barely catching his breath, “However, it seems to me that the pastor and leadership team can only facilitate this assessment. If they could fix it or change it, they would have done so already. An outside consultant or, at the very least, a team of congregation members made up of those who are trained or have a natural bent for such matters should be recruited and authorized to suggest needed changes. Preschool and elementary check-in stations must also be evaluated along with safety and security issues. Lawn and exterior maintenance issues must be considered. Music as background noise is a common expectation of contemporary environments. In some cases, flavored coffee and comfortable seating areas are made available. In other cases, these applications to the desired environment would be far too casual for the experience the church leadership creates in its weekend services. I think I’ve pressed that point far enough, Bill. Can I go on to a third and final implication on preaching?” Bill nodded.

“To understand this implication we must understand that the motivation of a worthwhile experience is transformation. Pine and Gilmore call this the ‘final economic offering.’ Ultimately, an experience points to the soul’s desire to connect with change, to

become something more than it presently is. It is a search for meaning that only life with God yields.”

“I don’t see where we’re going just yet. Help me out,” interrupted Bill.

“Remember the movie, ‘*City Slickers* starring Billy Crystal?’” Greg asked.

“Where they go on the cattle drive and run into the larger than life trail boss played by Jack Palance. Yes, I loved that movie. ‘Best day, worst day, same day,’” said Bill as he tried to mimic the now famous lines from the movie.

“Why were the actors in the movie willing to go to the dude ranch in the first place? What experience were they wanting and even willing to pay for in order to get? The answer I would suggest is transformation. That ‘one thing’ that Curly was talking about. And, transformation is what preaching ‘sells.’ The dude ranch was selling the potential for soul transformation. Church communicators ‘sell’ soul transformation, don’t they?” asked Greg. “With this in mind, preaching assists people in taking a

**Personal Assessment.”**

Greg paused long enough to write the words down before he continued. A personal assessment allows people to assess the quality of life they are experiencing given the subject being addressed that day. This may be either verbal or written. Let’s say that people admit that they want to become more relationally connected. The preacher defines, explains and ‘draws a picture’ of what relationally connected people say, do and experience. He helps the adult learner assess personally how she or he is doing in this area of life. Then the preacher persuades the hearers to think, behave and participate in an experience that has the opportunity to transform them. In other words,

he invites them to join a small group made up of spiritually interested individuals, led by a spiritual director facilitating spiritual conversations. After six months, the preacher and the discipleship leaders do another check to assess whether or not the participants are more relationally connected than before.”

“Short-term mission trips are another example,” said Greg. “Parents and their kids can pay a fee to go on a serving trip to the Dominican Republic to do medical missions, build churches, or conduct neighborhood Bible clubs. Their children experience another culture, but more than that, parents have paid for potential transformation. They have increased the chance that in the backdrop of poverty their children will become less selfish, more grateful and more generous. In this example, preaching will help parents see the need for taking the trip, and for taking their children with them. The sermon becomes a tool to persuade them concerning a personal assessment hoping it will lead to them taking a next step leading to transformation.”

“I see now that all three of these create a unified message,” said Bill thoughtfully. “The environment outside of the auditorium is reflecting values and themes. The sermon itself, and the creative arts/methods that communicate it, are clear and relevant in all the ways that respect the Scripture and the audience to whom the proposition is being proposed. And, finally, the preacher is helping the hearers assess the next steps of their spiritual journey by introducing them to another environment beyond the weekend services that has been designed for transformation. Can a church really become that intentional about creating *experiential environments*, Greg?”

“I hope so,” Greg replied. “An emerging generation is depending on it!”

## OVERVIEW OF SECTION THREE

### HOMILETIC METHODOLOGY

“From what you’ve been telling me about *adult learning needs* and the *cultural factors* influencing them, I’d say we’ve got our work cut out for us,” said Bill as he stared at the notes made from all the previous informal lessons Greg had shared with him. “I realize that my preaching must increasingly become more ‘learner-sensitive’ as you like to call it. But even now, when I try some of the things we’ve talked about in my own preaching, I can sense the tension beginning to rise in the room. Some really like the change and others, I think, wonder if these are the early steps toward rampant heresy. I’m not sure what to do. I’m convinced that changes are needed in my *homiletic methodology*, but I lack knowledge, and therefore confidence, about the necessary components for implementing a learner-sensitive approach.”

“I feel your pain, Bill. I really do,” replied Greg. “The future is unknown, but just doing it the way we’ve always done it is unacceptable. We’re stuck between ‘a rock and a hard place,’ as my mother used to say. It seems to me that the first thing we need for an improved homiletic is *a willing spirit*. I remember the day I came home and announced to my wife that the next message I preached during which Jerry Porter fell asleep, I was going to break out into an interpretive dance to get his attention. She actually liked the idea but thought that a ‘break dance’ might be more effective. I’m really not meaning to trivialize, but desperation is a key motivation for change.”

“You can see, can’t you, that without *a willing spirit* we won’t take the risks and implement the change necessary to preach with clarity and relevance to a new generation of disciples.” Greg went on, “As far as confidence is concerned, I would suggest that our model for learner-sensitive preaching is found in the pages of the Scriptures we teach from each week. In that sense, we have confidence that our model is *a Godly model* and that attention to things like multiple learning styles, experiential environments and utilizing cultural icons were standard in the preaching of our Lord Jesus when he ministered among us. I can see I’ve got your interest, Bill. I’ll go into greater detail on my thinking about this when we get together again two weeks from today.”

“I’ll be anxiously waiting to hear from you on that subject,” Bill told Greg as he began to collect his things to leave.

“There’s one last thing I promised we’d come back to before we’re finished,” said Greg.

“Oh, what’s that?” asked Bill as he stood.

“I promised you a discussion on *multi-sensory methods* and how to begin taking steps to implement them in your own preaching,” Greg answered. “Do you remember? When we finish that you’ll know everything I know.”

“I’ll know just enough to be dangerous. I know you’re setting me up to experiment with some of these ideas while you watch to see what works and what ‘whacks’ me up side of the head. Am I right?” teased Bill.

“You’re on to me,” said Greg smiling. And with a sneer he added, “Just three more weeks before we’re through. It’s too late to turn back now. You’re all mine.”

## CHAPTER 7

### A WILLING SPIRIT

Pastors Greg McGinnis and Bill Kirkland had been meeting at the diner for breakfast and conversation concerning preaching for the past six weeks. This Thursday morning Greg arrived first and was reading over the summary of the Barna Research Group's survey on the state of discipleship conducted in the year 2000. He was so intent on his reading that Bill startled him as he entered the booth and sat down.

"Whoa, sorry man. You got a guilty conscience? Need to confess something?" kidded Bill. "What's that you're reading? Must be pretty heavy stuff."

"Good morning, Bill. This is heavy. I brought it for you. I was just reminding myself of its content. Here, let me show you. Are you familiar with the survey on discipleship that Barna's group did a few years back?" asked Greg as he turned the printed online magazine article toward his friend. "The survey results and Barna's solutions were published in a book entitled *Growing True Disciples*."<sup>1</sup>

"No, I'm not familiar with the survey or the book," said Bill. "Tell me about it."

For the next several minutes Greg took the opportunity to share with Bill that research by the Barna Group revealed that the state of discipleship in the church has its share of challenges. The statistics surfaced the following facts:

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<sup>1</sup> George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Resources, 2000), 49-67.

1. A minority of adult and teen believers contends that absolute moral truth exists.
2. Less than one out of every ten believers possesses a biblical worldview as the basis for his/her decision-making or behavior.
3. When given thirteen basic teachings from the Bible, only 1% of adult believers firmly embraced all thirteen as being biblical perspectives.
4. When Christian adults were asked to identify their most important goal for their life, not a single person said it was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ, or to make disciples of Christ.

Greg continued, “Barna concludes these facts saying, ‘Our surveys among pastors showed that they dismissed such views as excuses and as inaccurate, but the bottom line remains unchanged: most Christians are simply not making progress in their personal spiritual development.’”<sup>2</sup>

Greg continued, “Responsible church leaders must answer the question, ‘Is current methodology sufficient to produce Christlikeness and biblical literacy in a generation whose learning needs are affected by the cultural factors we’ve been talking about?’ Preachers wanting to address this problem will admit that life-change for a new generation will inevitably include change in methodology. This change will undoubtedly result in resistance from some within their ranks who fail to see the need to reach a wider audience than is currently being reached. But, commitment to radical evangelism and

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<sup>2</sup> Barna, *Discipleship Insights Revealed*, 2.

discipleship will certainly mean offending the preferences of the convinced in order to accommodate the preferences of those who are not. If the conclusion is that current methodology is insufficient for an emerging generation, then what must be done?”

“There’s more bad news about the state of discipleship beyond what I’ve read thus far. But, you get the idea,” said Greg. “If we do what we’ve always done, chances are we’ll get what we’ve already gotten. That’s why I’m willing to make changes in the church, beginning with my sermon development and delivery. I still believe the preaching environment is worth considerable investment as a discipleship tool. But, it needs the kind of tweaking that learner-sensitive preaching principles provide.”

Greg continued, “The day in which rational objectivity is the sole persuader in the preacher’s arsenal is past.<sup>3</sup> For each and every new generation careful analysis of the culture, including its audience’s preferences, as well as continued attention to biblical mandates in cooperation with the unique personalities of the people involved has the greatest potential for effective communication of the gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

“I want to be willing to make the changes necessary to develop followers to full maturity,” Bill said as he shifted nervously in his seat. “I wonder, why am I still resistant? I can tell that I have reservations that are holding me back.”

“As I’ve considered this for myself,” responded Greg, “I’ve concluded that in order to have a spirit willing to embrace change in my homiletic methods I must be

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<sup>3</sup> Buttrick, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Hesselgrave, 226-227.

convinced of these four statements.” Instantly, he reached for his gel pen as if it were impossible for him to think without also writing it down.

“Here! I’ve got real paper today,” said Bill as he reached for a notebook.

“I prefer these napkins, but thanks anyway. It’s an unexplainable obsession of mine. I need help,” Greg said as he laughed. “Now, let me share and explain these beliefs that I think are foundational for change.”

“I’m listening,” said Bill.

### God Delights in Creative Communication

When God stood on the edge of eternity and began the wonder of creation, he expressed his own desire and delight in creative communication. As Romans 1:20 declares, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” Creatively, God spoke without words.

God made humans in his image for the purposes of rightly relating to him and caring for the things he created for them to enjoy. God said, “Let there be” and looked at all he had made and said that it was good. He gave Adam the assignment of naming the animals. He delighted in Adam’s creativity.<sup>5</sup> Art is an expression of what it means to be fully human. The fall of man kills, but redemption restores and creativity reflects that supernatural rebirth. Calvin Miller suggests that there is “an art hunger” in people that

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Turner, *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 66.

preachers must feed, while at the same time, faithfully calling for repentance.<sup>6</sup>

Many fail to understand creativity as a way to communicate through metaphor. Many think of the arts (e.g., drama, music, dance, videography, photography and painting) as only amusement. When the arts are seen only as amusement, then they are seen as a distraction from the really important things of life. They give us temporary relief from life's stressors. Others see the arts as decoration. The art elements, for example the music in many churches, is meant to get people ready for the important elements of the church, like the preaching. In this view, the arts are used as a means to draw attention to or to decorate the "real" ministry of the local church.

Thinking of the arts as merely means to amuse or enhance misses the impact for which it has potential. The arts can be used to creatively communicate a need to rethink our paradigms. Art can challenge presumptions. It questions dogma. Like creation, art touches the edges of a soul and reveals the nature of that which reflects the divine. It inspires. It reminds observers that God cannot be reduced to the content of a systematic theology. God must be worshipped and His mystery celebrated. He cannot be contained. Creative communication expressed through the arts speaks truth to those willing to experience it and delights the heart of God.

#### God Can be Trusted

Mistakes may very well be made in attempts to communicate differently to a new generation. A willingness to try new things may result in communication errors and

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, *Marketplace Preaching*, 38.

occasional excessiveness. God alone judges the motivations of the heart. In Romans 8:1 there is assurance: “There is, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Risk-taking church leaders do not have to fear a punitive response for errors born out of desire to impact the emerging generation with the transforming power of God’s word. If discipline is needed, they can be confident that the Lord will provide it (Hebrews 12: 5-11).

The apostle Paul found confidence in the diversity in which God’s work was being accomplished. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he declared that the motives of some who preached in Jesus’ name were skewed, competitive and ambitious, Notice Paul’s response: “But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And, because of this, I rejoice”(Philippians 1: 15-18).

Obviously, it is not Paul’s intention to declare that motives are unimportant and that careful evaluation is unnecessary. Instead, he is saying that immaturity and flesh patterns are a part of the preaching experience. Not everything done in church life merits absolute confidence that it is being done right. Church leaders are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to accomplish his purposes in cooperation with the effort of human skill.<sup>7</sup> God will protect his church and give correction where needed.

The heart of the Father is like the woman who found her lost coin, the shepherd who rejoiced when his one lost sheep was found, and the father of the prodigal who threw a party when his rebellious son repented and came home (Luke 15). The value of the lost

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<sup>7</sup> Sunukjian, 290.

demands risk. God will reward those who chance comfort and conformity for the privilege of participating with him in strategic endeavors to redeem fallen men and women facing an empty life and a Christ-less eternity.

### People are God's Treasure

From the early pages of Genesis the message that people are God's unique treasure is clear. Romans 8:18-19 says: "Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." The forming of man from the dust of the ground, giving him the breath of life and marking him in the image of the triune God was the ultimate act of his creation.

The fall of man (Genesis 3) marred that image, but it was not destroyed. There is no place so dark, no sin and suffering so despicable, where people are not God's treasure. They are each marked in his image. Throughout one's life, God pursues them with the intent of remaking them into the person according to his original purposes, allowing them experience the quality of life he intended.

God went to great lengths in hopes of seeing relationship reestablished with his created human beings. With Abram as representative head, God made a unilateral covenant with him and his seed, and through him that all the people of the earth would be blessed. God has, is and will be faithful to this covenant. Because it is the nature of God to be faithful and people are God's special treasure.

When our salvation needed to be redeemed with blood, God became human in the person of Jesus and as the perfect Lamb and took upon himself the sins of the world. His

earthly ministry modeled for us living the kingdom life on earth. When he left for heaven he left us the Spirit whose coming fulfilled the promise of Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Believers are sealed with the guarantee of his Spirit because people are God's treasure.

In John 14, Jesus said that he is preparing a place for us, that where he is we will be. The place he is preparing was beyond John's ability to describe. The size and beauty of that city are incomprehensible. The promise of God is that he will one day return to earth in the same manner in which he left (Acts 1:11). The kingdom of God will be established. The authority of God will be exercised. The will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. All who accept his grace will live with God in the eternal state. Not because people deserve to do so, but because people are God's treasure.

### People Can Change

What God invites us to become, he provides the necessary resources for it to happen. His instructions to love one another as he loved us (John 15:12) are given with the necessary resources to accomplish. Since we are admonished to persevere through persecution (John 15:18-25). We are provided what is needed to stand strong. Since we are commanded to put away lying, cheating and stealing, and instead to speak truth, deal fairly and work hard (Ephesians 4:17-32); then the change commanded is expected, and therefore, possible.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is given to all believers (John 15:26; 16:5-15). The ability for people to change is accessible through the ministry of the

Holy Spirit. People who respond in faith to God's offer for life to the full (John 10:10) are not enslaved as victims to selfishness and sin any longer.

Preachers can confidently call for and expect life-change in their hearers. There is power in the message. If a new methodology will increase attention and help persuade the audience members to adopt the propositions proposed, then life-change will result. When life-change occurs the preacher is inspired to continue in his cooperation with the Holy Spirit, doing all that can be done to see men and women remade in the likeness of God's Son.

"So as you can see Bill," concluded Greg as he looked up from the napkin he'd been scribbling on as he'd made his points, "The preacher's work is not in vain because people can change. And if we are willing, creative changes in homiletic methodology can enhance spiritual growth in God's treasure. God can be trusted to lead us in our endeavor to enhance the clarity and relevance of our sermons for an emerging generation."

"The things you've said today are pretty basic and remind me of why I yielded to the ministry of preaching in the first place," said Bill. "I do desire to see radical discipleship and growth to full maturity among those within my sphere of influence. I'm willing to be willing to embrace the changes necessary to communicate more clearly and relevantly to the next generation. Perhaps, what I still lack are models and specific examples of learner-sensitive preaching principles. Can you help?"

"I hope to," replied Greg. "We'll start next week with the divine model—the model of God in the person of Jesus. As I said to you early on in our time together, I

don't think these principles for preaching to postmodern people are nearly as new as some might think. Instead, they are in many ways a rediscovery of a methodology that is quite old. If it's okay, I'd like to assign you homework for next week" continued Greg as he rose to leave."

"Uh, okay, I guess. What is it?" asked Bill hesitantly.

"I want you to read one of the four gospels, preferably Luke, this week in one sitting. And, I want you to read with 'learner-sensitive' eyes," Greg said. "Look at the teaching of Jesus while being mindful of the principles we've been discussing over the past several weeks. Got it? Good. Now, I've got to jet. I'm already late for a staff meeting. Thanks for your friendship."

"Thank you for your wisdom and encouragement, Greg. And, no thanks for the homework," said Bill smiling.

## CHAPTER 8

### A GODLY MODEL

“Good morning,” said Greg as he slid into the booth across from Bill. “Sorry I’m late.”

“No problem,” said Bill. “I even had the waitress bring your coffee so we could jump right in.”

“If you insist,” answered Greg as he took a sip from his cup and grabbed a napkin from the edge of the table. “Let’s review. The fundamental nature of learner-sensitive preaching is the communication of a message that accommodates the preferences of the receivers. The motivation for doing so is not to make the message palatable, but to make the meaning understandable. In other words, the communicator grasps not only the content of the message and the motivations for sharing it, but also an understanding of the recipients and their environments that facilitate maximum learning. Isn’t that what we’ve been talking about?” Greg asked rhetorically. “Nowhere can this kind of communication be found in greater measure than in the revelation of God to man as revealed in his Word.”

“So now it’s time to talk about what Scripture has to say about learner-sensitive preaching?” asked Bill.

“That’s the plan,” answered Greg. “Hold on tight and see if you can follow me. From the early pages of Scripture, students begin to see the communication of God’s

nature and his plans through the creative teaching methods of metaphor and typology.<sup>1</sup> The exodus out of Egypt is a type of the rescue that God provides time and again for his people captive to sin. The blood of the Passover lamb daubed on the doorposts of YHWH worshippers is a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of God for the sins of the whole world. Noah's ark, the ark of the covenant, the Temple with its courts, lamp stands and purification rights are kinesthetic, visual and tactile teaching aids used by the divine to communicate to willing learners."

"The elements of bread and the cup we use in observance of the Lord's Table are contemporary examples of this, aren't they?" Bill commented. "Okay, I'm following."

"Then there are the Psalms," Greg went on. "The psalmists are yesterday's poets. Upon closer examination, their poetry might be considered impertinent if a contemporary equivalent were read sometime during a present-day worship service. The psalmists, when read in context, are known to express their art with an authenticity that might astonish even the most candid among us. As an example, the last eighteen verses of Psalm 44 may surprise those unfamiliar with how raw the Scriptures can express life's fears and disappointments."

"Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love."

"I understand that," remarked Bill. "But, what does that have to do with today?"

"Good question," said Greg. "The psalmists, the poets and lyricists of our day

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Turner, *Imagine*, 70.

express their doubts and questions-- replete with emotion-- through some of today's most popular songs. Would it be possible to use the songs of Bono and Sheryl Crow, modern day poets in the vein of the psalmists, as worship preludes and experiential illustrations for preaching? To do so, though unconventional, would be within the communication model of God."

"I never thought of it that way," said Bill. "Keep going."

"As I'm sure you know, many evangelical scholars agree that the biblical book "The Song of Songs," was used as a poetry and prose piece of literature in and around Jerusalem, 950 B.C.<sup>2</sup> When interpreted according to a literal interpretation, this sensual story of romance, love and sex would probably offend the sensibilities of many of our attendees if a contemporary translation were recited in church this coming week. But apparently, God thought it worthy to communicate the struggles and joys of the marital relationship in a way that goes beyond an expositional homily. Apparently, God saw the wisdom of pushing the envelope by communicating the principles of a successful marriage relationship through an art form. Is there any doubt that the preaching of this Bible drama was clear and relevant to the first-time hearers of that work of art? Undoubtedly, there was no one inattentive or sleeping during that Song's performance!" Greg said emphatically. "Perhaps, contemporary preaching for an emerging generation can rediscover the benefits of using the arts to enhance their sermons' clarity and relevance."

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<sup>2</sup> Jack S. Deere. "Song of Songs." *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*. ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 1983), 1009-1010.

“Interesting,” said Bill. “So your point is that the Old Testament gives us examples of God and the inspired human authors using poetry and music as at least two art forms to communicate his message. What does the Bible reveal about creativity as it relates to preaching?”

“Well,” answered Greg. “Analysis of Jesus’ teaching and preaching will reveal that he was quite adept in using methods of learner-sensitivity. His sermons may certainly be classified as experiential. They happened on a hill, while reclining for a meal, after walking on water and with twelve baskets of bread and fish for leftovers.”

“They sure did,” Bill said with an understanding nod.

“Jesus’ use of parables is widely acknowledged,” Greg went on. “He used them because they drew out the spiritually discerning. He used them in order to avoid engendering the angry response of the crowd bent on his demise before the appointed time. But, he also told stories because they were effective in gaining and keeping attention. Jesus created, adopted and adapted stories from his surroundings. As I’m sure you’re aware he told stories about plants, animals, humans and things. About half of the spoken words of Jesus recorded in Luke’s gospel are short story parables and parables of comparison for example, ‘you are the salt of the earth,’ or ‘a city on a hill cannot be hidden’ (Matthew 5:13-14).<sup>3</sup> He used storytelling often and effectively to communicate his message to the learners of his generation. Contemporary emphasis on narrative and imagery find a substantial model in the communication of Jesus,” Greg added. “But you already knew that,” he said with a wink.

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<sup>3</sup> Horne, 76.

“Jesus also used what was known from the world around him to teach spiritual truths that were not yet known to his disciples. This method, which I have learned is called apperception, uses common things as analogies of what life in the kingdom is like.<sup>4</sup> It was understood that what was known is just a hint of the reality of the spiritual truth, but it allowed the learner to get their mind around the concept suggested. Like when he talked with the woman at the well in John 4.”

Bill chimed in, “He took the water and said, ‘Drink this water and you’ll thirst again. But, whoever drinks of the water that I give, will never thirst again.’ In John 3:8 he used the wind as a metaphor to describe the impact of the new life the Spirit brings. He used a visual aid when ‘he called a child and had him stand among them; (Matthew 18:2), teaching his hearers about the kind of character qualities a kingdom person should display. Christ was very good at this technique,” Bill concluded.

“In this same vein,” Greg said. “The apostle Paul masterfully used metaphors to describe the mysteries of grace and spiritual living. Things like ‘old man/new man,’ ‘the whole armor of God,’ ‘running the race for a prize’ and ‘being grafted in to the promises of Israel’ are a few examples. Paul searched the language of his world to produce imagery that would give these truths meaning. Paul’s metaphors “have become our slightly emptied religious terminology.”<sup>5</sup>

“While in Athens, Paul preached to the philosophers of his day by beginning with

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>5</sup> Buttrick, 194.

what they were already familiar with—an ‘altar to an unknown god.’ Paul told them the identity and authority of this God by quoting their own poets to them (Acts 17:28). Paul clearly spoke ‘their language’ to declare to them the gospel.

“So what do you suggest we do with this information?” Bill asked.

“Well,” Greg replied thoughtfully, “wise communicators must similarly scour present day culture for images and metaphors that best connect with their congregation’s experiences, while doing so ‘with theological wisdom.’<sup>6</sup> To simply parrot traditional terminology is ill advised and irresponsible. The work of the biblical interpreter is to communicate to the people in a language that the people will hear while maintaining the integrity of the authority of the source from which they preach.”

“Okay,” Bill said. “But what about those who would argue that the imagery of Scripture is sacred while the imagery from contemporary pop culture is secular?”

“They’re missing something very important,” said Greg. “They fail to understand that, rightly understood, all truth is God’s truth; therefore, there should be no discrepancy between sacred and secular truth. What is true is true, and what is not true is not true. In the words of one Christian educator, ‘Responsible educators study both general and special revelation to understand God’s creation and to design ministry in accordance with how God has designed his world.’<sup>7</sup> The theological import of Scripture’s metaphors must be protected while at the same time complementary imagery from contemporary society is implemented to assure understanding,” Greg said intensely. “Can you tell I’m sold on

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Downs,, 15.

this?”

Without waiting for an answer he continued, “Another teaching method that Jesus used would be considered learner-sensitive was taking questions asked and turning them into platforms for life training. It was common among the rabbis of Jesus’ day to teach in response to the questions that people were asking. Questions like: ‘Why was this man born blind?’ (John 9: 1-2) or ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce a woman for any reason?’ (Matthew 19: 3) gave Jesus the opportunities he needed to move his learners from where they were to where they needed to be in their spiritual understanding. Learner-sensitive preaching respects the questions that people are asking. It also seeks to rephrase the question in order to get at the real motivations behind what’s being asked. Jesus was quite comfortable using the questions people were asking as a platform for taking them where they needed to go.”

“Paul did this quite well, too, didn’t he?” Bill asked knowingly.

“Yes, of course the book of I Corinthians is an example of how the apostle Paul used this method of answering their questions as an opportunity to teach them doctrine and principles for grace-oriented living. This method is known as topical exposition among homileticians.”

“Another example of Jesus’ use of learner-sensitive principles was his references to the pop culture around him. He spoke the language of the people. By language, I mean more than Hebrew and Aramaic, I mean he used terminology and lived in a way that identified him as ‘one having authority, not as one of the scribes and Pharisees,’ (Matthew 7:29) and ‘a friend of sinners.’ (Matthew 11:19). Jesus spoke of Caesar, the

Temple mount's history, Samaritan prejudice and the construction accident that killed eighteen citizens of Jerusalem (Luke 13:1-5) and other commonly held knowledge of his culture.”

“Okay,” said Bill. “And how is this idea relevant to our preaching?”

“These people and events were the pop icons of that day,” said Greg. “If ‘*Entertainment Tonight*’ and ‘*The Barbara Walters Special*’ had aired in the first century they would have been the featured stories. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus kept the common experiences of his listeners closely tied to all the parts of the messages he gave.<sup>8</sup> In the words of Herman Horne, author of the classic *Teaching Techniques of Jesus*, ‘Jesus was far more pragmatic than either idealistic or mystic.’ (From our study of his methods) ‘we have gotten the impression that the problems of teaching which we ourselves face are similar to those of Jesus, and that the solutions he found may aid us.’<sup>9</sup>

“I know another way that Jesus modeled learner-sensitive principles,” said Bill. “I discovered it during the reading you gave me for my homework assignment this past week.”

“You did your homework?” asked Greg surprised. “I’m impressed. Tell me what’s another learner-sensitive principle you found that Jesus modeled?”

“His willingness to do what was in the best interest of the people he was serving even if it meant stirring up the guardians of traditional methods. Do you recall what his accusers said of him in this regard when he was brought before Pilate? Here let me show

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis and Lewis, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Horne, 206.

you,” Bill said as he took his Bible and turned to Luke 23:5. “When Pilate could find no reason to charge him the assembly rose up and said, ‘He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching,’ and it hit me, Greg. It hit me really hard. What are the chances of me ever being accused of stirring up the people with my preaching? It goes back to what we were discussing last week about having a willing spirit to embrace change needed in traditional methods to communicate to an emerging generation.”

“So that’s another way that Jesus modeled a learner-sensitive principle,” Bill continued. “He was willing to experience the consequences for doing what he believed necessary. And by the way, thanks for the homework. I really benefited from doing it.”

“That’s a good point you made, Bill. I’ve never thought about that before today,” commented Greg. “Jesus was willing to do what needed to be done in order to communicate the ‘life and to the full’ (John 10:10) that he came for people to experience. His desire was to improve their quality of life by calling his followers to another level of obedience and righteousness.<sup>10</sup> The reaction of his critics held no sway in light of His stated purposes in doing the will of his Father. Of course, that’s the hope for myself, and a prayer I have for you. May we not sacrifice what’s expedient on the altar of what’s convenient.”

“Amen and amen!” Bill said smiling and pounding his fist on the table. “I think I may have gotten you off track. Is there more you had to share about the model of God as it relates to the ideas of learner-sensitive preaching?”

“Yes, thanks. I have saved the best for last. There’s no greater model of learner-

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<sup>10</sup> Downs, 33.

sensitive preaching than in the example of the Incarnation. That's the ultimate example of being learner-sensitive through the use of multi-sensory methods," said Greg.

"Tell me more," responded Bill.

"Well, when God became human in the person of Jesus he took on flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), right? No longer was the revelation of God relegated to the dwelling of God with man by His Spirit or the theophanies of the Son or the revelation of His will through the law given to Moses. As astounding as all of these were, at the Incarnation the manifest presence of God became that 'which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched (I John 1:1-2).'"

"God communicated himself by becoming a visual. He became what could be seen. His actions were those that communicated in a language that was familiar to the recipients. Pretty amazing, huh?" Greg asked as he looked up from the napkin he'd been writing on.

"God also communicated himself by becoming what could be touched. The tactile learner could experience him vicariously through the woman with the alabaster jar who washed his feet (Mark 14: 1-9) or the woman who found healing through her faith in touching the tassels of his robe (Luke 8:43-48)."

"For the kinesthetic learner, the actions of Jesus and his daily behaviors become a living lesson. He arose before dawn to spend time with the Father. He was a friend of sinners. He refused to be manipulated by religious dogma. These activities can be emulated with positive learning results by willing followers."

“Okay, I give up. I think I get it,” exclaimed Bill teasingly. “These examples all point to God’s use of multi-sensory methods to communicate his message. For the preacher hoping to engage a new generation, bringing the sermon to life through communicating in language sensitive to the preferences and experiences of the hearers is not without precedent. It is *a godly model* found throughout the Scriptures and in the person of Jesus.”

“By George, I do think you’ve got,” said Greg with a chuckle.

“It’s more food for thought,” Bill sighed as he leaned back, took a long sip of his coffee, and glanced at his watch. “Oh, I better get going,” he said. “How about next week?”

“I’ll be here,” Greg remarked. “Same time, same place.”

## CHAPTER 9

### A MULTI-SENSORY APPROACH

“Now let me try and restate your logic,” said Bill as he swallowed his last bite and pushed his plate to the edge of the table. “Obviously, you’ve said a lot, but let me try and boil it down this way. If I understand what we’ve discussed over the past several months now, you’ve suggested, and I agree, that the ministry of preaching still provides an important role in the discipleship of an emerging generation of learners still looking to the church for help. Growth in Christ-likeness is a matter of concern for church leaders and the work of preaching should continue to be a priority as a place to see that done. Is that accurate? Did I get it?”

“You got it,” affirmed Greg.

“Next, I’ve understood you to say that change is needed in the current methodology of sermon development and delivery. This change is needed because the learning needs that you valued and taught in your role as a Christian educator have failed to be addressed in the preaching ministry of the church. In addition, you noted that certain cultural factors were influencing your constituents’ learning expectations, and that the methodology you learned in Seminary did not adequately take these factors into account. How am I doing?”

“So far, so good,” Greg affirmed again.

Bill continued, “The bottom line is that you believe preaching needs to move well beyond the standard lecture format in order to enhance the clarity and relevance of sermons for an emerging generation of adult learners. You’re convinced that preaching needs to use teaching methods that engage the five senses, right?”<sup>1</sup>

“Right on. Keep going, I’m starting to enjoy this,” said Greg as he folded his arms and slid down in his seat. “I think you’re starting to sweat. Do you need a handkerchief?”

Barely acknowledging Greg’s fun, Bill went on with sustained intensity, “The change that you’ve suggested includes visuals, team teaching, personal stories from the congregation, questions from the audience, video clips from major motion pictures, songs from pop culture, computer graphic images, rubber bands thrown into the crowd and panel discussions.”

“Wow, nice job.”

“I’m not done yet,” said Bill. “I just needed to breathe. You’ve suggested that preaching will have to be planned in moves in order to accommodate the shortened attention span of adults.<sup>2</sup> These ‘moves’ need transitions that may also include poetry readings, ‘man on the street’ interviews, stationery to write letters to God, thematic stage sets, live painting, group discussions during the service, and Powerpoint presentations. Did I miss anything? I’m sure there’s more.”

“Can’t think of anything. Except maybe dance,” said Greg.

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<sup>1</sup> Pine and Gilmore, 59-61.

<sup>2</sup> Buttrick, 26.

“That’s great, dance. You go first with dance. I’ll put that on my list as a long-term goal. Or, maybe I’ll bring it up for a vote at my next associational meeting of local Baptists,” kidded Bill.

“The term that I think best describes all the things you’ve just mentioned is the word ‘multi-sensory,’” commented Greg. “Multi-sensory describes the variety of senses that the communicator engages when using the arts, technology and other interactive teaching techniques. And, as long as we’re defining terms, let me introduce you to ‘layering.’ That’s what we call it when we use more than one method at a time. For instance, having images on screen while an interpretive dance is being performed to live music.”

“There you go with the dance thing again,” said Bill.

“Kidding aside, you’d be surprised at how effective it can be,” replied Greg.

“But, I’ll give it a break. I promise.”

“As you know I’m intrigued with everything you’ve taught me over the past nine weeks, but assuming I’m willing to embrace change and assuming I’m confident enough to do so given the model you showed me from Scripture, what are the practical steps needed for implementing multi-sensory methods in the delivery of my sermons?” asked Bill. “Here’s a napkin to help you get started.”

“I’m glad you asked,” Greg said as he reached for his pen and started to write.

“Let me share with you four ideas that we’re experimenting with over at our place.”

### Create a Sermon Synopsis Months in Advance

One of the essential steps for implementing multi-sensory methods as a part of

sermon delivery is for the preacher to create a synopsis, documenting the content of the sermons, months in advance of when the sermon or sermon series will be preached. By working ahead, sufficient time is given to consider how the sermon can best be delivered in a learner-sensitive way.

“The way I’m doing it,” said Greg, “is to get away for a personal retreat several times a year. I leave on Sunday afternoon and come back after noon on Wednesday. I spend Sunday relaxing and getting settled. I prefer to take my spouse or another male staff member with me as long as they will respect my space. I typically fast on Monday and Tuesday. I spend Monday morning in prayer and personal preparation. By the afternoon, I’m ready to turn my attention toward the upcoming series of messages.”

“How far in advance are you working?” asked Bill.

“Ideally, if the series of messages begins in January, I’m taking a retreat in November. If it were summer and early fall that I’m preparing for, I’d work to have that synopsis ready mid-April. I can usually do four months at a time, especially, if you consider special Sundays and the weeks planned for a guest speaker,” Greg explained.

“Tell me more about how you spend the time on your retreat.”

“I’ve been keeping a file of Scriptures and topics that I want to deal with. I solicit input from our lay board and the staff, and invite suggestions from the congregation. I usually take a box full of books, tapes and journal articles that I’ve been collecting in a corner of my office. Obviously, I’ve been thinking about the upcoming quarter already. Then I prayerfully decide the sermons and series we’ll be doing.”

Bill interrupted, “What do you include in the synopsis? I’m assuming you don’t

work up an outline at that point, do you?”

“No, of course not. My goal is to get my mind around the subject. I’m asking myself, ‘What is the question that this text or that proposition proposes?’ I have to do enough work with the text(s) to insure that I’m being faithful to biblical preaching principles, but I don’t have to nail down the conclusions just yet,” explained Greg. “To answer your question, I include a rough draft of the series and message titles, related Scripture passages, a description of the subject that we’ll be talking about, and why I think it matters to the listeners. Finally, I include any creative thoughts I have about multi-sensory methods that may be employed. What I produce on the retreat may not be ready for the team’s eyes yet, but with a few hours of editing upon return, I’m ready to release it to the next level for input.”

“What’s the job of the team?” Bill asked.

### Recruit a Team

“Recruiting a team may be the biggest challenge for preachers wanting to implement these concepts,” answered Greg. “The day when the pastor went into the study alone during the week preceding the sermon and returned with a manuscript ready for delivery is past if multi-sensory communication is involved.<sup>3</sup> Once the synopsis is complete, team members receive a copy and a date is set for a daylong work session.”

“The purpose of the work session is to break the subjects that the preacher has decided to preach into moves. These moves, once outlined, allow the various team

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<sup>3</sup> See Slaughter, 77-87, for a description of another ministry team process.

members to work on how they can make a contribution to the delivery of the sermon. The preparation of the sermon's central truth and main ideas gives ample time for each member of the team to work on their contribution. Though the core of the message will not be developed until the week preceding the sermon, supporting materials will be ready in advance for the preacher to choose from. Invited players to this team make various contributions to the creative preaching process," concluded Greg.

"So, who makes up the team?" Bill asked curiously.

"In addition to the preacher, the primary communicator, one of the team members should be a leader in the art community of the church. Usually this person is the music pastor. But, in a learner-sensitive model their interests and responsibilities must extend beyond hymns and praise choruses. This person needs to have an "ear" to the culture and a feel for the language of the arts community at-large."

"Another member of the team should be a research assistant. This individual is one who loves to read, study and search the internet for relevant support material of the sermon. They will provide the pastor with statistics, contemporary illustrations and sermonic materials related to the passage and subject being preached."

"It is also helpful for the team to include a scribe. While the other team members are busy discussing great concepts and potential creative teaching methods the scribe is responsible to write it down for future reference. This person sends a copy of the notes within days to the other team members."

"Interesting," said Bill. "Anyone else?"

"Two other planning team members may include an image-preferred learner and a

target group representative. This may be the same person, though not necessarily. The image-preferred learner thinks in analogies or word pictures by default. Ideally, this person has expertise in the field of videography and can support the sermons with interviews, creative clips produced in-house and various moving images on screen. The target group representative can verify objections the team thinks the congregation will have to the proposed propositions and represents the attitudes of the learners experiencing the sermon.”

“Members of this team, including the preacher, the arts leader and the research assistant will meet weekly to evaluate the effectiveness of the previous sermon and to decide which elements will be implemented for the upcoming sermon.”

“It should go without saying that the members of this team will have one or more of their own teams who are essential for producing these creative elements. Music, video and drama teams are obvious examples,” Greg finished.

“So far I have to go on a personal retreat and recruit a team,” said Bill. “What’s next?”

### Think Creatively

“Well, it seems safe to observe that most church communicators are word-preference learners. Their appreciation and understanding for the art culture is typically low. Their thinking is linear, rational and highly objective. This is good and essential for faithful exposition of revelation. However, learner-sensitive preaching demands more.”

“Successful implementation of multi-sensory methods into the delivery of sermons is also dependent on the creative thinking of the preacher during the sermon

preparation process. Though supplemented, the majority of the sermon is still made up of the preacher's words. It is incumbent on the preacher to continue to work hard at biblical preaching with an edge for the creative." Greg paused long enough for Bill to chime in.

"How do I do that?" asked Bill.

"I'm glad you asked," said Greg with a smile. "One of the things a preacher can do is to simply observe art. The preacher can attend art fairs and art exhibitions. By observing, asking questions and entering into the artist's world, preachers can be stretched in their own appreciation of art and tap into their own creative juices."

"Another option is to take classes in a variety of creative activities. Participation in a pottery class, watercolor painting, art appreciation or tutoring in film's forms and processes are examples of opportunities of which preachers may avail themselves."

"Finally, the easiest creative activity for most preachers to do is to read books on the subject. The book *Preaching that Connects* is a must read for the preacher wanting to grow in creative process.<sup>4</sup> This book suggests journalism techniques that preachers can employ to create a manuscript or an outline that captures the heart as well as the mind. Chapters include suggestions on effective storytelling techniques, choosing the best words to communicate the message, ideas for producing fitting conclusions and other helpful suggestions for preaching clear and relevant sermons."

Greg continued, "Doing these kinds of activities and others suggested in the

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<sup>4</sup> Galli and Larson, 23-33.

resources read should enhance the preacher's competency in creative thinking. It is hoped that the result of enhanced creative thinking during sermon development is a manuscript/outline that more effectively captures the attention of the hearers and engages their learning needs."

"Okay," said Bill. "Three steps down, one to go, right?"

"Right," said Greg.

### Rehearse the Transitions

"Another necessary step to implementing multi-sensory methods is to practice necessary transitions prior to the service. When multiple people are involved in the sermon's delivery, cues from the sermon outline or manuscript must be noted, and transitions from one element to another should be practiced."

"A separate cue sheet from the sermon manuscript/outline may be created as well. This will include all the elements of the weekend service(s). The cue sheet serves as a reminder to all involved as to the service order and the times when participants should be in their places ready to go!"

"A service director should also be recruited to coordinate the run through and call the cues during the service itself. This individual orchestrates the total constellation of tech, music, preaching and other multi-sensory methods used during the service. They trouble shoot problems."

"Rehearsing the transitions of multi-sensory methods included in the preaching may seem awkward to the church and participants doing it for the first time. But, it must be taken seriously in order to insure a quality learner-sensitive communication

experience.”

Bill waited as Greg finished his thoughts and then restated what he had heard his friend say. “So, you’re saying that there are at least four essential steps for church leaders to begin implementing multi-sensory methods into their sermons. The first one is the preacher producing a synopsis of the sermons months in advance. Is that accurate?”

“Yes.”

“Next,” continued Bill, “the preacher assembles a team to assist in the development of learner-sensitive preaching tools. You also suggested that there are things preachers can do to grow in their own abilities as it relates to the creative process. You want me to take up finger-painting.”

“Did I say finger-painting?” asked Greg with a smile. “I meant to say mitten-crocheting.”

They both laughed before Bill concluded, “The final step you suggested is the need to rehearse the transitions. Is there more?”

“That’s pretty much it. Identifying the four steps just mentioned seems to minimize the work involved in creating and coordinating all the potential teaching tools we’ve suggested. Many of these need tech equipment that can be expensive and that takes a financial investment on the part of the church to purchase. It’s not the cheapest way to do ministry. A church will have to prioritize learner-sensitive preaching in its budget in order for it to become a reality,” said Greg.

“Not to mention, a commitment of this kind impacts the personnel budget of the church as well,” he continued. “Much of this can be done with volunteers, but if the

attendance and interest grows, as I think it will in a church that implements these principles, then the volunteers recruited and the props needed will demand full-time staff to oversee.”

“Hmm. I hadn’t considered that,” Bill said as he finished his last cup of coffee. “I think these ideas need to be implemented systematically through careful planning. The consequences of their execution may be bigger than I first realized, but so is their potential for impact on an emerging generation.”

“Look, Greg,” he said. “I don’t know how to thank you for your time. But, these past nine weeks have stretched my thinking and given me a renewed interest in preaching. I want to respect your time, but I’d love it if we could continue meeting as peers. I’ve grown to appreciate your friendship. And, you can counsel me as I begin to put into practice some of the things I’ve learned. How about it?”

“Funny you should ask because I was going to suggest that very thing,” Greg responded. “I can’t imagine what I’d do next Thursday morning if I had to sit in this diner alone. Besides, there are a few napkins left I haven’t written on yet.”

## CONCLUSION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Seven months later Greg McGinnis and his wife Kathy stood in the lobby following the weekend service of Heartland Baptist Church. Greg and Kathy had returned early from a much-needed vacation in Wisconsin and decided to visit the church of his weekly breakfast companion. As Pastor Bill Kirkland approached his friend, Greg couldn't resist a smile. "We still can't believe what we experienced this morning," he said as the two embraced. "That's right," said Kathy. "You are a gifted communicator, Bill. The sermon made sense and was relevant to something I'm facing right now with the wife of a couple in our small group."

"Thank for saying so," replied Bill. But you know your husband deserves much of the credit. He opened the doors for me that gave me just what I needed. And fortunately, the leadership of this church has been willing to let me experiment with 'learner-sensitive' preaching principles."

"The visual of the broken lawn chair versus the sturdy dining room chair was perfect for your point about how we approach God," commented Greg. "And, the video clip from the movie *Signs* was a great setup for the subject. 'Some people believe something's out there, and some think everything happens by coincidence,'" he mimicked in his best Mel Gibson impersonation. "I know I was totally attentive and so were those around me."

“Hey, tell you what. Let me grab Gail and I’ll let you continue your gushing over lunch, okay? And, we’re going to a place with cloth napkins. I don’t want another lesson today,” said Bill smiling, “Unless you have insight for me on how to start a dance ministry. I think I’m ready now.”

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