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Preaching Effectively to the Unchurched

Rodney Reed Carlson
Luther Seminary

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PREACHING EFFECTIVELY TO THE UNCHURCHED

by

RODNEY REED CARLSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Preaching Effectively to the Unchurched

by

Rodney Reed Carlson

Explores the question of how to preach effectively today to the growing number of Americans who have never regularly attended church or long ago stopped attending. The current challenges of Biblical illiteracy in the population, an increasing cultural hostility toward Christians, and a growing perception by many (especially the millennial generation) of the irrelevancy of Christianity are addressed. Biblical preaching that has proven to be ineffective with the unchurched is noted with special focus given to preaching that has been proven to be effective.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM, JUSTIFICATION AND RATIONALE

Introduction

Peter took up the challenge in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–42 NLT) and Paul attempted it in Rome on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22–31). Philip listened carefully to the Spirit before he tried it with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) and even Jesus used new and creative methods to do it during his earthly ministry (Matthew 5–7; 13). What is it they all desired to do? Each one wanted to preach effectively to those who had not yet heard the gospel message.

In this chapter I intend to introduce you to the problem, justification and rationale for researching ways to effectively preach to the unchurched today. While preaching meaningful sermons to the “already convinced” has always had, and continues to have its own challenges, preaching to those who are unfamiliar with the Bible, Christian doctrines, and church traditions presents a unique problem. Just as Peter, Paul, Philip and Jesus strove to effectively communicate with those unfamiliar with the gospel message in their day, preachers face the same challenge today.

I first became interested in this topic back in the late nineteen eighties. By then I had been in full-time ministry as a youth and young-adult pastor for over a decade and was serving on the staff of a large church in Orlando, Florida. While I appreciated the breadth of that church’s ministry, I began to feel as though we, as a staff, were mainly focused on ministering to Christians or the “already convinced.” Often I would come

home tired after a long day of ministry and realize I had not spent any significant time (if any at all) reaching out to those who were not followers of Christ or attending church. I also began to observe that as much as I enjoyed the preaching and worship elements of our Sunday services I felt they were focused mainly on those who were already following Christ.

This began for me a long journey of evaluating the impact and relevance of the local church on those who are unchurched. While I believe Scripture clearly teaches that the church should “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) and that the role of church leaders is to “...equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–12), I have often wondered if the church is only a place for Christians or can it also, at the same time, be a place for those who are still considering becoming a Christ follower? After all, Jesus said to “Go into all the world” (Matthew 28:19) and in a parable he told, which was focused on outsiders, he said, “Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in” (Luke 14:23).

Since that time of ministry in the church in Orlando I have read much about reaching the unchurched, spent time building relationships with the unchurched, and in 1991, along with my wife Melody, started a new church in Eagan, Minnesota. We borrowed our mission statement from Willow Creek Church, which states, “We exist to turn unchurched people into fully devoted followers of Christ.”¹ One of the primary ways that we set out to fulfill that mission was to offer relevant preaching to the unchurched who attended our worship services. Over the past 25 years of diligently striving to accomplish that mission, the truth is we have had only marginal success.

¹ “What Willow Creek Believes,” Willow Creek Community Church, <http://www.willowcreek.org/aboutwillow/what-willow-believes> (accessed August 4, 2015).

While our church is presently populated with many previously unchurched people who now regularly attend and participate in worship and service, we have not yet reached the numbers of unchurched people we dreamed about impacting back in the early years. This lack of “success” in the previous two and a half decades has caused me to ask some questions and make a few observations about preaching to the unchurched.

One observation is so obvious it is hard to admit that it actually took me so long to discover it. That observation is that unchurched people do not attend church simply because they do not want to. The reasons for not wanting to attend church are numerous and vary widely. Common reasons include being too busy, experiencing hurt by a church or pastor, not finding the church a safe place for questions and honest doubts, or finding the ministries and preaching to be irrelevant to their lives. Whatever the reasons for not attending, I have found that it is very difficult to get a practicing unchurched person to visit, let alone, regularly attend church.

Another realization is that I have been trying for years to reach a group of people with whom I should technically not be able to relate. I grew up in the church and have never left. For 59 years I have either been a church attender or church leader. How am I supposed to reach people with whom, in this context, I have little in common? Also, just as all church people are unique and have different needs and passions, so unchurched people are not a homogenous group either. How can I as a church leader make statements like, “All unchurched people think this way...” or “In order to relate to unchurched people in our preaching we need to...?” Since all unchurched people are unique, how does a church leader effectively preach the gospel message of Jesus Christ and encourage them to regularly attend a local church where they will build healthy

relationships and grow in their faith? Even after years of attempting to preach sermons that are interesting and relatable to the unchurched, I sometimes still wonder if it is possible to preach in a way that both encourages regular church attenders and effectively communicates to the unchurched.

My specific concern then in this thesis is reaching the unchurched. While I will explore to some degree the broader questions and concerns I raise here, the chief focus of my research is an investigation of how I might preach more effectively to the unchurched.

The Challenge of Preaching in the Current Culture

One challenge is found in research revealing that church attendance in America is declining. In a 2014 article called, “7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America,” Kelly Shattuck found that less than 20 percent of Americans attend church each week.² This is a significant drop from the historic average of 40 to 47 percent weekly church attendance reported for decades by pollsters Gallup and Barna.³

In addition to the decline in regular church attendance, another challenge is that an increasing number of Americans are reporting that they have no official affiliation with a religion. A 2012 report from the Pew Research Group revealed, “The number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One-

² Kelly Shattuck, “7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America,” *Church Leaders* (2014), <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html/2> (accessed August 4, 2015).

³ David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 26.

fifth of the U.S. public and a third of adults under 30 are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.”⁴

If this pattern of fewer Americans affiliated with a religion and fewer attending church continues, I believe that very soon most Americans will not view decreased church attendance as a problem or, for that matter, even an important issue.

On the other hand, for those of us who are Christ followers and believe that the church is the hope of the world as well as the hands and feet of Jesus on the earth today, these changing patterns are alarming. They also encourage us to ask the obvious question: Why are less people in America today regularly attending a weekly worship service at a Christian church?

In Chapter Three I will detail studies and surveys that reveal various reasons why fewer people are attending Christian churches today. For this chapter, in order to illustrate the problem, I will summarize the data into three general reasons.

The first is image. Many who do not attend church today say that the main reason for not attending is their perception of the hypocrisy, narrow mindedness and judgmental attitude of those who are regular church attenders.⁵

The second general reason is irrelevance. Many non-church attenders wonder why churches even exist; that is, they wonder what the purpose of the church is in the community. And for those who may stop in to find out the answer, research reveals that

⁴ “Nones on the Rise,” Pew Research Religion and Life Project, 2012, <http://pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/> (accessed August 4, 2015).

⁵ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity—and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 11.

many of the programs and ministries offered are not relevant to people's lives and felt needs.⁶

A growing number in this irrelevance category are millennials, many of whom grew up in the church but have left because of cynicism and disillusionment. Most of the attempts in the past few decades to become relevant, especially by evangelical churches, appear to have connected quite well with Generation X but do not seem to resonate with this younger generation. When invited by a large gathering of evangelical leaders to speak to the reasons why millennials were leaving the church, Rachel Held Evans said, "Millennials aren't looking for *hipper* Christianity...we're looking for a *truer* Christianity, a more authentic Christianity. Like every generation before ours and every generation after, we're looking for Jesus—the same Jesus who can be found in the strange places he's always been found: in community, and among the least of these. No coffee shops or fog machines required."⁷

The third general reason for fewer people attending church today is indifference. Here I will suggest two specific types of indifference. The first is social indifference. As I have already noted, the data show that after decades of a fairly high percentage of Americans regularly attending church there has been a recent dramatic decline. This may be due to something called the halo effect. The halo effect occurs when people want to show themselves engaged in socially acceptable behavior even when they are not. It seems that this desire to "keep up appearances" has had a positive impact on church

⁶ Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 38.

⁷ Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), xiv.

attendance statistics in America for many years. “Three subjects typically generate a halo effect: sex, politics, and religion.”⁸ Where past generations were more concerned about appearing “socially responsible” (like attending church) it seems that many today have become indifferent. This social indifference has possibly contributed to less regular attendance by church members. For some then it might finally be socially acceptable to just be honest about their religious indifference and admit they do not attend church. For others, who are members of a church, their indifference may show up by attending church less often.

A second type of indifference is intellectual. There is a growing belief in this country that people who believe in God (many of whom attend church) are also ignorant people. Philosopher Charles Taylor illustrates the condition of our secular age by asking, “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”⁹ Tim Keller adds another dimension to the way many people view religious faith in God by suggesting, “...religion is now almost the ultimate enemy. That is why for many today religious faith seems so unimaginable as to be crazy.”¹⁰

Just as in the irrelevance category, millennials comprise a growing number in this category of intellectual indifference. Continuing in her answer to why so many millennials like her are leaving the church, Rachel Held Evans said, “I told them we’re

⁸ Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches*, 23.

⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 25.

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York City, NY: Viking Press, 2015), 123.

tired of the culture wars, tired of Christianity getting entangled with party politics and power. Millennials want to be known for what we're for...not just what we're against. We do not want to choose between science and religion or between our intellectual integrity and our faith. Instead, we long for our churches to be safe places to doubt, to ask questions, and to tell the truth, even when it's uncomfortable. We want to talk about the tough stuff—biblical interpretation, religious pluralism, sexuality, racial reconciliation and social justice—but without predetermined conclusions or simplistic answers. We want to bring our whole selves through the church doors, without leaving our hearts and minds behind, without wearing a mask.”¹¹

In the context in which I minister I see a threefold challenge. The first is getting unchurched people to attend our church. Evans says that millennials want to bring “their whole selves through the doors.” I consistently wonder about the most effective way to get them to come in. Secondly, the data show that most sermons tend to be irrelevant to those who are unchurched. How then do I prepare and present sermons that effectively communicate the wonderful gospel message to those who do not attend church and who in most cases have a post-Christian mindset? Third, in my church setting where most of the members and attenders have already decided to follow Christ, how do I preach sermons that openly deal with, as Evans says, “the tough stuff” without offending or confusing the already convinced? These three challenges and questions have served as a guide for my thesis research.

¹¹ Evans, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church*, xiii.

Justification

An obvious question then at this point is: What do I mean by the unchurched? On this question I will begin big picture then get more specific. According to Barna's research, in the early nineteen nineties when we started Oak Hills Church, the regular evangelical church attender was in church an average of three to four weekends a month.¹² Recently, those numbers have dropped to one to two weekends per month. Regarding church attendance, I suggest today we have at least three fairly distinct groups of people in America. Those who are regular church attenders (3–4 weekends per month), those I will call "less churched" (1–2 weekends per month), and those that I define as unchurched (0–4 times per year). These unchurched can be people who have never attended church or who attended faithfully during different seasons of their lives (when they were growing up for example) but do not presently attend. This group can also include those who have no religious faith or who are Christ followers that simply do not regularly attend church. My definition then for the unchurched is anyone who does not presently regularly attend church. All of the people I surveyed for my research fit into this definition.

One surprising fact is that most unchurched people actually do attend a Christian worship service one to three times a year.¹³ These visits often include special holiday services as well as services where family members or friends are celebrating a religious ceremony like a wedding, confirmation, baby dedication or baptism. In almost all of these

¹² David Kinnaman, "Reaching Churchless America," *Leadership Journal* (Fall 2014): 10.

¹³ Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 221.

circumstances, the visiting unchurched person will have the opportunity to hear a sermon preached by a pastor of that local congregation.

Here then is both the opportunity and the challenge. The wonderful opportunity is that one of the best places to share the gospel message with those unchurched is while they are visiting worship services throughout the year. The challenge is to seriously consider the kind of preaching that connects and effectively communicates to those who do not regularly attend church. Thom S. Rainer comprised a list of nine myths of the unchurched. Some of those myths are: the unchurched never attend church (in fact most do 1–3 times a year), the unchurched are only concerned about their own needs (while they certainly are concerned about their needs, they also have a strong desire to make a difference and serve), and, with the unchurched, we must be careful in our teaching and preaching not to communicate deep spiritual truths that will confuse or offend (in fact the research shows that most unchurched people are looking for deep spiritual teaching taught in a relatable and applicable way).¹⁴

The data reveal that much of contemporary preaching is irrelevant to the unchurched and thus ineffective.¹⁵ The rationale for my research takes its cue precisely from this deficit in preaching: What can I learn through direct research with those who experience my own preaching that will make preaching to the unchurched more relevant and effective?

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Alan Ehler, “Preach to Reach: Seven Characteristics of Effective Evangelistic Preaching” (DMin Dissertation, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2007), 13.

Rationale

What if we could identify some foundational principles to be used in preparing and presenting sermons that greatly increase the effectiveness of those sermons to the unchurched? What if we could preach messages that challenge regular church members while at the same time connect authentically with those who attend church only a few times a year? These were the questions and goals I had in mind when, over a six-month period, I engaged almost fifty unchurched people in evaluating the effectiveness of my own preaching.

In considering these goals I read much of the research and writing that has been done on the subject. While I found this literature to be very insightful and helpful I felt it was missing an important perspective. In the end it was this missing angle that helped me form the specific rationale for my research.

The vast majority of the available material related to the unchurched is based on surveys, census data, and general observations by effective preachers. While this information has been essential in my study, I felt it was missing a personal touch. I wondered if, after listening to a sermon, having unchurched people not only fill out an evaluation but also engaging them in a face-to-face discussion, might add more nuanced insights to the results. In the end I concluded that this more personal approach would bring a unique addition to the research that has already been done with the unchurched and that it would greatly benefit me as a pastor and preacher in my local church as well as others in similar places of ministry.

During the six-month period of conducting my research for this thesis I made two interesting discoveries. First, friends and colleagues with whom I talked seemed

especially intrigued with this project. At first I thought these signs of high interest were simply kind gestures. However, as the season of my research progressed, I continued to have more and more conversations with people who made statements like, “I really want to read that when you’re done,” “This really sounds fascinating,” and “What kind of things are you learning about preaching effectively to the unchurched?” I do not know, maybe this is what all nice people say to their friends who are working on a D.Min. Thesis but I suspect the high interest from my colleagues came from a sincere desire to understand why many of their family members, neighbors, friends, and co-workers have lost interest in attending church.

The second interesting discovery came from getting to know the unchurched people who participated in my research. As you will discover, some were people I never had the opportunity to meet since their responses came through online evaluations. Others however were people who had some type of relationship (friend, co-worker, relative) with members of our church and who were gracious enough to attend worship services, listen to my sermons and then have lunch with me so we could engage in face-to-face discussions. These people along with the three unchurched people with whom I have a personal relationship (my doctor, my dentist and his wife) were honest, insightful, and thoughtful with their evaluation responses and discussion comments. There were a number of times during my lunches and interviews that I felt as though they were thinking, “Let’s really try to help this guy. I think he is serious and wants to learn how to preach to us.”

In this chapter I have introduced my topic of preaching effectively to the unchurched by outlining the problem Church leaders and pastors face in America of

fewer people attending church and having an authentic Christian faith. I have also shared the justification for my project by suggesting that, ironically, one of the best places to reach the unchurched is in church when they attend 1-3 times a year. I have argued that by improving the effectiveness of our preaching to the unchurched we can take advantage of this ongoing unique opportunity. Finally, I have given my rationale for the type of research I conducted. By taking a more personal approach I have been able to add some unique insights into the research that has already been done on this subject.

In the next chapter I will give theological and Biblical support for researching how to effectively preach to the unchurched.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this chapter I will share biblical and theological reasons for a study on preaching effectively to the unchurched. My approach will be two-fold: First, I will discuss the definition of conversion, as this was essential in evaluating the effectiveness of my research. Secondly, I will give biblical and theological guidelines for the action of and proper attitude for preaching to the unchurched today.

Defining Conversion

Defining conversion was vitally important as I considered my thesis research. As a Pentecostal, the book of Acts has significantly informed my theology. I grew up with preaching that referenced passages in the book of Acts as supportive texts for many of our core doctrines such as divine healing, evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and power to witness and fulfill the Great Commission (Mt 28:16–20). With just a few minor tweaks I still hold to my early Pentecostal roots. That said, I do not disagree with Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall who suggest that, “Too often Pentecostals have turned to Acts in order to support and establish charismatic expressions of Christianity, but without allowing Acts to be heard in its own voice, breadth, and depth. Acts is much more than a kind of blueprint for receiving the Holy Spirit, or for organizing the church and establishing such offices as deacons. It represents a

thoroughgoing vision of the church that will challenge Pentecostals to a more whole version of the faith.”¹

For me, “a more whole version of the faith” includes seeing in Acts much more than just the charismatic expressions of Christianity. Among other things it helps us understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus by reflecting on the conversion experiences of the early Christians. In studying the gospels we observe the impact of Jesus’ life, ministry, and teaching. We also learn the details of his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. But it is in this wonderful history book of Acts documenting the first thirty years of the Christian church that we discover how people first responded to the good news of Jesus preached by his followers. I believe that in the book of Acts we find a pattern for coming into the Christian faith that supports what I call *decisional conversion*. Simply put *decisional conversion* involves the personal decision by a person to believe in Jesus and make Him Lord and savior of his or her life. Consider the many examples in the book of Acts.

After Peter preached to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, Luke reported that, “Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all” (Acts 2:41). Here we see a large group of people who heard preaching that “pierced their hearts” and then believed in Jesus and publically proclaimed (through baptism) that they had made the decision to follow Him. Philip preached the good news about Jesus in Samaria, and Acts 8:12 records, “But now the people believed Philip’s message of good news concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized.” In Acts 9 we read about the

¹ Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 7.

Apostle Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus. While a personal decision by Paul to follow Jesus is not specifically mentioned, the fact that he personally encountered Jesus on the road and later chose to be baptized after Ananias explained to him what had happened implies an act of the will on Paul's part. In Acts 16 we read how the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas how he could be saved and they replied,

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household. And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God. (Acts 16:31–34)

In considering the different views of Christian conversion Walter E. Conn wrote, "Ever since Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, conversion has been fundamental to Christian life."² Then after giving a quick summary of the Old Testament view of conversion Conn writes:

The key biblical words for conversion are *nacham* and *shub* in Hebrew, and *metanoia* and *epistrophe* in Greek. If conversion means a radical turning, or a redirection of one's life, the first word in each pair, emphasizing repentance, specifies turning *from* (sin), while the second indicates turning *toward* (God). Emphasis on conversion as repentance for sin has probably kept Christians from thinking of Jesus as having experienced conversion, even though he did present himself to John for baptism. It has been the extraordinary experience of Paul on the road to Damascus, rather, that has dominated Christian thinking about conversion in the New Testament (especially in Acts).³

These accounts of the conversion of the Apostle Paul and so many others recorded in the book of Acts support the necessity of believing in order to receive the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

² Walter E. Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 5.

³ Ibid.

My belief in *decisional conversion* is quite different from another popular view which holds that conversion or salvation takes place by the work of the Holy Spirit and not by our good works or even by making a personal decision to follow Jesus. In explaining the third article of the Apostles' Creed Martin Luther wrote:

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.⁴

The Evangelical Lutheran Church confirmation curriculum further expresses this view of salvation by teaching:

The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity who brings us to faith. In I Corinthians 12 Paul wrote, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

Even as the Father created us, and Jesus Christ, His Son, saved us, the Holy Spirit's main role is to call us to faith. He does this by using the Word (the Holy Bible) and administering the Sacraments, specifically, through Holy Baptism.

Faith, of course, is an undeserved gift of grace. When we are called to faith, it is not because of our own works. Nor was it because we were better than others. The Holy Spirit has no favorites. Everyone is called to faith on the same basis: only grace."⁵

This view of conversion seems to involve more of a process than a personal profession and relies solely on the grace of God without any human effort or will.

While I believe that we are saved by grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, I also believe that at a specific point in time (consciously or not) we all must make a

⁴ "The Apostles' Creed and its Meaning, from Luther's Small Catechism," Trinity Lutheran Church, <http://trinitylutheran.info/creed.html> (accessed August 25, 2015).

⁵ "Unit 3e: The Apostles' Creed, the Third Article," Lutheran Confirmation On-Line, <http://smallcatechism.org/unit3/unit3-ee.htm> (accessed August 26, 2015).

decision to believe in Christ and receive salvation by grace. Robinson and Wall articulate well in their commentary on Acts the differences in these two approaches to conversion.

They write:

Different ecclesiastical traditions and church families hold different understandings and varied responses to the concept and experience of conversion. In significant measure, the mainline Christian denominations moved away from the language and experience of “conversion” as they embraced other understandings of Christian formation, notably Horace Bushnell’s famous nineteenth-century concept of Christian nurture. For Bushnell, the ideal was the Christian who never knew him—or herself to be anything other than Christian. Such a person was nurtured steadily, patiently, and wholesomely in the church from the day of his or her birth. Conversion was rendered unnecessary.⁶

Concerning a more decisional view of conversion Robinson and Wall write, “Nevertheless, the more evangelical churches and denominations held to a different understanding and emphasis, one that made a personal and dramatic moment of conversation to Jesus Christ much more central—indeed, essential.”⁷

I believe decisional conversion is supported not only by Paul’s personal conversion experience (and others in the book of Acts) but it is also evidenced in Paul’s ministry. For example, Luke tells us that after Paul concluded speaking on Mars Hill, “...some joined him and became believers” (Acts 17:34a). Here I see evidence that although it was only a few, these few became aware as they listened to Paul speak, that they believed in Jesus and so decided to follow Him or “become believers.”

Along with Paul’s personal conversion experience and response to his ministry, I believe his letters support this decisional view of conversion. One example is what Paul wrote to the church in Rome: “If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in

⁶ Robinson and Wall, *Called to be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day*, 139.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved” (Romans 10:9–10).

Clarifying my theology of conversion was important as I did research for my thesis for at least two reasons. First, I believe that preaching effectively to the unchurched includes the listener being encouraged to know more about making a decision to put their faith in Jesus and experiencing a personal relationship with Him. As I invited the unchurched to evaluate my preaching I attempted to discover if my sermons created a greater interest in that experience.

Secondly, I believe that a decision-based conversion may be helpful in increasing the number of regular church attenders in America. In Chapter Three I summarize the research that reveals that there are many who are outside of the church who do not see a significant difference between those who regularly attend church and those who do not. This may be due in part to what philosopher Charles Taylor calls “expressive individualism.” Dwight Zscheile suggests that, “Expressive individualism has become the predominant understanding of human life and purpose in contemporary Western societies, in which people are encouraged to find their own way, discover their own fulfillment, or do their own thing.”⁸ Zscheile implies that “expressive individualism” is prevalent also in many Christ followers who have turned their Christian faith into a way to get God to help them become who they want to be. This is especially true among the millennials. Zscheile points out that many youth today have reduced religion to a minor

⁸ Dwight Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), 22.

aid for self-improvement. He identifies what researchers have named “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”

In Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, religion is instrumental—it exists to help individuals do and be what *they* want, not to make individuals change to adhere to God’s teaching or calling. For most U.S. teenagers, religion is something to personally believe in that makes one feel good and resolves one’s problems...God is treated as something like a cosmic therapist or counselor, a ready and competent helper who responds in time of trouble but who does not particularly ask for devotion or obedience.⁹

In my research with the unchurched I attempted to discover if preaching that emphasized a personal decision to follow Jesus, die to self, give to others, and regularly gather together in community would be a more meaningful and effective challenge to the emptiness of this individual focus found in both the church and unchurched. Robertson and Wall write:

The more liberal (or mainline) traditions and churches, negotiating the new American post-Christendom era, are finding that they can no longer assume that those who take a place in their pews on Sunday have been adequately nurtured in the faith; nor have they always come to a moment of change of mind and heart and a clear Christian commitment. Mainline congregations and leaders are slowly—and cautiously—rediscovering the language and experience of conversion, of changed lives and transformation.¹⁰

I agree with Robertson and Wall and believe that if mainline churches “rediscovered the language and experience of conversion” they would observe a growing sense of personal passion for faith among their members that would greatly assist them in mission and evangelism.

Interestingly this call to have a greater emphasis on the experience of conversion was being reconsidered thirty years ago when the largest percentage of growing churches

⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰ Robinson and Wall, *Called to be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day*, 140.

at that time were teaching a personal decision conversion. In 1985 Walter E. Conn wrote:

During the twentieth century, it is true, conversion has not consistently been a primary concern of theologians. But in recent years many theologians, interested in taking the concrete experiential dimension of Christian life very seriously, have begun to pay special attention to the personal experience of salvation. In fact, some prominent theologians have recommended that we look to conversion as the basis of theology. Bernard Lonergan, for example, has proposed that reflection upon conversion can provide an appropriate foundation for a contemporary empirical theology.¹¹

I believe that in today's pluralistic society calling people to a personal conversion experience with a commitment to follow Christ is a key to fulfill the mission that Jesus gave the church to go into all the world and make disciples. In his book, "Confessing Jesus Christ," David Lose notes that theologian Miroslav Volf says that we live in a pluralistic, post-ecumenical age in which the church is failing to transmit its faith successfully to either a new generation of Christians or non-believers. This failure, he believes, is in part due to a fracturing of the church down individualistic and egalitarian lines on the one hand, and communal hierarchical lines of the other. Lose notes that Volf seeks to address this problem by "commencing a dialogue between a Free Church ecclesiology that stresses individual decision and participation and the episcopal traditions of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches that stress communal identity."¹² Specifically Volf writes in his book that one key to this "dialogue" taking place will involve not only the church confessing who Jesus is but also each Christian believer claiming it as his or her own. He writes, "The purpose of the cognitive

¹¹ Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender*, 7.

¹² David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 82.

identification of Jesus Christ (correct doctrine) is personal identification with him. In so doing, [believers] attest that he is the ‘determining ground’ for their lives; in him they have found freedom, orientation, and power.”¹³

Because I embrace a theology of decisional conversion, each of the sermons that were evaluated by the unchurched included a call to consider making a personal decision to follow Jesus. As you will read in future chapters, I had some very enlightening discussions with my unchurched evaluators about what it means to make a decision to follow Jesus and have a personal relationship with Him.

Preaching to the Unconverted and Unchurched Today

I believe that two passages in Mark inform the attitudes we should have and the actions we should take toward the unconverted and unchurched today. We can observe Jesus’ attitude toward what we might call the “unchurched” of his day when we read about him attending a party hosted by Levi, who at that time was his most recent disciple. Mark records:

“Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus’ followers.) But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with such scum?’ When Jesus heard this, he told them, ‘Healthy people do not need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.’” (Mark 2:15–17)

This passage clearly shows the gracious loving *attitude* Jesus had toward those whom some religious leaders saw as “scum.” Then, as we reach the end of Mark’s gospel, we read the *action* Jesus commanded his disciples to take with the unconverted and

¹³ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 146.

unchurched. He said, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15–16).

Ever since Jesus shared this command with the first members of his church, his followers have been committed to act on this challenge. The Acts of the Apostles reveals that just ten days after Jesus’ ascension when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, three thousand believed, were baptized, and were added to the church. The ongoing actions of the church in response to Jesus’ command in the centuries that followed can be seen in the study of church history from Acts to today. Even in our day it is almost impossible to find a Christian church that does not have as a part of its mission or doctrinal statement a commitment to preaching “the good news to everyone.”

The question then is, with so many Americans leaving the church today, what is the appropriate action and proper attitude toward the unchurched that will encourage them to believe in Jesus and become a part of a healthy, local church? I believe at least a part of the answer to that question is to change the way we preach. Jesus commanded his disciples in the first century to “preach the good news to everyone” and amazingly, in the twenty-first century, preaching is still one of the most effective ways to communicate the Gospel message. Timothy Keller addresses those who suggest that preaching has become ineffective and that a change is needed in the way we communicate the gospel. Keller writes:

Many say what is needed is a change in the mode of our communication. We should abandon the sermon “monologue” and move into interactive discussions in which all participants mutually discover their respective paths. One problem with this view is that the monologue speech is as popular a medium as it has ever been. TED talks and their many imitators are flourishing, and in 2008 one in every four American adults listened to at least one sermon podcast a week. The sermon form

is not dead, and many predictions of preaching's imminent demise now feel dated.¹⁴

Keller goes on to outline ways to make sure that, even today, this very alive and effective way to communicate is done in a way that clearly connects with the culture.

James Emery White suggests that because of “the rise of the nones” in America we as pastors and church leaders need to get an “Acts 2, Peter in Jerusalem” mindset out of our preaching and bring an “Acts 17, Paul in Athens on Mars Hill” mindset into our preaching.¹⁵ The difference in these two mindsets is their context.

Luke records in Acts 2 that on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, Peter preached mainly to Jews who were monotheistic, believed in Moses, the prophets, and the actual coming of the Messiah. His audience had a keen awareness of the concept of sin and a sense of moral standards and absolutes. Peter, then, was able to quickly get on track with his audience and proclaim to them that Jesus was this Messiah that the prophets had proclaimed was coming. With all of this common ground Peter could even suggest that they were guilty of killing the Messiah and needed to repent. While many rejected his message the text tells us that thousands positively responded. I believe this was in part due to this context of a shared common spiritual pedigree.

Paul, on the other hand, preached in a completely different context. In Acts 17 Luke tells us that Paul had an audience who, at best, were agnostics. Their common ground was limited to the one thing they could agree on, which was the shrine to the unknown god (a god they did not know about). This reveals that Paul had to start all the

¹⁴ Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, 95.

¹⁵ James Emery White and Neil Stavem, “Engaging the Non-Religious,” *Connecting Faith*, Faith Radio from Northwestern Media, podcast audio, May 6, 2014, <http://myfaithradio.com/2014/engaging-non-religious/> (accessed August 26, 2015).

way back at creation in order to describe the one and true God who had eternally existed, created the world, sent his son, etc. Paul had to work his way to Christ. One telling detail of this story is that only a handful of people responded positively to Paul's message. I think this is an indication of how difficult it was then and is today to interest people in the experience of believing and following Jesus. That said, White's main point is well taken. The danger today is that many pastors continue to preach to an Acts 2 context when in fact we live in an Acts 17 world.

Zach Eswine shares some insight that may help with this challenge of preaching to an Acts 17 world. He suggests that one effective way to move us from an exclusively Acts 2 mindset is to identify the cultural reality of biblical cities and use them as metaphors for contextual realities today. The first one is the *churched* context, which he compares with the city of Jerusalem. This culture is basically rooted in the reality of God and the truth of His law. In preaching to this context Eswine writes:

Consider a model sermon structure from the apostle Paul preaching in a churched environment. Notice that he starts with God, not as creator, but as redeemer (Acts 13:17). Notice also that Paul quotes explicitly from the Bible, assumes congregational familiarity with redemptive history, and directly addresses his hearers.¹⁶

The second basic cultural climate he calls the *unchurched*, which Eswine identifies with the city of Babylon. In this comparison he sees Christian people today who live in an exilic context. The dominant philosophies, art and literature, are grounded in something other than biblical truth. Here he notes as a model for preaching to this context the Apostle Paul's message in Acts 17. Paul did not begin with God as redeemer but God as creator. "He was not concerned to quote Bible verses for his sermon; he assumes no

¹⁶ Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 108.

familiarity with the redemptive history.”¹⁷ The third basic cultural climate he identifies as *once-churched* or *in-between*. This group he compares to Samaria. This, he says, is a place quite different from Jerusalem but it’s also not very far away. “The true God is still acknowledged, even though orthodox belief and practice has been tainted by years of compromise.”¹⁸ I believe these metaphors can help us expand our preaching styles and connect them to the cultural context in which we find ourselves.

James Emery White gives additional insight that speaks to not only our *action* of preaching but also our *attitude* in preaching today. He writes:

But there is something else beyond the Acts 17 context to consider. With the original Mars Hill, there was a rampant ignorance about Christianity, not to mention Judaism. Paul was able to start with a blank slate. In our context today, our culture is post-Christian, not non-Christian. This is a significant difference. In a post-Christian context many believe they do know about Christianity—even though it’s often a caricature of its true nature—and thus they feel it has been tried and found wanting. Further, the current context continually lampoons the Christian faith while dismissing it as intellectually bereft of weight. There’s a “been there, done that” attitude that is often more difficult to overcome than when engaging a pristine mission field. So we have a culture that is post-Christian, yet the people think they know Christianity. Consider it the worst combination of Acts 2 and Acts 17.¹⁹

If White is correct in saying that many of the unchurched today are post-Christian and feel as though they have “been there and done that,” then I believe a key to effectively preaching to them includes not only a contextual change but also an attitude change. The Pharisees’ question to Jesus’ disciples in Mark 2 asking why Jesus was hanging out with “such scum” reveals a hostile attitude that I believe is very prevalent in many churches, Christ followers, and even pastors today.

¹⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 66.

White goes on to label six different contemporary church environments that reveal varying degrees of hostility and hospitality toward the unchurched or as he calls them, the “nones” (those who have no religious affiliation). Considering these environments can help us check our own attitude toward reaching out to the unchurched in our lives and ministries. The first is the *none hostile* environment which is openly antagonistic toward nones who venture in. The *none indifferent* are not hostile, but apathetic and unwilling to answer nones’ questions. The *none hopeful* want to see the nones find Christ, but are unwilling to change their environment while the *none sensitive* want to reach nones, and are willing to change the environment, but still primarily cater to the already convinced. Those who have a *none targeted* attitude place a high priority on the needs of nones and make every effort to remove any and all barriers that may impede the exploration process. Finally White suggests an attitude or environment he calls *no man’s land* which he says is not targeted enough to reach the unchurched, but is too targeted to the unchurched for the church.²⁰

As I mentioned in Chapter One concerning my own ministry context, even after diligently striving to reach the unchurched these past twenty-five years (hoping to be “none targeted”), we have not seen the kind of “success” that we had originally dreamed about. I now wonder if we have spent too much time being “none sensitive” (catering to the already convinced) or in “no man’s land,” (not targeted enough to the unchurched while at the same time too targeted for the church). If we have been in “no man’s land” I think at least part of the reason is because of some ignorance on our part on how to truly reach the unchurched. Another maybe more influential reason has been the pressure by

²⁰ Ibid.

churched people that we should not be unchurched focused. Maybe we could have had more “success” if we would have had the courage of Jesus who certainly did not allow the “churched” of his day (the Pharisees) to intimidate or hinder him from walking right into the world of the “unchurched” (tax collectors and other sinners) and target those folks with his grace and love.

In this chapter I have shared biblical and theological reasons for a study on preaching effectively to the unchurched. Using the book of Acts as a guide I have explained my view of conversion and why I believe calling people to a personal commitment to Christ is essential to effectively preaching to the unchurched. I have also noted that a key to fulfilling the call of Jesus to “preach the good news to everyone” in our day must include the attitude of grace and love that Jesus showed the unchurched in his.

In the next chapter I will summarize the literature I have reviewed on preaching to the unchurched and how it helped form the research I have done for this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will summarize the literature I reviewed that formed the approach and scope of my specific research. This summary includes a consideration of the following questions: (1) Who are the unchurched? (2) Why don't the unchurched attend church? (3) What characteristics, if any, do the unchurched have in common? (4) What has proven to be ineffective in preaching to the unchurched? And (5) What has proven to be effective in preaching to the unchurched?

Who are the Unchurched?

According to James Emery White the average unchurched person in America today is not a seeker who is looking for a spiritual home nor are they all products of a secular society that is hostile toward Christianity (though some certainly are). Surveys indicate that the real snapshot of the average "none" in America today is that he is male (fifty-six percent), a liberal, a democrat, and importantly, not necessarily an atheist or hostile toward religious institutions. He thinks abortion and same-sex gender marriage should be legal, he is white, he is young, he is not very religious, and he is more likely to be a westerner.¹

While young adults today dislike being defined and generalized, this has not stopped researchers from categorizing them. In 2009 Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and

¹ Ibid., 23.

Jason Hayes published a book called *Lost and Found* in which they identified young adults as those between the ages of 18–29. Based on a survey of just over 1,000 unchurched young adults they found that twenty-two percent were always unchurched (they had never been involved in church) and sixty-two percent were de-churched (having attended as a child). In addition, fifteen percent were friendly unchurched (not particularly angry at the church) and thirty-seven percent were hostile unchurched (angry at the church or have had negative experiences with the church).²

In an article called, “Reaching Churchless America,” David Kinnaman noted three current trends of the unchurched based on the examination of three decades of research.³ His findings reveal that first, the unchurched population is steadily growing. Since 1990 it has jumped from thirty percent to forty-three percent. Second, the number of people who have never been active churchgoers has increased. In the past two decades the “never-churched” increased from fifteen percent to twenty-three percent. Currently then, one in four Americans has virtually no personal history in church participation. Third, what qualifies as “regular churchgoing” is being redefined. Active church attenders used to be those who attended three to four weekends per month. Today that has been reduced to just one or two weekends per month. Kinnaman suggests that, “Crammed calendars, kids’ sports, endless entertainment options, and expanding weekend schedules—not to mention changing family structures with less consistent church expectations—are making church increasingly optional.”⁴

² Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them*, 9.

³ Kinnaman, “Reaching Churchless America,” 24.

⁴ Ibid.

For me, this realization that fewer people in America are attending church each week than was previously reported has come as something of a relief. This is not because I am pleased that less people are attending church but because it coincides with my own unscientific observations. These observations are based on seeing the abandoned roadways as I drive to church Sunday mornings and by meeting an increased percentage of people who do not attend church and who seem to have little interest in doing so. I regularly have these haunting realizations that there is a growing percentage of people in this country who just do not care what we are doing each weekend inside the walls of our churches.

Related to this issue of the number of unchurched in America, I have recently been wondering about the impact of those that I call “less churched.” Kinnaman’s research substantiates what I have observed. When we started Oak Hills Church in 1991 around two-thirds of our members attended church on any given weekend. Today our average weekly attendance is about one-third of membership. Today our average “regular attender” attends a weekend service just two times a month.

As I studied the most recent research about the unchurched I made special note of the rapid growth today in the percentage of millennials who have no affiliation with any religious organization (the nones). Consequently in choosing participants for my thesis research group I intentionally attempted (and succeeded) in recruiting a higher number of millennials. I believe this gave my research the advantage of having greater insight into the unchurched of the coming most influential generation. In fact, as I am writing this, National Public Radio has reported that, “Americans born between 1982 and 2000,

known as millennials, now comprise one quarter of the country's population. At 83.1 million, millennials outnumber the 75.4 million baby boomers.”⁵

Why Don't the Unchurched attend Church?

According to David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, “Christianity has an image problem.”⁶ Their research found that many outside the church (especially younger people) have little trust in the Christian faith and little esteem for the lifestyle of Christ followers. They also found that the emotional and intellectual barriers of those outside the church *go up* when they are around Christians, and they often reject Jesus because they feel rejected by Christians.⁷ Kinnaman and Lyons went on to reveal that many of the unchurched perceive Christians to be hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental. Further investigation into the research also revealed that these perceptions had been formed by firsthand experience with evangelical Christians, bad experiences in church, and the media.⁸

While attending a seminar at Willow Creek Church in 1991, I remember Bill Hybels telling the story of starting a new church. Months before their first Sunday service, they did hundreds of door-to-door surveys asking people in the neighborhood that were unchurched why they did not attend. Back in the early 1980s the top three answers were:

⁵ National Public Radio, “Millennials Now Out Number Baby Boomers, Census Bureau Says,” 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/06/25/417349199/millennials-now-out-number-baby-boomers-census-bureau-says> (accessed October 11, 2015).

⁶ Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity—and Why it Matters*, 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

1. Church is boring and does not relate to my life.
2. The church is always asking for money.
3. I feel like the preacher is judging me and looking down on me.⁹

From my own experience in building relationships with dozens of unchurched people over the past thirty years, I find that these are still some of the top reasons why people do not attend church. I meet unchurched people on a consistent basis who have the same attitude Lee Strobel had as an unchurched person before attending Willow Creek Church with his wife who had recently become a Christ follower. He writes, “[...] to me, church was four things: boring, hypocritical, money-grubbing, and irrelevant.”¹⁰

More insight into why people do not attend church comes from Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes’ research. In asking young adults who do not attend church what might cause them to attend, sixty-three percent said they would attend if the church presented the truth to them in an understandable way that related to their life and fifty-eight percent said that they would be more likely to attend if they knew someone who attended a church who cared about them as a person.¹¹

Based on this research as well as my own observations concerning the “image problem” many Christians face today, I attempted in my evaluations by unchurched people to discover if my sermons came across as overly judgmental or manipulative. I also asked questions specifically targeted to determine the relevance of the sermon to their everyday lives.

⁹ Bill Hybels, Lecture presented at a church growth seminar at Willow Creek Church, South Barrington, Illinois, February, 1991.

¹⁰ Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 27.

¹¹ Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them*, 38.

What Characteristics, if any, do the Unchurched have in Common?

Alvin I. Reid gives us insight into the unchurched today. He first makes it clear that, “The radically unchurched population should not be seen as a monolithic group in America. Their diversity parallels that found in other demographic categories.”¹² That said, Reid goes on to identify some common characteristics of most of the unchurched today. He says they are: (1) Religious (while not necessarily Christian most believe in some deity); (2) Open and searching for meaning; and (3) “Happy Pagans” (many are educated and have a very good life).¹³

In his book, *Preaching to Pluralists*, Chris Altmock writes about proclaiming Christ in a postmodern age. After briefly summarizing western culture’s transformation from premodern (meaning determined by tradition) to modern (meaning determined by empirical evidence) to postmodern (meaning determined by experience), Altmock thoroughly investigates the seven faces of postmoderns. He believes that postmoderns are uninformed about the basics of Christianity, interested in spiritual matters, anti-institutional, pluralistic, pragmatic, relational, and experiential.¹⁴ Concerning his list he writes, “Of course, individual non-Christians and even groups of non-Christians before the postmodern era have possessed some of these qualities. For instance, as a rule, non-Christians have almost always been uninformed about basic Christianity. And generally, they have always tended to shy away from the church, even when attracted to Jesus.

However, no generation of non-Christians has, as a whole, been characterized as deeply

¹² Alvin I. Reid, *Radically Unchurched: Who They Are & How to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2002), 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴ Chris Altmock, *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in the Postmodern Age* (St. Louis, MO: Calice Press, 2004), 8.

by these qualities as the postmodern generation is.”¹⁵ This last statement by Altrock illustrates well the unique challenge we face in preaching effectively to the unchurched today.

Delving deeper into the beliefs of unchurched young adults, Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes note that eighty percent believe in God and sixty percent believe that the God of the Bible is no different than other gods depicted by other religions. Surprisingly, sixty-six percent believe that Jesus came back to life and seventy-seven percent believe that Jesus makes a positive difference in a person’s life. Some thirty-nine percent believe that the church would not accept their lifestyle and sixty-seven percent believe the church is full of hypocrites. Only nine percent believe that church is the only place to learn what it means to be a Christian, yet seventy-three percent believe that overall the church is helpful to society.¹⁶ These numbers fascinate me because they reveal that while a high percentage of the unchurched believe in the resurrection of Jesus and His positive influence on people even today, they lack respect for the people who profess to follow Him.

Lee Strobel makes fourteen observations about unchurched people that I have found to be true with many of my friends who do not regularly attend church. He states that unchurched people: (1) may have rejected church but not necessarily God; (2) may be morally adrift but secretly want an anchor; (3) resist rules but respond to reasons; (4) probably do not understand Christianity but are ignorant about what they do claim to believe in; (5) have legitimate questions about spiritual matters but do not expect answers

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them*, 18.

from Christians; (6) are not asking “is Christianity true?” but “does Christianity work?” (7) do not just want to know something, they want to experience it; (8) do not want to be a Christian’s project but they would like to be somebody’s friend; (9) may distrust authority but are receptive to authentic biblical leadership; (10) are not loyal to denominations but are attracted to churches where their needs will be met; (11) are hungry for a cause they can connect with; (12) want their children to get quality moral training; (13) are confused about sex roles and are not sure the Bible can clarify for them what it means to be a man or a woman; and (14) are tolerant of different faiths and think that Christians are narrow minded.¹⁷

In his book, *How to Reach Secular People*, George G. Hunter III has a list called “Ten Characteristics about Secular People” that adds additional insight into the characteristics of the unchurched. Hunter says that secular people are ignorant about basic Christianity, seeking to enjoy life before death (they are more concerned about “when they no longer exist” than they are about heaven or hell), conscious of doubt more than guilt, have a negative image of the church, have multiple alienations (they are lonely and alienated from people), are untrusting, have low self-esteem, consider forces in history and in their personality as “out of control” (Is there really a God in charge?) and do not know where to find the “door” to God.¹⁸ For me, Hunter’s list of the characteristics of the unchurched is especially helpful because it goes even deeper into their thinking process and inner attitudes.

¹⁷ Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, 44.

¹⁸ George G. Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 43.

Each of the authors who commented on common characteristics of the unchurched acknowledged the impossibility of identifying a definitive list of all unchurched people. I mentioned in Chapter One that because the unchurched are not a homogenous group, statements like “all unchurched people” and “in order to reach unchurched people we must always...” can never be honestly made. That said, I do believe that a general understanding of the mindset of an unchurched person is possible to attain and can be very helpful in preaching more effectively to them.

Thom S. Rainer gives us some hope in the midst of these statistics. Church leaders of some of the most effective churches reaching the unchurched were asked how preaching could reach the unchurched since they did not attend. They answered by noting that:

1. Unchurched does not mean never in church (most unchurched attend one to three times per year).
2. Great preaching is a great motivator to those who attend church to invite their unchurched friends.
3. The effective preachers to the unchurched tend to spend a lot of time thinking, being with, and dreaming about how to connect with unchurched people and then share those ideas and that knowledge with church attenders.¹⁹

The research reviewed above on defining who the unchurched “are” has also been somewhat of a validation of my own observations and experiences. I have long suspected that while some people outside the church are there because they have a resistance and rebellion toward God, most are unchurched because they are misinformed and unaware. They are misinformed about what it means to live an authentic Christian life and/or are unaware that following Christ will bring a level of joy and peace to their lives that they could not even imagine.

¹⁹ Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, 221.

I believe at least part of the reason for this misinformation and unawareness is a lack of effective preaching to the unchurched. As I have noted, while the research indicates that fewer and fewer Americans are attending church on a regular basis, it also reveals that most Americans are not completely unchurched. Most of them enter into a church building one to three times a year for a holiday service or family related event. I believe preachers must and can improve the effectiveness of their preaching so more people can experience the abundant life that Jesus promises.

Ineffective Preaching to the Unchurched

Chris Altmann tells about the Sunday they had *Bring Your Neighbor Day* at church. As the service began, the sanctuary was nicely filled with neighbors and friends that many in the congregation had invited to attend. Altmann had prayed and worked hard on his sermon. He preached it with energy and passion only to see absolutely *no one* respond to his invitation to come forward to receive Christ. After evaluating the sermon he had presented that Sunday, he determined that something was wrong with his preaching. He went on to say, “Along the way, I discovered that I’m not alone. With some exceptions, not only is there something missing in my preaching, something’s missing in the preaching of the western church. It is not as effective as it could be.”²⁰

In Matthew 9:27 Jesus states, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” Could it be that the problem for Christian leaders and preachers in effectively preaching to the unchurched is not just that the unchurched have certain negative perceptions about church, Christianity, and Christians? Could it be that the problem is not just with the

²⁰ Altmann, *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in the Postmodern Age*, 3.

harvest (Jesus said that it was plentiful)? Could it be that the problem is with the methods and tools of the laborers (the preachers and their sermons)?

While I believe the answer to all three of these questions is “yes,” I chose to focus my research on the last one which questions the effectiveness of the methods and tools preachers use to reach the unchurched. This focus helped to form the scope of my research. Consequently, in the sermons that I preached, I attempted to overcome what much of the current data indicates are two of the main problems in preaching effectively to the unchurched today. These are: (1) too often our sermons are culturally out of touch, and (2) too often our preaching reveals that we are unaware of the unchurched in the audience.

Culturally out of Touch

Indeed, the harvest field has changed a lot and very quickly in just the past few decades. For centuries, Christians in western cultures had the advantage of either an open-minded audience or an audience with only a basic understanding of Christianity. Altrock suggests that, “From Constantine to the Renaissance we have had the home team advantage.”²¹ The harvest field changed dramatically with the Enlightenment that began to demand scientific evidence and empirical data. In America today, not only are we long past those modern days (postmodern), we have become for all intents and purposes post-Christian. Lenard Sweet says that we now have in America 120 million pre-Christians

²¹ Ibid., 4.

age 14 and above. After China and India, Sweet suggests that America is the third largest mission field in the world.²²

I believe that Christian leaders and preachers today need to come full circle. One powerful way to reach and preach effectively to the unchurched today may be to study the unchurched of the first century. In his Doctor of Ministry Dissertation, Alan Ehler suggests that the preaching of Jesus, Peter, and Paul were effective in leading people to faith as recorded in the New Testament. He believes that these three "...serve as excellent models for effective evangelistic preaching today because the culture of the first century was more similar to that of the twenty-first century than any since."²³ It seems that one reason our preaching today is often ineffective is because we are not in touch with our audience. We preach as though all attendees have a basic understanding of the Bible as well as a Christian worldview when in fact most have long since moved on. They have moved on so far that they are now more like the people that Paul preached to on Mars Hill.

In his list of ten necessary changes for the American church to have a bright future, Dave Olson notes the best pattern for the mission of the American church is the model of the early church in the Greco-Roman world.²⁴ Olson's entire list of changes reflects well on why we have been ineffective in the past and what needs to change in order to become effective. George G. Hunter III seems to agree with the idea that our preaching has been ineffective because we are not fully aware of the times and our

²² Lenard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millenium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 50.

²³ Ehler, "Preach to Reach: Seven Characteristics of Effective Evangelistic Preaching," 13.

²⁴ Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches*, 183.

culture. Hunter suggests that the challenge we face today is much like the challenge of the early church and that we should approach our culture as they did.²⁵

In her article, “Preaching to Young Adults,” Joanna M. Adams suggests that we must take into account the cultures and lack of background knowledge and experience with the Christian faith as well as the negative knowledge and experiences with so called Christians. She writes that,

“Many young adults have been put off by the mean spirited rhetoric and irrelevance of the message they have heard from many quarters about what Christianity stands for in our time. The majority of them stay away from the church in droves. Thank God for those who do come. Some are just exploring. Many, if not most, have no interest in ecclesiastical or theological arguments. They come hungry to learn and eager to be taught, but they are decidedly not eager either for in-crowd issues or sermons that leave them asking, ‘So...?’”²⁶

Timothy Keller describes well what I discovered in analyzing the evaluations of sermons I preached to the unchurched involved in my research. He notes,

“Through centuries of habit most Christian speaking and preaching still assumes that listeners have the fundamental understandings of reality that they had in the past. Even the most outwardly focused, evangelistic churches continue to reach mainly people with traditional mindsets because their communication expects hearers to carry that historical imprint of Christendom. Yet fewer find the message comprehensible, much less persuasive.”²⁷

²⁵ Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People*, 35.

²⁶ Joann Adams, “Preaching to Young Adults,” *Journal for Preachers* 34

²⁷ Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, 94.

Out of Touch with our Audience

Along with the challenge of being in touch with the culture, effective preaching must also include being in touch with the audience to whom we are preaching and how we communicate with them. Andy Stanley has excellent insight into why many of us pastors struggle with changing our sermons so that they connect with the unchurched people in the audience. Stanley points out that while most preachers say they want to communicate effectively with the unchurched they “approach the communication piece of the weekend as if there aren’t any unbelievers in the house. They preach as if everybody present is a believer and attends every week.”²⁸ Stanley goes on to suggest that our ineffective preaching is very often not because of bad content, theology, or intent but because the communicator’s approach trumps the purpose almost every time. In *How to Reach Secular People*, George G. Hunter III gives a list of what not to do when trying to reach the unchurched. Hunter says that we should not talk down to them, put them down publicly, use words or body language that implies arrogance or judgment, talk as if we know all about them when we do not know where they are coming from, or cause them to miss out on the faith that they already have.²⁹ Timothy Keller notes another challenging reality of some of the people who may be sitting in the audience as we preach. More and more do not sense a need for God in their lives. Keller writes,

“Today we are seeing growing numbers of people who do not exhibit hostility to religion as much as indifference. The growth is in the ‘nones’ – those who may not necessarily be atheist but who do not feel part of any particular religious institution or even tradition. They see no need to explore possible religious solutions to any of their problems. They do not believe people need God in order

²⁸ Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 230.

²⁹ Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People*, 98.

to have a basis for meaning or purpose, to have a strong moral framework, to aspire for and achieve greatness, or to simply have a full and happy life.”³⁰

Effective Preaching to the Unchurched

While the research is clear that we cannot place all unchurched people into one single homogenous group, in order to effectively preach to them we must attempt to identify and understand (as best we can) any cultural characteristics or attitudes they may have in common. Any insight we can gain on that front will increase the likelihood that preachers will ask the questions that unchurched people are asking and then answer those questions in a way that interests and engages them in their world.

Referring again to Dave Olson’s list of ten necessary changes for the American church to have a bright future, the first six speak to this question of effectiveness. Olson says that in order to preach effectively to and reach the unchurched we must be honest about what is happening (we are not doing very well), have the courage to change, and learn to thrive and grow in an America that is post-Christian, postmodern, and multiethnic. He also says that we must model our mission after the early church in the Greco-Roman world, upgrade our ministry gifts and skills, and learn to articulate the message and mission of Jesus with passion, power, and wisdom.³¹

I believe one of the most effective preachers to the unchurched today is Andy Stanley. In his book, *Deep and Wide*, Stanley shares seven guidelines directly related to preaching to the unchurched. He recommends that when preaching to the unchurched,

³⁰ Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, 93.

³¹ Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of over 200,000 Churches*, 183.

preachers should first acknowledge that they know they are in the audience and that they are happy about it. In his sermons, Stanley will often say something like, “I know not all of you who are with us today are Christ followers, but we are so glad you’ve joined us.”³² He will even at times say something humorous like, “Now those of you who are not Christ followers you’re off the hook on this one.”³³ Second, we should always begin with the audience in mind. Stanley’s idea is to make sure we find the place in our text that relates to the real life problems people are facing. When we do that they feel like we, as the preachers know they are out there and where “they are coming from.”³⁴ Third, we should pick just one passage and stick with it. Everyone will be glad we did. Jumping all over may show how smart we are but it confuses the unchurched. Fourth, we should always give permission to people not to believe or obey. Stanley suggests that we should not judge non-Christians for behaving like non-Christians. He has found that when we give non-Christians an out they lean in. Fifth, we should avoid using the phrase “the Bible says” because technically it does not. Stanley advises that we even avoid calling it a book. When referring to the Bible he recommends that preachers cite the authors, not the Bible. Instead of saying, “The Bible tells us that Jesus rose from the dead,” we should say, “Matthew, a former tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus, recorded that...” Not only does this give the words greater context (a real person who followed Jesus believed this) but it also helps preachers not to alienate unchurched people by assuming that they know all the Bible stories and characters. When preachers retell a common

³² Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, 237.

³³ *Ibid.*, 239.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

Bible story and do not assume that the audience knows it, they put the unchurched on the same page as everyone else. Sixth, we preachers should acknowledge the odd—it would be odd if we did not. The Bible contains some strange things, so we should admit it when they are strange. As a rule, he suggests that we say what they are thinking because, when we do, it gives us more credibility and gives them space. Finally, Stanley gives great insight into sharing some of the “stronger” biblical principles. He has found that when people are convinced that you want something *for* them rather than something *from* them, they are less likely to be offended when you challenge them.³⁵

Thom S. Rainer found an interesting connection between the pastor and the receptiveness of the unchurched to preaching. Of the formerly unchurched who were surveyed, ninety-seven percent said that the pastor and his/her preaching played a key part in facilitating their return to church.³⁶ Specifically Rainer identified seven factors related to preaching that influenced the unchurched. They were preaching that teaches, preaching that applies to their lives, the authenticity of the pastor, the conviction of the pastor, personal contact by the pastor, the pastor as a good communicator, and the pastor as a leader.³⁷ Rainer also interviewed several pastors who had been effective in reaching unchurched people with their preaching. From those interviews, he found that effective preachers to the unchurched are biblical, relevant, transparent, illustrative, and well prepared.³⁸ In fact, the average amount of time spent studying for each sermon by this

³⁵ Ibid., 243.

³⁶ Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, 214.

³⁷ Ibid., 57.

³⁸ Ibid., 217.

group of pastors was twenty-two hours a week.³⁹ His research found that pastors whose sermons were “ineffective” in reaching the unchurched studied an average of four hours per week. Among the effective preachers he also categorized the kinds of sermons they preached. The pastors were asked to give the percentage of their sermons that reflect each of the following styles. The averages were fifty-two percent expository, twenty percent topical, seventeen percent thematic, seven percent doctrinal, two percent narrative and two percent other.⁴⁰

Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes studied the types of sermons churches that effectively reach unchurched young adults are using. They note that effective preaching first and foremost has great content and that the most common types being used are expository and topical. The topical sermon is a great way to reach the “felt-needs” of unchurched people and it does not need to become “watered down.” Also, a topical sermon can be delivered in a verse-by-verse fashion.⁴¹ The authors note that while topical sermons have their place and are effective, there is a growing trend in these effective churches back to expository sermons. It seems that creatively and relevantly expositing scripture is very effective in reaching the unchurched. Their surveys indicate that people are not so much interested in the method of delivery as they are in the delivery of truth that is relevant to their lives. Authentic preaching that presents God’s word as the answer will draw many people.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 220.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 214.

⁴¹ Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them*, 166.

⁴² Ibid.

In his book, *Preaching to Pluralists*, Chris Altmann detailed the seven faces of postmoderns. For each of these, Altmann suggests an effective way to preach to these “faces” or challenges. His suggestions are based on what he calls “a theological model for postmodern preaching.” He asks, “Why not preach like Peter in the book of Acts?”⁴³ Specifically he suggests how we can preach evangelistically to these seven types of unchurched people. To the *uninformed* we should use vocabulary, illustrations, and images that do not assume prior knowledge of the biblical story and the gospel. He points out that this does not mean we can never use biblical vocabulary, we just need to explain it. To the *spiritually interested* we should let them experience God. To do this, we should plan our worship services in a way that engage the unchurched so they can “feel” the presence of God. To the *anti-institutional and the relational* we should preach the idea of community. While moderns commit to the Christian message first and then to community, postmoderns commit to community then the message. To the *pluralists* we should preach the exclusive message of Jesus with its inclusive message. Jesus is for everyone and anyone who wants to receive him. To the *pragmatic* we should preach messages that deal with real life problems and show the practicality of the Bible. Altmann cautions that there are limits to pragmatic preaching. We are not called to become psychologists but preachers of the gospel. And finally to those who value *experience* we should use experiential worship methods and use inductive preaching over deductive preaching. To help preachers form messages that are effective to the unchurched, Altmann suggests that we remember what they want and are asking for. They want preachers to include the basics, make it practical, guide them to deeper spirituality, lead them to

⁴³ Altmann, *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in the Postmodern Age*, 37.

warmer community, show them tolerance, not to give them religion, and give them an experience.⁴⁴

Alan Ehler summarizes his research on effective evangelistic preaching by listing the characteristics of preaching that bring unbelievers to faith in Christ. Effective evangelistic sermons are biblical and Christ centered, relevant to unbelieving listeners, preached with persuasive appeal, contain engaging illustrations, have dynamic delivery, are spoken by an authentic preacher, and are empowered by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

Rick Warren, in his classic book *The Purpose Driven Church*, suggests that as we preachers prepare our messages we should always ask, “Would this message make sense to a totally unchurched person?”⁴⁶ He then goes on to suggest some ideas to help us prepare sermons that will do just that. First, we should adapt our style to our audience. Second, we need to always remember that the ground we have in common with unchurched people is our common need. Third, we should make scripture accessible to unbelievers by using newer translations, while selecting scripture passages with the unchurched in mind. Fourth, we ought to use sermon titles that attract and appeal to the unchurched. Finally, Warren suggests that we preach for commitment and give unbelievers an opportunity to respond to the message.

Referring again to his book, *How to Reach Secular People*, George G. Hunter III summarizes well most of the insights I found as I researched the literature on preaching effectively to the unchurched. He says that first we need to listen to unchurched people

⁴⁴ Ibid., 142.

⁴⁵ Ehler, “Preach to Reach: Seven Characteristics of Effective Evangelistic Preaching,” 4.

⁴⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 293.

and know where they are coming from. They need to feel they are being heard and feel like they are accepted and respected for who they are. With that as a foundation, he first says to make sure to engage them on neutral turf. For many of us today, that probably means hanging out with non church attenders, getting to really know them and have them as friends, not as “projects.” Second, in our preaching we should strive to come off as a friend and ally not an adversary. Our goal should be to win and persuade them, not necessarily “to preach” at them. Thirdly, we need to realize that a vital part of a person’s “conversion” is experience, not just information. Unchurched people often need to attend for a while, or be involved in small groups before they make a decision to become a Christ follower. Fourth, in our sermons we should make sure to speak to the unchurched early about the questions they are asking. As we share, we should personalize the message. Not only by using examples from our own lives but by using examples that speak to them as individuals and what they are going through. Finally, Hunter says to make sure to use words to our advantage, not cheesy phrases but phrases that can be remembered and have a powerful message in just a few words. He concludes by emphasizing the need to tell stories.⁴⁷

In this chapter I have summarized the literature reviewed concerning the unchurched. First, it broadly indicates that the unchurched are growing in numbers in America and are increasingly becoming unaware of biblical knowledge and a Christian worldview. Secondly, many of them have a negative view of Christians and feel that the church is irrelevant to their lives. Third, while they cannot be defined by a single list of things they all have in common, there are characteristics that most unchurched have that

⁴⁷ Hunter III, *How to Reach Secular People*, 98.

can help us preach more effectively to them. Fourth, research shows that certain methods and approaches have been ineffective in preaching to the unchurched as well as certain methods and approaches that have been effective.

In the next chapter I will describe the context, methods, and tools used for my own research into preaching effectively to the unchurched as well as the goals and expected outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In this chapter I will describe the context, methods, and tools used for my research in preaching effectively to the unchurched. I will also identify the goals and expected outcomes.

Context

I serve as the lead pastor of Oak Hills Church in Eagan, Minnesota. Eagan is a suburb just south of the Twin Cities. Pertinent statistics are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistics-Eagan, Minnesota

Population	66,000
Gender	
Male	49%
Female	51%
Median age	36.8
Race	
White	78%
Asian	8%
Black	6%
Hispanic	5%
Two or more races	2%
Other	1%
Education	
High School diploma	96%
Bachelor's degree	52%
Graduate or professional degree	16%
Median value of a single family home	\$243,000
Median household income	\$76,000

My wife Melody and I started Oak Hills Church in September of 1991. A large Assemblies of God church in Bloomington, Minnesota, which had a long history of planting new churches, partnered with us. In June of 1990, about a year and a half before

our first service in Eagan, we were introduced to the congregation in Bloomington as the church-planting pastors. While serving in that role the senior pastor encouraged us to formulate the vision and structure of our new church and recruit current members of the parent church to join us on this new church adventure. By the time we had our first service at Northview Elementary School on September 15, 1991, twenty families from our parent church had become charter members.

Today we have grown to 350 families, which reflects almost exactly the ethnic and age demographic of our city. We have also built a 24,000 square foot church building and a beautiful missionary home on fourteen acres located in a unique area of town. I say unique because our church sits in the middle of four different types of housing. Across the street to the north there are section eight and low-income apartments. To the west of us some of the most expensive single-family homes in Eagan have recently been built. To the south there are middle-priced single family homes, and to our east are middle-priced townhomes. We are also located quite close to what could be called the main business part of town and the Central Park and Community Center. About forty percent of our congregation resides in Eagan and the other sixty percent live in nearby suburbs and St. Paul and Minneapolis.

From the very beginning, even though we were all “churched people,” we had a passion to see the church grow by reaching out to people who did not regularly attend church. Our goal was to build authentic relationships with unchurched people, invite them to church (if they seemed interested), and pray that at some point they would decide to believe and follow Jesus. We then hoped that they would enjoy becoming a part of our local church.

We did not realize back then the great challenge of our mission. It is obvious now but we just did not know how difficult it would be to get people who have little interest in our “product” (following Christ and attending church) to buy in. Many times through the years we have been tempted to give up on that mission and instead reach out to the “already convinced” who were simply looking for a different church home. Research over the past few decades¹ indicates that it is much easier to convince a regular church attender to start attending *a different church* than it is to convince an unchurched person to start attending *a church*. It could be compared to convincing someone to fly on a different airline. If a person who flies to Chicago from Minneapolis for business every Monday morning on airline A hears from his friend that he can make that same trip on airline B, which has bigger seats, better coffee, and costs less, he is bound to make the switch. If, on the other hand, a person drives to Chicago from Minneapolis every Monday morning for business because he is afraid to fly, then convincing him to get on an airplane is a much tougher sell. For twenty-five years now we have been trying to persuade people to “fly to Chicago” while most of them “want to drive” while not even being sure they even want to go to Chicago. Even with this ongoing challenge, I am thankful that still today, two and a half decades later, we have kept our original mission in place. That said, we have consistently found ourselves frustrated with the results.

There have been three ongoing and significant challenges to accomplishing our mission. First, it has been a challenge to get our members to invite their unchurched friends and family to attend our weekend services. While many, of course, have done this, we have yet to see this happening with as many in the congregation as we would

¹ David Dunlap, “The Myth of “Growth” in the Church Growth Movement,” 2000, http://www.gracebiblestudies.org/resources/web/www.duluthbible.org/g_f_j/TheMythofGrowth.htm.

like. We have discovered at least two reasons for this. First, when a person decides to believe in Jesus and become a member of a local church, they often begin to have fewer and fewer relationships with those who are unchurched. We do not encourage this; in fact, we encourage our members to develop authentic relationships with those who follow Christ and are in the church as well as those (even especially those) who do not. Even with this encouragement, less connection with those who are unchurched often seems to be a reality and consequently limits their opportunities to invite friends and acquaintances who are not Christ followers to attend a worship service. Another reason not as many people are inviting people to our weekend services as we hoped is fear of being too aggressive. We have found that our members love our church, our worship services, and believe that unchurched people would enjoy attending but often do not invite people to attend because they do not want to seem pushy or overly religious.

A second challenge to accomplishing our mission has been the prevalence of so many post-churched people. As noted from my research reviewed in Chapter Three, it can be more difficult to reach unchurched people who have some church attendance in their history than those who have had none. We have a high percentage of post-churched people in our south suburban communities who have attended church in the past and in their experience have found it wanting. This, of course, causes them to be leery and very cautious about starting to attend church again.

Third, we face the ongoing challenge of discovering and implementing the best way to reach unchurched people when they do attend a worship service. As already noted, most unchurched people in America attend church one to three times per year. Our

challenge has been to consistently, week to week, design a worship service that communicates with them effectively.

We presently have three services each weekend with an average weekly attendance of just over 500. Our worship services are approximately one hour long and include the elements of congregational singing, special music, video and/or drama, scripture reading, prayer, communion and preaching. Each week our service planning team evaluates (to the best of our ability) the effectiveness of each of the different elements we used in the weekend worship service. One bonus of my research has been that I received some excellent feedback from my survey participants concerning all of the elements of our worship service. That information served to enhance my insight into the main focus of my study, which was to learn how to preach more effectively to the unchurched.

Methods

In the spring of 2015 I began a three-part research project that involved unchurched participants (who were comfortable being called “unchurched”) and had a relational connection with members of Oak Hills Church. Over the course of a six-month period I received over fifty evaluations of my sermons from these unchurched individuals. For this project I utilized the action/reflection model. Simply stated this method involves an action (in this case preaching) with a selected group of people (unchurched) who reflect on the action taken. The results of those reflections then are intended to create a possible new (hopefully more effective) concept or method that can then be used for further experimentation and evaluation. My plan was to not only attain written reflections of my sermons but also record responses in face-to-face discussions.

In the end I believe the action/reflection method resulted in the most effective way to gather my desired information.

The first group of evaluators involved individuals who did not regularly attend a church but had some kind of relationship with members of our congregation. One Sunday each month in March, April, and May of 2015 at the end of the worship service, I asked our congregation “to do me a favor.” I told them that I desired to evaluate the effectiveness of my sermons with unchurched people and wondered if they would be willing to ask an unchurched friend or family member to help me out. I then told them that if they found a willing participant they should inform that person to go to our church website that week, listen to the weekend message, and then complete a survey (Appendix A). At the end of this three month period I had received online evaluations from 27 different individuals. As an added enticement I let them know that anyone who participated would be entered into a drawing for a two hundred and fifty dollar gift card. One benefit of this first phase was that participants did not need to attend our worship service or even live in the area to be involved. It also gave our church members a greater range of family and friends to draw from.

The second group of researchers included 10 individuals who, like the first group, did not regularly attend church but did have some kind of relationship with members of our congregation. These individuals however made a bigger commitment by agreeing to attend at least two of the three different weekend worship services in which I desired my sermons to be evaluated. During the worship service they evaluated the sermon using a sermon evaluation form (Appendix B) and afterward joined me and the other participants for lunch. As we ate our meal together I encouraged everyone to introduce himself or

herself and then got the conversation started by asking some prepared questions (Appendix C) intended to get their observations of the elements of the worship service (not the sermon). This served well to “break the ice” and get everyone comfortable with sharing his or her thoughts and opinions. I then asked each of them to report to the group their impressions of the sermon using as a guide the responses and comments they had written on the evaluation forms. As we walked through each question I encouraged the group to discuss any additional reflection they had as they heard the observations of others. I believe the combination of the written responses as well as the reflection during the discussion with the other participants gave my research some unique insights into how to preach more effectively to the unchurched.

The third group of evaluators involved three unchurched individuals who agreed to attend a worship service at Oak Hills Church by my invitation (not as a group but individually or, if married, as a couple) with whom I have a personal relationship. Like the other participants, I asked these individuals to evaluate my sermon using a prepared form (Appendix B). After the service we met at a local restaurant for lunch and I recorded their impressions of both the worship service and the sermon. My intention with this group was to gather observations from individuals who were a bit closer to me relationally and encourage a more personal discussion together. I felt this gave me additional help in meeting my goal, which was to add more personal insight to the research already available on preaching effectively to the unchurched.

Research Tool and Goals

The evaluation forms I designed (Appendixes A and B) first asked questions intended to gather basic demographic information. These included questions on gender,

age, present church attendance habits and church attendance history. The goal in asking these general demographic questions was to provide more specific information on each respondent. I wanted to see if even in my small sample of unchurched people, there might be a pattern of opinions or perspectives from different unchurched sub-groups.

In regards to sub-groups, it is important to note the limitations of my research. One of the first challenges in outlining the parameters of this project was answering the question, “Who are the unchurched?” In Chapter One I defined an unchurched person as anyone who attends church zero to four times a year. I felt that simple but broad definition would actually help define the limits of my research. Early on, I kept thinking of questions that revealed the many possible nuances of those who are unchurched. Questions like: If a person attends church more than three times a year, does that make them “churched?” If a person is unchurched, does that mean he or she is not a Christian? What are the different common attitudes and perspectives (if any) of different generations, genders, and ethnic groups who are unchurched? Do more people attend church in one demographic group than another? I knew that finding the answers to these questions and others would be very helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of the unchurched but realized I needed to limit the scope of my research. In the end I believe using my simple but broad definition actually helped keep the project uncomplicated and accessible to all shapes and sizes of unchurched people. This simple definition of the unchurched was also very helpful to our church members and attenders as they invited their unchurched friends and family members to participate in the research.

Following the initial demographic questions, the first three quantitative questions were intended to find out what the sermon accomplished or “did.” The first question was,

To what degree (on a scale) did you understand the Biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon? Much of my literature review revealed that sermons were ineffective with the unchurched if the preacher assumed the audience had a general knowledge of the Bible or held a basic Christian worldview. With this question I hoped to discover if the biblical concepts and ideas shared in my sermon were clearly understood by the audience.

The second question asked, *Was the sermon relevant and applicable (very, somewhat, not at all) to your life?* Recent research on effectively preaching to the unchurched emphasizes the importance of letting the unchurched in the audience know that you are happy they are in attendance and then carefully using illustrations and examples that include real life (not just Christian life) application. With this question I wanted to discover if the participants felt the sermon they were hearing in this Christian church was relevant to their everyday lives even though they were not church attenders.

The third question was, *Did the sermon encourage you (yes, no, maybe) to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?* In Chapter Two I discussed how defining my view of conversion was important for my research. I desired to know if the sermon encouraged the listeners to be interested in becoming a Christ follower and having a relationship with Jesus. As you will discover in later chapters, this question encouraged a wealth of insightful discussion with my unchurched friends.

The next three quantitative questions were intended to help me discover if my sermons “did not do” certain things that the research suggested often alienates or offends unchurched people. Question number four was, *Did you disagree with anything in the sermon (yes, no, maybe) or was there anything you didn't like?* In preparing my sermons I attempted to speak in a way that both communicated what I believed to be biblical truth

but also to let them know that any internal processing of questions or disagreements was not only allowed; it was expected.

Question number five asked, *Did the sermon seem (yes, no, maybe) judgmental to you or alienate you in any way?* This question is tied closely to the previous one and both were intended to measure the impression my unchurched participants had about my attitude and authenticity as a preacher. So much of the research revealed that the unchurched respond very negatively to preachers who they believe are inauthentic and/or have a judgmental attitude.

The sixth question asked was, *Did you feel the pastor (yes, no, maybe) used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?* Recent research² reveals that millennials are generally turned off by brands that try to “sell to them.” They tend to appreciate just the information and facts about the product. If they feel the product has real value and relevance to their lives and the information about it is shared in an authentic way, they are far more open to considering what is being offered.

I intended the last four questions to be more qualitative in nature. Question number seven was, *Did any part of the sermon (yes, no) cause you to think about something in a new way? If yes, please give an example.* With this question I desired to discover if any of the ideas shared in the sermons challenged their worldview or maybe caused them to see in a new way a different view than their own. I was especially interested to see if any of the examples they shared (if they said yes) referred to a Bible story or biblical concept. In question number one, I asked if they fully understood the

² Jamie Gailewicz, “Catering to the Millennial Consumer Profile,” 2014, <http://thenextweb.com/entrepreneur/2014/03/29/meet-millennials-consumers-change-marketing-landscape/3/> (accessed November 12, 2015).

biblical concepts that were shared. Here I was hoping to find out if any of those biblical stories or ideas caused them to at least wonder if they might be true or at least worth exploring in a deeper way.

Question eight asked, *Was there any part of the sermon (yes, no) that was emotionally moving or funny? If yes please give an example.* All good communicators know that both humor and emotionally moving stories are wonderful ways to keep the attention of their audience. They are also effective ways to lower the sometimes unfair presumptions and/or defenses that your audience may have. With this question I desired to see if the respondents felt that the humor and emotional stories used in the sermon endeared them to me and the message or turned them off.

Question number nine asked, *What was your “gut level” response to the sermon?* My intent with this question was to try to catch any additional insight I could from their impressions of the sermon that the wording of the other questions did not bring out.

Finally, question number ten asked, *Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more enjoyable or understandable.* The answers to this kind of question can be devastating to those of us who preach on a regular basis. After spending hours preparing and then preaching a sermon, the last thing we preachers need is an armchair quarterback throwing in comments about what was done wrong or what did not work. That said, there is almost always some truth in the criticism we receive. I have found the best way to receive helpful criticism is to ask for it in a positive way. This is why I worded this question not with “what was wrong” but “what would have made it more enjoyable or understandable.” In this way I had a much better chance of receiving

helpful criticism. I also felt that these suggestions would give me even more insight into the attitudes and perceptions of those who do not regularly attend church

As I reviewed the literature on effectively reaching and preaching to the unchurched, I noticed that most of the observations were based on large national or regional surveys and census data, or on somewhat random personal interviews with people who were not regular church attenders or followers of Christ. A much smaller percentage of the research actually came from pastors who wrote out of personal experience.³ Even in those cases, there is no evidence that their strategies and observations came out of personal interviews and evaluations with unchurched people who had responded to specific questions. I do not mean to imply that these pastors' observations were not helpful or insightful. They were very helpful and came from numerous interactions with unchurched people and much experience preaching to them. In fact, it was their observations that helped form the questions I used in designing my evaluation form. But it was also this observation that encouraged me to keep as an overarching goal of all my research obtaining more personal insight that only comes from face-to-face conversations and personal connection.

Expected Outcomes

The expectations I had for my research were quite simple. I expected to gather honest evaluations of, comments about, and reactions to my Christian sermon from real-life people who do not regularly attend a Christian church. By carefully analyzing this information I believed that I would be able to identify more effective ways to preach

³ Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, 230. Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission*, 293. Altrock, *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in the Postmodern Age*, 3.

effectively to the unchurched. I also anticipated that the insights I gained in this project would help us communicate more effectively to the unchurched in our community as we attempt to let them know who we are and invite them to visit our church.

In this chapter I have given the context, methods, and tools used for my research in preaching effectively to the unchurched. I have also identified the goals and expected outcomes. In the next chapter I will thoroughly analyze the results of my research.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

As stated in Chapter Four, “The expectations I had for my research were quite simple. I expected to gather honest evaluations of, comments about, and reactions to my Christian sermons from real-life people who do not regularly attend a Christian Church. By carefully analyzing this information I believed that I would be able to identify more effective ways to preach effectively to the unchurched.”

The following is a report and analysis of the data resulting from my research including some initial insights, emerging themes and core conclusions. By analyzing each sermon independently I believe I was able to better identify the common strengths and weaknesses as they emerged in each of the five sermons.

Sermon One

On Palm Sunday, March 29, 2015, I preached a message entitled, “Who is Jesus?” which asks, “Who is Jesus in our lives? Is he: (1) a likable moral teacher, (2) an annoying religious activist, or (3) Christ, the son of the living God?” A transcript of that sermon can be found in Appendix D.

Following that sermon I interviewed eight unchurched people who had attended the service and filled out a sermon evaluation form. We then discussed the sermon in a group setting with the other unchurched participants who attended. The following week I received six additional evaluations from unchurched individuals who had watched the

sermon on our church website and filled out an online evaluation. Detailed demographic information and the data from those evaluations and discussions can be found in Tables 2 and 3 (Appendix E).

Insights and Emerging Themes—Sermon One

What was effective with my unchurched participants?

1. They were able to understand the biblical concepts and ideas that I shared.

Eleven of the fourteen participants indicated that they “highly” understood the biblical concepts and ideas that were shared. One person commented that the sermon was “very clear and easy to follow.” Another said, “You bring it to life and a perspective so someone in modern times can understand.” A third participant wrote, “When you make current references and compare to now it is helpful to me because bridging the gap can be hard.”

As noted in my literature review, the latest research reveals that in order to be effective in preaching to the unchurched we preachers must not assume our audiences are biblically literate. Consequently we must make every effort to ensure that our sermons are understandable to all who attend. The data indicates that I was able to do that in this sermon.

2. They perceived me to be authentic and sincere.

One online participant wrote, “He seems very down to earth/authentic—passionate in an understated way.” When asked, “What was your gut level response to the sermon?” one attending participant during the post-sermon discussion said, “Pretty good. I feel I have more in common with Pastor Rod than I thought.” Another attender said, “I enjoyed his honesty, no need to sugar coat.”

As I noted in Chapter Three, Thomas Rainer identified “the authenticity of the pastor”¹ as one of the seven factors related to preaching that most influenced the unchurched. The response of my participants suggests that I came across in my preaching as an authentic and sincere person.

3. They did not feel manipulated or intimidated.

Question number six on my evaluation form asked, “Did you feel the pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?” All fourteen participants said “no.” One online participant commented, “The pastor did not use intimidation at all. He only used persuasive speech.” While one of the attending participants was not so sure about the worship experience as a whole, he did feel the preaching was not manipulative. He stated, “Though I feel the experience seems contrived it doesn’t feel like manipulation.”

Although I am very pleased that 100% of the evaluators for this sermon did not feel I used manipulation or intimidation to convince them of my ideas, I never want my preaching to be timid about challenging my listeners to embrace biblical beliefs and ideas. The above comment about “persuasive speech” was very encouraging for me because it supported a goal I have for my preaching which is to persuade, not pressure, the unchurched. I am inspired here by the preaching of Paul before King Agrippa. Agrippa interrupted him saying, “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?” Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this

¹ Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, 214.

audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains” (Acts 26:28–29).

4. They liked my application of the Bible to everyday life.

While the response to this question about the relevancy of my sermon to everyday life was not as unanimously supportive as the question about manipulation and intimidation, I do feel encouraged by the response to this question. When asked, “Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?” three said “highly,” nine said “somewhat,” and three said “not at all.” While I certainly would have liked to have “scored” better here, I am encouraged that a good percentage of my unchurched evaluators did hear something in a Christian sermon that was highly or somewhat relevant or applicable to their lives.

The discussion following this sermon with my unchurched participants gave me some additional insight. Some were very clear about the lack of relevancy of the message to their lives. One person who identified herself as an atheist said, “Knowing more about Jesus and what he is supposed to be doesn’t relate to my day-to-day life.” That is a very clear statement; yet I was intrigued to observe that she was very interested and engaged in the discussion about application of the biblical principles. Another participant who was about 30 years old and had attended church only six times in his entire life said, “Who Jesus was as a person helped a bit in how I can act more like Him from a personal level vs. Jesus’ level.” Maybe I am being overly optimistic but I did feel as though a number of my unchurched attenders either did not expect the sermon to be

relevant or did not want to admit that it was. Consequently, getting three “highly” responses and nine “somewhat” answers to the relevancy question caused me to believe that they might be more open in the future to the Bible and the Christian faith.

What was ineffective with my unchurched participants?

They were not clear about my definition of having a relationship with Jesus.

In Chapter Two I wrote about the importance of defining my definition of conversion. I explained that I believe the Bible teaches a very “decisional” view of conversion and that a person must decide to accept Jesus and come into a relationship with Him. I also pointed out that an important part of my research would be attempting to discover if my sermons encouraged my listeners to want to know more about having a relationship with Jesus.

At least in Sermon One I was only moderately successful in defining what I believe it means to have a relationship with Jesus. Consequently, I only convinced a few to want to know more about what that means. In response to the question, “Did the sermon cause you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?” two responded “yes,” seven checked “maybe,” and three marked “not at all.”

Of the three who responded “not at all,” their comments were: “I think we may still have different opinions as to what a relationship with Jesus is,” “I’m not interested right now,” and “I am content in my Christian beliefs and ways and how I live my life.” One of the evaluators who responded with a “maybe” said, “Some things were interesting and there’s some interest there for me to explore deeper.”

Two other comments came from the question, “What was your gut level response to the sermon?” One person said, “Seemed to raise a lot of questions. Could you share any ‘answers’ from your own journey? Or is that too intrusive?” Another said, “Perhaps exploring the question of what it means to make Jesus Lord.”

This more casual interest in wanting to know more about what it means to have a relationship with Jesus emerged as a pattern in the next two sermons as well. While I will give more analysis from those evaluations, I believe that there are two main reasons for these responses. One is the need on my part as a preacher to bring more clarity to what I believe a relationship with Jesus really is and what it means to follow Him. The second is a spiritual reason. Often, as I am preaching about making a decision to follow Jesus, I feel that a spiritual battle is taking place. I believe some insight into this battle comes from the Apostle Paul: “But the people’s minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 3:14). For me, one key to preaching sermons that will increase the interest of my unchurched audience in a relationship with Jesus will be praying that the “veil will be removed.”

Sermon Two

On Sunday, April 19, 2015, I preached a message entitled, “Rethink your Circumstances,” taken from Philippians 1:12–20 about seeing the place you are in life from God’s perspective. A transcript of that sermon can be found in Appendix F.

Following that sermon I interviewed six unchurched people who had attended the service that day, filled out a sermon evaluation form and then discussed the sermon in a

group setting with the other unchurched participants who attended. The following week I received eight additional evaluations from unchurched individuals who had watched the sermon on our church website and filled out the online evaluation. Detailed demographic information and the data from those evaluations and discussions can be found in Tables 4 and 5 (Appendix G).

Insights and Emerging Themes—Sermon Two

What was effective with my unchurched participants?

1. In Sermon Two (like Sermon One) the majority of the unchurched evaluators were able to understand the biblical concepts and ideas I shared and felt the sermon related well to their everyday lives.

To the question, “To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?” seven responded “highly,” one marked “somewhat,” and six did not respond but commented. One evaluator said, “They were simple, thoughtful and expressed with intent.” Another said, “Message was great because you can relate to it no matter what your religious beliefs. I could take the message for my life even if I’m not in relationship with Christ.”

A common trend emerging in Sermon Two (and continuing through all five sermons) is that the majority of the unchurched understood the biblical concepts and ideas I shared even though they themselves were unchurched and may not have been a follower of Christ. As I stated in my analysis of Sermon One, this is encouraging to me because it indicates that unchurched people who hear me preach generally find they can understand the biblical ideas expressed. While the comment about “relating to the message no matter what your religious

beliefs” encourages me, it also concerns me. I want to make sure that my preaching is not only understandable and relatable to the unchurched but that it also challenges them to seriously consider pursuing a relationship *with Christ* not just getting good ideas about living *from Him*.

The key to doing this may come in my application. To the question, “Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?” eleven responded “highly” and three marked “somewhat.” Since the data show my sermons are consistently relevant and applicable to the unchurched person’s everyday life, I believe I should use this ability to not only make application to life but encouragement to follow Christ.

2. In Sermon Two (as in Sermon One) the listeners perceived me to be authentic and sincere. They also indicated that they did not feel manipulated or intimidated.

On the question of feeling manipulated or intimidated all fourteen of my unchurched evaluators said “no.” One online evaluator commented, “He was open to sharing his ideas in a non-forceful way.” An attending evaluator said, “It did not alienate me, not at all.” Another said, “I feel he used his passion for the subject to bring us to his message.” Concerning how I was perceived, one person wrote, “You come across as a really nice guy and sincere preacher and the message seems simple.”

I have been aware for most of my years in ministry (based on post-sermon comments, emails and notes) that I come across to people as a sincere and authentic person. My interpretation of this more official data in my thesis is that I

need to continue to concentrate even more intently on sharing my ideas with clarity and conviction but (as one evaluator commented) in a non-forceful way.

What was ineffective with my unchurched participants?

1. Especially with some in this group, I was ineffective in convincing them of the necessity (and advantage) of having a relationship with Jesus.

As mentioned in my analysis of the data from Sermon One on this subject, my lack of clarity on what I believe it means to have a relationship with Jesus emerged as a problem here in Sermon Two and consequently was ineffective. In response to being asked if the sermon caused them to want to know more about having a relationship with Jesus, three marked “yes,” five said “maybe,” and six indicated “not at all.” Comments included: “Messages are interpreted by (the) recipient. This recipient understood message but did not move me to Jesus,” “I wanted to know more about happiness, but not necessarily more interested in a relationship with Jesus,” “More life reflecting to me as opposed to thinking about my relationship with Jesus,” and “I took this as a message to me, less about God or Jesus, but about my behavior and outlook.” Another comment during the post sermon discussion was, “From my perspective you lost me at give your heart to Jesus because it seemed like a hook.”

I am challenged again here by the data and believe that I need to improve on my explanation of what I believe it means to have a relationship with Jesus. I realize that even with a clear explanation some (maybe even many) of my unchurched audience may still not be interested or even agree exactly with what I believe about decisional conversion. However, the data indicate this area of my

preaching does need improvement and by concentrating on greater clarity it will certainly increase odds for a more positive response.

2. An emerging theme is that I would be more effective if I showed more energy and was not as tied to my notes.

One online evaluator said, “Maybe a little more energy. Involving the crowd more maybe. Everybody would love more humor.” Another online participant from Sermon One wrote, “I wished the pastor had looked up more than down at his booklet during the sermon, to have kept the eye contact longer with his congregation and thus maybe their attention.” During the post-sermon discussion an attending evaluator said, “Very positive and uplifting. Very laidback without being disjointed.”

I believe my “laid back” approach to preaching comes from both my personality type and my deep desire to not be manipulative or intimidating. While I have discussed the data that clearly show that my “non-manipulation” is a strength of my preaching, I can see here that this need for “a little more energy” has, at times, limited my effectiveness.

Sermon Three

On May 17, 2015, I preached a message entitled “God’s Idea of Family,” which outlined God’s design for family and the biblical principles to help us live it out. A transcript of that sermon can be found in Appendix H.

Following that sermon I interviewed six unchurched people who had attended the service that day, filled out a sermon evaluation form and then discussed the sermon in a group setting with the other unchurched participants who attended. The following week I

received thirteen additional evaluations from unchurched individuals who had watched the sermon on our church website and filled out the online evaluation. Detailed demographic information and the data from those evaluations and discussions can be found in Tables 6 and 7 (Appendix I).

Insights and Emerging Themes—Sermon Three

What was effective with my unchurched participants?

1. In Sermon Three (as in Sermons One and Two) the majority of the evaluators were able to clearly understand the biblical concepts and ideas I shared and found them to be relevant to their daily lives.

When asked, “To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?” seventeen of the nineteen evaluators marked “highly.” The other two did not respond to this question. Some of the written remarks and discussion comments included: “Got them all,” “I felt that the concepts were incredibly clear,” “Seemed really clear and easy to follow,” “I had no problem taking notes,” and “I thought he did a great job of not only using biblical passage(s) but explaining them well and applying them to daily life.”

When asked, “Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?” sixteen marked “very” and three checked “somewhat.” Some of the comments included: “Everyone has a family,” “Ideas of family presented felt fairly universal, approachable,” and “Made me think of my family members and honoring my parents.”

The response to this question in Sermon Three supports this pattern of my preaching being consistently effective in communicating biblical ideas and

concepts. Because this sermon in particular seemed to elicit particularly strong comments from my listeners about clear understanding, I was interested to discover the reason.

I believe there are at least two reasons for this positive response. First, the subject matter of this sermon on family relations was relevant to a broad number of people. As one person said, “Everyone has family.” Secondly, with some sermons we preachers just do better at clear communication and application than others. I believe this sermon in particular will be a good choice for closer evaluation in order to learn how to preach more effectively to the unchurched.

One example of learning from closer examination is the comments from one of the attending evaluators about struggling with some of what he saw as gender bias in the Bible. To the question about whether he disagreed with anything or if there was anything he didn't like, he commented, “It's sometimes hard to get past the patriarchal language although I didn't feel like the sermon was pushing it.” From another comment you can see that he is very positive overall about the sermon but still struggling with some of the language of the Bible. He wrote, “Positive, applicable, relevant though the language (traditional gender roles) can be hard to get past.” It appears that, at least in this sermon, I was able to communicate biblical concepts, make them applicable to my unchurched listeners' lives, even though he was struggling with the patriarchal biblical language. This is a wonderful reminder to keep the unchurched in mind (the majority of whom are younger and are coming from a more gender neutral culture) as I prepare future sermons.

2. The evaluators did not feel I came across as judgmental or manipulative.

Here in Sermon Three I see additional support for my sermons not feeling judgmental or manipulative. When asked, “Did you feel the pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?” all nineteen evaluators responded “no.” Written online comments and remarks from discussion with attending evaluators included: “Surprisingly...not once did I feel as though you were trying to manipulate or intimidate me (I kind of expected it),” “Not at all, it was a very pleasant experience and the pastor has a very nice tone of voice,” and “Using Bible verses, there was great evidence in the teaching and it was presented in a respectful way.”

To the question, “Did the sermon seem judgmental of you or alienate you in any way?” sixteen checked “no” and three marked “maybe.” From those who marked “no” one wrote, “That was actually something I admired about the sermon. It felt like it was for everyone just as God is for everyone, which is what I believe. As I was listening, I thought, ‘wow my friend is so blessed to have a church like this.’” One person who checked “maybe” remarked, “I feel like the text is off-putting, but the sermon was less so.” And later he commented, “Overall not the message of the sermon—felt it was positive and inclusive.”

I believe this last remark can be connected to the earlier comment about the patriarchal language in the Bible. Often what people need when they hear a sermon is enough background information of the scripture to understand the context (i.e., the patriarchal culture of the day) and then insight into the spirit or

“God’s heart” in that text as it is applied in today’s culture. I believe the data show that in my preaching I am able to do that on a consistent basis.

What was ineffective with my unchurched participants?

1. Once again with many in this group, I was ineffective in convincing them of the necessity (and advantage) of having faith in Jesus.

This may be the most consistent area of ineffectiveness in my preaching. When asked, “Did the sermon cause you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?” seven marked “yes,” five checked “maybe,” and seven responded “not at all.” For me some real insight into this subject came in the post-sermon discussion. As I was listening to the comments about this idea of having a relationship with Jesus I became very aware of the importance of words and language when challenging (especially millennials) about having a relationship with Jesus and becoming a follower of Jesus.

One evaluator said, “That phrase ‘relationship with Jesus’ is off-putting.” Another said, “The phrase has some baggage to it because I only know of it in that context (protestant and evangelical) so when it’s said it tells me what the faith is and I have a bad experience with it because it means so much more. When I hear it I think here comes the judgment.” A third person said, “Relationship with Jesus is not off-putting but it doesn’t draw me in.” These comments and others like them caused me to ask my unchurched participants to help me come up with words that might be more effective in inviting people to consider following Jesus. One said, “Maybe say ‘does the sermon invite you or make you interested in the spiritual community of Jesus?’” Another person said to me in a one-on-one

conversation right after the sermon, “The truth is I’m more interested in the kind of people who attend here and are Christians. First I’d like to find out what kind of people they are and then I might be interested in a relationship with Jesus, although I’m not exactly sure what that means.”

These responses as well as those from Sermons One and Two have encouraged me to make at least four observations about how I can increase the effectiveness of my preaching to the unchurched about having a relationship with Jesus. First, I need to communicate more clearly what I believe a relationship with Jesus really means. Second, I need to be careful not to use language that is off-putting or that may have religious baggage. Third, I need to invite people to get to know the people in our church community who are Christ followers and then encourage them to follow Jesus. Although this differs slightly from my pentecostal evangelical rooted theology, I do believe that when people are in relationship with others in the Christian community, whether they are active Christ-followers or not, they enter into a relationship with Jesus because the church community is the body of Christ. My preaching needs to effectively communicate the power of this relationship with Christ through the church community as well as encourage people to then personalize their faith in Jesus. Finally, I need to pray and be prepared for the spiritual battle that takes place while I am giving the invitation to follow Christ.

2. Some people felt I would be more effective if I “loosened up a little.”

Here from Sermon Three (and from previous sermons) I see additional evidence that I can be more effective in preaching to the unchurched if I loosen up

a little bit and show a bit more passion and emotion when I preach. When asked to “Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more helpful for you,” one online evaluator wrote, “The only thing that I think would’ve made it more enjoyable was just more freedom. The pastor seemed to stick to a script and it was a great one, but he shouldn’t feel like he has to be so formal I don’t think. Let loose a little bit.”

It is important to note here the substantial difference in the research done for the next two sermons. First, the data are from fewer subjects than the previous three sermons. As I point out in my reporting, Sermon Four involves just one individual and Sermon Five involves just one couple. Second, again as noted in my reporting, I have a professional/personal relationship with the subjects involved in these last two sermons. I feel it’s important to note the potential for significant favorable bias from these participants especially considering the positive response to question number three which asks if the sermon caused them to want to know more about having a relationship with Jesus. I reflect more on this potential bias in Chapter Six.

Sermon Four

On July 12, 2015, I preached a sermon entitled, “A Christian’s Righteousness,” taken from Matthew 5:31–37 (Sermon on the Mount) about how Christians can have holy marriages and honest speech. A transcript of that sermon can be found in Appendix J. That day my friend (who is also my physician) who does not regularly attend church agreed to attend the worship service, evaluate my sermon, and join me for lunch to discuss his worship experience and comment on the effectiveness of my sermon. The

detailed data from his evaluation and our discussion can be found in Table 8 (Appendix K).

Insights and Emerging Themes—Sermon Four

What was effective with my unchurched friend?

1. As in the first three sermons my preaching was relevant to my friend's everyday life and he clearly understood the biblical ideas and themes that I shared.

In response to the question, "To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?" my friend responded, "a lot" and in our post-sermon discussion stated, "Because I come from a religious background I've been in a lot of Biblical classes so I understood and was able to follow along." He also indicated that the sermon was "highly" relevant and applicable to his life and commented, "I think you did a great job of combining the Bible with current terms." When asked about his "gut level" response to the sermon he wrote, "Excellent; I felt like there was more to come that I would be interested in hearing."

I am particularly encouraged here by my friend's positive response because he has mentioned to me on many occasions the negative religious baggage he carries from previous church experiences. As I noted in my literature review in Chapter Three, the research shows that sometimes it is more difficult to reach the *previously churched* unchurched than it is the *never churched* unchurched. With the never churched unchurched you can expect doubts, skepticism and unbelief, but there is a greater chance you will not have to also get past cynicism or hurt from previous church attendance. In this experience my

friend seems to have been very open to understanding and applying these biblical ideas to his life.

2. In this case (unlike the previous three sermons) my sermon caused my friend to be very interested in knowing more about having a relationship with Jesus.

In answer to the question “Did the sermon encourage you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?” my friend commented, “Very much so, because your perspective of Jesus is positive, productive and good. I liked what you had to say.” Here again this answer was very encouraging to me especially following the less positive responses from the previous three sermons.

Because my friend has an evangelical church background it may explain why the phrase “relationship with Jesus” did not seem to be off-putting for him. In my analysis of Sermon One I noted one person who had grown up in an evangelical church and admitted to reacting negatively to the language I used in the sermon like “relationship with Jesus.” Here my friend who had also had a past negative church experience, was encouraged to want to know more about what that really means. While the reasons for this very different reaction to the sermon by these two individuals may be related to the different aspects of their lives (personalities, life experiences, upbringing, etc...), a more thorough examination of this sermon in particular may be very helpful in improving the effectiveness of my sermons to the unchurched on this issue of conversion.

3. In this sermon (as in the previous sermons) I did not come across as judgmental or trying to manipulate or intimidate in order to convince him of my ideas.

When asked if he felt judged or alienated, my friend said, “No, because everything you said was inclusive and not critical and respected others’ ideas.” As to feeling manipulated or intimidated he responded, “No, the thing is if what you have to say is good and positive you don’t need to intimidate.”

What was ineffective with my unchurched friend?

Overall there were no negative comments about the sermon. In almost all aspects my preaching seemed to be very effective. One observation I have made relates to a few questions my friend had about positions that I hold on certain issues. He mentioned in his remarks and also in the post-sermon discussion his interest in my stand on divorce as well as how I as a pastor addressed the church regarding the Supreme Court decision about gay marriage.

I explained to him that on the one hand, in my sermons I am intentionally vague on certain issues (especially those that are political and more controversial) so that a person’s emotional defenses will not get in the way of receiving the overall message. I really believe that if a person will first be open to following Jesus, then the Bible and the Holy Spirit will enlighten them about how to respond to different cultural, social and moral issues. I then told him that on the other hand, I have observed (based on his comments and other evaluations) a pattern revealing that I could be more effective in my preaching to the unchurched if I would be more clear (especially on less controversial issues) about where I personally stand.

Sermon Five

On August 16, 2015, I preached a sermon entitled, “A Christian’s Relationship,” taken from Matthew 7:1–12 (Sermon on the Mount) about how Christians should relate

to others and to their heavenly father. A transcript of that sermon can be found in Appendix L. That day my friend (who is also my dentist) and his wife, who do not regularly attend church, agreed to attend the worship service, evaluate my sermon, and join me for lunch to discuss their worship experience. The detailed data from those evaluations and our discussion can be found in Table 9 (Appendix M).

Insights and Emerging Themes—Sermon Five

What was effective with my unchurched friends?

1. As in the previous four sermons my friends gave me high marks for the relevancy and clarity of my biblical ideas and themes.

In answer to the question, “To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?” my friend said, “Very Much. Pastor Rod cited passages and shared interpretations which facilitated a greater understanding.” His wife commented, “I agree with his biblical concepts.” Concerning the relevancy and application to his life my friend commented, “Highly. Very helpful with relationships with friends (the “pigs” example in sermon), our heavenly father, and others.” When asked if the sermon caused him to think of something in a new way my friend commented, “Yes. I liked how each relationship was defined and explained.” His wife responded very positively to this question as well.

I was especially encouraged by these comments because I know my friend does not presently attend church regularly and when he does (just a few times a year) he does not feel like he connects spiritually or emotionally to the worship service or the sermon. When asked about his gut level feeling about the sermon he

said, “I liked feeling connected and people feeling the Spirit.” He then added, “I felt God is with me.” In Chapter Four I mentioned that one goal I had in using this “gut level” question was “to catch any additional insight I could from their impressions of the sermon that the wording of the other questions did not bring out.” For me this is a good example of this question accomplishing that goal as it brought out the feelings my friend was experiencing throughout the sermon.

2. Both my friend and his wife indicated that they were interested in finding out more about having a relationship with Jesus.

Here again I am encouraged by these positive responses to the idea of finding out more about having a relationship with Jesus. My initial observation is that my personal connection with these folks (my friends) may in part explain this more affirmative response here (in these last two sermons) than those given in the first three. That said I also believe that all three of my friends are very interested in following Jesus and this sermon encouraged them to want to learn more about what that really means.

3. In this sermon (as in all of the previous sermons) I did not come across as judgmental or as trying to manipulate or intimidate my friends in order to convince them of my ideas.

Based on all of my research I believe this area of my listeners not feeling judged, manipulated, or intimidated was the most consistent pattern in all of the five sermons. Here again, as in all the previous sermons, when asked about feeling judged or alienated and when asked if they felt intimidated or manipulated by the sermon my friends both responded “no.” As stated in earlier analysis of

other sermons I believe this is one of my greatest strengths in preaching more effectively to the unchurched.

What was ineffective with my unchurched friends?

Although my friends were very positive overall about the effectiveness of this sermon, and as noted earlier, very open to knowing more about a relationship with Jesus, there is more evidence here that supports a pattern that emerged from previous evaluations. I need to continue to bring greater clarity to what I believe it means to make a decision to follow Jesus and develop a relationship with Him.

Core Conclusions

Referring again to the goals for my research, which I stated in Chapter Four and again at the beginning of this chapter, “I expected to gather honest evaluations of, comments about, and reactions to my Christian sermons from real-life people who do not regularly attend a Christian Church. By carefully analyzing this information I believed that I would be able to identify more effective ways to preach effectively to the unchurched.” Based on my research and analysis, here are my *core conclusions* about how to preach more effectively to the unchurched.

1. Clearly explaining and contextualizing biblical ideas and concepts elicits a very positive response from unchurched people. They desire to have greater insight and understanding of the Bible.
2. Making biblical ideas and concepts applicable to everyday life is a powerful way to be effective in preaching to the unchurched. Everyone (churched or unchurched) loves to hear about concepts and ideas that will positively impact their lives for the better. Many unchurched people seem to be pleasantly surprised

and emotionally moved when they see that the Bible can be very helpful and relevant.

3. The unchurched become more receptive to the message of the sermon if they believe the preacher is sincere and authentic. Discovering this kind of preacher often surprises them. They are also often surprised and become more open if they feel the preacher is not trying to judge, manipulate or intimidate them.
4. Many unchurched people (even those who are not necessarily interested in becoming a Christian) are looking for suggestions on how to practice the biblical ideas and concepts they hear about in a sermon.
5. Clearly explaining what it means (to the preacher) to be a Christian is absolutely necessary in preaching effectively to the unchurched. It is also important to stay away from language that may carry religious baggage and to use inclusive language that first invites people into the Christian community and then to follow Christ.
6. Expressing personal passion and authentic enthusiasm while preaching enhances greatly the effectiveness of preaching to the unchurched.

In this chapter I have shared an analysis of the data resulting from my research including some emerging themes, initial insights and core conclusions. In Chapter Six I will share what I believe to be the strengths of this research as it relates to the goals of my project (how to preach effectively to the unchurched). I will also identify some weaknesses in the project and how I might do things differently if I were to do it again.

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION

In the previous chapter I shared an analysis of the data resulting from my research. I included some emerging themes, initial insights and core conclusions. In this chapter I will share what I believe to be the strengths of this research as it relates to the goals of my project. I will also identify some weaknesses in the project and how I might do things differently if I were to do it again.

Project Strengths

Personal Connection

From the very beginning of this project I felt that a significant strength and unique quality of my research would be the relational connection. In Chapter Four I mentioned that in reviewing the literature on effectively reaching and preaching to the unchurched I had noticed how most of the observations were based on large national or regional surveys and census data, or on more random personal interviews with people who were not regular church attenders. It was clear that a much smaller percentage of the research had actually come from pastors who wrote out of personal experience. It was this observation that encouraged me to obtain, as an overarching goal of my research, more personal insights that could only come from face-to-face conversations and personal connection. I believe this was a strength of my research and benefited the project in a number of ways.

First, I immensely enjoyed connecting with the many unchurched people who agreed to come to a worship service, evaluate my sermon, and then stay for lunch and further discussion. Just being together and getting to know them was not only enjoyable but also very insightful. I believe it has already impacted how I prepare and preach sermons. Each week now as I begin to write a new sermon I feel a fresh awareness that someone who is new to Church and to Christianity will most likely be in the audience listening to my message.

Along with the personal connection, the observations made by my unchurched participants during the face-to-face discussions were incredibly helpful. Those discussions gave me a glimpse into the lives and the responses of real unchurched people with names, faces, and personalities. I believe this has helped me see the unchurched not as an impersonal percentage of our population but as real individual people whose lives are a wonderful story.

Second, it has been exciting to observe how this project involved our congregation. I was personally surprised at how willing so many members of our congregation were to invite friends and acquaintances to be a part of this project. I was both pleased and surprised at how quickly we gathered a group who agreed to attend the worship service, evaluate the sermon and even stay after for discussion during lunch.

In addition to this attending group I also asked our members and regular attenders, on three different occasions, to invite an unchurched friend or family member to go online to watch and then evaluate my sermon from that weekend. These requests created a lot of interest from our congregation not only in this project but, even more importantly, in evaluating how we as a church relate to those who do not attend church or follow

Christ. It has also encouraged our church family to reexamine their own personal relationships with unchurched people.

Finally, inviting my personal acquaintances to attend church and evaluate my sermons was enlightening and encouraging. Enlightening because spending the morning and afternoon together allowed me to see past our professional relationship and receive insights from them on a personal level. Encouraging because I was reminded of something I know to be true but sometimes doubt. Many of my unchurched friends and acquaintances are very open to visiting church. They just need to be invited.

Research Tool

I believe another strength of my research was the research tool I used to collect data. There are two reasons I believe it was effective.

First, the simple demographic and church attendance questions at the beginning helped me get a clear picture of my participants. Because the percentage of unchurched people in America has progressively increased in each emerging younger generation, my goal was to get a higher number of unchurched millennials involved in my research group. I am thankful this proved to be the case and my opening questions efficiently identified them.

Another strength of the research tool was the ten questions I created to help the participants evaluate the sermon. These proved to be very effective in tapping into the issues that my literature review indicated were the most common reasons unchurched people struggle with sermons and do not attend church.

The first three quantitative questions were intended to find out what the sermon accomplished or “did.” Did the sermon clearly communicate biblical concepts and ideas?

Did the sermon seem relevant and applicable to my listeners' everyday lives? Did the sermon encourage them to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus? The next three questions were intended to help me discover what the sermon "did not do." Was there anything in the sermon they did not like? Did they feel judged? Did they feel manipulated? The last four questions were intended to be more qualitative in nature. Did any part of the sermon cause them to think about something in a new way? Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny? What was their "gut level" response to the sermon? And finally, I asked them to share any ideas they had that they felt would have made the sermon more enjoyable or understandable.

As I carefully studied the results of my research I felt these ten questions were written in a way that encouraged the participants to respond honestly and thoughtfully. I believe the responses to these questions (both from the online and attending evaluators) combined with the post sermon discussions with those who attended proved to make this a key strength of my research.

Diversity of Participants

I believe another strength of my project was the diversity of unchurched participants. Not only were they diverse in the more traditional sense of the word such as gender, race, and age (as noted, I had a larger percentage of millennials but also a good representation of older participants), they were also diverse in their church attendance habits and history.

In Chapter Four I mentioned that one of the challenges of this project was answering the question, "Who are the unchurched?" In Chapter One I simply defined an unchurched person as anyone who attends church zero to three times a year. I also

identified different questions that might reveal the possible nuances of those who are unchurched. Questions like: If a person attends church more than three times a year, does that make them “churched?” If a person is unchurched, does that mean he or she is not a Christian? What are the different common attitudes and perspectives (if any) of different generations, genders, and ethnic groups who are unchurched? These kinds of questions highlighted the need for me to limit the scope of my research, yet I still had the goal to include as many “sizes and shapes” of the unchurched as possible. By using the simple but broad definition mentioned above (an unchurched person is anyone who attends a Christian Church zero to four times a year) I was able to accomplish that goal.

A closer look at the responses reveals that my participants had diverse church attendance habits. Of the fifty participants, six percent attended church more than twelve times per year, nineteen percent attended five to twelve times per year and seventy-five attended zero to four times per year. I believe this variation in church attendance habits (most of which landed within my definition of unchurched) provided a broader spectrum of unchurched people and a stronger set of responses in my research.

I noted in Chapter Three how recent research has shown that it can often be more difficult to reach the unchurched who have never regularly attended church than it is to reach the unchurched who have been regular church attenders in their past. Here again I believe a strength of my research can be found in the diversity of the respondents’ church attendance history. Of the fifty participants twelve percent had never regularly attended church, eleven percent had occasionally attended church in the past, and seventy-eight percent had at one time been regular church attenders. This kind of diversity in my

evaluators gave my research a much better chance of producing insights into preaching effectively to a broader variety of unchurched people.

Beyond the Sermon

One significant strength of the project was unexpected. After preparing the research tool and inviting the unchurched to attend, just before the first week I decided to prepare a few questions not specifically related to the sermon. Since I had unchurched people coming to evaluate my sermon I thought I should take the opportunity to also ask them to evaluate their broader worship service experience. Those of us who preach regularly know that as good as our sermon may be (or may not be) the overall experience of the attender in the worship service has a significant influence on their receptiveness to the message. As we gathered for lunch following the sermon I thanked them all for coming and said, “Before we discuss your reflections of the sermon itself I wonder if you would tell me how you felt about your overall experience from walking in the front door to coming in here to lunch?” Each week they were very willing to tell me their impressions. This “last minute” decision to ask these questions proved to be very insightful and an unexpected strength of my project.

I asked three questions. “Did you feel welcome and well informed when you arrived?” “What were your impressions of the other aspects of the worship service?” and “What were your thoughts on the building, sound system, use of screen for sermon points etc...?” While the responses to these questions were very specific to our congregation I did learn that generally unchurched people, just like most church people, appreciate a sincere warm welcome, notice a clean and well kept facility (as well as the architecture), and enjoy the use of good lighting, video and sound equipment (as long as it is not

overdone). There were a variety of opinions expressed about the style of our music (both positive, neutral and negative) and a comment about it feeling “a little contrived” but I was both surprised and pleased to discover that none of the other elements of our worship service seemed to cause our unchurched guests to feel uncomfortable. Many of them, in fact, enjoyed the use of video clips and special songs that were performed and felt that these elements enhanced their worship experience.

As I mentioned in Chapter Four, each week our service planning team evaluates (to the best of our ability) the effectiveness of the different elements we used in the previous weekend service. It turns out that a bonus of my research was receiving this excellent feedback from my survey participants that we can use in the future to create services and sermons that more effectively reach the unchurched.

Random Sermons

Another strength of my project is difficult to extract directly from the survey results. It relates to the random nature in which the sermons were selected for my unchurched participants to evaluate. In planning my research I purposely decided to choose what I believed were the best dates for my research participants, not the best sermons.

Because I plan my sermon series a year in advance it would have been tempting to choose what I thought were the best sermons for the unchurched to evaluate. However I believed that the most helpful insights would come from evaluations of sermons that I preach regularly to my congregation. After all, I did not want to learn from my unchurched evaluators how to prepare a sermon especially for them. I wanted to learn

how to prepare and preach a sermon for my congregation that would also effectively communicate to them when they happened to attend.

While specific insight from these “random sermons” is difficult to pull from my evaluation responses and comments, I feel the overall results are more helpful for me in my future regular week-to-week sermon preparation and preaching because they are based on past regular week-to-week sermons.

Project Weaknesses

Limited Responses

As noted above, I believe a strength of this study was the diverse church attendance history and habits of the unchurched participants. One change that I believe would have made the results even more helpful is more participants. While I was very pleased with the number of attending evaluators each week, I had hoped for a much larger number of people to respond to the online survey. My optimism caused me to believe that we might get an average of 25 online evaluations for each sermon. That number combined with the 23 attending evaluators would have doubled my participants.

In Chapter Four I mentioned that I chose the action/reflection model for my research. In researching this model I was not able to find any evidence that a minimum number of respondents are needed in order to make it reliable or even that a higher number would make it better. That said, I do believe that having twice the number of people responding to the evaluation questions along with the insights gained from the additional comments and remarks would have only served to make this project more helpful in preaching more effectively to the unchurched.

A Favorable Bias

One of the strengths of this project may also have been a weakness. As I have noted in this chapter, the personal connection and insight from face-to-face discussions was a big plus in this project. However, because I had both a personal and professional connection with three of my evaluators, their answers may have been influenced because of a favorable bias toward me. There is also a chance that some of the participants who were recruited by members of our congregation may have felt hesitant during post sermon discussions to be fully honest in order to not offend their friend or their friend's pastor (me).

Another angle on favorable bias being a possible weakness of this project relates to my own personality. I tend to be a very optimistic person. When I meet new people or hear statements from acquaintances I have a tendency to give people the benefit of the doubt and consequently almost always trust that what they are saying is a reflection of their true feelings and motives. It is more than probable that my analysis of the comments from my unchurched participants were skewed in a more positive light. I of course realize that all pollsters, journalists and thesis writers have biases that influence their interpretation of results. In my case, reminding myself of this bias will encourage me in the future to balance the application of the insights I have identified.

Local Limitations

One obvious weakness of my research is the built in limitations of its local influence. All of my attending participants lived and worked in the Twin Cities area and although I cannot know for sure, it appears that the majority of my online evaluators were from the Twin Cities and its suburbs (I am aware of a few from other states and rural

Minnesota). This of course gives my data a definite Midwest flavor. While this more specific data is especially helpful for me and churches and pastors in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and even perhaps the Midwest, it does limit the impact of the data for pastors and preachers in other parts of the country.

Doing it Again

What I would do differently if I were to do this project over again is of course based mainly on the weaknesses of the project as I have stated above as well as a few other more personal preference observations.

First, I would be more strategic in my planning to make sure I had more participants. I feel strongly that my insights into preaching more effectively to the unchurched would be even more helpful with twice the participants. A part of this change would include involving a few more of my professional and personal acquaintances in the process. Originally I had five personal acquaintances scheduled to participate (I ended up with three) as two at the last minute were not able to attend. The short time I had to replace them toward the end of my research period did not allow me to find replacements. I believe even these two others (who had never attended church and were not professional people as my others were) would have added excellent additional insights.

Second, I would include (at least for one session) a group of our regular church attenders in the post sermon discussion with my attending unchurched participants. A requirement for attaining my D.Min degree at Luther Seminary was enlisting eight of the members of our congregation in a "Parish Response Group." These eight individuals (four males and four females of different ages and ethnicities) were very involved over a three-year period, three times per year, in evaluating sermons that I preached to our

congregation. They were also responsible for helping me recruit many of the unchurched people who participated in my research group. I believe that adding this group to at least one of our post sermon discussions would have created a group dynamic that would have encouraged more insightful conversation and consequently more insightful observations about preaching effectively to the unchurched. As a side benefit for our congregation I believe this would have also increased the interest and passion for reaching the unchurched among my “Parish Response Group.”

In this chapter I have stated what I believe to be the strengths of this research as it relates to the goals of my project. I have also identified some weaknesses in the project and how I might do things differently if I were to do it again. In the next and last chapter I will reflect on personal lessons learned from the project and its value to others who desire to preach more effectively to the unchurched.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTIONS

In the last chapter I identified what I believe to be the strengths and weaknesses of my research as it relates to the goals of this project. I also shared how I might do things differently if I were to do it again. In this chapter I will reflect on lessons learned and my personal growth from the project as well as its potential value to others who desire to preach more effectively to the unchurched.

Lessons Learned

Many of the lessons learned in this project are directly related to the vision that we embraced in the early days of Oak Hills Church. I mentioned in Chapter Four that as we formed our new church, even though we were all “churched people,” we had a passion to see the church grow by reaching out to people who did not regularly attend church. Our goal was to build authentic relationships with unchurched people, invite them to church (if they seemed interested), and pray that at some point they would decide to believe and follow Jesus. We then hoped they would enjoy becoming a part of our local church.

A critical part of accomplishing that goal is to have consistent preaching that effectively reaches the unchurched. After all, it is possible for members of a church to build authentic relationships with people, invite them to their church (step one and two of the above stated goal) but then lose momentum and impact because of the ineffectiveness

of the preaching. The combination of this research project and its implementation in our church, that for twenty-five years has attempted to see unchurched people become fully devoted followers of Christ, has produced the following lessons that I believe will be very helpful to other churches and more specifically preachers who have a similar goal.

First, in order to preach effectively to the unchurched the preacher must purpose to be in relationship with those who do not regularly attend church. Some pastors have the privilege of focusing most of their time on preaching and teaching. Consequently, because they are often not as involved in pastoral care and counseling, they lose touch with the very real needs and personal struggles of the congregation. This critical insight into the felt needs of the attenders is often then a missing element in their preaching to the church.

So it is with effectively preaching to the unchurched. While many of the issues preachers deal with apply to both the church and the unchurched, if they are not in relationship with people who do not attend church, their sermons will regularly miss important insights and applications that will effectively connect with the unchurched. In my research I became acutely aware (particularly in my post sermon discussions) of the need for pastors to purposely and authentically engage in relationships with people who do not attend church. The insights gained in those relationships will range from subtle to substantial but the effect will be sermons that regularly connect with and apply to the lives of the unchurched.

Second, in order to preach effectively to the unchurched, sermons must be preached in churches that have a passion for reaching the unchurched. I mentioned in Chapter Four the challenge of getting our members at Oak Hills Church to invite their

unchurched friends and family members to attend our weekend services. Many of our members have done this, but not as many as we had hoped. Unfortunately, when a person decides to believe in Jesus and become a member of a local church, they often begin to have fewer and fewer relationships with those who are unchurched. This limits their opportunities to invite friends and acquaintances that are not Christ followers to attend a worship service. Consequently, in order for preaching to be effective to the unchurched, you must have a congregation that is passionate about inviting their unchurched friends and family members so they will hear the message.

I also reported in my literature review the observations made by James Emery White about the six common contemporary church environments that have varying degrees of hostility and hospitality toward the unchurched, or as he calls them, the “nones” (those who have no religious affiliation). His descriptions of the different environments range from churches that are *none hostile* (do not care about the needs of the unchurched) to church environments that are *none targeted* (cater to the needs of the unchurched). In order to preach effectively to the unchurched I believe those sermons must be preached in congregations that embrace a very *none targeted* attitude. This will assure that each weekend a number of unchurched people will be sitting in a church that not only wants them to be there but they will also be listening to a sermon preached by a pastor who is in touch with the needs of people who are not regular church attenders.

Third, in order to preach effectively to the unchurched, unchurched people should regularly evaluate the preacher’s sermons. After reading fifty different evaluations of my sermons by people who do not regularly attend church I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the process. Reading a negative comment here and there and noting that

occasionally for some the sermon was not relevant, was only slightly discouraging. Looking back on the process I can see now that reviewing the evaluation forms, reading the remarks, and hearing comments during post sermon discussions were the most invigorating element of this research.

As a pastor who sincerely desires to preach effectively to the unchurched I am now determined to regularly recruit unchurched people to come, listen, evaluate, and discuss my sermons. I believe this will be essential in my continued growth in effectively preaching to the unchurched, especially as the culture continues to change in the years ahead.

Personal Growth

Since undertaking this research project I have personally grown in my love for unchurched people. Two of my many experiences during this project help explain why this happened. At the very end of the post sermon discussion following the first message, one member of the attending unchurched group began to cry a little and said, “It’s very brave of you to do this; you seem very honest and I sense some vulnerability in you and I appreciate that because with a lot of churches the pastor is up front and they are the boss.” Like many comments I have read and heard during this project I have not always been sure of the exact meaning. That was certainly the case with this comment, but even without full understanding I did sense a strong appreciation from this person for what he perceived to be (and I hope was true) a humble attitude and vulnerability in my preaching. For reasons that I do not fully understand, this caused me to become very aware of the wide variety of lenses that filter the information people eventually hear or receive as they listen to our sermons. I was emotionally moved at that moment by this

person's past "bad" experience in church and I saw the power of not only the words in our sermons but the attitude we have as we preach our sermons. This has created in me a greater awareness, empathy, and love for the unchurched and their perceptions of Christians and the Church.

Another conversation added to my growing love for the unchurched. During the post-sermon discussion following Sermon Three I was trying to understand why most of my unchurched evaluators that day had marked on the evaluation form that the sermon did not cause them to want to know more about having a relationship with Jesus. Throughout this paper I have outlined in detail other challenges to this question including my conclusions. This discussion was unique because it gave me insight into the heart of my unchurched participants. There was a moment when I felt like the whole group realized, "This guy is serious; he really does want us to help him know how he can preach more effectively to us." As I observed the group discuss which words I might have used to encourage more people to be interested in a relationship with Jesus, I was very moved by their desire to help me understand them better. This discussion has only served to increase my love for the unchurched and my desire to see them embrace Christian faith.

Another area of personal growth has been becoming a better preacher. About halfway through the D.Min. program at Luther Seminary I commented to cohort members and wrote about how I felt that my preaching had actually gotten worse since starting the degree process. Since that is clearly a very subjective personal evaluation I am not sure it was true. It did however cause me to understand what I believe happened during this program and research process.

I have had the privilege of preaching now in Christian Churches for almost forty years. When I began preaching at the age of nineteen I received positive responses and encouragement from professors and church members. Unfortunately that encouragement may have caused me to develop a style, or to use a golf analogy, a “swing” that may not have been the most effective. I certainly believe that over the past four decades I have improved that “swing.” Now, however, I believe I have been practicing a “swing” that actually needs to change (not just improve) in order to preach more effectively to the unchurched.

I have a good friend who is presently attempting to join the senior PGA tour. As you might imagine, he is already a very good golfer. In order to improve his golf game even more, he hired a well-known professional coach. After evaluating my friend’s swing, the coach informed him that he felt he could help him improve his game. He then said that in order to do that my friend would have to change his swing and, in doing so, his game would get worse before it got better.

In many ways this has been an encouraging analogy for me to reflect on as I have progressed through this program and processed the data from my research. I believe that my preaching to the unchurched (and to the church) is gradually becoming more effective as I have worked on changing my “swing.” This change for me has come about by incorporating (slowly but surely) the core conclusions about preaching more effectively to the unchurched that I noted in Chapter Five.

Third, I believe I have grown in my ability to effectively process the sermon critiques and evaluations by others. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, during this research project I found myself becoming energized as I reviewed the survey results and

observations of my sermons. The same was true as I met with the eight members of our congregation who made up my “Parish Response Group.” While I have at different times throughout my ministry set up somewhat less structured systems for people to evaluate my preaching, I had never before had so much specific information, in this volume, in this relatively short period of time. This has proven to be a wonderful opportunity for me to grow in my ability to use this data to not only improve my preaching but also properly process evaluations and critiques as a pastor, preacher, and leader.

I cannot help but hope that a bonus of my own personal growth in this area may translate to our church’s corporate growth. If I am able to model as a leader an openness to well-intentioned evaluation of my preaching, and then demonstrate a sincere desire to improve, this attitude may very well filter into the DNA of our congregation.

Value to Others

I believe my research has value for both pastors and professors who are interested in preaching more effectively to the unchurched. First, by reading the data and core conclusions a pastor will observe the impact they can have on a congregation when they personally embrace a vision for reaching the unchurched. As I noted in previous chapters, wonderful byproducts of this project have been the renewal of my own personal passion for the unchurched and a fresh awareness within our congregation that the priority of our church must be (as our mission statement states) to help unchurched people become fully devoted followers of Christ. I believe this study might also encourage pastors to build authentic relationships with the unchurched and as a result they will find their sermons becoming more relevant and effective in preaching to them.

Bible college and seminary professors may find my research helpful in teaching homiletics to future pastors of local churches. Since this project took place within the context of a local church the data and core conclusions will be especially helpful for students who will soon find themselves preaching every week to a congregation that will most likely have regular unchurched guests.

Future Research

In a recent conversation I had with a young pastor she said, “I believe that I will outlive my denominational church. I know the church of Jesus will always be here but I think the church of my youth will soon be gone.” This observation by this young pastor reflects what I noted in Chapter One. Church attendance in America is declining. Not only are fewer people attending church, but many people today (especially the younger generations) are wondering what the purpose of the church really is.

I argued in this thesis that improving the effectiveness of the preaching to the unchurched each week in our congregations is still a wonderful way to reach the unchurched with the gospel of Jesus. I believe my research supports that argument but I also believe we may have a short window of opportunity to keep doing ministry in this way. Certainly this trend of decline in church attendance in America could change and I hope and pray that it does. On the other hand, declining church attendance may continue, and a decade or two from now we could have a very small percentage of our American population regularly hearing a Christian sermon each weekend.

I believe that exploring *The future of preaching in America* would be an excellent future D.Min. research project. Jesus said, “...Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone” (Mark 16:15). I have recently been wondering (quite a lot) how many

people in America ten or twenty years from now will be sitting in our churches anxious to hear that preaching. I have also been wondering (as I have attempted to discover in this project) what kind of preaching will actually effectively reach those who do not attend church and, with the real possibility of fewer people in church, where a preacher will be able to deliver a sermon so that they will hear it. Even if church attendance levels off or even if it starts to increase, I wonder what kind of preaching will effectively reach the emerging generation of millennials and the generation that follows them.

I agree with my young pastor friend that whatever happens in her lifetime the Church will always be here. The question is, “What will it look like?” I also believe that two and three decades from now Jesus’ command to “...Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone,” will still be His main assignment to the church just as it has been for the past two thousand years. The question is, “Where will we preach and what kind of preaching will be effective?”

Conclusion

As I conclude this research project I am encouraged. I personally have a renewed vision for reaching the unchurched and I believe that reaching out to them is still today the most important assignment Jesus gave to the church. I strongly believe that sermons carefully prepared with the unchurched in mind and preached regularly in our American churches are still a very effective way to reach those who do not attend church or have a Christian faith. I have a fresh understanding of those who do not regularly attend church and see them as wonderful people whose lives tell a great story and who on any given Sunday may show up in one of our churches and hear a sermon that will *change their lives*.

APPENDIX A

ONLINE LETTER OF INVITATION AND SURVEY

Dear Participant,

Thank you for joining with others in this study intended to help pastors preach more effectively. You have been invited to participate in this study because of your relationship with a regular attender of Oak Hills Church.

After listening to the sermon, please complete the following survey. The survey is designed to test effective ways to preach to people who do not regularly attend church. It will take about 5-10 minutes. Your return of this survey is implied consent to use your responses in my Thesis.

No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, however if you choose to, you can enter your name in a drawing for a \$250.00 gift card. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be used anonymously.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Oak Hills Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please contact Julie Lord at julie@oakhillschurch.net or 651-289-1570.

Thanks for your participation,

Rod Carlson
Lead Pastor
Oak Hills Church

* 1. Contact Information

Name
Email
Phone

2. Date

Date MM DD YYYY
 / /

3. Sermon Title/Subject

4. Male or Female

- Male
 Female

5. Age Range

- 18-25
 26-40
 41-60
 60+

6. How often do you attend church?

- 0-4 times a year
 5-12 times a year
 More than 12 times a year

7. What is your church attendance history?

- I have never regularly attended church
 I have attended church regularly at different times in my life
 I have been an occasional church attender throughout my life

8. To what degree did you understand the Biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?

Did not
understand

Understood
them well

To what degree did you
understand the Biblical
concepts and ideas
shared in the sermon?

Comments:

9. Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?

- Very
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Comments:

10. Did the sermon encourage you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Comments:

11. Did you disagree with anything in the sermon or was there anything you didn't like?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Comments:

12. Did the sermon seem judgmental of you or alienate you in any way?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Comments:

13. Did you feel the Pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What made you feel that way?

14. Did any part of the sermon cause you to think about something in a new way?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give an example.

15. Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny?

Yes

No

If yes, please give an example.

16. What is your "gut level" response to the sermon?

17. Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more enjoyable or understandable.

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INVITATION AND SURVEY

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study intended to help pastors preach more effectively. You have been invited to participate in this study because of your relationship with a regular attender of Oak Hills Church.

If you decide to participate, please complete the following survey. The survey is designed to test effective ways to preach to people who do not regularly attend church. It will take about 5 – 10 minutes. Your return of this survey is implied consent to use your responses in my study.

No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, however if you choose to, you can enter your name in a drawing for a \$250 gift card. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be used anonymously.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Oak Hills Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact Julie Lord at Julie@oakhillschurch.net or call 1-651-289-1570

Thank you for your participation,

Rod Carlson
Lead Pastor
Oak Hills Church

Sermon Evaluation Form

1. To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?

Comments _____

2. Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?

Please circle: highly somewhat not at all

Comments: _____

3. Did the sermon encourage you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?

Please circle: very somewhat not at all

Comments: _____

4. Did you disagree with anything in the sermon or was there anything you didn't like?

Circle one: Yes No Maybe

Comments: _____

5. Did the sermon seem judgmental of you or alienate you in any way?

Circle one: Yes No Maybe

Comments: _____

6. Did you feel the Pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?

Circle one: Yes No Maybe

What made you feel that way? _____

7. Did any part of the sermon cause you to think about something in a new way?

Circle one: Yes No

If yes, please give an example _____

8. Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny?

Circle one: Yes No

If yes, please give an example _____

9. What was your "gut level" response to the sermon?

10. Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more helpful for you.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS REGARDING ELEMENTS OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE

Additional discussion questions: Along with recording each participant's individual responses to the sermon survey questions, the following questions will be used to create group discussion and encourage additional insight during the lunch meeting following the worship service. Comments made will be recorded but the individuals will not be identified.

BEFORE the sermon survey questions are discussed:

In a moment we're going to get your evaluation and comments on the effectiveness of the sermon. Before we do that can you comment on other aspects of your experience attending Oak Hills Church today?

- a. Did you feel welcomed and well informed about where to go and what to do?
- b. What did you think about other aspects of the worship service? (the singing, prayer, screen images, sound system, greeting time, etc...)
- c. What are your thoughts (if any) about the building? Was it a clean, comfortable, and inviting place to attend? Did anything distract you?

AFTER the sermon survey questions are discussed:

1. Today almost 20% of Americans have no religious affiliation. On an average weekend only about 20% of Americans attend a Christian worship service. Why do you think fewer people are attending and joining Christian churches today?
2. Was there anything that surprised you in attending our worship service today?

APPENDIX D

SERMON ONE TRANSCRIPT

Slide – One Week to Live/Big Graphic

- Before I begin my message today/ask a favor
- Some of you know I'm working on a doctoral degree
- As a part of pursuing that is researching how to...
- Communicate/P better to P who do not R A C
- So, Favor? Ask an unchurched friend/family member
- 1)This Sermon and 2)Unchurched is....3)Gift card

Slide – One week to Live

- Tue Morning/150 people boarded a G Wings plane...
- In Barcelona headed for Dusseldorf Germany
- The plane crashed in the French Alps/All 150 died
- None of those P knew/less than an hour to live
- I'm sure your heart went out to the families/prayers
- As J rode into J on PS he was the only one in the...
- Excited crowd that knew he had less than one W to L
- Greg read the story for us so, let's look a little closer
- By the time J came into J on Palm Sunday...
- While he had become quite well known regionally...
- The truth is the rest of the Roman Empire...
- Had little idea of who he was/so imagine...
- Jerusalem is packed with people from all over the W
- They've come to J for the Passover party
- Think of any big event in a large city/Indianapolis/FF
- Streets are full of visitors/Restaurants and bars full

- A lot of activity around the Lucas Oil Stadium
- That is the feel of Jerusalem as we pick up the story
- Streets are packed/a lot of activity around the Temple
- Because of J's rising notoriety in the region
- As He rode into J/ he created quite a commotion
- Many had heard about/Healing/his Auth. teaching
- There were even rumors about J being/promised M
- So now P had a chance to see what he looked like
- So this crowd had gathered/growing/wondering

Slide – Who is Jesus?

Matthew 21:10 The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. “Who is this?” they asked. (NLT)

- Melody and me in Paris/outside Le Bon Marche...
- We would have liked to ask “who is that”/no french
- So J is full of people from all over world for PP and...
- They see the commotion and ask...who is this?
- I suggest that it's not all that different for us today
- Most likely in your lifetime you have heard...
- Some kind of commotion about Jesus
- You grew up in a church/heard about J as a child
- You have friends who go to church/talk about J
- No church but general knowledge of Jesus
- You attend a church, maybe this church, regularly...
- Somehow/somewhere for most all of you...
- There has been and still is some C about J in your L
- Whether we consciously do this or not...
- I believe we all have to make a D about who J is...
- Even if our decision is to ignore him...
- As we look again at this story about J entering J...
- We see that Luke describes 3 different groups who...
- Each came to D conclusions about who J was...

- Let's take a look at each group and as we do...
- I'll ask you to consider which G you most I with
- The first group Luke identifies is Jesus' disciples...
- To his D's, Jesus was Lord...

Slide – Who is Jesus?

-To disciples Jesus is Lord

Luke 19:28 After telling this story, Jesus went on toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. 29 As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. 30 “Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Slide – Who is Jesus?

-To disciples Jesus is Lord

32 So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. 33 And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, “Why are you untying that colt?” 34 And the disciples simply replied, “The Lord needs it.” 35 So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on. (NLT)

- That text is packed with meaning/note 3 C things
- 1/In the culture a major religious or political figure could request the use of livestock/Jesus did
- 2/Zechariah had prophesied about 500 yrs earlier...
- That the Messiah would come into J on a colt/J did T
- 3/The language used to describe Jesus' riding the animal/like 1 Kings 1/David's selection of Solomon
- This scene is packed/signs that J is the promised M
- Remember the previous 3 years of J life and ministry -Pointed to G's K coming to earth (Miracles/teaching)
- Yet, in the end only a few recognized Jesus as Lord
- It's true today isn't it?
- About 7 B P in the world/1 in 3 are Christians

- I wonder how many of those Christians have...
- Made Jesus Lord? How many are true Disciples?
- It's not our call to make is it but I suspect...
- Many of those Christians just like Jesus
- While the D's made J Lord/the crowd here on PS...
- Joined in and shouted and waved palm B's because..
- They liked Jesus

Slide – Who is Jesus?

-To the crowd Jesus is liked

Luke 19:36 As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. 37 When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. 38 “Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!” (NLT)

- Latest data show that most Americans like Jesus...
- But very few of them like Christians
- I remember the time I saw the bumper sticker that S
- Jesus Save Me from your followers
- Laughed out loud/I've met some of those F's/not P
- Most C F s are wonderful people/not all...
- I think a lot of people like Jesus because they...
- See Jesus the way THEY want to see him
- A really nice guy/a good moral teacher of L and P
- And who's not for that, come on...?
- Here in this PS setting you have many in the crowd... -Who had “heard about Jesus” and...
- Were excited that finally the P M had come to...
- Push out the nasty R's and restore the rule of G in I
- Less than a week later most in this crowd of course... -Had totally rejected Jesus as he hung on the cross...

- What a disappointment he turned out to be...
- He was not the kind of M they wanted...
- I'm just not sure how many in our day want J to be L
- That is, let Jesus rule and reign in their hearts and lives... according to God's loving design
- Those of you familiar with C. S. Lewis/F with this Q
- “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”
- In College/Sears Lake street/Charlie/Chuck/don't call
- Today, as in J day, we have a bunch of P calling J
- What they want to call him/I think Jesus would say...
- Don't call me that... That's not who I am
- Let's be honest, those of us who attend church and...
- Call ourselves Christians....
- It's so easy to attend church in America today and...
- Just sort of like Jesus, make him what we want not L
- Here at OHC and other churches...
- To J's Disciples Jesus is Lord
- To the Crowd Jesus is liked
- There's one last group here in our PS story...
- It was the powerful and political players of J day
- The movers and shakers
- To them it seems that J was a liability
- Slide – Who is Jesus?**
- To the powerful and political Jesus is a liability**

-Luke 19: 39 But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”

40 He replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!”

- Think of the Pharisees (here) Sad./teachers of Law...
- As the Rep/Dem/1 %/some of the rotten C L's of toda
- Some good P in that group for sure but...
- Think of the bad ones who use and manipulate P...
- For their own personal gain/politically – economically
- The Pharisees mentioned here are those K's of P...
- And are concerned mainly about two things here...
- 1/Possibly loosing their influence and power in I and
- 2/Concerned that the news of this commotion about J
- Will get the Romans and they will be angry/come in...
- The P's for sure did not think Jesus was the M/Lord
- And we know they didn't like Jesus...
- For them Jesus was just a liability
- West Wing?/conservative Christians in oval office
- Portrayed as mean/ignorant/racist... of course...
- And the president looked at them as a liability
- And he needed to “deal with them” to A agenda
- Think of all the big corporations that have to “deal w”
- The conservative C who boycott/sexuality issues
- The Christian who wants to witness on the job
- Jesus being Lord or liked is not even in radar of...
- The powerful and political
- Jesus is simply a liability they're trying to get rid of
- So the big question then... Who do you most I with?

Slide – Who is Jesus to you?

-Political or social liability

-Likeable teacher

-Lord and savior

- Intriguing thing? The Bible makes clear/we get to D
- I think most P decide without G information/research
- If J is really who He said he was and is....
- Creator of everything/Source of all T and meaning...
- And S of the messy/painful/unjust world we live in
- Then we'd all be wise to seriously consider H as L
- End with song/Listen/consider/Be open to J as L/pray

APPENDIX E

SERMON ONE BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION WRITTEN EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION COMMENTS

Table 2. Sermon One Basic Demographic Information

Attending Evaluators	Online Evaluators
Gender	Gender
Male.....5	Male 3
Female3	Female.....3
Age	Age
26-40 years 7	26-40 years..... 3
41-60 years 1	41-60 years..... 2
	60+ 1
Current Church Attendance	Current Church Attendance
0-4 Visits per year 7	0-4 Visits per year 4
5-12 Visits per year 1	5-12 Visits per year 1
	More than 12 times per year 1
Historic Church Attendance	Historic Church Attendance
Previously attended church regularly ... 7	Previously attended church regularly..... 4
Never attended church regularly 1	Occasional attenders 2

Table 3. Sermon One Written Evaluation Results and Discussion Comments

<i>Question 1: To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?</i>	
Attending evaluators	7 highly / 1 somewhat
Online evaluators	4 highly (2 did not respond)
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	“I liked the current references to help define the historical context.” “Very clear and easy to follow.” “Followed everything.”
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	“You bring it to life and a perspective so someone in modern times can understand.” “When you make current references and compare to now it is helpful to me because bridging the gap can be hard.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“Had 12 years of private Catholic education.” “I wished the pastor had looked up more than down at his booklet during the sermon, to have kept the eye contact longer with his congregation and thus maybe their attention.”

<i>Question 2: Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?</i>	
Attending evaluators	1 highly / 6 somewhat / 1 not at all
Online Attenders	2 highly / 3 somewhat / 2 not at all
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	“Helps deal with confusion about where one stands with Jesus.” “Knowing more about Jesus and what he is supposed to be doesn’t relate to my day to day life.”
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	“Sermon was trying to make a challenge to people to explore things that are hard in a deeper way which could apply to our life when we need to make and challenge ourselves.” “For me it was applicable because it challenged me to make a decision of what Jesus means to me every day.” “Who Jesus was as a person helped a bit in how I can act more like Him from a personal level vs. Jesus’ level.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“I really enjoyed the personal anecdotes relating the biblical topic to the pastor’s own life.” “Jesus is always a great conversation. It is a conversation about love and forgiveness.” “I understood all his analogies, and they were quite good.”

<i>Question 3: Did the sermon cause you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?</i>	
Attending Evaluators	1 very / 5 somewhat / 2 not at all
Online Evaluators	1 yes / 2 maybe / 3 no
Selected Written Comments from Attending Evaluators	“I’m not interested right now.” “The basis of who Jesus was as a person is very inspiring, religiously or not.” “The concepts (including the C. S. Lewis quote) were not new to me. Growing up evangelical, this was evangelical 101.” “I’m appreciative of his moral teachings.” “I think we may still have different opinions as to what a relationship with Jesus is.”
Selected Discussion Comments from Attending Evaluators	“Some things were interesting and there’s some interest there for me to explore deeper.” “I need to tear it all apart myself. Someone telling me won’t do much for me.”
Selected Written Comments from Online Evaluators	“It was interestingly laid out.” “I am content in my own Christian beliefs and ways and how I live my life.”

<i>Question 4: Did you disagree with anything in the sermon or was there anything you didn’t like?</i>	
Attending evaluators	4 no / 4 maybe
Online attenders	1 yes / 5 no
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	“The intensity of the experience can seem contrived (music, use of dying in plane crash). The evangelical experience (on the road to Damascus) is not mine and it can feel as though I need to fit my experience into it.” “Political references felt slightly ambiguous – felt political theme was presented but left vague.” “There is a 4 th group.” (In the sermon I implied there were three groups or responses to who Jesus is.)

Selected comments from online evaluators	“Implying that my definition of Jesus was incorrect, and they were clueless.”
<hr/> <i>Question 5: Did the sermon seem judgmental of you or alienate you in any way?</i> <hr/>	
Attending evaluators	1 yes/ 7 no
Online evaluators	1 yes/5 no
Selected written comments from attending	<p>“Not really, good job.”</p> <p>“Very welcoming – assumption of existing belief.”</p> <p>“One of the least judgmental and or fear based sermons I’ve ever heard from a ‘traditional’ perspective/paradigm of practice. Very positive environment.”</p> <p>“Was presented as a strong challenge, it’s important to give people access to help them find a path if they feel left behind in where they are with their relationship to Jesus.”</p>
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators–	<p>“Wasn’t uncomfortable, didn’t move me to a new place maybe somewhere in between.”</p> <p>“I didn’t feel alienated, I just didn’t feel it’s relevancy to my own life or others’ lives like how you embrace the message might be more helpful, why should Jesus be Lord vs. who is Jesus?”</p> <p>“The beginning point was very strong and contemporary entry point as to what this story means but you didn’t come back; I didn’t hear what it means to you; maybe you need to tell people what you think...tell me what you believe and why and I’ll decide if I want to agree or not.”</p>
Selected comments from online evaluators	<p>“Left out intellectual and mystical. I have done a lot of study on this and there are other ways of interpreting Jesus as being enlightened for one.”</p> <p>“The pastor seems to have a very balanced view of the positions and motivations of nonbelievers and extreme theists.”</p>
<hr/> <i>Question 6: Did you feel the Pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?</i> <hr/>	
Attending evaluators	8 no
Online evaluators	6 no
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“Good use of the judgments of what mainstream ‘Christians’ tend to be like.”</p> <p>“Though I feel the experience seems contrived it doesn’t feel like manipulation.”</p> <p>“Let’s face it, public speaking is always a form of manipulation...trying to bring your audience around to your point of view. But this was certainly less intense or overt than most sermons.”</p>
Some written comments from online evaluators	“The pastor did not use intimidation at all. He only used persuasive speech.”
<hr/> <i>Question 7: Did any part of the sermon cause you to think of something in a new way?</i> <hr/>	
Attending evaluators	6 yes/2 no
Online evaluators	3 yes/3 no
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“It was very interesting to realize that devout Christians find some of the people “claiming” to follow Jesus objectionable also.”</p> <p>“Some room to continue my mind exploration of the meaning and greatness of positive based Christianity.”</p> <p>“More critical of the idea of Jesus being just a teacher than I had</p>

	previously considered” “How do I view Jesus? Do I really believe He is who He says He is”, “Made me wonder if Jesus was annoying to some people – like a know-it-all – trivial but just what I thought about.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“Before this, I hadn’t really believed in the Trinity (I had been raised to believe Jesus was a separate human that God created), but the sermon gave evidence that Jesus was God on Earth.” “The idea that Jesus knowing he only had a week to live and tying it to a recent plane crash was a very novel approach to Palm Sunday.” “I think it was a great connector to use modern examples of current life and the actual time Jesus lived.”

Question 8: *Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny?*

Attending evaluators	4 yes/4 no
Online evaluators	3 yes/3 no
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	“Enjoyed funny stories from Rod’s life – reference to plane crash at the beginning gave a serious emotional tone – might have tied back to that reference later.” (I related how the passengers on a plane that had recently crashed did not know they were going to die within an hour of take off, but how Jesus knew He was going to die at the end of the week.) “Thinking about boycotting Target and whether it made them think about Jesus as Lord.” (I shared a story of how a few years back some Christians boycotted Target Company and I wondered if the board of Target thought about Christians today like the Pharisees did in Jesus’ day, a liability.) “Rod’s honesty of some of the misguided Christians in our world and how they can negatively create a sense of disconnect.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“In the opening, the pastor discussed the recent plan crash. I think a lot of people related to the idea of the victims not knowing they would die within an hour, unlike Jesus.”

Question 9: *What was your “gut level” response to the sermon?*

Selected comments from attending evaluators	“Pretty good. I feel I have more in common with Pastor Rod than I thought.” “Sounded like a history lesson.” “I felt like some interesting concepts were brought up but I didn’t feel like I got a good understanding of where you stood or how/what you think they meant.” “It felt sincere.” “I enjoyed his honesty, no need to sugar coat.” “As someone who grew up Christian it left me trying to figure out my “category.” “It’s an interesting thought as it’s something I wrestle with whenever I consider my past faith.”
Selected comments from online evaluators	“It was good, and even though I had seven interruptions during my viewing today, and had to resume watching it with a fifteen minute interval at one point, I followed it well.” “The sermon was ok; it didn’t lull me to sleep. The thesis of the sermon seemed to change from knowing about the imminent death to how we as a person view Jesus.” “I enjoyed it and it held my attention.”

“He seems very down to earth/authentic. Passionate in and understated way.”

“It made me want to answer the question it posed.”

“Simplistic in that it has been taught this way before.”

Question 10: *“Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more helpful for you.”*

Selected comments from
attending evaluators

“Moral teachings rather than praise and explanation of one man.”

“A little more or less streamlined.”

“Seemed to raise a lot of questions. Could you share any “answers” from your own journey? Or is that too intrusive?”

“Perhaps exploring the question of what it means to make Jesus Lord.”

Selected comments from online
evaluators

“Some of the tangential/personal stories seemed unnecessary, too long, and almost seemed to detract from the actual sermon.”

“I just think to continue the practice of modernizing your sermons so the time gap is bridged.”

“I really enjoyed the bits of history and culture. They helped me understand the scriptures better.”

“Delve into culture more.”

APPENDIX F

SERMON TWO TRANSCRIPT

Slide – Four Habits of Happiness

-Show as I walk up/go to next slide as I begin

Slide – You Happy?

-How many feel happy after watching that kid?

-OK/so this past Monday/was T Jefferson's Birthday

-With help from John Adams/Ben Franklin/a few O's

-Jefferson crafted the American declaration of I

-Famous line... We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the **pursuit of Happiness.**

-So, according to our founding F's...

-We all have the right to pursue happiness

-Turns out/many have taken advantage of that R

-Amazon/Tons of books on H/science of H

-Why? We all want to be happy/but a lot of sad people

-So this series from the book of Philippians but...

-Some of you/concerned about this series/because...

-You feel we live in a world where too many people...

-Have as their main goal in life to be happy...

-Sort of a "all about me/self focused" existence

-The A Paul would have had the same concerns

-In NT days/two very popular philosophies

-Stoicism/ "virtue is sufficient for happiness"/Swedes

-Epicureanism/ "pleasure" is the greatest good/Italians

-This is why Paul wrote to the C in Philippi about...

-Joy found in Jesus/not/H found in happenings

-And it's from this letter...

-That we are finding these 4 H of H. Last week...

Slide – Habits 1 & 2

-Say Thanks

-Rethink your circumstances

-We talked about habit # 1/Say thanks!

-Today I want to talk about habit #2 which is...

-Rethinking your circumstances

-So one habit today/one idea/rethink your C's

-You know what a circumstance is don't you?

-It's an event or fact that causes or helps to cause something to happen, typically something undesirable

-Have you noticed how we often...

-Use the word circumstances in a negative way?

-“She's holding up quite well considering the C's”

-Today/I'm asking the question...

-How do you experience H no matter your C's?

-Let's get some insight from the AP on this...

-Here's one application about thinking D about Y C's

Slide – Think differently about what has happened to you

Philippians 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

-Let me remind you of context here...

-Paul wrote this letter/yr. 61/from prison in Rome

-It's one thing to be in prison/another thing to...

- Be there when you have done nothing wrong
- You see/AP was a M/started churches/ANE and E
- As he started the C's/many Gentiles became C's...
- Which then created a lot of tension between...
- Jewish Christians and gentile Christians
- So/Paul had this brilliant idea...
- On his 3rd M journey/took offerings from gentile C's...
- For Jewish Christians/being persecuted in Jerusalem
- So came to Jerusalem/after 3rd/with gift/great but...
- The religious L's/out to get him/so temple cleansing
- Someone saw him Greek believers/said/defiled T
- They tried to kill Paul/the Roman guards protect him
- In jail/then Caesarea/two years/then Rome
- By the time Paul writes this letter to the C in P
- Paul has been in some kind of prison for 3-4 years
- The only thing he did/brought an off. to help P in J
- If anyone had the right to complain about his C's...
- Paul did but...
- Notice how Paul thought differently about his C's
- Because Paul was in chains or under house arrest
- He was regularly watched by Roman guards...
- What do you suppose Paul did as they hung around?
- He talked to them/asked about their families...
- Days off?/Hobbies?/Lifetime?/motorcycles?/golf?
- And he told them his story/about the R to D/Risen J
- And all his travels/the change Jesus made in Ps lives
- By the way/we should always be telling P our story/J
- So what happened as P told his story?
- The Roman guards heard about Jesus and....
- Discouraged C's heard about Paul's faith and...
- They were encouraged to proclaim their F in J/13-14

- For many of us/(all?)/our H dependent on happy C's
- Kristen Heitzmann wrote...
- "[Christ] has accomplished your salvation. But He has not yet perfected your circumstances. Do not be confused in the two."
- I think the AP would say...
- Don't let the pain of what's H to you/present/past
- Cloud what Christ had done for now/and future
- Paul/later in this L/how he thought differently/about C
- ...but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,
- One habit for happiness is rethink your C
- More specifically...
- Think differently about what has happened to you
- And...

Slide – Think differently about what people have said about you

Philippians 1:15-18

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, (NLT)

- Old saying "sticks and stones/but words/never hurt..."
- Not true/We've all been hurt by words
- We can see/in text/P has been hurt by other's W's
- Most likely/Some prominent teachers in C in Rome
- Jealous/Paul came and robbed some of the spotlight
- They began to spread rumors about him...
- I wish I were more like Paul...
- He says "some have said bad things about me"

- Others “love me, good motives/what does it matter”
- “The gospel of Jesus is being preached”
- Important to note that Paul is not saying heretics
- Just believers/leaders in church/jealous of him...
- It’s never easy to have bad things said of you/anyone
- But usually stings a little more when from other CF’s
- “just enough time to get to a real worship service”
- I’ve listened to you preach for 5 years/gotten nothing”
- I really admire the Apostle Paul here/he took shots
- Read his letters and you will discover the awful words
- Yet here he is/saying/”what does it matter”/Christ is P
- It’s not easy folks but one habit for happiness is...
- To think differently about what P have said about Y
- Get it in perspective/grow up/forgive/lead/move on or
- You will experience much unhappiness/not happiness
- None of those things are easy/but are necessary to...
- Practice this last application of this habit which is to...

Slide – Think differently about what God’s purposes are for you

Philippians 1:19-20

...for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

- A key to understanding this point is this...
- Moving past your plans and into His purposes
- When you are in a circumstance you don’t like...
- It’s never what you planned...right?
- I don’t know anyone/in terrible situation who says...
- Yep/took a lot of planning/But/I finally made it...
- In a divorce/in prison/in bankruptcy/in poor health
- So/in my opinion/here is the key to this habit today

- It's while you are in your really bad/terrible C...
- That you/with God's help/move your focus from...
- You and your present situation to...
- God, and Him working His purposes in and through Y
- But here is the thing that many of us do...
- When we are in a tough C/we plan how to get out...
- “I know what I'll do I'll...”
- And so our planning often causes us to miss...
- God's purposes for us in the circumstance
- Maybe Paul was just mature enough know this
- He wrote (from the message)
- “Everything happening to me in this jail only serves to make Christ more accurately known...”
- See/unfortunately/everyone of us has missed an...
- Opportunity for God to be more accurately known...
- In and through our lives...because of our plans
- Our plans often mess up His greater purposes in us
- And God's promise to us is that his purposes...
- Are always better and more impacting than our plans
- Just before this text were studying today P wrote...
- Philippians 1:6 And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus return
- Slide – Your promises to me**
- That is a promise to all of us when we...
- When we practice this Habit of Happiness...
- Rethink our circumstances
- The Band/a song/Your promises to me/Sat/Bap's
- Doesn't matter what I feel/Doesn't matter what I see
- My hope will always be Your promises to me
- Pray/Altar Counselors
- Next Week/Know Christ

- Need your help/thanks-6/Looking for more/about 15
- Ask friends and family members/unchurched/etc

APPENDIX G

SERMON TWO BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION WRITTEN EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION COMMENTS

Table 4. Sermon Two Basic Demographic Information

Attending Evaluators	Online Evaluators
Gender	Gender
Male.....5	Male 2
Female 1	Female..... 6
Age	Age
26-40 years4	18-25 years..... 1
41-60 years 1	26-40 years..... 4
60+..... 1	41-50 years..... 2
	60+ 1
Current Church Attendance	Current Church Attendance
0-4 Visits per year 5	0-4 Visits per year 5
5-12 Visits per year 1	5-12 Visits per year 2
	More than 12 times per year 1
Historic Church Attendance	Historic Church Attendance
Previously attended church regularly...5	Previously attended church regularly.... 4
Never attended church regularly 1	Occasional attenders 2
	Never attended church regularly 2

Table 5. Sermon Two Written Evaluation Results and Discussion Comments

<i>Question 1: To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?</i>	
Attending evaluators	5 highly / 1 somewhat
Online evaluators	2 highly (6 did not respond)
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“I would hope my 100% understanding of message was accurate but more than likely, like all messages, they are interpreted by the recipient.”</p> <p>“They were simple, thoughtful and expressed with intent.”</p> <p>“The only thing I had trouble with was understanding if Paul’s circumstances were in God’s plan since all things come from God it didn’t “add up” to me.”</p>
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	<p>“You come across as a really nice guy and sincere preacher and the message seems simple.”</p> <p>“From my perspective you lost me at give your heart to Jesus because it seemed like a hook.”</p>

	<p>“Could be a good message even without Jesus.”</p> <p>“Message was great because you can relate to it no matter what your religious beliefs. I could take the message for my life even if I’m not in relationship with Christ.”</p>
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“I appreciated that Paul didn’t really feel bothered by those who were against him because ultimately the words of Jesus were being spread regardless.”
<hr/> <i>Question 2: Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?</i> <hr/>	
Attending evaluators	5 highly / 1 somewhat
Online Attenders	6 very / 2 somewhat
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“Re-evaluate your circumstances, look at things through a different lens.”</p> <p>“Everyone wants to be happy and I think everyone has times that they want to be happier.”</p> <p>“I find myself needing more time than I have. This taught me to not worry about it.”</p>
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	“Highly, but didn’t shift my spiritual thinking, somewhat inspires me to want to read the Bible more, because I enjoy getting the word from Jesus (in his word) but not from His people.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	<p>“It made me think about my own circumstances which are difficult right now, but to try and see the bright side of it all.”</p> <p>“About rethinking my circumstances.”</p>
<hr/> <i>Question 3: Did the sermon cause you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?</i> <hr/>	
Attending Evaluators	2 somewhat/ 1 somewhere between somewhat and not at all / 3 not at all
Online Evaluators	3 yes / 3 maybe / 2 no
Selected Written Comments from Attending Evaluators	<p>“The Bible reading inspires me to want to read the Bible more.”</p> <p>“More life reflecting to me as opposed to thinking about my relationship with Jesus.”</p> <p>“I took this as a message to me, less about God or Jesus, but about my behavior and outlook.”</p> <p>“Messages are interpreted by recipient. This recipient understood message but did not move me to Jesus.”</p>
Selected Discussion Comments from Attending Evaluators	<p>“It made me more interested in the differences between Christians and non-Christians.”</p> <p>“I wanted to know more about happiness, but not necessarily more interested in a relationship with Jesus.”</p>
Selected Written Comments from Online Evaluators	<p>“How wonderful to know that Jesus is always looking out for me. My circumstances will change again, but Jesus will never leave me.”</p> <p>“I already have a relationship with Jesus...But the experiences are endless!”</p>
<hr/> <i>Question 4: Did you disagree with anything in the sermon or was there anything you didn’t like?</i> <hr/>	
Attending evaluators	4 no / 2 maybe
Online attenders	7 no / 1 maybe
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“I agreed with the message ‘rethink your circumstances’ – individually achieve in your own spiritual way, not necessarily ‘in Jesus way.’”</p> <p>“Was a great sermon, a call to personal action.”</p>

Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators “I understand God has a path but I wouldn’t live my life without planning, without planning it leads me down a path that’s not good for me so planning is important.”
 “The struggles don’t bother or scare me, they make me happier (not physical peace) and have mental peace as I work through them.”

Question 5: *Did the sermon seem judgmental of you or alienate you in any way?*

Attending evaluators 6 no
 Online evaluators 1 yes / 7 no
 Selected written comments from attending “It was welcoming.”
 “I thought it was interpretive of Paul’s situation and message. Not how I would have interpreted Paul’s letter.”
 Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators “Did not alienate me, not at all.”

Question 6: *Did you feel the Pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?*

Attending evaluators 6 no
 Online evaluators 8 no
 Selected written comments from attending evaluators “No but his prejudice showed toward his interpretation of Paul’s letter and his circumstances. Most people ‘spin messages’ to their purpose and Pastor Rod did that well.”
 “I feel he used his passion for the subject to bring us to his message.”
 Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators “Not at all.”
 Selected written comments from online evaluators “He was open to sharing his ideas in a non-forceful way.”
 “Pastor Rod has a great way of telling a story and giving a lesson that makes one feel welcome. He has a great sense of humor too.”

Question 7: *Did any part of the sermon cause you to think of something in a new way?*

Attending evaluators 4 yes / 1 no / 1 somewhat
 Online evaluators 7 yes / 1 no
 Selected written comments from attending evaluators “Good reminder to move past my plans and find His purpose.”
 “Understand your circumstance, how will you react to it? How can you progress?”
 “I know that worrying doesn’t help, but it’s good and helpful to get independent perspective.”
 Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators “I thought it was so good when you emphasized forgiveness and getting past negative things and let it shape who you are.”
 “Didn’t bring something new but you were saying don’t worry so much – just look at it as something you can overcome, so it is a nice reminder, don’t be too controlling”
 “Understanding the circumstance and how to handle it and move on was good.”
 “A nice reminder but not necessarily faith based.”
 Selected written comments from online evaluators “Helped me realize I need to move on and not dwell on the little things.”
 “Exactly the title of the sermon. To think about circumstances in a new way. To think about what people say to you in a new way and to think

about God's purpose versus our plans."

"To remember even in hard times there is happiness, nobody plans on hard times but if you trust in Jesus you can get thru."

<i>Question 8: Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny?</i>	
Attending evaluators	4 yes / 2 no
Online evaluators	5 yes / 3 no
Some written comments from attending evaluators	"Personal stories...the guy who looked at his watch. Very strong, we can all relate."
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	"Reminded me of 'Happy' on Netflix." "The Sesame Street video helped and I like it. It grabbed me because it was so innocent and funny, so simple, put me in a good place." (To set up my sermon I showed a Sesame Street video of John John and Ernie talking about being happy.)
Selected written comments from online evaluators	"Having been in a bad circumstance in my life in 2013...I know God will be with me on this journey too...taking one day at a time." "The Swedish people versus Italian people was funny." "I was moved by Paul's story, about how he was suffering in prison for many years, yet he was happy that the word of God and words of Jesus were still being taught, spread and learned even though he was not able to be free to go out and spread it."

<i>Question 9: What was your "gut level" response to the sermon?</i>	
Selected comments from attending evaluators	"Brilliant." "Really tangible and relevant." "I enjoyed it." "Very positive and uplifting. Very laidback without being disjointed." "Meaningful, important, helpful, inspired thought."
Selected comments from online evaluators	"Don't know for sure what you mean by gut level, the sermon was in whole very good." "It was interesting to watch and kept my attention fairly well." "It was OK. Nothing really stood out to much to me." "I found it useful and thought provoking."

<i>Question 10: "Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more helpful for you.</i>	
Selected comments from attending evaluators	"The message was sound 'rethink your circumstances' – I was expecting more of a powerful positive life message – then he related it to Jesus Christ and Paul. Lost the 'powerful message' to me when it was related to just Jesus." "I think talking about God's purpose in your circumstances is great but how do you find His purpose? What action steps can you take?" "Pretty good."
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	"How do you make Him a part of your life? If it means what you talked about I might not be interested." "Make it more personal so people see how to move toward God." "I am questioning things in many areas of faith and creation, I am a seeker."
Selected comments from online evaluators	"Maybe a little more energy. Involving the crowd more maybe. Everybody would love more humor." "None at this time."

“Pastor Rod speaks clearly and in a way that most can understand.”

APPENDIX H

SERMON THREE TRANSCRIPT

***Simpsons Clip**

Slide – Modern Family

-Show as I walk up/move to next slide as I begin

Slide – The Modern American Family

-So, compare Simpson's clip/Leave it to Beaver

-The MAF/changed a lot/last 5-6 decades...

-Some would say yes but the changes in TV/not reality

-Leave it to Beaver/too idealized/not all F's that perfect...

-The Simpsons/too cynical/not all F's that dysfunctional...

-True but I think we'd all agree the shows reflect changes

-That Simpson's clip/from the first season/25 yrs.

-So things have changed significantly even since then...

-Today/show/“modern family”/better reflects the...

-Current reality in many American families/seen it?

-Consider some changes since the days of Beaver Cleaver

-More than 60% of couples now cohabit prior to their first M

-The average married couple faces a 40-50 % chance of D

-Forty-one percent of all childbirths are nonmarital

-More and more couples and M's are same sex couples and -Many of those couples are adopting or having children

-26 % of children live with only one of their biological parents

-So marriage, Children. Divorce. Remarriage. Blended

families. Multicultural relationships. Gay marriage. Adoption. -These are the realities of the MAF

- Many/"nothing wrong with this, families are changing"
- Others would say/"these changes reveal the breakdown OF"
- Whichever view you have here is a good question I think...
- Does the Bible teach principles that can help the MAF?
- No matter what you believe F's should look like all F's...
- Want to be happy/healthy/functional/loving, so...

Slide – God's idea of family?

- Does the Bible reveal to us any principles that can help?
- Study the Bible times and you'll see...
- Some contrasting ideas and realities
- One hand/a culture of a defined family structure
- Married parents with children in a close relationship/Jesus
- But you will also read about how...
- Some men had more than one wife/for example...
- 12 S's/formed 12 T's/from 4 different mom's, the wives of...
- Jacob, later given the name Israel (by God himself)
- In the NT you have both Paul and Jesus dealing with...
- The reality of divorce as well as same sex relationships
- So how in the world can we look at the Bible and then...
- Talk about God's idea of family in 2015 America? And...
- How do we talk about family in the church if...
- The traditional family makes up only 22% of A families?
- Does the Church have anything to say to F's/since so non T
- I think the answer to that is a resounding yes/here at OHC...
- We like many churches have a FLD and...
- Last week our FLdirector Jen/next week/ North SM's Matt
- So what is the churches role?
- Let me tell you some things the church can do....
- Even though the American family has changed so much...

- 1) Partner with parents to raise Children to know Christ
- 2) Help increase the Christlikeness in family relationships
- 3) Help equip and support families for the work to which God called them together.

-So here's my point...

-Even though the American Family has changed/6 decades

-The church has a vital role in encouraging strong F's

-And since were the C/we take our guidelines from the Bible

-So let's consider what the Bibles says about the family

Slide – The Bible teaches that family was God's plan

Matthew 19:4-6 “Haven't you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’ 5 And he said, “‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ 6 Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.” (NLT)

-In this scripture the P's had just asked Jesus about divorce

-And Jesus responded by quoting from Genesis

-Many of you here have experienced divorce

-Your 1st Marriage didn't work out like you planned

-When you came before that pastor/priest/justice of peace..

-Said your vows/you had a P/loving marriage/maybe kids...

-And dreamed of a safe/secure/loving mini society/your F

-But it didn't go just as you planned/so did you lose out?

-I mean here is Jesus/Asked by P's about divorce and...

-Jesus takes them to Genesis and to G's original plan for F's

-Is Jesus saying “hey, if not the ideal then forget it?”

-Of course not/God wants your F, however it looks...

-To enjoy/safety/security/love/a sense of I/it's part of God's P

-See the Pharisee's weren't asking Jesus...

-“Do you have grace if our F's aren't perfect?”

-If that were the Q then J would have said “yes, of course”

-But the P's wanted to mess with God's original plan

- My point?
- This desire to form a family of safety/protection/love/security
- It was hard wired into all of us at creation...
- Melody and I watch Sunday morning (record)/feel good S's
- Many about the love of F/what members will do/Cancer/cry
- Why do they touch our hearts?/Tears?/Hardwired@creation
- And this hard wire goes beyond just humans....
- It might be more instinctive than intuitive but animals C for Y
- Why do you think those YouTube videos of animal F's...
- And one species of animal taking care of young different S's
- So here we see the Bible indicates to us that...
- The Bible teaches that family was God's plan/2nd thought...

Slide – The Bible teaches God's purpose for family

Genesis 2:18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." (NLT)

Genesis 1:27-28 So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. (NLT)

- With these verses I've identified just two biblical purposesFF
- One purpose is to provide companionship and intimacy
- While C can be found outside of marriage/the Hebrew here
- Is the idea of the wife complimenting/ "as his compliment"
- This is biblical support for sayings you may not like...
- About husbands and their wives...
- "This is his better half"/Jerry-"you and I clearly you M up"
- These are not intended to put men down/this just good Theo
- Any of us men who actually found a wife...
- Married up/and now we actually deserve a compliment
- So one of God's purposes of M is companionship. Also...
- Note from the verse I read earlier in Matthew/in marriage...
- You have this miraculous idea of two people becoming one

- It's a concept you find nowhere else
- Marriage is common of course in many religions/cultures
- Miraculous oneness is a unique and mysterious God idea
- The purpose of M is for a M and W to experience this OIC
- Look at that second verse
- Another purpose for F/a long with companionship is...
- To be fruitful and multiply
- As P Jen told us last weekend/the main idea here/have kids
- But the principle applies to all of us whether kids or not...
- We're all hard wired to influence/leave a G legacy for nextG
- Old man's SG/coffee house/all 3 of us waved at kids
- Parent?/You have a driving desire to multiply God in nextG
- Not a parent?/You want to mentor/teach/influence for God
- These are just two of God's purposes for family (more) but
- The bigger picture here is...
- God's purpose for the family is to raise humans who feel...
- Loved/secure/valued/connected/a sense of identity - history
- A missionary that we support/Sam Johnson/to his kids...
- "Remember who you are and act accordingly..."
- Consequently I said it to my kids/they remember...
- Some kids never get that...No family calling them higher...
- Some kids never feel the incredible security that comes...
- From being loved unconditionally...
- Listening to this sociologist the other day
- The power of undivided attention
- That's one gift everyone can give to another human being
- It's often the main way a child feels unconditionally loved
- 10 years ago on a train in Poland/48/my mom....
- The Bible teaches that family was God's plan
- The Bible teaches God's purpose for family
- Finally...

Slide – The Bible teaches principles for a healthy family

Ephesians 5:21 And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

(husbands and wives)

Ephesians 6:1-2 Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. 2 “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise:

- Here again I'm mentioning just two of many P's for HF's
- But just consider for a moment the power of these 2 ideas
- 1st, Submission of husband and wife to each other
- Not domination/not intimidation/not manipulation but...
- Submission one to the other/one model for this?
- This crazy Christian doctrine of trinity/3 S to each O
- All marriages struggle at times/if ongoing/one or both not S
- And 2nd, consider these powerful ideas for children who hav
- Loving, healthy, mature parents...
- Honor and obey them/there is a novel idea for our MF's
- Look what Jesus pointed out/first of 10 C's with a promise
- The Bible teaches us to first obey (as kids)/older honor Ps
- We talked earlier about what the church can do for F's?
- In April/"Discipline that connects with your Childs heart"
- Was based on these wonderful biblical P's for healthy F's
- But again, my big overall idea here is that...
- The Bible is filled with principles for HF's, even for the MAF
- So, before I close I'll try to get real practical
- What is the application of these 3 ideas to the MAF?

Slide – Application to the Modern Family?

- Plan**/Don't fight God's original plan, go with His design of F
- Melody and I the other day/old question/popular culture...
- Songs/TV/Movies/Video games/books/trends...
- Reflect culture or shape culture?/concluded/a little of both
- But sometimes we allow culture to give us permission to...

- Go outside the way God hardwired us for family
- “Look at that movie/that’s how marriages, families are now”
- God’s ideal of Family is not to condemn if ours not perfect...
- It’s to show us his ideal/his original plan to model after...
- Purpose/**What about purpose?
- According to the B/the purpose of F is to instill in humans
- A deep sense of security/safety/identity/confidence/faith...
- My Daughter/Kindergarten/a child/loved/secure by parent(s)
- This was God’s purpose for families...
- Don’t you want to help P emotionally healthy/secure K’s?
- Parent? Grandparent? Uncle, Aunt?...
- Help form families that fulfill these purposes
- What can you do for a parent? A child?
- England/met a guy who had poured into my son/thanks
- Right now at Harvard/Thd/John Levenson/pouring in...
- Many of you want your kids to have teachers/coaches
- Take advantage of pastors who will pour into your kids and
- Partner with you...
- We have a whole FLD here at OHC/partner on faith
- Principles?**What about principles?
- Try practicing these principles in your family
- Are you married? Then really consider this idea of...
- Submitting one to another
- Also, Teach your children to honor and obey
- Our kids came home from district 196/mad at teacher...
- Don’t give up on the hard stuff/hang in there/push for right
- Slide – Modern Family**
- Clearly the Bible has much to offer today’s modern family
- Let’s pray and ask the Lord to apply this to each of our Lives
- Slide – Modern Family** (altar prayer time/come)

-Before next week/one last time/a friend/family member/no church -Go on line/Listen-watch today's message/survey/250.00 GC

-I have 15 from the first two/I was hoping for 15 each time

-Thanks to you who have asked/but ask again-new/wash car

APPENDIX I

SERMON THREE BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION WRITTEN EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION COMMENTS

Table 6. Sermon Three Basic Demographic Information

Attending Evaluators	Online Evaluators
Gender	Gender
Male.....4	Male 1
Female2	Female..... 12
Age	Age
26-40 years 5	18-25 years..... 4
41-60 years 1	26-40 years..... 7
	41-50 years..... 1
	60+ 1
Current Church Attendance	Current Church Attendance
0-4 Visits per year 6	0-4 Visits per year 5
	5-12 Visits per year 4
	More than 12 times per year 4
Historic Church Attendance	Historic Church Attendance
Previously attended church regularly...4	Previously attended church regularly... 10
Never attended church regularly2	Occasional attenders 2
	Never attended church regularly..... 1

Table 7. Sermon Three Written Evaluation Results and Discussion Comments

<i>Question 1: To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?</i>	
Attending evaluators	6 highly
Online evaluators	11 highly (2 did not respond)
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	“Got them all.” “I felt that the concepts were incredibly clear.”
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	“Seemed really clear and easy to follow.” “I had no problem taking notes.” “Very clear.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“I understood them well – so well that I think I could rephrase very minimally and try to help my children understand. They are 5 and 6 and recently have brought same sex marriages, and why mommy isn’t married, etc. These are questions I was not prepared to answer, and I feel like the sermon came at just the right time for me to relay a very basic approach.” “I absolutely loved how the pastor applied scripture of God’s plan for

family. At the beginning of the message I was feeling that the connection of the modern family and God's plan for family is almost too far gone. But how very wrong that thinking is. The pastor brought a beautiful fresh perspective through God's word!"

"I thought he did a great job of not only using biblical passage but explaining them well and applying them to daily life."

Question 2: *Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?*

Attending evaluators	5 highly / 1 somewhat
Online Attenders	11 very / 2 somewhat
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	"I have a 2 1/2 year old and am married and found the sermon relevant." "Everyone has a family." "Ideas of family presented felt fairly universal, approachable."
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	"Made me think of my family members and honoring my parents." "I liked the story about your mom because I talk to my mom every other day and I have a safe secure feeling with my family."
Selected written comments from online evaluators	"We can never get too much encouragement to invest in our families and the next generation." "I'm a young unmarried person so some of it wasn't yet applicable to me since I don't have a spouse or children, but honoring my father and mother is something I struggle with and all of it felt like it would at least be relevant to me at some point. Truths to hold on to for later." "Especially the reminder to keep the bar high in your life, avoiding the pitfalls of current cultural influences."

Question 3: *Did the sermon cause you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?*

Attending Evaluators	2 somewhat/ 4 not at all
Online Evaluators	7 yes / 3 maybe / 3 no
Selected Written Comments from Attending Evaluators	"It encouraged me to know more about a relationship with Oak Hills Church. And that is more important to the unchurched." "It inspires me to want to search for more answers in the Bible."
Selected Discussion Comments from Attending Evaluators	"Relationship with Jesus is off putting." "Relationship with Jesus is not off putting but it doesn't draw me in, it's more about learning about the teachings of Jesus and many people who are Christians have a bad rap and that's too bad." "The phrase has some baggage to it because I only know of it in that context (protestant and evangelical) so when it's said it tells me what the faith is and I have a bad experience with it because it means so much more. When I hear it I think here comes the judgment." "Jesus is a figure head of a moral code you want to follow and beyond that a relationship with Jesus is awkward so maybe it would be good to say 'we are following this way of life/path.'" "Maybe say 'does the sermon invite you or make you interested in the spiritual community of Jesus?'"
Selected Written Comments from Online Evaluators	"I wouldn't say it made me want to know more – I got what I needed." "It did encourage me to try harder in my relationship with Him than I have been lately." "I have a relationship with Christ and this gave me encouragement to spend more time in the word." "The sermon felt like it was for me it made me feel like God was talking

to me.”

“No, I am not in that sort of place right now. Jesus is not something I would make a decision on during a sermon most likely regardless of the message.”

“I could see where it would lead a person without a relationship with Jesus to want to pursue one, but it didn’t encourage me to because I already have one.”

Question 4: Did you disagree with anything in the sermon or was there anything you didn’t like?

Attending evaluators	3 no / 2 maybe / 1 yes
Online attenders	10 no / 2 maybe / 1 yes
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“Very inclusive, well done.”</p> <p>“It’s sometimes hard to get past the patriarchal language although I didn’t feel like the sermon was pushing it.”</p> <p>“Introductory comments that some people might feel that some families were kind of broken seemed to leave open a door to judge.”</p>
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	<p>“I appreciated you explaining it in a way that made it more clear on how we are to submit to one another.”</p> <p>“Your beginning made me wonder if the sermon was asking if something is wrong or right? I wanted to know where you stand.”</p>
Selected written comments from online evaluators	<p>“I was impressed that you were able to bring up both the good and the bad examples of family that were in the Bible. I was also impressed that you didn’t tip-toe around gay marriage.”</p> <p>“I enjoyed the entire sermon.”</p> <p>“The sermon was about the ideal family as seen from a biblical perspective. It spoke mostly to someone who already believes the Bible to be 100% true. I struggle with that which makes it difficult to accept it as a basis for looking at where family has come to in society and determining whether that is wrong or not.”</p> <p>“I liked it all, but must admit that I am in a relationship without marriage and have been so for over 30 years. So, following the words of the Bible, I am a sinner in this respect.”</p>

Question 5: Did the sermon seem judgmental of you or alienate you in any way?

Attending evaluators	4 no / 2 maybe
Online evaluators	12 no / 1 maybe
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“I feel like the text is off-putting, but the sermon was less so.”</p> <p>“Overall not the message of the sermon – felt it was positive and inclusive.”</p>
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	“No, not at all.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	<p>“That was actually something I admired about the sermon. It felt like it was for everyone just as God is for everyone, which is what I believe. As I was listening, I thought, ‘wow my friend is so blessed to have a church like this.’”</p> <p>“I did not feel intimidated or judged. This man, I believe, is a pastor who has heart and just wants to bring God’s word to others and provide hope and encouragement through that.”</p> <p>“We were asking each other if we thought it was judgmental and we agreed it was not.”</p>

“While it was never explicit, it was implied gay marriage is not the way the Bible views marriage and is therefore wrong. I don’t know where I come down on this. I believe that everyone deserves to be with who they love and the government and church shouldn’t stop them. On the other hand I see marriage as a Christian institution and as gay marriage directly goes against the Bible it seems odd to combine the two. The sermon however did not take a judging tone which I appreciate.”

“I think one of the best things about the sermon was that it included everyone and asked people to come to their own conclusion about who to apply these biblical principles to their life. There was not condemnation and it left me feeling like I wanted to hear more.”

“At first when he was talking about the original plan for marriage I thought he might offend people, but he made sure to talk about the grace of God and that God still wants them to experience the original design.”

Question 6: Did you feel the Pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try and convince you of his ideas?

Attending evaluators	6 no
Online evaluators	13 no
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	“Surprisingly...not once did I feel as though you were trying to manipulate or intimidate me (I kind of expected it).”
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	“It felt like you were reaching with the Trinity regarding submission, I understood, but thought there were better examples.” (In the sermon I used the mutual submission of the Trinity as an example of how husbands and wives should mutually submit to each other.)
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“Using Bible verses, there was great evidence in the teaching and it was presented in a respectful way.” “I feel like he did a great job of bringing all types of families to the conversation without making any situations uncomfortable and not accepted.” “Not at all, it was a very pleasant experience and the pastor has a very nice tone of voice.”

Question 7: Did any part of the sermon cause you to think of something in a new way?

Attending evaluators	2 yes / 4 no
Online evaluators	12 yes / 1 no
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	“Perhaps not new but at least a reminder to listen, engage, and be present for my child and spouse.” “It’s a good reminder.” “Felt like a positive reminder.”
Selected discussion comments from attending evaluators	“Appreciative at the end where you were speaking about this project because of your humility in asking of help, not many people would do that and it moved me because it reminded me I am here to help the “community” and it shows how to be submissive.”
Selected written comments from online evaluators	“The discussion about being submissive to your partner made a lot of sense. Something I failed to do in just about every relationship. I guess that’s part of why I am single.” “Not a totally new way but it was a great opportunity to re-examine and reflect on some ideas.” “I feel he did a great job of bringing all types of families to the conversation without making any situations uncomfortable and not

accepted.”

“Mutual submission – if there is an ongoing problem in your marriage, it might be a lack of mutual submission in the relationship.”

“That divorce and other issues does not change God’s plan for family.”

“Even though we have messed up with the ideal family image, we should continue to strive to have the ideal family according to God.”

“I’ve never thought of how I could inspire and speak identity into the younger generation as someone without my own children, and it encouraged me to embrace my role as a young single woman.”

Question 8: *Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny?*

Attending evaluators	4 yes / 1 no / 1 did not respond
Online evaluators	11 yes / 2 no
Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“Personal example of calling his mom and having her ‘just listen’ to him even when he was 48 years old.”</p> <p>“Talking about raising children and Pastor Rod asking for help.”</p> <p>“Effectively uses humor and cultural references.”</p>
Selected written comments from online evaluators	<p>“I liked when the pastor revealed he wasn’t the perfect parent and his kids weren’t perfect either, but they were a healthy and loving family. It was refreshing.”</p> <p>“I loved what he said about investing in the next generation, whether it is our own children or not.”</p> <p>“I was moved when he talked about how families have the opportunity to speak so much truth and life into their children. I think that is beautiful and one of the best roles a family can play.”</p>

Question 9: *What was your “gut level” response to the sermon?*

Selected written comments from attending evaluators	<p>“Very positive.”</p> <p>“Positive, applicable, relevant though the language (traditional gender roles) can be hard to get past.”</p> <p>“A good relevant sermon. Easy to relate to life.”</p> <p>“Enjoyable.”</p>
Selected comments from online evaluators	<p>“It was a great message and in my singleness, is something I am looking forward to in the future-having my own Godly family.”</p> <p>“I think it’s great to have three basic principles that are easy to remember.”</p> <p>“It made me want to change some things/take responsibility for my family and myself, for the better.”</p> <p>“Very inspiring and encouraging and gives me much hope!!!”</p>

Question 10: *“Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more helpful for you.”*

Selected comments from attending evaluators	“Non-biological families supporting each other.”
Selected comments from online evaluators	<p>“I don’t think I could add anything to the sermon to make it more enjoyable or understandable.”</p> <p>“What do you say to people who do not feel like they are hardwired to have or live the ideal family? Like Gays?”</p> <p>“Maybe too much for one single sermon.”</p> <p>“The only thing that I think would’ve made it more enjoyable was just more freedom. The pastor seemed to stick to a script and it was a great one, but he shouldn’t feel like he has to be so formal I don’t think. Let loose a little bit.”</p>

“Nothing that I can think of. It did however leave me wondering what his views were on gay marriage and that line of things. Seeing that he never outright gave an opinion. Which isn’t a problem in my mind. It just made me curious. Which is also probably a good thing because eventually I’d seek out what his thoughts are, effectively keeping me involved.”

APPENDIX J

SERMON FOUR TRANSCRIPT

Slide – The Best Sermon Ever

-Show as I walk up/Move to next slide as I begin

Slide – Why lie?

-Usually no clips/make fun/permission/laugh at self....

-Why did those people lie and act as they knew stories?

-Why do we find ourselves lying from time to time?

-Maybe has something to do with Halo effect/voting

-Psychologists say there are 6 main reasons...

-Fear of Harm (self-protection)

-Fear of Conflict (avoid an argument)

-Fear of Punishment (as a kid/on the job)

-Fear of Rejection (our insecurities)

-Fear of Loss (greed)

-Altruistic Reasons (Lying protect another person or make them feel good/probably the only selfless reason)

Slide – A Christians Righteousness 3

-Today's message is called....

-Pretty exciting title right?

-But here's the thing/ it's the 3rd message in this Stheme of...

-A Christians Righteousness/or right living in our S's "TBSE"

-Jesus preached the best sermon ever/Sermon on the mount

-In that sermon Jesus told us what People...

-Who follow him/What P who are part of the K of G are like...

-What they act like/what their attitudes are like

- What we've learned so far is that...
- Following Jesus/being a part of the K of G is not...
- Following a list of rules...it's having a changed heart so...
- It's interestingly (since not about rules) that J said that...
- He did not come to...
- Do away with law or OT rules but he came to fulfill them by..
- Having them written on our hearts...
- And to teach these ideas Jesus used everyday examples
- Today we're going to consider two examples Jesus used
- And they deal with...

Slide – Fidelity in marriage and honesty in speech

- Marriage and speech
- How many of you know someone who is married?
- How many of you talk on a fairly regular basis?
- You see how relevant these topics are to your life today?
- Seriously/Let's consider these 2 subjects this morning and...
- See what Jesus wanted us to learn and apply to our lives
- Let's consider first...

Slide – Fidelity in marriage

- This is a relevant subject considering the...
- Recent Supreme Court decision on gay marriage which...
- Allows homosexual couples to have a legal civil marriage
- And have the same rights as married heterosexual C's
- Let me share just a few thoughts on this with you
- For me, it's clear, that the ideal biblical view of marriage is...
- One man with one women for life
- Consequently that's my view of marriage as well, however...
- Our state and federal government now define M differently
- And there has now been this civil and cultural change
- That doesn't change what I believe the Bible teaches
- That said...

- I'm not planning to show disrespect or unkindness...
- Toward those whose view of M is different than mine and...
- I hope and pray that those who hold a D V of M than me...
- Will treat me kindly and with respect as well
- Now, no one listening to J's sermon on the mount was...
- Wondering about the definition of marriage/not an issue
- Many were however wondering about the dissolution of M
- The question for many in Jesus' audience was...
- What did the law say about getting out of M? They wondered
- What kind of circumstances allowed people to divorce?
- In J day two prominent teachings by two D groups of Ps
- Pharisees were religious leaders/parties like D's and R's
- The P democrats believed that the only reason for divorce was some grave matrimonial offense/unseemly or indecent
- The Republican Pharisees however held a far more lax view
- You see by Jesus day the Rabbis had added (to Deut 24)... -All kinds of additional trivial R's why a man could D his W
- Like bad cooking/plain looks/or even...
- If he became enamored with someone else
- So, knowing now what his audience knew listen to J

Slide – Fidelity in marriage

Matthew 5:31 “You have heard the law that says, ‘A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.’ 32 But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery. (NLT)

Slide – Fidelity in marriage

- Here is what is fascinating for me
- The Pharisees were preoccupied with the grounds for D
- Jesus was interested in protecting and strengthening...
- God's original plan for Marriage
- In other words...

- The P's were wondering about the...
- Allowable reasons to get out of a M while...
- Jesus wanted to focus on the best ways to have a great M
- So here we all are worshiping together
- Some of us D/D and R/never M/M just once
- I believe J would say to all of us/no matter which category
- Hold up high...the institution of M/don't treat it casually, and
- Encourage everyone who is M to be faithful in their M's
- Remember I asked how many knew someone who's M?
- My guess is that the marriages that you admire most are...
- Those where the man and the woman are...
- Loving and faithful to each other...
- Why?
- Because that's the way God designed M to work
- When a M and W are married and are (not perfect) but...
- Loving and Faithful to each other and keep G at the center
- That marriage is incredibly powerful and influential in...
- Their children, their extended family, their community etc...
- So here in J's sermon on the mount J said
- People who are a part of the K of G and are married...
- Do not treat M casually but...
- Strive to live out their marriages in a way that honors God
- From Marriage, Jesus then moves to...

Slide – Honesty in speech

- Which by the way can really help build a strong M but...
- J doesn't necessary connect the two directly here in fact...
- Notice how J moves from one topic to another by saying...
- “You have heard” or “You have also heard”...
- When Jesus says “you have H” he's referring to the L of M..
- Which his audience had been taught since they were little
- Jesus then follows “you have heard” with “But I say”...

- Here's what we've learned in our series...
- When Jesus said "But I say..." he was not...
- Doing away with the law or adding his own beliefs, rather...
- He was giving a fuller understanding of why God gave that law in the first place
- So here then we have Jesus bringing up...

Slide – Honesty in speech

Matthew 5:33 "You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.' 34 But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. 35 And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. 36 Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. 37 Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one. (NLT)

Slide – Honesty in speech

- You see the laws of Moses taught that vows/oaths were...
- Very serious and were binding
- Here's what they had been taught...
- It's in Leviticus 19:11-12 Do not steal. Do not deceive or cheat one another. 12 Do not bring shame on the name of your God by using it to swear falsely. I am the Lord.
- Jesus said in his sermon "This is what you've heard..."
- If you're going to say something followed by "swear to God"
- Then you better mean it and you better not break that swear
- So knowing very well what the Law of Moses said the P's...
- Devised a way to swear/oath/vow without using G's name
- Why?
- Well, they wanted a way to make a promise that sounded authoritative (swear to heaven/earth/Jerusalem/my head)
- They wanted to make an authoritative sounding promise...
- That didn't have consequences if they broke that promise
- Now at first this sounds hypocritical but here's an example..
- Anyone ever bought a house?

- When you went to closing/nice office/stack of papers/pens
- Not 8 1/2 by 11/but the long legal size/lot's of legal words
- There were 107 places to sign your name
- And you hesitated before signing/swearing/oathing/vowing
- Not because you were planning to break your promise but...
- Because you knew if something went wrong and...
- You couldn't keep your promise...
- You'd be in big trouble
- Well this system the P's had was sort of like that...
- It was a way to say "I really do mean this, but...
- I don't want to make an oath in God's name ...
- Just in case something goes wrong
- So when J said "you have heard..." he knew that...
- This was how the Ps had messed with that Mosaic law so...
- So Jesus said "But I say..."
- "People who are a part of the K of G don't need to swear to God that they are telling the truth because...
- The truthful character of God is written on their hearts and...
- Because of the work of the HS they naturally speak the truth
- We live in a culture where it's normal to mix lies with the T
- I mean Jimmy Kimmel has a bit he calls "Lie witness news"
- One study from UMass found that 60 percent of people lied at least once during a 10-minute conversation and told an average of two to three lies.
- You might think you are part of the 40% who wouldn't lie but
- Ever said, "that looks nice" when you didn't think it did?
- Ever been asked if you liked someone/you didn't/but "yes"
- Have you ever exaggerated a story or something on your R
- Have you ever told a lie by not telling the whole story?
- Here's the deal...
- In his sermon on the mount Jesus is not saying...

-Here is the new litmus test for determining if you are telling the truth in every single situation

-Jesus is saying, “When we decide to follow him...

-We will find ourselves becoming more and more...

-Fully truthful in our speech...

-Truthful words will flow because of....

-The Christ like character forming in our hearts

-Ever meet folks who say “I swear to God”/Honest, on my mother’s grave/May god strike me dead right now if I’m not telling the truth

-These are all good signs that these folks are lying...

-See people who follow Christ will not find a need to...

-Swear by some other authority to prove they are truthful

-They will have developed a habit of truth telling/others will K

-Ever met a person/found them to be nice/maybe a friend but

-soon flowery speech/stories embellished/words that position

-All forms of lies that reflect how most of this K operates and

-Jesus said that it comes from the evil one

-Jesus says “no, not you, if you follow me and...

-Become a part of the K of G your yes will be...yes

-And your no will be no

-In fact, that is our focus verse for this week/mem/meditate

Slide – This weeks verse

“Just say a simple, ‘Yes, I will,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ Anything beyond this is from the evil one.”

-Can you imagine the impact all of us could have in our W’s

-If we left here today determined to honor and hold high fidelity in M AND determined to just tell the truth

-Talk about living counter to the culture and impacting it for C

Slide – The Best Sermon Ever

-Let’s pray...

Slide – The Best Sermon Ever

Next Week: A Christians Righteousness 4

APPENDIX K

SERMON FOUR WRITTEN EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION COMMENTS

Table 8. Sermon Four Written Evaluation Results and Discussion Comments

Question	Written Response	Discussion comments
Question one: <i>To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?</i>	“A lot.”	“Because I come from a religious background I’ve been in a lot of Biblical classes so I understood and was able to follow along.”
Question two: <i>Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?</i>	“Highly.”	“Highly; I think you did a great job of combining the bible with current terms. It’s not total psychology like some sermons I’ve heard in the past, so you didn’t lose the spiritual end of it.”
Question three: <i>Did the sermon encourage you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?</i>	“Very.”	Very much so, because your perspective of Jesus is positive, productive and good. I liked what you had to say.”
Question four: <i>Did you disagree with anything in the sermon or was there anything you didn’t like?</i>	“Maybe.”	“I was interested in your decision on the Supreme Court decision (re: gay marriage) and on how you responded as a pastor of a church.”
Question five: <i>Did the sermon seem judgmental or alienate you in any way?</i>	“No.”	“No, because everything you said was inclusive and not critical and respected other’s ideas.”
Question six: <i>Did you feel the pastor used manipulation or intimidation to try to convince you of his ideas?</i>	“No.”	“No, the thing is if what you have to say is good and positive you don’t need to intimidate.”
Question seven: <i>Did any part of the sermon cause you to think about something in a new way?</i>	“Yes.”	“Yes, lying is an interesting topic, there are no absolutes.”
Question eight: <i>Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny?</i>	“Yes.”	Video was refreshing in church.”
Question nine: <i>What was your “gut level” response to the sermon?</i>	“Excellent, relevant.”	“Excellent; I felt like there was more to come that I would be interested in hearing. What is your position on divorce?”

APPENDIX L

SERMON FIVE TRANSCRIPT

Slide – The Best Sermon Ever

-Please show as I walk up/move to next slide as I begin

Slide – Judge Not

-I wonder if Bob Marley read his Bible because...

-In writing that song he pretty much nailed the...

-Essence of Jesus' teaching about judging

-Let me show you what I mean...

Slide – Matthew 7:1-2 “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. 2 For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

Slide – A Christian's relationships

-This summer here at OHC we've been examining...

-The best sermon ever, which was preached by Jesus

-We know it today as the Sermon on the Mount and in it...

-Jesus described what Christians are like

-So far we've looked at what Jesus taught about...

-A Christian's character, influence, righteousness, religion, prayer, ambition, and today, what J taught about a...

-Christian's relationships...

-And here's what we learn from Jesus right away...

-C's value R's **& know** it's a challenge to keep them healthy

-Here's a Q/Don't raise your hand...

-How many of you had some kind of R challenge this month?

-Friend, spouse, someone you work with, a family member?

- And after that challenge, how many found yourselves...
- Judging the other person?
- Healthy R's are a challenge, just...
- Start a business with someone/get married/find a roommate
- Yet...
- The Bible tells us that God hardwired us to need R's
- This is why one of the worst kinds of human punishment is..
- Long periods of time in solitary confinement/inhumane
- So it's interesting/in the west/no where more than N America
- We tend to be very individualistic&independent relationally
- It's even considered kind of cool to be distant/Sign of S
- But you see God designed each of us not to be...
- Totally Dependent and not to be totally independent but...
- To be interdependent on each other
- So as Jesus begins to talk about a Christian's R's...
- He says, "people who are a part of the kingdom of God live counter to this individualistic/independent idea...
- They know it's about community and relationships"
- Relationships with others in the kingdom of God and...
- R's with those outside the K of G (those who don't follow C).
- So J taught that Christians should handle their R's carefully
- And in this part of his sermon he addressed...

Slide – A Christian's relationship with friends, pigs, their heavenly father, and others in general

- I know that's kind of a weird list but...
- The truth is we all have R's with (1) friends...
- R's with (2) people who don't respect what we believe...
- (3) R's with God and with (4) others in general so...
- For a few minutes let's consider each of these, 1st...

Slide – A Christian's relationship with friends

Matthew 7:1-5 1“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. 2 For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. 3 “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? 4 How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

-Imagine a person with a big log in their eye trying to...

-Remove a speck of sawdust from their friend’s eye

-With this great word picture Jesus teaches that...

-With their friends Christians will...

Slide – A Christian’s relationship with friends

-Be helpful not hypocritical or harsh

-A couple Sundays ago/Melody – shirt

-We all appreciate when a friend points out something that might otherwise embarrass us

-Our zipper is open or there is a piece of food in our teeth

-And if we’re grown up, we also appreciate a...

-Mentor or Christian Brother or sister challenging us about... -A behavior that might be hurting others or ourselves

-Ex) Willowcreek Summit/Blind spots - % of body/feedback!

-So, this verse is not J telling us to never judge or discern

-Actually in Matthew 7 Jesus said to expose false prophets

-No, with this log in the eye picture J is talking about P who..

-Judge Harshly or hypocritically (your sawdust/their LOG)

-The big lesson here from Jesus about A C’s R with friends?

-Christians will always be working for healthy R’s...

-Where there is loving confrontation when needed but...

-Never harsh or hypocritical judgment

-Does that describe the R you have with friends?

-Let’s consider # 2...

Slide – A Christian’s relationship with pigs

Matthew 7:6 “Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

- So right after telling his audience to be careful not to...
- Judge too harshly and to lovingly confront others...
- Jesus calls some people pigs... what’s going on?
- You know what this is? This is J saying to Christians...
- While you need to be gracious in your judgments of O’s...
- Don’t be stupid!
- Some P are not interested in loving confrontation or...
- The gospel message of Jesus so...

Slide – A Christian’s relationship with pigs

-Don’t cheapen the gospel

- See this is Jesus using symbolism to reveal value
- You might know that Pigs were unclean animals to Jews
- So, imagine if a devout J was taking a food sacrifice to TT
- And along the way they accidentally dropped it and...
- A wild dog or the pigs being herded scooped it up/ate it
- The animals/no U of the value of that holy sacrifice
- Jesus said that sharing the gospel with some people is...
- Like throwing pearls into a pig pen/they don’t know value
- So they’ll just try to eat them like everything else
- It’s one thing to not be interested in the gospel/have choice
- It’s another thing to mock the message of Jesus/cheapen it
- Proverbs 9:8 says...

Slide – A Christian’s relationship with pigs

Proverbs 9:8 So don’t bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you. But correct the wise, and they will love you.

- Here Jesus is saying to true Christians that...
- Some of the people you know or meet will not value...
- The message of Jesus and others will mock you for it...
- Don’t waist your time correcting them/or preaching to them

- That will only cheapen the gospel message/just love them
- A couple years ago/emails asking about some of our beliefs
- I immediately picked up/he was a debater/distracter/and...
- Didn't value what we were trying to do as a Christian church
- I just wouldn't engage/got really angry too/which confirmed
- Big Picture here from Jesus on a T C's R with pigs?
- Some people you meet or get to know will not value...
- What is so precious to you, the wonderful grace of Jesus
- Don't cheapen it by throwing it at them/just love them
- So let's consider what J said about...

Slide – A Christian's relationship with their heavenly father

Matthew 7:7-11 7“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

8 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 “You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? 10 Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! 11 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

- Here J is trying to explain to his A the C of God so that...
- We Christians can enjoy a healthy R with our heavenly F
- So Jesus says “think of a good earthly father, even though they are sinful, they still want to give good gifts to their kids”
- J continues “How much more your heavenly father is good and loves you and wants to give good gifts to you”
- Jesus knows that if we can get an accurate picture of the character of God we will have a healthy R with God
- At Willowcreek Summit/comedian/explain the video
- Slide – SHOW MICHAEL JR. YOU TUBE VIDEO HERE**
- Slide – A Christian's relationship with their heavenly father**
- Don't complicate your conversations with God (prayer)**

- There folks is a great picture of the Goodness of our HF
- God loves us and tells us He's there for us so...
- Let's not complicate our conversations with God
- Here's what I mean...
- Some C's read scriptures like this one and pull from it...
- Complicated formulas for how to pray/move the hand of G
- If you ask, seek, knock, long enough and hard enough...
- God will finally answer...
- Make sure to be persistent/God needs to be prodded...
- And we know God is good, yes, but, he may be mad at us...
- Let's not forget the context here...
- This is about the good character of God not formulas to...
- Cajole a mean or disinterested God into doing what we want
- This is Jesus saying to folks "do you want to come into the Kingdom of God? Do you want to experience all God has for you? All you have to do is ask, because..."
- "Your Heavenly Father is good and if you let Him know you'd like to come in and be a part of his Kingdom, he will open the door"
- Jesus taught us about A Christians R with friends, pigs, our heavenly father and finally here...

Slide – A Christian's relationship with others in general

Matthew 7:12 "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

- This is this weeks focus verse for memorizing/meditating
- Would you recite this verse with me/I'll lead...

Slide – A Christian's relationship with others in general

-Do to others rather than don't do to others

- Maybe you've heard the more cynical take on the GR...
- Do to others before they do to you/how many like better?
- My wife's Italian/this is how her family lived life...
- Actually, the positive angle on Jesus' V of the GR is imp.
- You probably know that there were a number of similar V's

- The Apocrypha/the Jewish Rabbi Hillel/the stoics/all had V's
- But all of those had more of the negative angle
- "Don't do to O's what you would not want them to do to you"
- So J summarizes his teaching on a C's R's by saying...
- For Christians there is a distinctive positive take on the GR
- Christians are proactive/they do to others first...
- What they would want done to them and of course...
- This is the character of God that we see in Romans 5:8...
- "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."/the heart of God is proactive love/love first...

Slide – This week, Let's do to others whatever we would like them to do to us.

- Think for a moment about what that might mean
- With a friend it might mean a loving confrontation or...
- You being open to the loving advice from a trusted friend
- With a pig that might mean an act of unconditional love
- With your Heavenly Father it might mean...
- Uncomplicated, honest conversation (that's prayer)
- Or for some of you this means responding positively to...
- God's love for you by receiving Jesus as your Lord and S

Slide – The Best Sermon Ever

- Let's pray together about what today's sermon means for... -Each of us this week

Slide – The Best Sermon Ever

Next Week: A Christians Relationship II

- Prayer Team, come/Next week...

APPENDIX M

SERMON FIVE WRITTEN EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION COMMENTS

Table 9. Sermon Five Written Evaluation Results and Discussion Comments

Question	Written Response	Discussion comments
Question one: <i>To what degree did you understand the biblical concepts and ideas shared in the sermon?</i>	Husband: "Very Much. Pastor Rod cited passages and shared interpretations which facilitated a greater understanding." Wife: "I agree with his biblical concepts."	Husband: "Do unto others – meeting at work and bringing community in the workplace. People were concentrating and felt like you were sitting across the table from Rod."
Question two: <i>Was the sermon relevant and applicable to your everyday life?</i>	Husband: "Highly. Very helpful with relationships with friends (pigs example in sermon), our heavenly father, and others." Wife: "Highly. Christians want relationships with other Christians, they gravitate to other believers."	
Question three: <i>Did the sermon encourage you to want to know more about experiencing a relationship with Jesus?</i>	Husband: "Somewhat." Wife: "Very."	Husband: Relationship with heavenly father, this is a hard one to explain. Different words mean different things to different people." Wife: "My son needed to go through a crisis in his life before he was open to God."
Question four: <i>Did you disagree with anything in the sermon or was there anything you didn't like?</i>	Husband: "No. Could've spoke on how challenging it is to achieve a relationship with our heavenly father. I liked pastor Rod's 'open door' analogy." Wife: "Maybe. I think you should try to bring the gospel (the message of God) to non-believers, someone's heart may be touched for them to believe."	Husband: "I liked feeling connected and people feeling the Spirit." Wife: "The church can sometimes be too entertaining, like a concert. I didn't like people raising their hands during singing."
Question five: <i>Did the sermon seem judgmental or alienate you in any way?</i>	Husband: "No" Wife written response: "No"	Husband: "Not at all"
Question six: <i>Did you feel the pastor used manipulation or</i>	Husband: "No." Wife: "No."	Husband: "Not at all."

<i>intimidation to try to convince you of his ideas?</i>	<p>Husband: "Yes. I liked how each relationship was defined and explained." Wife: "Yes. The blind spots of people's character. Sometimes people need to point them out, in a non judgmental or harsh way."</p>	<p>Husband: "I had never really understood the pig and pearl text, I may have a blind spot."</p>
<p>Question eight: <i>Was there any part of the sermon that was emotionally moving or funny?</i></p>	<p>Husband: "Yes. The video of the new born." Wife: "Yes. Very moving to see how the baby in the video responded to her dad's voice."</p>	<p>Husband: "The baby video very moving, felt God. It's important to see vulnerability from a tough guy."</p>
<p>Question nine: <i>What was your "gut level" response to the sermon?</i></p>	<p>Husband: "Felt God is with me." Wife: "Great preparation, good message. Can be applied every day. Pastor was enthusiastic to message."</p>	<p>Husband: "Felt God with me." Wife: "Contemporary."</p>
<p>Question ten: <i>Share any ideas you have that would have made this sermon more helpful for you.</i></p>	<p>Husband: "Can't think of any. It was wonderful, educational and motivational."</p>	

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