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This dissertation entitled

PREACHING THE ABSOLUTE CLAIMS OF SCRIPTURE IN A POSTMODERN
CONTEXT FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Written by

HOWARD GRIFFIN

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned reader:



Keith J. Matthews



Kurt Fredrickson

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PREACHING THE ABSOLUTE CLAIMS OF SCRIPTURE IN A POSTMODERN
CONTEXT FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Preaching the Absolute Claims of Scripture in a Postmodern Context for Spiritual Transformation

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Doctor of Ministry

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This dissertation argues that to help transform a postmodern heart and mind in the United States today, sermons should be biblically faithful, insightful, relevant, conversational, short, and serve as a humble invitation to participate in various spiritual disciplines for further personal exploration. Through an initial overview of postmodernity and current trends in communication, the case will be made that in today's sound-byte culture sermons should be shorter. In postmodernity, a dialogue format is preferred to a long monologue, so sermons should be inductive not deductive in style, and should serve as a conversation starter not an exhaustive claim to truth.

Recent church studies have also revealed that spiritual transformation most often happens when one faithfully practices various spiritual disciplines. It is argued that in a postmodern context, where truth is ultimately based on experience, the sermon should invite its listeners to practice some type of spiritual discipline as a part of its application if it wants to help transform the listener. It will be shown that Jesus's Sermon on the Mount followed this basic format.

Finally, an exegetical process will be outlined that moves from Scripture text to current cultural context. In this process of preparation a conversation begins in the pastor's study where one reads and ask questions of the text. This conversation continues with commentaries, then with the culture, and finally with one's congregants. This dissertation will then provide different inductive sermon outlines that are often used by some of the most effective preachers today. Finally, a unique process that seeks to bring the best of several approaches into one outline will be provided as well as tips on writing for the ear and eye.

Content Reader: Keith Matthews, PhD

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To my lovely wife Sarah, my children (Hannah, Elizabeth, and John), my parents, First Presbyterian Church Amarillo, Highland Park Presbyterian Church, First Presbyterian Church Houston, Dr. Robert Jacks, Dr. Cleo LaRue, and Dr. Keith Matthews who have supported me in my work as I have sought to follow God's call and maximize the gift of preaching that the Lord has given me

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INTRODUCTION

In the US, where thoughts and ideas are exchanged at such a rapid rate through the internet and other forms of mass communication like television and radio, it is difficult for anyone to believe that there is just one truth when there seem to be so many different perspectives on what is true. For instance FOX News and CNN can report the same event from very different perspectives. In a globalized, postmodern, information age, where there seem to be so many different perspectives, truth is usually viewed as relative. Initially driven by a fear of the abuse of absolute authority, postmodernity argues that truth is no longer considered objective and absolute, rather all truth is relative and based on one's own personal experience and perspective.¹ What is true for one person is not necessarily true for another. As Heath White points out, "Postmodernism tends toward moral relativism and the rejection of all absolutes, while Christianity has historically insisted upon moral absolutes as a part of its ethical teaching and doctrinal absolutes as a part of its theology."²

The challenge for the preacher today is to know how to communicate faithfully and effectively the absolute claims of Scripture in a postmodern context that rejects claims to absolute truth. To address this problem John Stott, in his book *Between Two Worlds*, argues that the preacher must be a bridge builder between the ancient world of the Bible and the postmodern world of today. He argues that, "It is across this broad and deep divide of two thousand years of changing culture (more still in the case of the Old

¹ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001),

² Heath White, *Postmodernism 101: A First Course for the Curious Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 18.

Testament) that Christian communicators have to throw bridges. Our task is to enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today."³ He argues that this bridge from the ancient text to the current world is best built when the preacher seeks to treat the listeners as "real people with real questions: that we grapple in our sermons with real issues; and that we build bridges into the real world in which they suffer, grow old, and die."⁴ To create such a bridge there must be a careful analysis of the current postmodern culture and a study of what has proven to be the most effective way to transform a heart and mind in the context of the US today.

This dissertation focuses on how one can effectively preach the absolute claims of Scripture to a postmodern audience so that it ultimately makes a difference in the listener's lives and leads to spiritual transformation. Throughout this dissertation "pastors" or "ministers" who preach will be called "preachers." Admittedly, ministers and pastors do much more than just preach, but this dissertation is focused on the spiritual practice of preaching, and when a minister or pastor preaches he is "the preacher."

This dissertation is divided into three parts. Part One is focused on the cultural context of the US with an emphasis on the principles of postmodernity and the sound-byte nature of communication in the current information age. It will be argued that sermons should feel more like a dialogue and less like a monologue in the current information age. Also, it will be argued that inductive sermons, where the thesis is stated towards the end, seem more dialogical in nature than deductive sermons, that state a thesis at the beginning and then try to argue for the validity of that thesis throughout the

³ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 138.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

rest of the sermon. Inductive sermons feel more like a dialogue because they invite the listener to join the preacher on a journey of discovery where the thesis is stated at the end. This dissertation also argues that a sermon should feel more like a conversation starter, rather than an exhaustive monologue that seeks to say everything there is to say about a particular question or idea.

To maintain a sense of dialogue, this dissertation argues that sermons should be shorter. It would be unnatural for someone to have a conversation with someone who spoke for forty-five minutes straight. Therefore, it is argued that with shrinking attention spans sermons should be less than twenty-two minutes, the average length of a television sitcom without commercials. In a sound-byte culture like the US, where advertisers are learning to communicate their message in thirty-, fifteen-, and even five-second advertisements, it is critical that a postmodern preacher learns to be clear and concise.

Part Two of this dissertation contains an analysis of recent church studies that indicate that the greatest spiritual transformation most often happens through one's personal experience of the spiritual disciplines. The case is then made that sermons should therefore invite people to practice the spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. Using the writings of Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and John Ortberg, the case will be made that an invitation to follow Jesus is really an invitation to practice spiritual disciplines. A brief overview of the most practiced spiritual disciplines will be provided in Part Two, as well as an analysis of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus invites his listeners to practice many of the spiritual disciplines. It will then be argued that the polytheistic, pluralistic context of the first century that Jesus preached in is very similar to the pluralistic context of today's

postmodern world. The fact that Jesus encourages his followers to practice spiritual disciplines in a pluralistic context like the first-century should therefore encourage the postmodern preacher to exhort her listeners to practice the same disciplines in the pluralistic context of the twenty-first century.

Part Three of this dissertation provides an exegetical model for preparing sermons that are biblically faithful, insightful, and relevant. This exegetical model begins as a conversation with the Scripture text that later expands to a conversation with biblical scholars from the past and present. The conversation then expands to the culture and eventually to the preacher's own congregants.

To help a preacher organize her message this dissertation will then provide a series of helpful inductive sermon outlines from men like Paul Scott Wilson, Thomas Long, Haddon Robinson, Andy Stanley, and Eugene Lowry. A new inductive sermon outline will then be proposed that seeks to utilize the best elements of these various sermon outlines to help the preacher write a sermon that is biblically faithful, insightful, relevant, conversational, short, and that serves as a humble invitation to participate in some type of spiritual discipline for further personal exploration. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that because truth is based on experience in postmodernity, and because the classic spiritual disciplines of the Church have proven to lead to the greatest long-term spiritual transformation, a sermon that seeks to transform its listeners into the image of Christ should offer a humble invitation to participate in some type of spiritual discipline as a part of its application.

PART ONE

CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CHAPTER 1

A POSTMODERN, SOUND-BYTE, DIALOGUE CULTURE

The US, with its instant access to information through the internet and other forms of mass media, is becoming a thoroughly postmodern culture. In postmodernity truth is viewed as relative and ultimately determined by one's own personal experience and perspective. In order to communicate the absolute claims of Scripture to a postmodern context one needs to understand the principles of postmodernity and its history. Using the work of David Bosch, Heath White, Graham Johnston, Brian D. McLaren, Michael J. Quicke, George Hunter, Jimmy Long, and Stanley J. Grenz this chapter will provide a brief history and overview of postmodernity.

Then referencing various studies, this chapter will provide a detailed explanation of the current sound-byte nature of communication in the US. It will be demonstrated that television, the internet, and digital video recorders have helped shorten the attention span of Americans. As attention spans decline it will be argued that when preaching to an American audience sermons should be brief and encourage further personal exploration.

The case will then be made that because experience is paramount in postmodernity, the sermon should feel more like a dialogue and less like a monologue. In

a postmodern context the sermon should feel like an exchange of ideas not just a presentation. The final section of this chapter will provide an analysis of how the principles of postmodernity and the sound-byte dialogue nature of communication impacts preaching in the US today.

Moving from Modernity to Postmodernity and its Implications for Preaching

The modern world, which was guided primarily by the principles of the Enlightenment, is quickly transitioning into a postmodern era. George Hunter summarizes the five core convictions of the Enlightenment:

First, the universe functions like a machine and does not need God. Second, human beings are basically good and rational. Third, human reason can design the best approach to human life and organize community. Fourth, science and education can liberate the human race from problems of war, oppression, and disease. Fifth, all religions are the same at their cores, for they are rooted in a common religious consciousness.¹

The Enlightenment that drove the modern era is often referred to as the Age of Reason. René Descartes' famous statement, "*Cogito Ergo Sum* ('I think, therefore I am')"² reflected one of the primary values of the Enlightenment. In the Enlightenment it was believed that, "Human reason was 'natural', that is, it was derived from the order of nature, and therefore independent of the norms of tradition or presupposition."³ There was a strong belief that the human mind could solve any problem. As McLaren explains,

¹ Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living The Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 70.

² Johnston, *Preaching Postmodern World*, 24.

³ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 264.

“In modernity, the ultimate intelligibility of the universe was assumed. What was still unknown was ultimately knowable.”⁴

Guided by human reason and the scientific method, there was a belief in continual human progress with an emphasis on the survival of the fittest as seemingly revealed by nature. In modernity, “The inherent sinfulness of human nature was denied, and a remarkably optimistic view of humanity as essentially good was propagated.”⁵ It was believed that because of the power of human reason, humanity would continue to progress, and “people would ‘naturally’ do the right thing if left to themselves.”⁶

With its emphasis on the scientific method, modernity also “operated with a subject-object scheme . . . that separated humans from their environment and enabled them to examine the animal and mineral world from the vantage-point of scientific objectivity.”⁷ From this subject-object scheme it was believed that “scientific knowledge was factual, value free, and neutral.”⁸ The strong belief in inevitable progress of humanity through the power of the scientific method and human reason guided Western culture through the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Manifest Destiny of the American frontier, the Industrial Era of the modern world, and eventually through two world wars.

⁴ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 25.

⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 268.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 264.

⁸ Ibid., 266.

While the principles of modernity led to some great innovation in industry and technology, World War I and World War II were such destructive events that people began to question many of the principles of modernity. While the scientific method had been instrumental in helping advance technology, this new technology ultimately led to the creation of weapons that were able to kill more people than ever before. This new ability to destroy life seriously challenged the principle of modernity that humanity was always progressing.

The modern assertion that humanity was essentially good and always progressing was questioned even further when fanatical leaders like Adolf Hitler were able to use arguments from evolution, human reason, and religion to convince people that there was a superior Aryan race. Hitler was able to convince the Germans that those from inferior races like the Jews should be destroyed. The trauma of the Holocaust led people to wonder if science, human reason, and religion could be trusted since it was arguments from these disciplines that Hitler used to convince an entire nation of people that a particular race of people were inferior and should be eliminated.

While modernity was characterized by a general optimism, postmodernity now has a general pessimism when it comes to humanity. As Grenz explains, “In eschewing the Enlightenment myth of inevitable progress, postmodernism replaces the optimism of the last century with a gnawing pessimism.”⁹ Despite advancements in technology the world has experienced tremendous brokenness and destruction through its numerous

⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 7.

wars. The experiences of pain and loss have made the postmodern mind pessimistic rather than optimistic.

Finally, Albert Einstein with his theory of relativity turned the scientific world upside down. Einstein explained that pure energy was equal to pure mass at the speed of light squared in a vacuum ($E=mc^2$). This relationship between matter and energy made it clear that things are not always the way they appear. A physical object can become pure energy. Everything is relative, and Einstein explained in his metaphysics that space and time are relative as well.

Einstein's theory of relativity and the way science was used to kill so many people in the twentieth century have led the postmodern mind to believe everything is relative and science is now just one way among many ways to observe and discover truth. As Grenz explains, "The postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth. There are other valid paths to knowledge besides reason, say the postmoderns, including the emotions and the intuition."¹⁰ Quicke observes that in postmodernity, "there is a new creed: 'I feel therefore I am.'"¹¹ This cultural shift to postmodernism, with its emphasis on personal experience and emotions as a legitimate indicator of truth, has become the predominant paradigm of thought for Generation X, Y, and Millennials in the United States today.¹²

What ultimately emerged from the disillusionment of the Enlightenment was a new postmodern reality where all previous claims of absolute truth are questioned and

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 71.

¹² Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 77.

deconstructed. Postmodern philosophers like Jacques Derrida argue that everything is a matter of interpretation. Derrida is known for famously saying, “There is nothing outside the text.”¹³ Derrida argues that it is not possible to get the one true meaning of a text because everything is up to personal interpretation. As Grenz explains,

Meaning is not inherent in a text itself, they [postmoderns] argue, but emerges only as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the text. And because the meaning of a text is dependent on the perspective of the one who enters into dialogue with it, it has as many meanings as it has readers (or readings) . . . this means that there is no one meaning of the world, no transcendent center to reality as a whole.¹⁴

This emphasis on the role that one’s perspective plays on understanding truth begins to deconstruct modernity’s view of absolute truth.

Postmodernism also rejects claims to absolute truth because when one makes a claim to absolute truth one assumes absolute authority to make such a claim. As White points out, “The authority to determine what counts as true is also the power to determine who counts as important.”¹⁵ The abuse of power in modernity, where arguments from science, human reason, and religion were used by the Nazis to argue for a superior Aryan race, have led the postmodern mind to reject anyone who promotes an absolute truth and seriously questions the truth they proclaim.

Postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault argues that, “Every assertion of knowledge is an act of power.”¹⁶ Foucault believed that what counts as knowledge in society today was ultimately created through a network of power. He explains that the

¹³ James K.A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 34.

¹⁴ Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 6.

¹⁵ White, *Postmodernism 101*, 55.

¹⁶ Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 6.

people and institutions in positions of power have been given the authority to declare what is true thereby furthering their power over culture and society. Truth and knowledge are not neutral according to philosophers like Foucault; rather people promote a particular view of the truth to enhance their position of power. The fear of the continual abuse of power through knowledge has led the postmodern mind to question anyone who claims to know anything for sure because all truth is relative and any claim to knowledge can be viewed as a potential abuse of power. Consequently communicators in a postmodern context should speak humbly if they want to win a hearing. Furthermore, as the next section explains, any claims to truth will have to be communicated not only humbly, but succinctly in the sound-byte communication culture of today.

Sound-byte Nature of Communication in the Postmodern Information Age

With the increasing influence of television and now the internet as primary forms of communication, most communication experts in the US argue that, “The attention span of the average individual in the United States is 30 seconds.”²³ In light of this reality, the average commercial on television lasts only fifteen- to thirty-seconds. Stuart Elliot writes, “When television began as an advertising medium, the standard commercial length was 60 seconds. Thirty-second spots began running not long after cigarette commercials left the airwaves in 1971.”²⁴ Networks then began to sell fifteen second commercials in the 1980s, “As a way to compensate for the rapidly rising cost of 30-second spots. . . . 15-second spots account for more than thirty-six percent of all commercial time sold by the

²³ Milo O. Frank, *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less* (New York: Pocket Books, 1986), 15.

²⁴ Stuart Elliot, “TV Commercials Adjust to a Shorter Attention Span,” *New York Times*, April 8, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/08/business/media/08adco.html?_r=0 (accessed July 10, 2014).

major broadcast networks.”²⁵ Today on the popular internet website Youtube, people are usually forced to watch the first five seconds of a commercial before they can click a tab that allows them to “Skip Ad.” Some advertisers realize that with the power of a remote control, people watching television will regularly change the channel during a thirty-second commercial, so advertisers have begun to produce five-second ads that are usually too short for a viewer to try to avoid with their remote control.

For example, Cadillac ran a simple five-second commercial showing how their car could go from zero- to sixty-miles per hour in less than five seconds.²⁶ With the shrinking attention span of viewers in the US, advertisers are realizing that they need to take less time to communicate their message because they know viewers can just tune them out. As a communication consultant Connie Dieken explains, “When it comes to communicating influentially in our fast-paced, Twitter-happy society, less is more.”²⁷ According to Dieken, one has to connect, convey, and convince in a very concise manner in the current communication culture of the US.

The thirty-second attention span of most Americans has also impacted the way news stories are presented on television according to Frank. Frank explains that, “Because of attention span, the average time of all television news stories is one and a half minutes. The reporter needs 30 seconds to set up the story, another 30 seconds is

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Cadillac Advertisement,” youtube.com, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doVIXUFGsFA> (accessed July 10, 2014).

²⁷ Connie Dieken, *Talk Less, Say More* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009), 1.

reserved for the actuality, which means an interview or tape of what's happening, then another 30 seconds for the reporter to summarize and end the story."²⁸

The most popular television sitcoms today last thirty minutes, but with a digital video recorder one can now fast forward through the commercials so that an entire episode only lasts around twenty-two minutes. Even these popular sitcoms usually have many scene changes so that any particular scene may last just a few minutes. Television screenwriters know that one scene or one television angle will bore today's viewers, so they keep things moving.

In an interview with *Preaching Magazine*, Ortberg, the senior pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, talked about the challenge of preaching to a culture whose attention span continues to shrink. He explained that, "Part of what we wrestle with is that attention spans keep getting shorter. On television and in movies, the editing cuts keep getting briefer. The sound keeps getting louder because people are losing the capacity to focus their attention. . . . Our attention muscles, if you want to think of it that way, have gotten really, really flabby."²⁹

Historically this was not always the case in the US. In the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, the first candidate was given sixty minutes for his speech. Then the opposing candidate was given ninety minutes for his response. Then the first

²⁸ Frank, *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less*, 17.

²⁹ Michael Dudit, "Preaching through their Defenses: An Interview with John Ortberg," Preaching.com, <http://www.preaching.com/resources/articles/11581043/page-4/> (accessed September 12, 2014).

candidate was given thirty minutes for a final response.³⁰ Audiences would patiently listen for three hours to these debates.

In contrast, the 2012 presidential debates between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama lasted only ninety minutes altogether with several commercial breaks. There were six fifteen-minute segments, with the moderator introducing a topic and giving one candidate two minutes, the other candidate two minutes, and the remaining time for facilitated discussion between the two candidates, with both candidates receiving approximately equal time.³¹ At the end of the debate each candidate was given only two minutes for a closing statement. These presidential candidates had to summarize the main points of their campaign in just two minutes. To communicate effectively and memorably in the sound-byte context of the US, a preacher needs to be as concise as possible.

Dialogue versus Monologue in Postmodern Communication

The format of the 2012 presidential debate helps highlight a continual shift in communication from monologue to dialogue in the US. With such a short attention span, it is virtually impossible for a postmodern mind to listen to a ninety-minute monologue like Americans were asked to do during the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. The dialogue format of the 2012 presidential debates, where each candidate is given just two minutes to answer questions, is more consistent with the short attention span of most postmodern minds and the dialogue nature of communication today.

³⁰ National Park Service, "Lincoln Home: National Historic Site Illinois," <http://www.nps.gov/liho/historyculture/debates.htm> (accessed October 10, 2014).

³¹ David Jackson, "Obama-Romney Debate Formats Include Town Hall," *USA Today*, July 25, 2012, <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/theoval/post/2012/07/obama-romney-debate-formats-include-town-hall/1#.U76-DdwkhuY> (accessed July 10, 2014).

Quicke points out that, “Many argue that in an age in which attention spans have supposedly shrunk to three minutes, television has mastered the message in a minute (or less), and the visual now complements and sometimes overwhelms the spoken word, monologue preaching is obsolete.”³² The postmodern mind does not want to sit and listen to a monologue for an extended period of time. Postmoderns love to dialogue about good questions.³³ Because truth is relative, postmodern generations like Emergents are open to listening to another person’s perspective, but equally important is the desire for them to get to share their own perspective. As Tony Jones points out, “Emergents are enamored of story, particularly of telling their own stories and listening to others’ stories.”³⁴ They do not want to be told what to believe or do. They want to discover truth for themselves through an open discussion of ideas as a part of their own personal experience.

Communication in the US has moved from a monologue form where an expert might speak for ninety minutes, to more of a dialogue form where ideas are shared in a much shorter time frame. Living in the US today it would be difficult to imagine having a conversation with someone who spoke for ninety minutes straight. Both parties would be exhausted after such an experience. The talker would be tired of speaking, and the listener would certainly be tired of listening for ninety minutes straight. Usually a conversation is interactive where ideas and stories are shared back-and-forth.

The internet has further encouraged interactive forms of communication. News stories were previously printed on newspaper or magazines, read by the consumer, and

³² Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 43.

³³ Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2008), 109-110.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

then thrown away. There was no interaction with the journalist, unless the reader chose to write the journalist directly or perhaps a letter to the editor. Now news stories are posted on the web, and readers can provide instant feedback to the article that has been written. A conversation usually ensues as each reader responds to the original article and any other comments that may have been posted in response to the original article. The interactive written dialogue of a news story can often be as informative as the original article as people post their opinions from their own personal experience.

Fred Craddock in his seminal work, *As One without Authority*, began to recognize the shift from monologue to dialogue in the US during the late-twentieth century. Historically preachers had been instructed to use a deductive method of communication where they tell the congregation from the very beginning what they planned to say. The preacher was then to spend thirty minutes saying it, and then reminding the congregation what they had just said at the end. There is no suspense in this method, simply a transfer of information.

In the deductive method the sermon is a strict monologue where the preacher is the expert with all of the information. Craddock points out that for effectiveness, “The preacher seriously asks whether it is best to continue to serve up a monologue in a dialogical world.”³⁵ A strict monologue does not require the listener to do much, particularly if the form is deductive, where the thesis or conclusion is given at the beginning. In a deductive monologue, the listener simply has to sit and listen to see if the preacher has been able to prove the thesis or assertion that she made at the beginning.

³⁵ Fred Craddock, *As One without Authority* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 15.

However, the inductive method that Craddock supports feels more like a dialogue as the preacher takes a journey with the congregation to discover the truth of God's word. In the inductive method, the conclusion is not stated until the very end. The inductive method of preaching keeps the listener guessing at where the preacher is going and what conclusion and application the sermon is going to make at the end. Craddock argues that, "Without question, preaching increases in power when it is dialogical, when speaker and listener share in the proclamation of the Word."³⁶ The inductive method feels more like a dialogue because it invites both parties to engage in an active discovery of truth.

According to psychologists, "We have the potential of remembering only up to 10 percent of what we hear. And that's potential, not actual."³⁷ Psychologists also state that people have the potential of remembering 50 percent of what they see. If one adds doing to seeing and hearing, then a person has the potential of remembering 90 percent of what he or she does.³⁸ The deductive method of preaching, with its thesis stated at the beginning, does not ask the listener to do much, simply listen and agree. Psychologists would argue that one only has the ability to recall up to 10 percent of what one hears when one is taught deductively, because the listener is not asked to do much but listen and agree. The inductive method however, with its application at the end, invites the listener to do something. Specifically, the listener is invited to join the preacher in a discovery of truth. The inductive method encourages personal discovery, because the sermon does not begin with a conclusion but a problem or question that needs to be

³⁶ Ibid., 18.

³⁷ Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1987), 58.

³⁸ Ibid., 58-59.

solved. The listener then joins the preacher through a journey of discovery as he discusses how the Bible helps answer the question or problem that has been raised. In the inductive method the listener has to do something, and so the listener has the potential to remember 90 percent of an inductive sermon. Craddock advocates for an inductive form of preaching because he believes that, “In induction, thought moves from the particulars of experience that have a familiar ring in the listener’s ear to a general truth or conclusion.”³⁹ Craddock argues that in the inductive method, “One often need not make the applications of the conclusion to the lives of the hearers. If they have made the trip, it is their conclusion, and the implication of their own situations is not only clear but personally inescapable.”⁴⁰ In light of the sound-byte, dialogical, nature of communication today, sermons should be shorter, using the inductive method when possible so that the sermon feels more like a dialogue of discovery rather than a simple monologue presentation of ideas.

Impact of Postmodernity and Sound-byte Dialogue on Preaching

The general fear of the abuse of power that permeates postmodern thought has some serious implications for preachers in a postmodern era. Historically, preachers in the US have been given some authority by the nature of their position, calling, and often seminary training. The preacher could speak as one who had authority because of her knowledge of the Bible, but today the preacher must humbly proclaim that she is just a sinner trying to tell other sinners how to know God. The first step to maintaining a

³⁹ Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

humble attitude throughout the sermon preparation and delivery process is an active prayer life that includes regular prayers of confession. As 1 John 1:8-9 states, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁴¹ Consistently offering prayers of personal confession as a part of one’s prayer life helps keep the preacher humble in the sermon preparation process and mindful that he is a sinner in need of God’s grace.

There is a mystery to God that a postmodern preacher should also recognize and embrace. As the Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” Recognizing that one does not have all the answers will help the preacher feel like a fellow sojourner seeking truth to a postmodern listener. R. Scott Smith makes the point that in postmodernity one does not have to have certainty to have knowledge. He states that in postmodernity, “We are free from overstating the degree of confidence we have in our beliefs. In turn, we will tend to attract postmodern people, who would be put off if we claimed to have utter certainty.”⁴² Doug Pagitt makes the point that when preaching to a postmodern crowd, “The use of provisional statements (‘It seems to me . . . ,’ ‘As I understand it . . . ,’ and so on) is an essential aspect of creating a culture of openness and invitation.”⁴³

⁴¹ All Scripture quoted is from the English Standard Version Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), unless otherwise noted.

⁴² R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 171.

⁴³ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), 40.

The preacher should still remain sincere and passionate about what she believes and preaches. Postmodern listeners want to know that the preacher believes what he is saying, but the message must be given in a more humble tone. In remaining humble a preacher should not try to hide or deny the absolute claims of Christ. As David Kinnaman explains, “Softening or reshaping the gospel is an utterly wrong response to the objections people raise.”⁴⁴ Guided by 1 Peter 3:15, the preacher in her heart should set apart Christ as Lord, and be prepared to give an answer for the hope that she has in Christ Jesus with gentleness and respect.

The preacher should not speak down to the congregation, but rather as a fellow sojourner who is sharing his humble perspective about God’s Word and how it might apply to one’s life. As the apostle Paul warns the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 8:1, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” The great temptation of the preacher is to show his congregation all that she knows about a particular text, but the most effective preachers in a postmodern era seek to speak to the heart not just the mind of the listener. It is more important that the preacher communicate that she loves the congregation with the love of Christ, rather than just transferring knowledge about Christ.

If a preacher wants a hearing in a postmodern context, he should preach with love, passion, and humility. As John Killinger points out, “The preacher’s first calling is to love. Otherwise the preacher doesn’t understand community and has nothing to preach. We must love the community and love the people who belong to the community.”⁴⁵ If people know that the preacher loves them, then they are more willing to listen to what the

⁴⁴ David Kinnaman and Gaby Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 33.

⁴⁵ John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (London: SCM, 1985), 8.

preacher has to say. One way a preacher can show that she loves the congregation is by trusting them and being vulnerable with them about her own struggles as appropriate to the setting. It is difficult for a postmodern congregant to connect to a preacher who seems to have it all together. As Quicke points out, “Today, postmodern hearers particularly seem to value authenticity and vulnerability. Preachers need to be genuine about their spirituality, to be courageous and mature.”⁴⁶

Instead of simply telling the congregation what to do, the preacher in a postmodern context should share her struggles and invite the congregation to join her on an exploration of truth as revealed in Jesus and the Scriptures. The preacher should also avoid using pronouns like “you” and “your.” The preacher should use pronouns like “I,” “we,” and “our.” In postmodernity, truth is determined by one’s experience, and so any sermon that seeks to transform his listeners into the image of Christ will need to provide a humble invitation to join him in exploring and experiencing the truth of God’s Word as a fellow sojourner on the journey of life.

Arguably the most famous and impactful speech of the twentieth century is Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream.” It was given in front of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, as a part of the famous March on Washington. The speech helped mobilize a nation to work tirelessly for civil rights in the United States, and the speech is less than seventeen minutes in length. It is interesting to note that the Sermon on the Mount when read aloud is just over twelve minutes long. Arguably the most famous speech in American History, the *Gettysburg Address*, given by Abraham Lincoln is less than five minutes long. Skye Jethani astutely points out that,

⁴⁶ Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 94.

Many forget that Lincoln's speech was not the keynote at the ceremony that day. The featured speaker was Edward Everett, a celebrity orator. His address at Gettysburg was 13,607 words, over two hours long—not unheard of for a gifted speaker in the nineteenth century. After the event Everett wrote to the President saying, “I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes.”⁴⁷

Today, no one remembers what Edward Everett said, but many middle-school children in the US can recite Lincoln’s five-minute *Gettysburg Address* from memory. Speeches and sermons that are less than twenty-two minutes can have a great impact on the hearts and minds of its listeners. Less is often more in communication.

It is true that some popular preachers to postmodern audiences often preach for forty-five minutes or more today, but if given a preference many Americans would prefer to listen to a sermon that is less than forty-five minutes. During a class lecture in 2008, a ninety-minute video of popular postmodern preacher Rob Bell was presented to a classroom of doctor of ministry students. Bell has been one of the most popular preachers in the US who attracts a very postmodern crowd. He has produced a series of Nooma videos that are image rich and about eleven minutes in length. These brief Nooma videos can be used to help initiate great discussions when shown in small groups.

However, after watching Bell’s ninety-minute whiteboard presentation on the creation of the world and the story of redemption, a classroom of doctoral ministry students had very little to say when it was done. Bell, the expert, had said most of what needed to be said about creation and redemption. His ninety-minute presentation had eliminated the need for further discussion. In contrast, in his brief Nooma videos, Bell

⁴⁷ Skye Jethani, “A Case for Shorter Sermons,” *Christianity Today*, May 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2014/may-online-only/case-for-shorter-sermons.html> (accessed September 12, 2014).

says just enough to draw the audience in, engage their minds, and get them thinking.

Admittedly, preachers like Bell, Erwin McManus, and Stanley can hold a congregation's attention for forty-five minutes or more because they are very good communicators, but the more they talk the less the listener will have to say in response because the preacher has said most of what needs to be said.

Preachers who currently preach for forty-five minutes or more may argue that they need forty-five minutes to set up a text and explain all that it has to say. However, if media research is correct, the average attention span of Americans today is only thirty seconds.⁴⁸ With such a short attention span the preacher must grab the attention of the listener right away. If advertisers are able to communicate a clear concise message and speak to a consumer's emotions in thirty seconds then a preacher should be able to communicate a clear concise message in twenty-two minutes or less. Wilson points out that when writing for the ear, "Brief visual details that quickly paint a scene are better than long descriptions, and short snippets of conversation that allow a character to come to life are preferred to long monologues or dialogues."⁴⁹ To make the move from forty-five minute sermons to twenty-two minutes sermons will take some work, but the shorter the sermon the more likely listeners will remain attentive to the entire message and want to discuss the ideas that were shared after the sermon is over.

In a postmodern context, where truth is based on experience, active dialogue is the way people prefer to learn. Dialogue feels more like an interactive experience than simply listening to a really long monologue. The inductive form of preaching, as

⁴⁸ Frank, *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less*, 16.

⁴⁹ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 11.

advocated by Craddock, where the listener is invited on a journey of discovery and the thesis is revealed at the end is a style of preaching that feels more like a dialogue than a monologue. Inductive sermons will be preferred by postmodern listeners to the traditional deductive sermons that state the thesis at the beginning. In a sound-byte, postmodern culture where truth is determined by experience the sermon should seek to serve as a dialogue starter as the preacher humbly invites the listeners to join her on a journey of spiritual transformation.

PART TWO

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE DISCIPLINES

CHAPTER 2

IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

In this chapter a brief overview of Willow Creek Community Church's *Reveal* study will be provided. The primary finding of the *Reveal* study that was done in over 1,000 churches representing over 250,000 congregants is that spiritual transformation takes place most readily among people who are practicing spiritual disciplines in their daily lives. The case will be made that in light of the results of the *Reveal* study preachers should encourage their listeners to practice various spiritual disciplines as a part of the sermon application so the spiritual lives of the listeners might be transformed.

Looking at the writings of Willard, Foster, and Ortberg the case will then be made that the invitation to follow Jesus is actually an invitation to practice the spiritual disciplines. It will be pointed out that when Jesus invited his disciples to come and follow him they spent three years watching Jesus practice various spiritual disciplines like solitude, prayer, and service. Jesus then taught them to do the same so that the disciples might sow to the Spirit and be forever changed.

An overview of the most practiced spiritual disciplines will then be provided. Using the writings of Willard and Ortberg the case will be made that certain spiritual

disciplines help combat certain habitual sins. Then specific disciplines will be recommended to combat each of the seven deadly sins that most often tempt humanity.

Willow Creek: Results of *Reveal* Study and its Implications for Preaching

Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, led by Bill Hybels is the third-largest church in the US.¹ With its five campuses, Willow Creek reportedly has an average weekly worship attendance of over 23,000 with an operating budget of over \$54-million and over 500 paid staff.² From a numeric perspective Willow Creek has been a model church for growth as it has spent the last thirty-nine years growing in almost every measurable category: worship attendance, membership, conversion, and giving.

In the fall of 2003 Willow Creek was about to open their new 7,200-seat auditorium. As they looked ahead to the future, they knew they would need to do some strategic planning. To plan for the future they felt that they should have an accurate assessment of where they were spiritually. Using the research expertise of Eric Arnson, the executive team of Willow Creek surveyed 6,000 of their members, as well as 300 members who had recently left.³ These initial surveys were very revealing. Eventually through the Willow Creek Association, they were able to get 1,007 churches representing

¹ “2013 Outreach 100 Largest Churches in America,” *Outreach Magazine*, <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/2013-outreach-100-largest-churches-america.html> (accessed October 10, 2014).

² William C. Symonds, “Marketing God’s Word,” *Stanford Graduate School of Business* (February 15, 2009), <http://web.stanford.edu/group/knowledgebase/cgi-bin/page/66/> (accessed October 10, 2014).

³ Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Association, 2007), 23.

approximately 250,000 congregants from numerous denominations around the country to participate in their detailed spiritual life survey.⁴

Based on the two most important commandments according to Jesus in Matthew 22, Willow Creek determined that, “an increasing love for God and for other people” would be their “working definition of spiritual growth.”⁵ As they analyzed the results of their survey they were disheartened to learn that, “One out of every four people at Willow Creek were stalled in their spiritual growth or dissatisfied with the church – and many of them were considering leaving.”⁶ Despite their growing worship attendance and small group participation, it was clear that participation in church activities did not necessarily mean that one was growing spiritually.

However, the survey did reveal that, “Personal spiritual practices are building blocks for a Christ-centered life.”⁷ This discovery was confirmed even further in their survey of over 1,000 churches. They explain that, “As our data and analysis has become more comprehensive and enriched through the participation of additional churches, we continue to see this pattern emerge: personal spiritual practices are the secret to a fully engaged Christ-Centered identity. If we could recommend only one spiritual growth pathway for people to follow, personal spiritual practices would be it.”⁸ They found that across the country people who shared that they were growing more in love with God and

⁴ Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 259-265.

⁵ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Reveal*, 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 117.

their neighbor consistently practiced certain spiritual disciplines. Specifically, they discovered that reflection on Scripture is the most impactful spiritual discipline a church can encourage its congregants to do. They write that,

Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture. If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives. The numbers say most churches are missing that mark—because only one out of five congregants reflects on the Scripture every day.⁹

The results of the *Reveal* study make it clear that the more the sermon can encourage further personal exploration of a biblical text, the more spiritual transformation can take place in the lives of the listener. They specifically argue that, “Challenging people to engage with Scripture more intentionally and more frequently would advance the spiritual growth of most, if not all, people attending church today.”¹⁰

The Reformed practice of *Lectio Continua*, where the preacher preaches through an entire book of the Bible, can be used to help encourage a congregation to read and reflect on every verse of Scripture for themselves. By preaching through an entire book of the Bible, the preacher models what it means to read through the Bible book-by-book. Furthermore, Randy Frazee points out that preachers who only give topical sermons to speak to the felt needs of their congregants ultimately develop disciples who are biblically illiterate. He writes, “Topically based, felt-need sermons have left Christians unable to access the Bible. Instead of digging deeper for themselves, they rely on the

⁹ Ibid.,19.

¹⁰ Ibid., 223.

sound bites they get from their pastors and teachers each week.”¹¹ In contrast *Lectio Continua*, models for the congregation how they can read through a book of the Bible and gain wisdom from God. At the end of the twentieth century George Gallup wrote that,

The churches of America face no greater challenge as we approach the next century than overcoming biblical illiteracy, and the prospects for doing so are formidable because the stark fact is, many Christians don't know what they believe or why. Our faith is not rooted in Scripture. We revere the Bible, but we don't read it. Some observers maintain that the Bible has not in any profound way penetrated our culture.¹²

Utilizing the regular rhythm of preaching through a book of the Bible will help train listeners to see how they can read the Bible for themselves book by book.

As previously stated, in a postmodern, sound-byte, dialogical culture, a sermon should ideally serve as a conversation starter where the listener wants to read more and explore more of what the Bible has to say. Shorter sermons help capture the listener's attention and encourage further exploration by not exhausting a particular idea or concept. One helpful way for the preacher to encourage further biblical exploration by the listener is to cross reference passages of Scripture when preaching on a particular text.

For instance, when preaching on Psalm 103:13, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him,” a preacher can cross reference the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to show how Jesus illustrated the love of the Heavenly Father. Regularly using the Scriptures to illustrate and interpret other passages of Scripture encourages a congregation over time to read the Scriptures for themselves and see how it all comes together. Weekly demonstrating how Scripture helps

¹¹ Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community 2.0* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 77-78.

interpret Scripture also helps the preacher demonstrate the truth of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

It is important to note that when the preacher preaches, she is not just speaking to the mind. The word of God when faithfully preached speaks to the heart, as the writer of Hebrews points out in Hebrews 4:12, “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” As James K.A. Smith points out, “The primary aim of discipleship is to create a certain kind of person who acts in a certain way, not someone who simply thinks in a certain way.”¹³ Life change occurs not simply at the intellectual level, but through a change of heart as well.

In his analysis of postmodern culture, Smith goes on to argue that, “We would do well to recover the tradition of spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting, meditation, simplicity, and so on as a means of shaping our souls through the rituals of the body.”¹⁴ If the spiritual disciplines help shape the heart and soul so that a person acts more like Jesus, then as a part of its application the sermon should offer an invitation to participate in some type of spiritual discipline. The results of the *Reveal* study by the Willow Creek Association make it clear that to transform the heart of the listener, a preacher’s sermon needs to invite them to explore spiritual disciplines on their own during the week. As the

¹³ Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

Willow Creek Association discovered, “The more time people spend engaged with God outside the church, the more likely they are to grow as disciples of Christ.”¹⁵

Becoming Like Jesus by Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines

Willard argues that, “We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.”¹⁶ As one reads the Gospels closely one can see that Jesus did “such things as solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God’s Word and God’s ways, and service to others.”¹⁷ Willard argues that when Jesus invited his disciples to follow him, he was inviting them to do the kinds of things that he did, which is practice spiritual disciplines. As the disciples follow Jesus, he teaches them how to pray, and then he invites them to join him in prayer. Jesus shows the disciples how to serve, and then invites the disciples to join him in serving others. When one makes the commitment to follow Jesus, one is making the commitment to do the kinds of things that Jesus did like the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, solitude, service, and meditation.

Willard makes the claim that, “Full participation in the life of God’s Kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit.”¹⁸ According to Willard, if a person wants to be all that

¹⁵ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 225.

¹⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding how God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper One, 1991), ix.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

God designed her to be in His Kingdom on this earth, then one needs to practice the spiritual disciplines because God uses the spiritual disciplines to help transform hearts and minds. As Foster explains, “God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”¹⁹ Foster goes on to explain that, “By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done.”²⁰ Foster uses the example of a farmer to explain the role of spiritual disciplines in the life of a disciple of Jesus. He writes that, “A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines—they are a way of sowing to the Spirit.”²¹ Spiritual growth and renewal is ultimately a work of the Holy Spirit, but God has chosen to use the spiritual disciplines to help prepare hearts and minds for the work of the Spirit.

Ortberg explains, “Practices such as reading Scripture and praying are important—not because they prove how spiritual we are—but because God can use them to lead us into life.”²² He continues, “Spiritual disciplines are to life what calisthenics are to a game. Once the game starts, basketball players get no bonus points based on how

¹⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper One, 1998), 7.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) 39.

many free throws they shot in practice. The only reason to practice them is to be able to make them in a game.”²³ As one regularly reads and meditates on Scripture God moves in one’s heart and mind, and one begins to see the world through the lens of Scripture. This new perspective prepares one to act according to the word of God when trials come. As Willard explains, “When through spiritual disciplines I become able heartily to bless those who curse me, pray without ceasing, to be at peace when not given credit for good deeds I’ve done, or to master the evil that comes my way, it is because my disciplinary activities have inwardly poised me for more and more interaction with the powers of the living God and his Kingdom.”²⁴

Foster makes the point that when Jesus was out in the wilderness for forty days fasting, praying, and meditating in solitude and silence, these spiritual disciplines were preparing Jesus for the temptations that Satan was going to bring. When Satan tries to tempt Jesus to turn stone into bread after days of fasting, Jesus is prepared and resists the temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). God uses the faithful practice of the spiritual disciplines to prepare people to resist temptation when it comes, and God uses the spiritual disciplines to help prepare people to do the work of God’s Kingdom. Before Jesus was betrayed and crucified he spent an evening serving his disciples by washing their feet and praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. If a preacher wants to help train her congregation on how to become like Jesus and so be prepared for the work of God’s

²³ Ibid., 45.

²⁴ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 157.

Kingdom, her sermons should regularly point her congregation to practice the various spiritual disciplines that Jesus practiced.

Overview of the Spiritual Disciplines

Willard divides the traditional spiritual disciplines into two primary categories: disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement. He explains, that “in the disciplines of abstinence, we abstain to some degree and for some time from the satisfaction of what we generally regard as normal and legitimate desires.”²⁵ Under the disciplines of abstinence he lists: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice.²⁶ He argues that, “The disciplines of abstinence must be counterbalanced and supplemented by disciplines of engagement. Abstinence and engagement are the outbreathing and inbreathing of our spiritual lives.”²⁷ Willard goes on to explain that, “the disciplines of abstinence counteract tendencies to sins of commission, and the disciplines of engagement counteract tendencies to sins of omission.”²⁸ Under the disciplines of engagement he lists: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission.²⁹

Foster divides the spiritual disciplines into three different categories: inward disciplines, outward disciplines, and corporate disciplines. Under inward disciplines he lists: meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. Under outward disciplines he lists: simplicity,

²⁵ Ibid., 159.

²⁶ Ibid., 158.

²⁷ Ibid., 175.

²⁸ Ibid., 176.

²⁹ Ibid., 158.

solitude, submission, and service. Under corporate disciplines he lists: confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.³⁰ There is some clear overlap in these lists of the spiritual disciplines, and Foster credits Willard in his introduction of *Celebration of Discipline* for helping form his understanding of the spiritual disciplines. Willard personally taught him how to practice many of the spiritual disciplines, and Ortberg credits much of his knowledge and experience of the spiritual disciplines to Willard as well. All three agree that God uses spiritual disciplines to help transform the hearts and minds of those who practice them faithfully. They also agree that, “The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits.”³¹ What follows is a brief description of each spiritual discipline as listed by Willard, Foster, or Ortberg. The list is in alphabetical order.

Celebration

Willard explains that, “We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God’s greatness, beauty, and goodness. We concentrate on our life and world as God’s work and as God’s gift to us.”³² Paul encourages the church in Philippi to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (Phil 4:4). Celebration helps one fulfill the command of Paul, by setting one’s mind on the things of God and casting one’s cares upon Him. Foster explains that, “The spirit of celebration will not be in us until we have learned to be ‘careful for

³⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, v.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

³² Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 179.

nothing.’ And we will never have a carefree indifference to things until we trust God.”³³

As one puts his faith in God and sets his mind on the goodness of God and God’s great love, he is moved to celebrate. Foster continues, “Celebration helps us relax and enjoy the good things of the earth.”³⁴

Chastity

According to Willard, “In exercising the spiritual discipline of chastity, we purposefully turn away from dwelling upon or engaging in the sexual dimension of our relationships to others—even our husbands or wives.”³⁵ The purpose of chastity is to help one treat the opposite sex in a loving non-sexual way. In fact Willard argues, “Healthy abstention in chastity can only be supported by loving, positive involvement with members of the opposite sex. Alienation from them makes room for harmful lusts, and so this discipline must be underscored with compassion, association, and helpfulness.”³⁶

One practices chastity by first practicing altruistic love, seeking the good of those of the opposite sex so that one can see them as a fellow sojourners created in the image of God. The opposite of lust is love, and chastity helps one love people of the opposite sex in an appropriate non-sexual way. Bonhoeffer argues that chastity is absolutely necessary

³³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 195.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁵ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 170.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

for lucidity and concentration.³⁷ The discipline of chastity allows one to concentrate on loving others with a selfless *agape* love, not a self-satisfying *eros* love.

Confession

In 1 John 1:8-9 it says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Confessing one’s sins to God directly allows one to experience God’s grace and forgiveness first hand. As Foster explains, “Without the cross the Discipline of confession would be only psychologically therapeutic. But it is so much more. It involves an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change in us. It is a means of healing and transforming the inner spirit.”³⁸

In James 5:16, the people of God are exhorted to “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” Confessing one’s sins to a trusted brother or sister in Christ allows one to experience grace and forgiveness firsthand through a fellow follower of Christ as one’s confession is heard and prayers are prayed on one’s behalf. As Willard explains, “In it [confession] we let trusted others know our deepest weaknesses and failures. This will nourish our faith in God’s provision for our needs through his people, our sense of being loved, and our humility before our brothers and sisters.”³⁹ Bonhoeffer adds to this that, “He who is alone with his sin is utterly

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 376.

³⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 144.

³⁹ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187.

alone.”⁴⁰ Confessing one’s sins to a fellow believer helps one know that he or she is not alone as one experiences grace, love, and forgiveness through the prayers of another.

Fasting

According to Foster, fasting is more than simply abstaining from food or drink for spiritual purposes; “Fasting reminds us that we are sustained ‘by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Mt 4:4) . . . in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting!”⁴¹ Willard points out that, “Fasting teaches temperance or self-control and therefore teaches moderation and restraint with regard to all our fundamental drives.”⁴² In the Scriptures one finds that just as solitude and silence are often linked together so are fasting and prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about fasting right after he has taught his disciples how to pray the Lord’s Prayer. When one fasts, one’s metabolism naturally slows down. As one’s metabolism slows down, one’s thoughts slow down, and one’s prayer life is enhanced as one becomes less distracted.

Fellowship

People were created for fellowship. In Genesis 1:26-27, one reads that humanity was created in the very image of God, and God in his essence is a divine community of

⁴⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christians Fellowship* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1954), 110.

⁴¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 55.

⁴² Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 167.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As Frazee states, “God is a social God, a relational self.”⁴³ The community of the Trinity is so intimate that the three persons of the Trinity are one.

Willard explains that, “In fellowship we engage in common activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, and service with other disciples.”⁴⁴ As Paul explains to the church in Corinth, the followers of Jesus are the Body of Christ: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Cor 12:21 ESV). Every follower of Jesus needs one another, and the discipline of fellowship helps one experience Christ’s presence through community. As Bonhoeffer explains, “God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s word to him.”⁴⁵ As Jesus explains to his disciples, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them” (Mt 18:20). Christ’s presence is made known in Christ centered fellowship, and Willard argues that, “Fellowship is required to allow realization of a joyous and sustained level of life in Christ that is normally impossible to attain by all our individual effort, no matter how vigorous and sustained.”⁴⁶

Giving/Tithing

In the Old Testament, the people of God are instructed to give 10 percent of their first fruits back to God (Lv 27:30-32; Dt 14:22-29; Prv 3:9, Mal 3:6-12). While tithing is not a command in the New Testament, Jesus honors the widow who gives well above a

⁴³ Frazee, *Connecting Church*, 62.

⁴⁴ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 186.

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 23.

⁴⁶ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187.

tithe when she gives all that she has to the temple (Lk 21:1-4). As one looks at the earliest church one can see that members of the earliest church like Barnabas gave well above the 10-percent tithe as required by the Old Testament (Acts 4:32-37). This generous giving of the earliest church was certainly in response to the generosity of Jesus, who gave his life to save the world.

The commitment to giving to the Kingdom of God can also be found in the words of Jesus when he instructs those listening to the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt 6:19-21). As someone invests financially in the Kingdom by giving to ministries that help grow the Kingdom, her heart follows. As people trust God with the resources that God has given to them, by investing in different Christ-centered ministries, people are able to see how God is able to take what they give and use it to minister to so many more. Giving money back to God helps one grow in her relationship with God as one sees the Lord bless her giving to help others, and one sees how the Lord continues to provide for her own needs as well.

Guidance

The spiritual discipline of guidance is driven by a desire to discern the Lord’s will and follow it. Individually people discern God’s will through meditation on Scripture, circumstances, and the Spirit’s promptings of the heart. Corporate guidance happens when the Body of Christ comes together and there is a clear consensus among the people

where the Spirit has moved uniformly in the hearts of many to move in a particular direction. Foster explains that, “Unity rather than majority rule is the principle of corporate guidance. Spirit-given unity goes beyond mere agreement. It is the perception that we have heard the *Kol Yahweh*, the voice of God.”⁴⁷ When clear consensus does not occur he argues that, “We would be well advised to encourage groups of people to fast, pray, and worship together until they have discerned the mind of the Lord.”⁴⁸ In corporate guidance God given consensus is pursued not just compromise.

Meditation

Foster explains that, “Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word.”⁴⁹ He writes that the primary difference between meditation and study is that “meditation is devotional; study is analytical. Meditation will relish a word; study will explicate it.”⁵⁰ Christian meditation is different than Eastern mediation, because in Eastern meditation one is focused on emptying his mind, while Christian meditation focuses on filling one’s mind with the things of God. As Paul writes in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” In Christian meditation one empties one’s mind of worldly distractions so that one might fill her mind with the things of God. One of the primary ways that one can focus his heart and mind on

⁴⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 182.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

God is by meditating on Scripture. As Foster explains, “The meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage.”⁵¹

As a part of meditation one can participate in the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*, or holy reading. Peterson points out that there are four basic elements to *Lectio Divina: Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, and Contemplatio*.⁵² In *Lectio* one does not simply read the text for understanding. One reads the text so that one might hear God speaking. In *Lectio*, Scripture is read to hear God speaking, telling one what to do, or how to live. In *Meditatio*, one meditates on a particular word or phrase. As Peterson explains, “Meditation moves from looking at the words of the text to entering the world of the text.”⁵³ As he goes on to explain, “Meditation is the prayerful employ of imagination in order to become friends with the text.”⁵⁴ As one enters the world of the text through quiet thoughtful meditation one realizes that, “This text is God-revealing: God creating, God saving, God blessing.”⁵⁵

As one reads a text, and meditates on that text one is moved to *Oratio*, praying the text. Peterson continues, “We pray what we read, working our lives into active participation in what God reveals in the word.”⁵⁶ After reading, meditating, and praying the text one moves into *Contemplatio*, living the text. Peterson explains that,

⁵¹ Ibid., 29.

⁵² Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 91.

⁵³ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 109.

“Contemplation in the schema of *lectio divina* means living the read/meditated/prayed text in the everyday, ordinary world.”⁵⁷ Whenever one reads, meditates, and prays a Scripture text, God speaks through the Scripture and calls one to be transformed, to live according to God’s word. Meditation helps one hear what God is calling her to do.

Prayer

Prayer is conversing with God. Prayer often involves other disciplines like solitude, worship, meditation, and fasting. Willard argues that, “Prayer as a discipline has its greatest force in strengthening the spiritual life only as we learn to pray without ceasing (1 Thes 5:17; Phil 4:6).”⁵⁸ As one practices the spiritual discipline of prayer he begins to develop a running conversation with God throughout the day, and according to Foster, this conversation with God creates change. He explains that, “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us . . . in prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things that he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.”⁵⁹

As Peterson points out, “Prayers are tools that God uses to work his will in our bodies and souls. Prayers are tools that we use to collaborate in his work with us.”⁶⁰ As one looks at the Lord’s Prayer, the model prayer for Christians today, one can see that

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 164.

⁵⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33-34.

⁶⁰ Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 2.

prayer should begin by focusing on God. As one prays and seeks to honor God, then after adoring God and thanking God one can move to supplication.

Sacrifice

According to Willard, “The discipline of sacrifice is one in which we forsake the security of meeting our needs with what is in our hands. It is total abandonment to God, a stepping into the darkened abyss in the faith and hope that God will bear us up.”⁶¹ In sacrifice one intentionally holds loosely to the things of this world and give things up in honor of God’s great sacrifice for her, trusting that the Lord will meet her future needs. The widow who gave two copper coins, representing all that she had in Luke 21:1-4 is an example of sacrifice. She gave to God trusting that the Lord would provide in the future.

Secrecy

Willard explains that, “In the discipline of secrecy . . . we abstain from causing our good deeds and qualities to be known.”⁶² In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells his listeners, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 6:1). In the spiritual discipline of secrecy one takes steps to make sure that his good deeds are not known. For instance, one gives anonymously to a particular need. As Willard explains, “Secrecy rightly practiced enables us to place our public relations department entirely in the hands of God. . . . We allow him to decide when our deeds will be known

⁶¹ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 175.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 172.

and when our light will be noticed.”⁶³ Practicing the discipline of secrecy teaches humility before God and others, so that one cheers the success of others rather than seeking accolades for oneself.

Service

Willard defines the spiritual discipline of service as the act of engaging “our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world.”⁶⁴ He writes that one can do acts of service that are good, but practicing the spiritual discipline of service is a little more intentional than a random act of service. He explains that there are many ways to serve others. Sometimes one’s service to others is not readily noticeable by the one receiving the service. Willard explains that, “I will often be able to serve another simply as an act of love and righteousness, without regard to how it may enhance my abilities to follow Christ. . . . But I may also serve another to train myself away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or covetousness. In that case, my service is undertaken as a discipline for the spiritual life.”⁶⁵

Foster explains, “We serve out of whispered promptings, driving urgings.”⁶⁶ He elaborates that, “True service is a lifestyle. It acts from ingrained patterns of living. It springs spontaneously to meet human need.”⁶⁷ Service is the great antidote to pride. As one humbly serves others and gets into the practice of serving, one is humbled and one’s

⁶³ Ibid., 173.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 182.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 128.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 129.

heart is filled with joy, particularly if one does acts of service in hiddenness. He offers some helpful ways to serve others like allowing oneself to be served. For example Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet. One's pride can often prevent one from receiving the gracious service of others. There is the service of small things, common courtesy, hospitality, listening, and sharing the word of life with one another.⁶⁸ There are numerous ways to serve others, but the key for service as a spiritual discipline is that it is done for God in gratitude for what God has done. One simply serves so that God might be glorified, and so one might become more like Jesus.

Silence

According to Foster, "Without silence there is no solitude. Though silence sometimes involves the absence of speech, it always involves the act of listening."⁶⁹ He continues, "The purpose of silence and solitude is to be able to see and hear."⁷⁰ Willard explains that, "In silence we close off our souls from 'sounds', whether those sounds be noise, music, or words."⁷¹ He argues, "Only silence will allow us life-transforming concentration upon God."⁷² During extended periods of silence one's heart and mind is quieted, and one can hear the gentle whisper of God. On Mt. Horeb God revealed himself to Elijah, "And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 135-139.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 163.

⁷² Ibid., 164.

wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper” (1 Kgs 19:11-12). The Lord was in the whisper. Silence and solitude help one hear the gentle whisper of God.

Simplicity/Frugality

According to Foster, “The Christian Discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward life-style.”⁷³ He continues, “The inward reality of simplicity involves a life of joyful unconcern for possessions.”⁷⁴ Simplicity is found in recognizing that all one has is a gift from God and so it is available to others. Simplicity is discovered as one pursues the command to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Mt 6:33). Willard explains the spiritual discipline of simplicity through an explanation of frugality: “Practicing frugality means we stay within the bounds of what general good judgment would designate as necessary for the kind of life to which God has led us.”⁷⁵

Solitude

According to Willard, “Solitude is choosing to be alone and to dwell on our experience of isolation from other human beings.”⁷⁶ Foster writes, “Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place.”⁷⁷ He elaborates, “Inward solitude has outward

⁷³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 79.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁵ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 168.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁷⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 96.

manifestations. There is the freedom to be alone, not in order to be away from people but in order to hear the divine whisper better. Jesus lived in inward ‘heart solitude.’ He also frequently experienced outward solitude.”⁷⁸ Willard argues that, “Of all the disciplines of abstinence, solitude is generally the most fundamental in the beginning of the spiritual life, and it must be returned again and again as that life develops.”⁷⁹ In solitude one seeks to be alone with the Lord so that one might hear the Lord. In communion alone with God one finds contentment, fulfillment, and direction as she seeks to listen to the quiet promptings of the Lord. In times of solitude one should remain flexible to respond to the quiet promptings of God as he seeks to experience God’s presence alone.

Study

According to Willard, “In the spiritual discipline of study we engage ourselves, above all, with the written and spoken Word of God.”⁸⁰ He argues, “Study is the primary discipline of engagement.”⁸¹ Foster explains that there are four steps to study: repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection.⁸² As one reads and studies God’s word, simple repetition of Scripture helps shape one’s mind. After being repeatedly brought to the Scriptures one must concentrate and focus on what is studied. As one repeatedly reads and concentrates on the Scriptures she gains comprehension or understanding. Finally, reflection allows one to understand the significance of what one is studying. The key to

⁷⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁷⁹ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 161.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 176.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 64-66.

transformative study is not simply reading a lot but reading carefully and reflectively. In study it is helpful to utilize some of the best biblical scholarship available to understand the historical background of a particular Scripture so that one might hear and understand the text as the first readers may have heard and understood it.

Submission

Foster describes submission as “the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way.”⁸³ He continues that in submission “we discover that it is far better to serve our neighbor than to have our own way.”⁸⁴ In the discipline of submission one practices self-denial by putting the wants and needs of others before her own. The discipline of submission seeks to honor Christ by recognizing that Jesus submitted himself to death on a cross on behalf of humanity. As Paul exhorts the church in Ephesus, members of the Body of Christ should submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21). Foster points out that the disciplines of submission and service often work together. In practicing submission and putting the needs of others before one’s own, one will naturally serve others.

According to Foster there are seven acts of submission, or seven groups that one should seek to submit to as one practices the discipline of submission. The first act of submission is to the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The next act of submission is to the Scriptures. The third act of submission is to one’s family. The fourth act of submission is to one’s neighbor. The fifth act of submission is to the believing

⁸³ Ibid., 111.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 112.

community, the Church. The sixth act of submission is to the broken and despised, the widows and orphans of the day. The seventh act of submission is to the world, knowing that Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations.⁸⁵ Willard argues that, “The highest level of fellowship—involving humility, complete honesty, transparency, and at times confession and restitution—is sustained by the discipline of submission.”⁸⁶ Submission is the way of the cross as one dies to oneself and seeks to serve others in reverence for what Christ has done for the world.

Worship

Foster explains that, “Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father.”⁸⁷ Willard writes that, “In worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols. We do this alone as well as in union with God’s people.”⁸⁸ God is the focus of one’s worship. In worship one focuses his heart and mind on God whether individually or corporately, and seeks to bring all glory and honor to God. In worship one focuses on adoring, praising, and thanking God for all that God has done. In the Ten Commandments the people of God are commanded to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex 20:8). Originally, the people of God set apart Saturday, the seventh day in the Jewish calendar as a day for holy rest and worship. However, beginning with the first Easter Sunday followers of Jesus have gathered for corporate

⁸⁵ Ibid., 122-123.

⁸⁶ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 189.

⁸⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 158.

⁸⁸ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 177.

worship of Jesus on Sunday, to remember the day that Jesus rose again. Through a careful reading of Acts one can also see that worship was not confined to just one day of the week. The earliest church gathered regularly in the temple courts, and within one another's homes for worship, as they gathered together around the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, for fellowship, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

Foster, Willard, and Ortberg agree that the spiritual disciplines help people train against particular sins of humanity. Willard argues that, "Which disciplines must be central to our lives will be determined by the chief sins of commission and omission that entice or threaten us from day to day."⁸⁹ If one struggles with the deadly sin of pride, then service, submission, sacrifice, secrecy, guidance, and confession would be good disciplines to practice. If one struggles with the sin of lust, then chastity, prayer, meditation, confession, and worship would be good disciplines to practice. If one struggles with the sin of wrath, then solitude, silence, prayer, and celebration would be good disciplines to practice. If one struggles with the sin of envy, then frugality, simplicity, service, and sacrifice would be good disciplines to practice.

If one struggles with the sin of gluttony, then fasting, prayer, simplicity, frugality, and worship would be good disciplines to practice. If one struggles with the sin of sloth, then study, worship, service, celebration, and fellowship would be good disciplines to practice. If one struggles with the sin of greed, then frugality, simplicity, sacrifice, service, and worship would be good disciplines to practice.

⁸⁹ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 191.

Ortberg astutely points out that, “Whatever our season of life, it offers its own opportunities and challenges for spiritual growth.”⁹⁰ Certain disciplines will be easier to practice based on the season of life one is in. A mother of infants may find it hard to practice the discipline of solitude, but she can certainly practice the discipline of service. The key is to try to order one’s life in such a way that one is practicing the spiritual disciplines that God might use to transform oneself based on the season of life that one is in and based on the sins or temptations that one faces. As Jesus explains to Nicodemus in John 3:8, the Spirit is like the wind. One cannot see the wind or the Spirit, one can only see where it has been. However, the spiritual disciplines faithfully help one catch the wind of the Spirit so that one might be transformed according to God’s design and plan. As Ortberg explains, “We can open ourselves to transformation through certain practices, but we cannot engineer it. We can take no credit for it.”⁹¹ Ultimately spiritual transformation is the work of God, but as the recent survey from Willow Creek discovered those who experience spiritual transformation the most often are committed to practicing certain spiritual disciplines in their daily lives. If a postmodern preacher wants to see spiritual transformation take place in the lives of her listeners she would be wise to invite her listeners to practice some type of spiritual discipline as a part of her sermon’s application, so that they might sow to the Spirit and experience the movement of the Spirit in their lives.

⁹⁰ Ortberg, *Life You’ve Always Wanted*, 54.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

CHAPTER 3

PREACHING AS AN INVITATION TO THE DISCIPLINES

Because spiritual disciplines help sow to the Spirit for spiritual transformation, the preacher would be wise to exhort her listeners to practice some type of spiritual discipline as a part of her sermon's application. In this chapter an analysis of the Sermon on the Mount will be done to help highlight the fact that throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus exhorts his listeners to practice different spiritual disciplines. While Jesus said many things throughout the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount is the longest sermon recorded, and serves as an excellent example of what kind of application Jesus offered to his first-century audience in his sermons. As one looks closely at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus invites his listeners to practice different spiritual disciplines like service, secrecy, submission, sacrifice, prayer, solitude, giving, fasting, and simplicity. In the first section of this chapter an analysis of the Sermon on the Mount will be done to help highlight the spiritual disciplines that Jesus invited his listeners to practice.

After recognizing the emphasis that Jesus placed on practicing different spiritual disciplines in the Sermon on the Mount, it will then be argued that the pluralistic world that Jesus lived in is very similar to the pluralistic postmodern world of today. Jesus

preached primarily to a Jewish audience living in Galilee; as a conquered people, the Jews in Galilee were familiar with the fact that there were many different belief systems in the first-century Roman Empire. It will be argued that just as personal experience is an important determiner of truth in the pluralistic twenty-first century, so it was an important determiner of truth in the pluralistic first century when Jesus preached. In light of these similarities, it will be argued that Jesus's method of inviting his listeners to practice different spiritual disciplines in his Sermon on the Mount should still be utilized today.

Following the Model of Jesus: Preaching as an Invitation to the Disciplines

Through a careful study of the Sermon on the Mount one can see that Jesus encourages his disciples and the crowd listening to him to participate in numerous spiritual disciplines. Specifically, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus encourages his listeners to practice the spiritual disciplines of service, submission, sacrifice, giving, prayer, solitude, secrecy, fasting, and simplicity. For example, in Matthew 5:16 Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

As one reads the Sermon on the Mount it becomes clear that these "good works" are acts of service. Jesus exhorts his listeners to practice good works again when he states in Matthew 7:12, "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." In the golden rule Jesus is telling people to work for the good of one's neighbor, to go the extra mile when possible. Trying to live out the golden rule and going the extra mile leads one to practice the spiritual disciplines of submission and service together as one makes the needs of others a priority and tries to

help others. As Foster explains, “In submission we are at last free to value other people. Their dreams and plans become important to us. . . . We discover that it is far better to serve our neighbor than to have our own way.”¹ In trying to treat someone else the way one wants to be treated, one will naturally serve the other person and submit to the needs of the person being served.

Jesus exhorts his listeners to practice the discipline of service and submission not only in Matthew 5:16 and Matthew 7:12, but he provides very specific examples of submission and service in Matthew 5:40-42 when he says, “And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.” This imperative command to go the extra mile, to give what another wants, encourages his listeners to practice the discipline of submission.

In submission one voluntarily puts the needs of others before one’s own desires. One is not simply a doormat in submission, but willfully decides to put the needs of others before her own. By willfully choosing to give one’s cloak, one is offering grace, unmerited favor, a gift, and so service and submission become a means of grace. If someone simply gives the tunic because he has to, that is not grace, that is payment; but to give one’s cloak voluntarily through the discipline of submission is an example of extending grace to one’s neighbor.

In Matthew 5:41, Jesus says that, “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” In Jesus’s time it was not uncommon that a Roman soldier might require a Jew living in ancient Palestine to serve as a guide or a scout and go with him a mile or

¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 112.

so.² The Roman soldier might grab a Jew and say, “take me to Bethlehem.” The helpless Jew would have to take the Roman soldier to Bethlehem or face certain punishment. Jesus is telling his mostly Jewish audience that the next time they are forced to go a mile offer to go two, thereby offering grace not simply compliance. The spiritual discipline of submission seeks to bless one’s neighbor by willfully submitting one’s own will to the needs of another. It appears that serving another person and treating this person the way one would want to be treated would be an example of letting one’s light shine before others so that God might be glorified in these acts of service and submission. As Foster explains, “More than any other single way, the grace of humility is worked into our lives through the Discipline of service.”³ Service in the name of Jesus as promoted in Matthew 5:16 humbly seeks to bring glory to God, not to oneself.

In Matthew 5:42, Jesus then promotes the spiritual disciplines of sacrifice and giving when he says, “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.” Giving without a concern for repayment is a form of sacrifice. Taking the command of Matthew 5:42 seriously could lead one to give sacrificially so that there is not enough left to meet one’s own needs. As Willard explains, the discipline of sacrifice asks Christians to give that which is necessary for their own living, trusting that God will provide for their needs.⁴ Jesus promotes the discipline of giving again in Matthew 6:2-3 when he states, “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be

² R.C. Sproul ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1369.

³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 130.

⁴ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 174-175.

praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” Giving and sacrifice are key spiritual disciplines that Jesus promotes in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew 5:44, Jesus promotes the spiritual discipline of prayer when he instructs his listeners to “pray for those who persecute you.” He gives further instructions on prayer in 6:5-13, when he states,

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Jesus makes it clear that prayer is spoken to God, not to be seen by man. As Willard explains, “Prayer is conversing, communicating with God.”⁵ By looking at the Lord’s Prayer one can see that prayer should have as its principal focus God, for the first three petitions are about God: hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come, your will be done. The last three petitions are about humanity’s needs: give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, lead us not into temptation. Jesus makes it clear that prayer should be toward God alone, seeking his help.

By encouraging his listeners to pray alone behind closed doors Jesus is also promoting the spiritual discipline of solitude in Matthew 6:5-7. In solitude one chooses to

⁵ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 184.

be alone with God in prayer so that she might hear God speaking through a quiet conversation. In this time alone with God one must seek to stay focused as he has a prayerful conversation with God alone. As Willard explains, “We can only survive solitude if we cling to Christ there. And yet what we find of him in that solitude enables us to return to society as free persons.”⁶

In Matthew 6:1, Jesus promotes the spiritual discipline of secrecy when he says, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.” Jesus then explains how giving, praying, and fasting should be done in secret thereby promoting the spiritual discipline of secrecy. Willard explains, “Secrecy at its best teaches love and humility before God and others.”⁷ Ortberg adds, “The practice of secrecy exists to liberate those who are trapped by the desire ‘to be seen,’ to impress others.”⁸ By promoting the spiritual discipline of secrecy Jesus helps ensure that God receives the glory.

In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus promotes the spiritual discipline of fasting when he says, “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” According to Jesus fasting is to be done in secrecy, and as

⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁸ Ortberg, *Life You've Always Wanted*, 168.

Willard explains, “Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food.”⁹

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also encourages his listeners to practice the discipline of simplicity when he states that they should not worry about what they should eat, drink, or wear, but they should “seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Mt 6:33). By focusing first on the Kingdom and avoiding the temptation to serve money, one is able to live more simply, not worrying about clothes, food, or other material things. As Foster explains, “Seeking first God’s kingdom and the righteousness, both personal and social, of that kingdom is the only thing that can be central in the Spiritual Discipline of simplicity.”¹⁰

As one looks closely at the Sermon on the Mount it becomes clear that Jesus promotes the practice of several spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines of service, submission, sacrifice, giving, prayer, solitude, secrecy, fasting, and simplicity are all encouraged. Jesus concludes his famous Sermon on the Mount by saying, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock” (Mt 7:24-25). Jesus knows that the greatest transformation takes place in a loving relationship with him where one seeks to practice various spiritual disciplines as a part of that relationship. These spiritual disciplines become a means of grace that prepare one for the storms that life will inevitably bring. According to Jesus one is wise if she practices the spiritual

⁹ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 166.

¹⁰ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 87.

disciplines of the faith, and it is a wise preacher who invites her listeners to join him in practicing the various spiritual disciplines of the faith as well.

Cultural Context of the First Century Similar to the Twenty-First Century

The simple fact that Jesus promotes various spiritual disciplines in the Sermon on the Mount does not necessarily mean that a preacher in the twenty-first century should do the same. Sermon applications from first century Palestine do not necessarily translate to the twenty-first century unless it can be shown that both contexts are similar. The technological advancements of the last two-thousand years could lead one to believe that the cultural context of twenty-first-century United States has very little in common with first-century Palestine. However, both cultures are characterized by religious pluralism.

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount he mostly spoke to Jews, but the fact is the Jews of the first century had been exposed to many different belief systems. Beginning in 605 B.C. the Jews of Judea were a conquered people. William Marty writes, “Under Nebuchadnezzar’s leadership, the Babylonians invaded Judah three times. First, in 605 BC, they took Daniel and other young men from the royal family as hostages to Babylon.”¹¹ While living in exile the Jews of Jerusalem were exposed to the religious beliefs of the Babylonians, then later the Persians when King Cyrus defeated the Babylonians. He continues, “The Babylonians and Persians spoke Aramaic, and out of necessity the Jews learned it.”¹² Eventually the Jews were able to return and rebuild the

¹¹ William H. Marty, *The World of Jesus* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2013), 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 28.

temple and the city walls, but they still lived under Persian rule until Alexander the Great conquered Persia. Jerusalem then came under Greek rule.

Eventually Greek became the language of trade and “many Jews at the time of Christ spoke three languages – Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic.”¹³ Alexander the Great’s military success helped open trade routes between East and West. As religion historian Calvin J. Roetzel points out, “Wittingly or not, he [Alexander the Great] cleared away barriers to a lively reciprocal exchange of culture, ideas, religion, social forms, and political institutions between Hellenism and the Eastern traditions.”¹⁴ Roetzel explains, “Its location on the vital corridor linking Egypt and Asia Minor made it impossible for Israel to insulate herself from the ‘modernizing’ tendencies represented by Hellenism.”¹⁵

While most of the people living in Galilee in first-century Palestine during Jesus’s ministry were Jewish, they were all familiar with the religious pluralism of the world they inhabited. Roetzel writes, “Even in Jerusalem, the symbolic center of Israel’s religion, the Jewish aristocracy embraced Hellenistic ways, founding a gymnasium, giving their children Greek names, following Greek fashions, and at least tolerating if not practicing the worship of Greek gods.”¹⁶ According to Roetzel, “No portion of the Mediterranean world, including Palestine, was devoid of Hellenistic influence.”¹⁷ In fact, Roetzel argues that, “The active interchange between cultures set in motion by Alexander’s conquest

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Calvin J. Roetzel, *The World that Shaped the New Testament* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

made religious tolerance a political necessity—especially in the Greek cities scattered across the Middle East. Exclusive views gave way to ecumenism, and confrontation, to compromise.”¹⁸

Greek religion was not exclusive. They believed there were many gods, and people were encouraged to worship as many gods as they wanted. As Moyer Hubbard writes, “In the ancient Greco-Roman world, gods were everywhere. There were gods for lovers, gods for poets, gods for bakers, gods for farmers, gods for travelers, gods for protecting the hinges on one’s door, and many others.”¹⁹ In such a pluralistic context, any exclusive claim to truth could seem narrow minded and uninformed even in Palestine where the majority of people were Jewish.

In fact, under Roman rule ancient Palestine was now being exposed to emperor worship. Joel Green and Lee McDonald offer, “Statues of the emperor were omnipresent throughout the empire.”²⁰ People were expected to offer reverence if not worship to the emperor of Rome. They continue, “Any challenges to the religious supremacy of the emperor could be perceived as an act of political subversion—a dynamic that would prove challenging for the early church.”²¹ Nicholas Perrin explains that, “When the NT writings were produced, the imperial cult had already infiltrated every aspect of Roman life. Even if the very first generation of Christian believers were not necessarily forced to participate in the imperial cult, the cult as a religious expression of Romanocentric

¹⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁹ Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald eds., *The World of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 107.

²⁰ Ibid., 131.

²¹ Ibid., 127.

ideology remained a force with which to reckon.”²² It is in the midst of a context with many faith systems with very different understandings of God that Jesus invites his listeners at the Sermon on the Mount to try various spiritual disciplines. Jesus knew that faithful practice of the spiritual disciplines would help followers experience the one true God—Yahweh. Judaism had always declared that there is only one true God.

In first-century Palestine every Jewish boy could recite the *Shema*, the principle declaration of the Jewish faith that is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Faithful Jews wrote the Shema on the doorposts of their home. They recited it together every time they gathered for worship. They would say it daily in their homes, but the Greco-Roman world they lived in told them that there were many gods. The Greco-Roman world that they lived in told them they should treat the emperor of Rome like a god and revere him. Preaching in first-century Palestine Jesus knew there were many things competing for the hearts and minds of his listeners. To combat the pluralistic culture, Jesus invited his listeners to experience the truth, power, and presence of Yahweh through spiritual disciplines like service, submission, sacrifice, giving, prayer, solitude, secrecy, fasting, and simplicity.

As one gains a better picture of the pluralistic culture that Jesus preached in, it is clear that the twenty-first century United States shares many similarities. Palestine’s geographic connection between Egypt and Asia Minor made it a region of cross-cultural exposure and experience. The US has often been described as a cultural melting pot where people from all over the world migrate to live and practice their faith.

²² Ibid., 132.

The Jews were a conquered, subjugated people who had been exposed to the various gods of their conquerors. The *Pax Romana* allowed for free trade and free exchange of ideas. Roman roads allowed for the quick exchange of goods, services, and ideas. Today, the internet provides a quick exchange of goods, services, and ideas.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus, first-century Jews in Palestine were exposed to many different faith systems and were still free to practice their religion, and people were encouraged to discover what was true for them. The same can be said of the US, where numerous faith systems abound. Under the freedom of religious liberty, Americans are encouraged to discover for themselves what is true for them when it comes to God.

It was in the midst of the pluralistic religious backdrop of the Greco-Roman world that Jesus invited his listeners to experience the presence of God through a faithful practice of various spiritual disciplines during the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus's invitation to practice different spiritual disciplines certainly had an impact on his hearers that day. Preachers around the world still talk about the Sermon on the Mount and the spiritual transformation that it helps bring when people seek to put it into practice. In light of the similarities between the religious pluralism of first-century Palestine and the twenty-first century United States, the contemporary American preacher would be wise to follow the example of Jesus who in his application of the Sermon on the Mount exhorted his listeners to practice different spiritual disciplines. These spiritual disciplines help one experience the truth of Christ, and it is an individual's personal experience of Christ's grace that ultimately transforms a life forever.

PART THREE
CRAFTING THE SERMON

CHAPTER 4

EXEGESIS THROUGH CONVERSATIONS

In the postmodern information age of the US, many Americans believe they have already heard the Gospel and understand the message of Jesus. People believe that they only need to do a Google search on “Christianity” to learn what Christians believe. Many Americans believe that they already know the message of the Bible even though they do not read it for themselves. According to the George Barna Group, 88 percent of American homes own a Bible, but only 37 percent will read it in a given week.¹ To engage a postmodern mind in the midst of the current information age, a sermon will need to be viewed as faithful, insightful, and relevant. That is the focus of this chapter.

To ensure that a sermon is faithful, insightful, and relevant one must begin by having a series of conversations. The first conversation is with the Scripture text itself. Then, the preacher has a conversation with biblical scholars about the text through a careful study of different commentaries. After, the preacher has a conversation with the culture by searching the internet and other forms of mass media. Finally, the preacher

¹ George Barna, “The State of the Bible: 6 Trends for 2014,” Barna Group (April 8, 2014), <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/664-the-state-of-the-bible-6-trends-for-2014#.VOS3AUskhuY> (accessed February 18, 2015).

seeks to have a conversation with her congregants as she seeks to discern how a particular text relates to the people in her church. It will be argued that if one views the exegetical process as a series of conversations, then the sermon will have more of a conversational tone. The sermon will feel more relational for the hearer, and ideally the sermon will serve as a conversation starter for the listeners where the sermon is discussed and spiritual disciplines are explored after the sermon has been preached.

Conversation with the Text: Initial Impressions and Questions

William Willimon astutely writes, “We preach because God speaks, and a primary way for this God to speak is through preaching.”² A preacher’s primary goal is to determine what God wants to say to his people through God’s written word. When offering his final written instruction to Timothy, his son in the faith, Paul writes that, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tm 3:16-17). While the Scriptures have been written by men, they were inspired by God; if the preacher wants to know what God wants to say to his people today, the preacher should begin by looking at Scripture.

A preacher’s job is not to entertain or to make the listeners feel good; although a sermon may be entertaining, and it may make people feel good. The call of the preacher is to faithfully speak God’s word as revealed in Scripture, because it is the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit ultimately uses to teach, reproof, correct, and train the believer in righteousness. Paul exhorts Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5:

² William Willimon, *Proclamation and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 9.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The great temptation of the preacher is to say what people want to hear, but the call of the preacher is to say what God wants to say. In order to determine what God wants to say to his people, the preacher needs to turn to the Scripture and prayerfully consider what segment of Scripture he should preach on a particular Sunday.

Some preachers in mainline traditions use the common lectionary to determine the text they will preach. The common lectionary usually provides an Old Testament text, a Psalm, a Gospel, and an epistle from which to choose. Even using the common lectionary one is forced to make a choice and prayerfully consider which text among the four provided is most appropriate for the people that God has called the preacher to speak. When using the common lectionary the preacher should pray to see which of the texts God wants for her congregation on any particular Sunday.

While the common lectionary can be helpful when determining which text to preach during the high church seasons of Advent and Lent, over a three-year cycle even the common lectionary leaves out a lot of biblical texts. One way to ensure that the congregation gets to hear every verse of a particular book in the Bible is to practice the discipline of *Lectio Continua*. As previously mentioned, in *Lectio Continua* the preacher preaches through every verse of a particular book in the Bible. The practice of preaching through every verse of a book prevents the preacher from succumbing to the temptation

of trying to avoid the really controversial verses of Scripture. *Lectio Continua* also helps model for the congregation how they should read through the Bible for themselves verse-by-verse. However, even if one chooses to preach through a particular book of the Bible she must first determine where a particular section of Scripture begins and ends.

Thomas Long offers some helpful advice in determining where to begin and end a particular section of Scripture for preaching. He writes, “What we are looking for in a text is not a passage that can stand alone—all texts are linked to their surroundings—but rather a text that can stand as reasonably coherent unit of thought.”³ Good study Bibles often offer headings within chapters of books to provide some general guidelines in determining a pericope that stands as one coherent unit of thought. When preaching through a book of the Bible, one can also see how the common lectionary breaks down a particular chapter if the book being preached is a part of the common lectionary.

For example, if a preacher is preaching through the Gospel of John, and she is now in chapter fourteen, she must prayerfully consider how much of chapter fourteen can faithfully be preached in a twenty-two minute sermon. If she looks at the common lectionary she will find that chapter fourteen is broken up into two sections. The first section is John 14:1-14; the second section is verses 15-21. It is interesting to note that verses 22-31 of John 14 do not appear in the common lectionary. This is disappointing particularly since Paul writes that, “All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching” (2 Tm 3:16). This example highlights the need to do *Lectio Continua* if one wants his congregation to hear the full counsel of God as found in the Scriptures of the both the Old and New Testament.

³ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 64.

After looking at how the common lectionary divides John fourteen, one can see how specific study Bibles divide a particular chapter of Scripture. A quick glance at several study Bibles like *The Reformation Study Bible*, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, *NASB Study Bible*, and *The NIV Study Bible* reveals that all of these study Bibles do not agree on how to divide this chapter. For instance, *The Reformation Study Bible* divides John 14 into two headings: John 14:1-14 - “I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” and John 14:15-31 - “Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit.”⁴ However, *The NASB Study Bible* divides John 14 into three basic headings: John 14:1-6 - “Jesus Comforts His Disciples,” John 14:7-15 - “Oneness with the Father,” and John 14:16-31 - “Role of the Spirit.”⁵

As one looks at the different divisions of John 14, she must prayerfully consider what set of verses God wants one to preach on a particular Sunday. Recognizing the controversial nature of Jesus’s statement in John 14:6, one may choose to go with the division of John 14 that the *NASB Study Bible* suggests: John 14:1-6, 7-15, and 16-31. By only preaching on six verses for the first Sunday, he can be sure to spend the time needed to give a thorough historical background of John 14:6 and explain what this countercultural statement most likely meant to the original readers of John’s Gospel.

The goal of biblical exegesis is to determine what was the original meaning of a particular Scripture. It is very easy from a twenty-first-century perspective to read a text and assign it meaning based on this cultural background, but exegesis demands uncovering the original meaning of the text. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart offer this helpful definition of exegesis: “Exegesis is the careful, systematic study of the Scripture

⁴ Sproul, *Reformation Study Bible*, 1539-1541.

⁵ Kenneth Barker, ed., *NASB Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 1546-1548.

to discover the original, intended meaning. This is basically a historical task. It is the attempt to hear the Word as the original recipients were to have heard it, to find out what was the original intent of the words of the Bible.”⁶ To determine the original meaning of text, the preacher may be tempted to run to commentaries to consult with the experts before spending time alone with the text. However, reading through a text and praying through a text is an important step in making sure one hears what God wants to say to his people through a particular passage of Scripture.

As Long explains, “A preacher goes to a biblical text seeking to hear a word for the life of the church and, indeed, expecting to hear such a word. The preacher, then, views the text as a living resource for the community of faith and not merely as a historical object.”⁷ The preacher’s desire is to hear what God is saying through the text to her congregation today. Commentaries written by the best biblical scholars will not necessarily speak to the specific way a particular text applies to a particular congregation. To hear clearly what God is trying to say through a particular Scripture to a specific congregation, the preacher needs to spend time reading, meditating, and studying the Scripture passage that is going to be preached.

Furthermore, if the preacher wants to have listeners who will read the Bible for themselves it is imperative that the preacher spends some time reading and meditating on the text for herself. Preachers must model what they hope their congregants will do in their own time with God’s word. As Haddon Robinson says, “Ultimately God is more interested in developing messengers than messages, and because the Holy Spirit

⁶ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 23.

⁷ Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 84.

confronts us primarily through the Bible, we must learn to listen to God before speaking for God.”⁸ The best way to listen to God is by spending time alone reading and meditating on the Word. In this time of meditation the preacher wants to listen carefully to what he believes God wants to say through that particular text today.

After reading through the text several times it is helpful to write down initial impressions. God often speaks this way. Here are some helpful questions that one should ask oneself when trying to capture the initial impressions of a text: “What words or phrases stand out and why;” “Would these words or phrases have stood out to the original readers of this text and why;” “Why did the author of this Scripture write these verses;” “What did they probably mean to the original audience;” “What does this text say about God;” “How are people called to live today in light of this text?”

For example, looking again at John 14:1-6, when one asks, “What words or phrases stand out and why?” one may be drawn to verse six: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Living in a postmodern context where truth is relative and ultimately determined by one’s experience, it is hard for twenty-first-century ears to hear that Jesus is “the truth,” when the culture says there are so many different truths. It can be difficult for those living in this information age to hear that Jesus is “the way” and “no one comes to the father except through” Jesus, because there are so many different world religions today. Verse six naturally stands out because it seems to be so countercultural. The fact that verse six stands out and raises immediate questions for the preacher leads one to believe that it may raise questions for

⁸ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 27.

the congregation as well. This could lead the preacher to believe that God may want her to focus the message around this text as God speaks today.

After wrestling with this initial question of, “What words or phrases stand out and why,” the preacher then turns to the second question, “Would these words or phrases have stood out to the original readers of this text and why?” As Robinson explains, in biblical exegesis “we attempt to work our way back into the world of the Scriptures to understand the original message.”⁹ To answer the question, “Would these words or phrases have stood out to the original readers of the text and why,” one must first look at John 14:1-6 within its greater literary and historical context.

As one reads through the entire Gospel of John, verses 14:1-6 is a part of a larger conversation that Jesus has been having with his disciples. The conversation begins in John 13, in the upper room. In John 13 Jesus washes the disciples’ feet. Jesus tells his disciples to serve one another just as he has served them. Jesus then predicts that one of them will betray him. At the prompting of John, Jesus reveals it is Judas. Judas leaves the table, and Jesus continues to instruct his remaining disciples by saying that soon he will leave them, “Where I am going you cannot come” (Jn 13:33).

Peter asks Jesus, “Lord where are you going?” (Jn 13:36). Jesus reiterates, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward” (Jn 13:36). In light of the entire Gospel of John it is clear that Jesus is talking about his pending death. Jesus knows that he is going to die on a cross, and in the moment his disciples will not be able to go with him when he dies. The disciples do not understand what Jesus is

⁹ Ibid., 25.

talking about, but they are obviously troubled that Jesus is about to leave them. While seeing the disciples' concerned faces, Jesus states,

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:1-6).

The question must be asked, "Would John 14:6 have stood out to the original readers of this text and why?"

Based on the religious pluralism of the first-century Roman world, the words of Jesus in John 14:6 would probably stand out to the original readers because it would be so countercultural for them. From John 20:30-31 one can see that the author of the Gospel wrote that the reader might believe. As the author of John states, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:30-31). Verse 31 indicates that the author of John wrote the Gospel to non-believers, so that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If John was originally written to non-believers in the first century, then Jesus's statement in John 14:6 would have certainly challenged the original reader as well. If Jesus is "the way" and "the truth" and no one comes to the father except through him, any non-believer reading John 14:6 for the first time would certainly be challenged by these words as well as the words of John 3:16-18 where Jesus says,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the

world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn 3:16-18).

Both John 14:6 and 3:18 are exclusivist claims. Clearly John wants the reader to know that Jesus is God's one and only son, and Jesus alone is the way to the heavenly father. Knowing that the Gospel of John was written to a mostly non-believing audience living in a Roman world, where there were many religions and gods, it is clear that these words of Jesus would have challenged the people who first read John.

If it is discovered in the exegetical process that the words or phrases that initially stand out to the preacher would not have stood out to the original audience it is wise for the preacher to find other words or phrases to explore. The goal of exegesis is to discover what the text meant to the original readers. Pursuing the in-depth meaning of a word or phrase that would not have stood out to the original audience does not help the preacher discover the original meaning of the overall text. The preacher is trying to discover what would have stood out to the original readers because it is in this discovery that the preacher will find what the text meant to the original audience. Once he discovers what a text would have meant to the original readers then the preacher can begin to explore how the ancient text should be applied to today's current cultural context.

Returning to the example of John 14:6, after recognizing that the words of John 14:6 would have stood out to the original audience who read them, one needs to move to the third question: "Why did the author of this Scripture write these verses and what did they mean for the original reader?" John explains that he has written the Gospel so that the reader might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The author also points

out that, “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book” (Jn 20:30 ESV). Jesus certainly said many other things that are not written in John, so the preacher must determine why the author of John made a point to write the countercultural statement that Jesus makes in John 14:6.

Certainly, John wrote John 14:6 most likely because they are true. It is what Jesus said. These bold countercultural words of Jesus would be easy to remember because they were so bold and countercultural. Whenever someone says something bold people tend to remember it, and the author of the Gospel wanted readers to know that Jesus was not “a truth” Jesus was “the truth.” Jesus was not “a way” Jesus was “the way.”

In determining why a biblical author wrote a particular passage of Scripture and to determine its original meaning, one should look at the Greek or Hebrew of the original text. Through a careful study of the original Greek of John 14:6 one can see that the Greek term for “the way” can also be translated as “the road.” In fact *The Message* by Peterson translates John 14:6 as, “Jesus said, ‘I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me.’”¹⁰ This translation helps clarify that there is only one road to the Father and that is through Jesus.

As one seeks to determine the original meaning of a text, she should look at how the words and phrases of a particular text are repeated or used within the Bible as a whole. The same Holy Spirit who inspired Mark to write his Gospel also inspired Paul to write his letters, and so Scripture should be used to illuminate Scripture. If one verse of Scripture is not clear one should keep reading the book that the verse is found in and then

¹⁰ Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002), 1950.

see how these words or phrases are used in the rest of that book and the rest of the Bible. In fact using a simple concordance to see how else the term “the way” is used in the Bible, one discovers that the people of God are instructed in Deuteronomy 5:33 to walk in “the way” of God: “You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.”

In the New Testament the earliest church are called the people of “the way.” In Acts 9:1-2, Saul wanted to persecute the people of “the way.” It reads: “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2). From these passages it is clear that “the way” of Jesus is different from the world. In John 14:6 Jesus makes it clear that his followers are called to believe and live according to “the way” of Jesus.

In light of the entire Gospel of John one can also see that Jesus’s death on the cross, paid the price for sins, that is why Jesus says while dying on the cross, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). As previously stated in John 3:16, one receives the gift of eternal life that Jesus’s sacrifice brings by simply believing in him. If there is another way to the Father then Jesus did not have to die on the cross, but the exclusive claims of Jesus make it clear that there is no other way to the Father except through him. This exclusive claim of Jesus as recorded in John 14:6, makes it clear that John recorded these words because he wanted the reader to believe in Jesus, follow him, and begin living in his way.

After discussing these first three questions the preacher then moves to the fourth question, “What does this text say about God?” John 14:1-6 indicates that God loves humanity. It was God’s love that motivated him to send his son to pay the price for the sins of humanity through his death on a cross. Jesus’s death on a cross made a way for humanity to be with God in Jesus’s heavenly Father’s house where there are many rooms. The fact that there are many rooms in Jesus’s heavenly Father’s house indicates that many can come to God through Jesus. In John 14:1-6, Jesus lets his listeners know that God is a welcoming God, but also clarifies that there is only one way to get to God, and that is through Jesus.

After discussing these four questions the preacher should then ask, “How are people called to live today in light of this text?” As previously mentioned the words of Jesus seem to move one to a decision, as the entire Gospel tries to move one to believe. According to John 14:6, if one wants to know the truth and experience the eternal life that Jesus came to give, one must believe in Jesus and walk in his ways. Walking in the way of Jesus means following Jesus and doing the kinds of things that Jesus did while he was on the earth. As previously mentioned, much of what Jesus did was spend time practicing various spiritual disciplines like prayer, solitude, service, and the like.

At this point the conversation with the text has been between the preacher and the Scriptures. In this initial conversation the preacher should begin by prayerfully meditating on the text that he plans to preach. He should then begin to ask questions of the text as one seeks to discover one’s initial impressions. Working through the five suggested questions will help ensure that one clearly hears what God is saying through the text. Once he has taken the time to read and meditate on a particular set of verses and

ask basic questions of the text, one is ready to have a conversation with the experts, which is the topic of the next section.

Conversation with Scholars

Pastors should seek out several commentaries to serve as dialogue partners in the preparation of their messages. Pastors should try to read a sermon from an ancient church father on the text being preached like St. Augustine when possible. Then they should seek to discover what a traditional theologian from their denominational heritage has to say about the text. Finally, they should try to read three modern commentaries from different denominational backgrounds. As Long explains, “By pulling commentaries off the shelf the preacher can create a scholarly seminar on the biblical text.”¹¹ By reading multiple commentaries, a preacher is able to see how one biblical text has been interpreted in a myriad of ways. Preachers will also quickly notice any common themes in interpretation that help serve as checks and balances for their interpretations.

When preaching the text the pastor may decide to address the opinions of these ancient theologians or contemporary biblical experts directly by quoting them. When quoting the ideas of scholars the preacher should present their opinions as simply opinions, not as law. They are simply fellow followers that the preacher has invited to the conversation that the congregation is now having with the text. Knowing that, “literature, not science or theology, is the master discipline, the paradigm of inquiry, for postmoderns,”¹² the best way to illustrate an ancient father’s perspective or a relevant

¹¹ Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 76.

¹² White, *Postmodernism 101*, 109

theologians belief is by telling their story, not just giving their quote. Before quoting what John Calvin has to say about John 14:6 one might tell the story of who he was and how he left his family and law practice in France to follow Jesus once he realized that Jesus was “the way, the truth, and the life.” Because Calvin made great personal sacrifices to follow Jesus, postmoderns may be more interested to hear what he had to say about Jesus. It is also important to tell the story of the author of a biblical text whenever possible. Telling the congregation the story of Paul, James, John, and Peter before reading the written works credited to them will help a postmodern congregation connect with the biblical text as they begin to understand why the author wrote what he did and why he might be worth listening to as apart of a dialogue on life.

As one has a conversation with biblical scholars by reading their commentaries, it is often helpful to write out important lines or statements that help summarize what they believe a particular text meant for the original audience (see Appendix A for example of notes on John 14:1-6). This conversation helps check the initial thoughts of the preacher. If several commentaries contradict a preacher’s initial thoughts, then the preacher should probably adjust his thinking. By reading several commentaries from different times and denominational backgrounds the preacher helps ensure that her sermon is faithful to the original meaning of the text, and the preacher’s sermon will prove to be insightful.

In the postmodern information age many postmodern minds believe they already have heard the Gospel. Even faithful Christians in the US can become quickly bored if they believe they have already heard what the preacher is going to say. Taking the time to carefully study a text helps the preacher gain insights that the casual reader of Scripture may not have. These faithful insights help capture the mind of the listener.

Conversation with Culture

The biblical insights that come through a conversation with scholars must also be relevant if the preacher hopes to capture the mind and heart of the postmodern listener. To make sure that the listener sees the relevance of Scripture, the preacher needs to exegete his own cultural context to see how to best build a bridge between the ancient context of the Scriptures and the current context of the US. As Stott explains, “Our task is to enable God’s revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today.”¹³

Once one has determined what a particular passage meant to the original audience and why the author wrote the passage, it is the preacher’s job to make sure the sermon helps address the same problem or issue in today’s world. The preacher will have to do some exegetical work of one’s current culture to determine how the problem in the past is similar to a problem today. Through the use of simple search engines on the internet, one can quickly search any topic and see what the culture has to say about that topic.

It is usually wisest to make sure that in one’s internet searches he seeks to rely on credible web pages for information like a news page from a well-known magazine or news source like CNN (www.cnn.com) or USA Today(www.usatoday.com). These news webpages are committed to reporting what usually can be corroborated by multiple witnesses. One could do a search on a topic and find a webpage that is interesting, but that simply represents the opinion of a particular person. To get a sense of what the broader culture believes, and not just the opinion of one person who made a web page, it is best to use the web pages of credible news sources when gathering information.

¹³ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 138.

For example when looking at John 14:6, John wrote those words because Jesus said them and John wants his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ. Writing in a first-century Roman context, where there were known to be many religions and worldviews, the words of Jesus in John 14:6 certainly challenged the first-century readers to see that not every religion and worldview leads to heaven, only Jesus does.

To get a sense if the US is anything like the pluralistic first-century Roman world, one can do a quick Google search on “Religion in the United States.” One of the first articles listed was from George Gallup, a well-known and credible polling company. The webpage stated that, “In the United States today over 77% of the population is Christian.”¹⁴ This webpage goes on to explain that despite the fact that the majority of the US population claims to be Christian, there is still a great diversity of faiths in the US, and more people are claiming to have no faith at all. In the current postmodern age, people may know who Jesus is as a historical figure, but they do not know him as Lord, and so they certainly are not walking in the way of Jesus.

Recognizing the reality of globalization one could expand one’s search by typing, “Religion in the World” on the Google search line. When typing “Religion in the World” one finds an article from Pew Forum another credible polling company that is also linked to a CNN news article. According to the Pew Forum and CNN an,

Analysis of more than 2,500 censuses, surveys and population registers—finds 2.2 billion Christians (32% of the world’s population), 1.6 billion Muslims (23%), 1 billion Hindus (15%), nearly 500 million Buddhists (7%) and 14 million Jews (0.2%) around the world as of 2010. In addition, more than 400 million people (6%) practice various folk or traditional religions, including African traditional

¹⁴ Frank Newport, “In US 77% Identify as Christian: eighteen percent have no explicit religious identity,” *Gallup* (Dec. 24, 2012), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159548/identify-christian.aspx> (accessed February 4, 2015).

religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions. An estimated 58 million people – slightly less than 1% of the global population – belong to other religions, including the Baha’i faith, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Tenrikyo, Wicca and Zoroastrianism, to mention just a few.¹⁵

These simple web searches help the preacher discover how many different world religions exist in the US and around the globe. With so many different world religions, it is easy to build a bridge between the ancient pluralistic context of the first century, when John’s gospel was written, and the world today. In both contexts there were multiple religions, and yet in the midst of this context John writes that Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6).

One can also get a sense of what culture thinks about a particular Scripture or biblical idea by looking up what cultural icons like Oprah have to say about the claims of Jesus or beliefs of the Christian faith. By simply typing “Oprah Jesus the only way” in the Google search bar, one immediately finds a link to a video from the Oprah Winfrey show.¹⁶ In the video Oprah is talking about God and spirituality and how one should live, and she says, “There couldn’t possibly be just one way.” A woman from the audience challenges Oprah and says, “What about Jesus?” Jesus becomes the focus of the conversation and one is able to see and hear what Oprah, a cultural icon, thinks about Jesus being the only way.

Youtube can be a very helpful place to do a search for videos relating to a particular topic. Movie clips or television show clips can be found to help illustrate what

¹⁵ Pew Research Center, “Global Religions Landscape,” Pew Research Center, (Dec 18, 2012), <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/> (accessed February 4, 2015).

¹⁶ Youtube.com, “Oprah Denies Jesus is the Only Way to Salvation and Heaven,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noO_dCWtB1E (accessed February 4, 2015).

the culture thinks of a particular topic. Search engines like Google and Bing have made it much easier to see what the culture is saying about the absolute claims of a particular passage of Scripture.

Conversation with Congregants

After reading and reviewing credible webpages to gather what the broader culture has to say about a biblical principle, it is important whenever possible to discuss the biblical passage or principle with a congregant before preaching it. As Robinson says, “We must know the people as well as the message, and to acquire that knowledge, we exegete both the Scripture and the congregation.”¹⁷ One way to exegete the congregation is to form a diverse group of faithful church members that one can meet with on a weekly basis to preview the basic theme of a sermon. This study allows the pastor to get an interactive reaction from the congregation before the sermon is preached.

In this Bible study time it is best for the preacher to get just the church member’s initial reaction to a particular text. The congregant should not have to do a lot of study beforehand. The preacher just wants the initial reaction from the congregant because on Sunday morning most of the congregants will come to the text unprepared as well. They will not study it beforehand. Without prior preparation this small group of congregants pray, read the text that will be preached, and then answer the opening question of the exegetical process, “What words or phrases stand out to you and why?” In hearing the answers to this simple question the preacher is able to listen for common challenges that the text brings to their hearts and minds.

¹⁷ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 28.

It is also helpful to interview members of the congregation for their expertise on a particular subject when possible. For instance, when preaching the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex 20:16) one may want to interview a local judge, particularly if there is a judge in one’s congregation. A modern-day judge can tell the preacher how she knows if someone is lying in the court of law today. This information can then be shared with the congregation during the sermon. A quote from a local judge will help the listeners connect to the message because they know it came from one of their own.

Telling the story of fellow church members is often the most powerful illustration a preacher can give. The stories of fellow church members help build cohesion in a community, and it makes the message relevant as the listeners see the truth of the text being lived out in someone’s life that they know. This is particularly important in postmodernity because now is a “postindividualistic”¹⁸ time where truth is not determined by individual reason but by communal experience. Telling the stories of God’s activity in the lives of other congregants helps express the communal experience and so should be done whenever possible. In fact it is often very effective to have the congregation member tell their story as a part of the sermon either through a pre-recorded video interview, or live as a part of the message. While such testimonies are planned and often scripted, they do offer members of the community an opportunity to speak and become part of the dialogue of the sermon. However, it is not possible to tell the stories of fellow church members unless the preacher takes time to get to know fellow church members and hear their stories.

¹⁸ McLaren, *New Kind of Christian*, 27.

CHAPTER 5

POPULAR INDUCTIVE SERMON OUTLINES

Once one has been through the exegetical process of discovering what a particular passage meant for the original audience and how it applies to the current cultural context, he needs to begin to form an outline for the message. There are many helpful sermon outlines that a postmodern preacher may use to organize her thoughts for an inductive sermon. This chapter looks at four popular outlines that utilize inductive preaching.

In the inductive form of preaching the listener is invited to join the preacher on a journey of discovery where the thesis of the sermon is not given at the beginning but closer to the end. In his seminal work *As One without Authority*, Craddock writes, the

Inductive movement in preaching corresponds to the way people ordinarily experience reality and to the way life's problem-solving activity goes on naturally and casually. It has been argued that this method respects rather than insults the hearers and leaves them the freedom and hence the obligation to respond. In addition, unfolding or unrolling the sermon in this fashion sustains interest by means of that anticipation built into all good narration.¹

The inductive method feels more like an experience of discovery for the listener than the deductive method, and so is preferred when communicating the absolute claims of Scripture to a postmodern audience. Initially these four inductive outlines should be used

¹ Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 55.

to help organize the thoughts of the preacher. By applying the exegetical meaning of a text to all four outlines the preacher has a much better sense of what she is going to preach. These outlines are viewed as tools to help clarify and organize the thoughts and the ultimate message of a preacher. When the preacher is ready to write the sermon, the preacher can use one of these outlines for his message or some other form.

Paul Scott Wilson – *The Four Pages of the Sermon*

Wilson, in *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, argues that for clarity and engagement there should be four basic movements within any sermon. In any sermon the preacher will address these four basic movements: “(1) sin and the brokenness in the biblical world, (2) sin and brokenness in our world, (3) grace in the biblical world, and (4) grace in our world.”² To utilize this basic outline one simply answers the following questions: “What is the problem in the biblical world that the text is trying to address; What is the problem in our world that parallels the problem of the biblical world that the text is trying to address; What is the resolution that the biblical text provides to the problem facing the biblical world; and Based on the resolution found in the biblical text how might that resolution help solve the problem in our world today?” To put it more succinctly one could simply make the following four-page outline: “Trouble in the biblical World; Trouble in our world today; Resolution in the biblical World; and Resolution in the world today.”

² Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, 13.

Wilson writes, “Not every sermon need follow this movement from trouble in the biblical text and our world to grace in the biblical text and our world.”³ However, clearly identifying the trouble in the text, the trouble in today’s world, the resolution in the text, and the resolution in today’s world is a very helpful practice in clarifying the logical flow of a sermon. He explains that, “How we arrange the pages, and whether or not we use all of them in any one sermon, these four theological functions present the basic options available to preachers.”⁴

A sermon that is literally four pages in length, double-spaced, with Times New Roman twelve-point font takes about twelve minutes to deliver orally. A four-page sermon that is twelve minutes in length is certainly shorter than the forty-five-minute sermons that many preachers give today. As previously argued a shorter sermon can feel more like a dialogue starter than a forty-five-minute sermon, where the preacher does all of the talking and exhausts the topic.

Keeping with the common illustration of John 14:1-6, one could begin by answering the first question of “What is the problem in the biblical world that the text is trying to address?” This first question is very similar to the question that has been previously answered as a part of the exegetical process, “Why did the author of this Scripture write these verses, and what did they mean to the original audience?”

As mentioned earlier the author of John wrote his Gospel so that others might believe. He wrote the words of John 14:1-6 most certainly because Jesus said them, but also because these verses help move the reader towards his greater purpose, that they

³ Ibid., 16.

⁴ Ibid.

might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. As previously recognized, the words of John 14:6 were certainly countercultural for the first-century Roman world where there were so many different religions and belief systems. The trouble in the biblical world is that there were so many different religions and teachers that people did not know which one they should follow, which one was true. John 14:6 helps address “which way is the right way?” Jesus makes it clear in John 14:6 that he is “the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Once one has answered the first question of Wilson’s outline, she should move to the next question, “What is the problem in our world that parallels the problem of the biblical world that the text is trying to address?” There is just as many, if not more, known religions in the world today as there were in the first century. The tremendous diversity of religions leads American icons like Oprah to declare in a predominately Christian country like the US that, “There couldn’t possibly be just one way.”

Even though 70 percent of Americans claim to be Christian, in a global-information age where Christians represent only one-third of the world’s population it can be difficult for one to believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. In a postmodern age where truth is relative, one would seem arrogant to claim that he is the only way to God. As one considers the problem that John 14:6 is trying to address in the pluralistic first-century Roman world, it becomes clear that the same problem exists today. Using Wilson’s four-sermon page outline one can say that, “The problem in our world today is that there are so many different religions in our world it is difficult for one to know which one to adhere to or follow.”

After answering the first two questions, the preacher moves to the third question, “What is the resolution that the biblical text provides to the problem facing the biblical world?” The answer Jesus provides to the question, “which teacher or religion should people follow?” is that he is the one way, truth, and life. When studying John 14:6, and doing a word study on the term “way,” it was discovered that in the Old Testament the people of God are told to walk in “the way that the Lord your God has commanded you” (Dt 5:33). In the New Testament, followers of Jesus were described as the people of “the Way” (Acts 9:1-2). The resolution to the question “which way should I go?” is to follow Jesus. Jesus invites people to follow him and walk in his ways because he is the truth.

Once one has determined how the biblical text has resolved the tension or problem of the biblical world, one should ask the fourth and final question, “Based on the resolution found in the biblical text how might that resolution help solve the problem in our world today?” If following Jesus and walking in his way is the answer to finding the truth amidst so many different choices in the first century that would also seemingly be true for today. Speaking to a postmodern context one could certainly make the case that it is worth trying. With an eye towards the spiritual disciplines one could explain that walking in the way of Jesus means trying to do the kind of things that Jesus did like: praying, fasting, solitude, silence, service, meditation, and other disciplines.

As a general summary it is helpful to write out these answers in outline form. It is usually best to begin with an issue facing the current culture or “the trouble in our world.” As previously discussed postmodern listeners resist authority, so the pastor cannot assume that just because she will have the pulpit or stage on Sunday the congregation will want to listen to her. The introduction is therefore critical to capturing

the attention of the congregation. Sadly, in today's culture the Bible is no longer viewed as authoritative. As Craddock wrote in 1971, "No longer can the preacher presuppose the general recognition of his authority as clergy, the authority of his institution, or the authority of scripture."⁵ So when preaching to a postmodern congregation it is usually more effective to start with an issue facing the world, not a historical issue facing the biblical world of the first century. People do not usually care that much about the first century, but they do care about their world today.

The sooner a sermon speaks to a problem or issue facing the world today the sooner it will capture the attention of its postmodern listeners. Therefore, in the introduction the pastor needs to establish the trouble in the world, a current-day problem or question that most hearers wrestle with or wonder about. Frank calls this "the hook." He explains that, "A hook is intended to get attention, and listeners usually pay attention when someone asks them a question."⁶ An opening question for this sermon could simply be, "With so many different religions in the world today, how can we know which one, if any of them are right?"

A contemporary story can also serve as a good hook. For example, a preacher might begin by telling a brief personal story of getting lost by turning down the wrong street or taking the wrong path. In this example, the preacher could then follow this story with the simple statement, "In life the wrong turn can lead us down the wrong road, and there seem to be a lot of roads to travel down these days when it comes to our faith. How do we know which roads to take? I believe our text this morning helps answer that

⁵ Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 14.

⁶ Frank, *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less*, 43.

question.” This simple introduction with a humble personal story of taking the wrong road followed by a relevant question captures postmoderns’ attention. Postmoderns love to dialogue about good questions,⁷ and truth is found in story for most postmoderns.⁸ Personal stories are most effective in a postmodern context because one’s personal experience is the ultimate indicator of truth. The key idea is that the pastor begins her sermon by addressing a problem that exists in the world today. Using this model, the outline of a four page sermon for John 14:1-6 may look like this:

 Trouble in our World Today - There are so many different religions in our world today how does one know which one to adhere to or follow? Trouble in the biblical World - There were so many different religions and teachers in the first century, people didn’t know which one they should follow, or which one was true. Resolution in the World of the Bible - Jesus invites people to follow him and walk in his ways because he is the truth. Resolution in our World Today – We should walk in the way of Jesus which means trying to do the kind of things that Jesus did while he was on this earth like: praying, fasting, solitude, silence, service, meditation, etc. so we can experience the truth of Christ.

By creating this basic outline one has begun to clarify the general direction of one’s message, and is ready to write a succinct thesis and application statement for one’s sermon, which is the topic of the next section of this dissertation.

Thomas Long and Haddon Robinson: Focus, Function, and the Big Idea

Long argues that the primary goal of the pastor is to write a sermon with a clear focus and function. The “focus statement is a concise description of the central, controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon. In short this is what the whole sermon will

⁷ Jones, *New Christian*, 109-110.

⁸ White, *Postmodernism 101*, 109.

be about.”⁹ The focus of a sermon is driven by the focus or meaning of the text. Scripture makes a claim on the lives of the hearers. The focus statement declares this is what the text is communicating, and the “function statement is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers.”¹⁰ Stanley argues for creating a clear statement of the message that leads people to action when he writes that, “Every time I stand to communicate I want to take one simple truth and lodge it in the heart of the listener. I want them to know that one thing and know what to do with it.”¹¹ Previous generations may have wanted multiple points, but Stanley and other contemporary preachers argue for one focused point or big idea.

Robinson says, “First, and above all, the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon.”¹² He calls this primary thought of the biblical writer “the big idea.” Robinson explains that, “A sermon should be a bullet, not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of scripture.”¹³

In determining the focus or big idea of a sermon the preacher needs to ask what was the focus or big idea of the biblical writer. Using the example of John 14:1-6, one could argue that the big idea or focus of this passage is that, “Jesus is the way to salvation through his death on a cross and in the way that he lived, and truth and life are ultimately

⁹ Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 86.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Stanley and Jones, *Communicating for a Change*, 12.

¹² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 35.

¹³ Ibid.

found in following Him.” H. Grady Davis argues that, “no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as crystal.”¹⁴ Clarifying the focus, big idea, or theme of a sermon in a short sentence is paramount in making sure the message of the sermon will be clear.

Once one writes out the focus or big idea of the sermon, one needs to write out the function. The function of a sermon helps answer the question, “In light of the big idea or truth of this passage of Scripture how should we then live?” The truth of Scripture asks for a response and calls people to live a certain way. Using the example of John 14:1-6, one could say that, “We should believe in Jesus and follow Him by walking in his ways which includes practicing certain spiritual disciplines like prayer, solitude, and meditation.” The function of the sermon is often very similar to the “resolution in the world today” or the final page of the four-page sermon in Wilson’s model.

To help clarify the theme and application of a sermon before writing it the preacher should clarify the four pages of Wilson’s model as previously discussed and then write out the focus or big idea of the sermon and the function. For example, keeping with the biblical passage that has been the primary example of this dissertation, one could write out that the focus, big idea, and function of John 14:1-6 this way: “The Focus or Big Idea is we know that Jesus is the way to live and the way to salvation because through his life, death, and resurrection we can see that Jesus has done what no one else has ever done. The function is to experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring, we should try to walk in his ways by doing the things he did like worship, meditation, and prayer.”

¹⁴ Ibid., 37.

A preacher, according to Long is to build a bridge between the text and the sermon such that the sermon makes a claim on the hearers and explains “what the text wishes to say and what the text wishes to do through its saying.”¹⁵ In John 14:6, Jesus makes the very exclusive claim that, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The meaning of this verse is clear. Jesus is telling his disciples that he is the only way to their Heavenly Father and there is no other way.

In light of the greater context of the Gospel of John, verses 14:1-6 call the reader to a decision to believe in Jesus and walk in his ways and therefore experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring. Clarifying the biblical author’s original intent is how one determines the focus, big idea, and function of one’s sermon.

Andy Stanley: Me, We, God, You, We

As the senior pastor of North Point Community Church, Stanley has proven to be one of the most effective communicators to the postmodern generation. North Point is the second largest church in the US with over 30,000 in attendance each week.¹⁶ In his book, *Communicating for a Change*, he offers an outline that can be helpful as a preacher seeks to outline her message. His outline is “Me, we, God, You, We.” He explains that,

With this approach the communicator introduces a dilemma he or she has faced or is currently facing (ME). From there you find common ground with your audience around the same or a similar dilemma (WE). Then you transition to the text to discover what God says about the tension or question you have introduced (GOD). Then you challenge your audience to act on what they have just heard (YOU). And finally, you close with several statements about what could happen

¹⁵ Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 85.

¹⁶ James P. Long, “The Outreach 100 Fastest-growing and Largest Churches in America,” *Outreach Magazine* (September 22, 2013), <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/5446-the-outreach-100-fastest-growing-and-largest-churches-in-america.html> (accessed February 6, 2015).

in your community, your church, or the world, if everybody embraced that particular truth (WE).¹⁷

Stanley's opening step of "Me" works well because it helps the preacher connect to the congregation by sharing a personal story. As Stanley points out "ME isn't really about me. ME is about finding common ground with THEM."¹⁸ He argues that making a personal connection at the beginning of one's message is very important because, "It is difficult to receive challenging information from someone who seems to have no clue as to what it is like to be you."¹⁹ When telling personal stories, the preacher should be careful not to be the hero though. Personal stories where one is the hero can sound arrogant and self-serving.

Since postmoderns are suspect of authority to begin with, any statement that makes a preacher seem prideful will not be well received. As Kinnaman writes, "Transparency disarms an image-is-everything generation."²⁰ Sharing a personal story of past mistakes or current struggles makes the preacher seem real, and such vulnerability will open a postmodern congregation to what one has to say.

As one shares about a past mistake or challenge it makes for an easy transition in the outline to talk about how "We" all face similar challenges. Stanley writes that in the "We" section, "You need to spend some time applying the tension to as many areas as

¹⁷ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 120.

¹⁸ Ibid., 121.

¹⁹ Ibid., 123.

²⁰ Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 56.

you can so as to spark an emotion in as broad an audience as possible.”²¹ The preacher is speaking to the people of God as a part of the community, and so he or she is a part of the collective “We.” The “Me” and “We” of Stanley’s outline fits well with the “Trouble In The World,”²² of Wilson’s outline of *The Four Pages of the Sermon*. The “Me” and “We” of Stanley’s outline and the “Trouble in the World” in Wilson’s outline encourage the preacher to begin with a problem the preacher has experienced and then invites the listener to realize that all people face this same problem together.

The next move for Stanley’s outline is “God.” Stanley explains that in the “God” section, “The goal here is to resolve the tension, or at least some of it, by pointing people to God’s thoughts on the subject at hand.”²³ He exhorts preachers to “engage the audience with the text. Don’t just read it. Don’t explain it to death. Engage the audience with it. Take them with you. Make this part of the journey. Make it so fascinating that they are actually tempted to go home and read it on their own.”²⁴

Stanley’s “God” section works well with Wilson’s pages of “Trouble in the Biblical World”²⁵ and “Resolution in the Biblical World.”²⁶ In moving to “God” in this outline the preacher will initially need to spend time establishing how today’s challenges are similar to the challenges the characters in the Bible faced. As the preacher explains

²¹ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 124.

²² Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, 107-129.

²³ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 127.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 73-152.

²⁶ Ibid., 155-196.

and expounds the text, he can point to the resolution that God provides, or the answer that God provided to the problem in biblical times.

The next step in the outline is “You.” The “You” section is the application section where the preacher tells the listeners what to do, “How you should apply this truth to your life.” Stanley points out that in his application section of “You,” “My preference is to find one point of application that I can challenge everybody to embrace. I rarely ask people to make a life-altering commitment to anything. I don’t think that is realistic. But I often challenge people to try something for a week, or even a day. Occasionally, I’ll ask people to commit to something for a month.”²⁷

It is important that a preacher always maintain an attitude of humility in preaching a sermon to postmoderns, and so the preacher should avoid using the personal pronoun of “you” when preaching. It is better for the preacher to use the pronouns of “I,” “me,” “we,” and “us.” When the preacher uses the pronoun “you” and tries to tell others what they should do, the preacher can sound arrogant as if the preacher believes he or she is better or holier than the congregation. This attitude is not received as well as a humble attitude of “us.” Using the pronoun “us” in the application helps the preacher stay connected to the community of faith that she is preaching to in the moment. Instead of saying, “God is telling you that you need to change.” The preacher should say, “God is telling us that we need to change.”

The final stage of Stanley’s outline is “We.” He uses this final “We” to inspire his listeners “to imagine what the church, the community, families, maybe even the world

²⁷ Ibid., 127.

would be like if Christians everywhere embraced your one idea.”²⁸ The “We” of his outline invites the listener to have a grander vision for her life as she imagines how she can change the community she lives in by following the counsel of the Scripture text that is being preached.

Using Andy Stanley’s outline of “Me,” “We,” “God,” “You,” “We” one could outline a message on John 14:6 this way:

“Me” – “I was driving in the mountains of New Mexico, and I lost my map, and my GPS wasn’t working. I got to the fork in a road, and I didn’t know which road to take. I took the wrong road and I ended up in the wrong town.”
“We” – “In life we often find ourselves at a fork in the road with our careers, relationships, our faith. With so many choices how do we know which road to take?”
“God” – “In John 14:1-6 Jesus tells us to take his road. Taking the road of Jesus means we trust him to lead us, and we seek to live the way that he lived by practicing some basic spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation on Scripture, and service. Then we will hear God clearly and know which road to take.”
“You” – “What would happen if you took just 5 minutes each day this week to read a saying of Jesus and then pray about how God might help you live it out?”
“We” – “What do you think our community would look like if everyone just spent 5 minutes each day, reading a saying of Jesus and praying that God might help them live it out? I bet the hungry would get fed. The naked would get clothed, and violence would be greatly diminished in our community.”

Stanley’s outline of “Me, We, God, You, We”²⁹ is certainly an effective way to order a preacher’s thoughts. The opening “Me” in Stanley’s outline is particularly effective in a postmodern context as the preacher seeks to make a personal connection to the listeners by sharing a short story of personal struggle.

²⁸ Ibid., 129.

²⁹ Ibid., 120.

Eugene Lowry: Oops, Ugh, Aha, Whee, Yeah

Lowry in his best-selling book *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* argues that, “preaching is storytelling.”³⁰ He makes the case that, “A sermon is a plot (premeditated by the preacher) which has as its key ingredient a sensed discrepancy, a homiletical bind. Something is ‘up in the air’ – an issue not resolved. Like any good storyteller, the preacher’s task is to ‘bring the folks home’ – that is, resolve matters in the light of the gospel and in the presence of people.”³¹ Lowry provides a preaching model where the sermon centers around a particular question.

The preacher begins the sermon by upsetting the equilibrium of the listener, and raising a relevant question of the text that needs to be resolved. Lowry calls this the “Oops.”³² The first couple of pages are then spent analyzing the problem and therefore raising the tension for the listener. Lowry calls this stage in the sermon the “Ugh.”³³ Once the tension to the problem has reached its climax there is a brief statement that discloses the clue to the resolution. Lowry calls this stage the “Aha”³⁴ of the sermon. This “Aha” usually involves reversing some of the assumptions of the listener, or revealing a detail of the biblical story or text that may not have been initially known. In describing this “Aha” statement, Lowry writes that, “Once the clue to resolution is articulated, the hearer is

³⁰ Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 12.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 28-38.

³³ Ibid., 39-52.

³⁴ Ibid., 53-73.

ready to receive the Word—to discover how the gospel of Jesus Christ intersects the human predicament.”³⁵

Stage four is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. It explains how the Gospel helps resolve the tension that was previously raised. Lowry calls this stage of the sermon the “Whee,”³⁶ because the listener gets to experience the joy of the Gospel. According to Lowry, “The focus of our preaching is upon the decisive activity of God, not upon us, and hence the climax of any sermon must be stage four—the experiencing of the gospel.”³⁷ In stage four the preacher elaborates on how God has brought a resolution to the problem that had been previously raised.

The fifth and final stage of the Lowry plot loop is called the “Yeah!”³⁸ It asks the listener to consider how life should now be changed in light of the Gospel that was proclaimed in stage four. Lowry writes that in stage five the preacher and listener “anticipate the consequences.”³⁹ This final stage can be very similar to Stanley’s final stage of “We” where a vision for the future is painted in light of the Gospel.

To summarize, the outline of the Lowry Loop is “Oops, Ugh, Aha, Whee, and Yeah.”⁴⁰ Using the Lowry Loop, one could outline a sermon on John 14:1-6 in the following manner:

³⁵ Ibid., 73.

³⁶ Ibid., 74-79.

³⁷ Ibid., 83.

³⁸ Ibid., 80-87.

³⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

“Oops” – How can Jesus say he is “the way” when there seem to be so many ways out there? “Ugh” – In ancient times like today there were numerous gods and numerous religions. There have been countless religious leaders like Muhammad, Buddha, and Bahulla. Everyone claims to speak “the truth.” How could anyone claim to be “the way, the truth, and the life”? How can Jesus say he is “the way” when there seem to be so many ways? “Aha” – Because no one has ever done what Jesus did. “Whee” - Jesus lived in perfect obedience to our heavenly father, died on a cross, and on the third day he rose again. “Yeah” - What would the world look like if everyone who followed Jesus began to do the kinds of things Jesus did by praying, meditating on Scripture, and serving others?

This sermon outline works really well if the Scripture text presents a question that has no easy answers. To capture the listener’s attention the opening question that seeks to disrupt the listener’s equilibrium must be relevant to a postmodern mind.

In the Lowry Loop the preacher spends the first half of the sermon building the tension around a central question. If the question seems irrelevant to the lives of the listeners, then they will not care to hear the answer. The postmodern preacher does not have to use this outline, but as the preacher prepares to write her sermon it will be helpful to walk through the five steps of Lowry Loop to see what leading question the preacher should try to explore as a part of the sermon.

In a postmodern context where dialogue is such an important part of determining truth, it is important that one asks the right questions to help initiate an engaging dialogue in the mind of the listeners. If someone tries to spark a conversation or dialogue with a question that no one really cares to answer, the minds of those listening will not be engaged. However, if the preacher can find a question that the text answers, and the listeners already wrestle with in their own lives, then an opening question can be a great way to hook the listener.

Wilson, Long, Robinson, Stanley, and Lowry all provide helpful outlines for postmodern preachers trying to write an inductive sermon that will engage the hearts and minds of postmodern listeners in the US today. After the preacher has done the prayerful, careful work of discovering what a passage of Scripture meant for the original audience and how God is calling him to apply the text today, all of these outlines should be used to help organize the preacher's thoughts before writing a sermon for a particular congregation.

In a postmodern information age it is important that sermons are clear and concise, and working through different sermon outlines will help a preacher discover what is the best way to communicate the message that God has given her to preach to her congregation. In the final chapter a new hybrid outline will be proposed that seeks to take the best of each outline. This new sermon outline will help a postmodern preacher write and deliver sermons that are biblically faithful, insightful, relevant, conversational, short, and humbly invite the listener to engage in some type of spiritual discipline for further personal exploration.

CHAPTER 6

A NEW OUTLINE AND WRITING FOR THE EAR AND EYE

In working with the proposed sermon outlines of Wilson, Long, Robinson, Stanley, and Lowry, a new sermon outline has begun to emerge. In this chapter a new inductive sermon outline will be proposed that seeks to utilize the best elements of the inductive outlines previously described. This new outline has seven components: Story, Relevant Question, Bible, Context, Gospel, Discipline, and Kingdom. After clearly defining this new outline, some tips on how to write a sermon manuscript for the ear and the eye will be given.

New Outline: Story, Relevant Question, Bible, Context, Gospel, Discipline, Kingdom

As one works through the sermon outlines of Wilson, Long, Robinson, Stanley, and Lowry, one begins to notice some common patterns. For instance, Stanley's "Me," Wilson's "Trouble in the World," and Lowry's "Oops" all serve as effective hooks to capture the attention of the listener as the preacher seeks to deal with a contemporary issue. Frank explains that, "Anecdotes or personal experiences make excellent hooks."¹

¹ Frank, *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less*, 49.

This is why the “Me” of Stanley’s outline works so well to capture the listener’s attention as the preacher tells a personal story to connect with the listeners. Frank also remarks that, “Listeners usually pay attention when someone asks them a question.”² This is why the “Oops” question of Lowry’s outline works well to engage the mind of the listener. Recognizing the need to connect with one’s listeners immediately and the importance of inviting her listeners to practice different spiritual disciplines, a new sermon outline has emerged that has seven steps summarized by the words: Story, Relevant Question, Bible, Context, Gospel, Discipline, and Kingdom.

As previously mentioned, Jones writes that, “Emergents are enamored of story, particularly of telling their own stories and listening to others’ stories.”³ Consequently, opening a sermon with a story is a great way to capture the attention of a postmodern listener. Similar to Stanley’s “Me,” in this new outline the preacher tells an opening story where he shares an issue or problem he has struggled with so that he can make a connection to the people who are listening. Because a postmodern mind rejects authority, a preacher who appears to have it all together usually will not be well received.

However, a preacher who begins by sharing a story that points to a common problem or struggle can be very effective with postmodern listeners. Postmodern listeners are more open to what one has to say if they view the preacher as a humble messenger who is simply a fellow sojourner of life wrestling with issues and questions that they have. Personal stories are often the most effective way for the preacher to connect to the congregation, but it is critical that the preacher is not the hero in the personal story. The

² Ibid., 43.

³ Jones, *New Christian*, 142.

preacher wants to tell a story that shares a common struggle. In fact the story does not have to be personal, and it would be best if the opening story is not a personal story every week. If the preacher opens with a personal story every week, listeners can begin to think that the preacher is self-centered and the sermon is about her. The preacher can tell stories from movies, books, or another person's story and then share how he has wrestled with the same issue before.

In determining what story to tell, the preacher needs to pick a story that will point to the primary problem that the Scripture is going to address. Utilizing the exegetical process previously described, this problem is most often identified when the preacher seeks to answer the question, "Why did the author of this Scripture write these verses, and what did they mean to the original audience?" The human authors of Scripture were inspired by God to write the Scriptures to address particular issues or to tell a particular story for a particular purpose. Using the example of John 14:1-6, it has been pointed out that the author of John wrote these words and ultimately the entire Gospel so that the reader might believe that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus certainly said the words of John 14:1-6, but the author of John wants the reader to know that amidst all the different ways to live, only Jesus is the way to the Father.

Preaching on the text of John 14:1-6 the preacher could begin by telling a personal story of getting lost on a road, and facing a fork in a road, not knowing which way to turn. The preacher could then transition to the fact that life is a lot like that fork in the road. The preacher could say, "Everyday we have decisions to make, and we are not always sure which road to take, which way to go."

Once one has shared a personal story for connection, the preacher then moves to the primary Relevant Question that the Scripture text is going to answer. If one is unable to identify a personal story that relates directly to the problem that the Scripture is going to address, the preacher can simply begin her sermon with the Relevant Question that the Scripture is going to address. Like the question of the Lowry loop, it is critical that this opening question is relevant to the listener. If this opening question appears to be irrelevant the listener will not want to listen. In determining what question to ask, it is helpful to ask very broad questions about life that everyone listening can relate to and will want to have answered as they think about their own lives. Continuing with the example of John 14:1-6, the preacher could ask the following question after telling the opening story of getting lost, “In life how do we know which road to take? When we face a decision, and we face decisions everyday, how do we know what we should do?”

After a dramatic pause, that allows this Relevant Question to ruminate in the minds of the listeners, the preacher could then invite the listeners to move to the third step of this outline, the Bible. In the third step of this new outline the preacher invites the listeners to open the Bible to the specific Scripture text that promises to answer the Relevant Question that has been raised. For instance, one could say, “To find out how we are supposed to know what we should do, which way we should go in any decision we make, please open the Bible to John 14:1-6.” This invitation to open the Bible, to find the answer to the Relevant Question, helps train the listeners to know that the Bible provides answers to life’s deepest questions. As the Apostle Paul explains, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good

work” (2 Tm 3:16-17). Inviting listeners to open the Bible after asking the Relevant Question helps the listener see the need to look to the Bible for life’s answers. The preacher does not want the listeners to look to her for the answers to life’s deepest question. The preacher wants to train the listeners to turn to the Bible.

As noted by the *Reveal* study, no spiritual practice impacts a life more than reflection on Scripture.⁴ Therefore, the preacher wants to train her listeners to look to the Bible for answers to life’s greatest questions. Because the Scriptures are fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, and so infallible, the reading of Scripture is the most inspired moment of any worship service. Every preacher prays that her sermons are inspired by God, but there is no guarantee. However, every word of the Scriptures are fully inspired, and so time should be taken to read the Scripture text that is being preached in such a way that the congregation may hear the word, experience the word, and so understand it.

Preachers can often spend so much time preparing their sermons that they rush through the reading of God’s word as if reading the Scripture text was an obligatory part of the service, but really the reading of Scripture is the gem of the service. G. Robert Jacks challenges his readers when he asks, “Do you really think it’s fair to spend a lot more time preparing our words (the sermon) than we do on God’s word? Do you really think your preaching is more important for the people to hear than the reading of God’s word?”⁵ By taking the time to do a slow, deliberate, careful, interpretive reading of the Scripture text after raising the Relevant Question, the listeners know that the answer to the question that is troubling them will be found in the Scripture that is being read.

⁴ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 19.

⁵ G. Robert Jacks, *Getting the Word Across: Speech Communication for Pastors and Lay Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 15.

In the first part of this sermon outline the preacher has challenged the listener with a Relevant Question, and she has encouraged the listener to open the Bible to see how the Bible answers the Relevant Question. With eager anticipation the listener tries to hear how the Scripture text the preacher is reading will answer the Relevant Question that was just asked. Often the answer is not readily apparent to an untrained ear that lacks the necessary biblical knowledge. After reading the entire Scripture passage it is often helpful for the preacher to re-read a key word, phrase, or verse that stands out to the preacher and most likely the people listening to the sermon.

After reading the entire Scripture text the preacher moves to the fourth step of this new outline, Context. In this fourth step, the preacher explains the historical and literary context of the Scripture text that was just read. This explanation of the historical and literary context is necessary because most postmodern listeners in the US are biblically illiterate.⁶ When a preacher reads Scripture in a church in the US, most listeners have little idea of the literary and historical context of the Scripture that was just read.

This is necessary so listeners can grow in their understanding and begin to make a connection to the text. Continuing with the example of John 14:1-6, after reading the preacher may choose to re-read verse 6 where the tension of the Scripture is found. After re-reading verse 6 the preacher can reiterate a form of the Relevant Question by asking, “How can Jesus be so arrogant to say that he is the way to the father when there seem to be so many ways? Were there no other great teachers or religions in the first century?”

⁶ Ed Stetzer, “Biblical Illiteracy by the Numbers Part 1: The Challenge - How Well do American Christians Know their Bibles? Hint: Not Well,” *Christianity Today* (October 17, 2014), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/october/biblical-illiteracy-by-numbers.html?paging=off> (accessed February 7, 2014).

After a dramatic pause where the listener can reflect on these two questions, the preacher can then move to the fourth stage of this sermon outline: Context. In the Context stage the preacher provides historical and literary context to the text that has been read. In this outline Context is similar to Wilson's "Trouble in the biblical world," and the "Trouble in our world today." In this fourth step of Context, the preacher is trying to establish what this Scripture text meant to the original readers and what it means for today and how the problem in the biblical world is similar to a current problem.

By providing a description of the historical context of the biblical text that was just read, the listener can see that the cultural context of the Bible story would certainly raise the tension of the question that was just asked of the key phrase. For instance, the preacher asks the question, "How can Jesus be so arrogant to say that he is the way to the father when there seem to be so many ways? Were there no other great teachers or religions in the first century?" The preacher could answer this question and say, "Actually in the first century, when Jesus lived and when this Gospel was written, there were a lot of different teachers and world religions." The preacher could expound on the details of the various religions that were prominent in the first century and then point out the similarities between the biblical context and the context of the twenty-first century. One could simply say, "The religious pluralism of the first century is very similar to our current day and age where we have many different world religions with many different teachers and prophets directing people to live in very different ways." After building the tension of the Scripture text by pointing out the similarities of the biblical context and the cultural context of today and how the problem is the same in both contexts, the preacher is ready to move to the fifth step of this new outline, the Gospel step.

In this new outline the Gospel step is similar to Lowry's "Aha" and "Whee" and Wilson's "Resolution in the biblical world" and "Resolution in the world today."⁷ In this Gospel step the preacher helps point out how the biblical text resolves the trouble that has been raised in the text and today's world. Continuing with the example of John 14:1-6, the preacher could repeat the question that was asked right after reading the Scripture text, "How can Jesus be so arrogant to say that he is the way to the Father when there seem to be so many ways?" The preacher may choose to repeat this question for emphasis or simply wait for a dramatic pause and then answer it by saying, "I will tell you how Jesus can be so arrogant to say that he is the only way to the Father, because no one has ever done what Jesus did." This "Aha" statement points to the Gospel—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. At this point the preacher can then return to the Relevant Question that was asked at the beginning of the sermon by saying, "In life how do we know which road to take? When we face a decision, and we face decisions everyday, how do we know what we should do? We know which road to take by looking at Jesus because no one has ever done what Jesus did."

The preacher will then spend time describing all that Jesus did in his life, death, and resurrection, and how the remarkable life of Jesus helps Christians see that he is "the way" because no one else has done what Jesus did. In this outline the Gospel stage of the outline always answers the Relevant Question and relieves the tension that was raised by the Relevant Question and the problem that was raised by the Scripture text itself. As Tim Keller points out when preaching to a postmodern context one should seek to "solve all problems with the gospel. In this way, non-believers hear the gospel each week and

⁷ Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, 13.

believers have their issues and problems addressed with the beauty of the gospel.”⁸

Admittedly, many Scripture texts do not mention Jesus directly. However, all Scripture can point to the love and faithfulness of God and how God’s love is epitomized in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Knowing that the Gospel of Jesus should move one to a response of gratitude and faithfulness, the preacher can then move to the sixth stage of this new outline, Discipline. In the Discipline stage the preacher invites the listeners to experience the transforming truth of the Gospel of Jesus by walking in the way of Jesus and participating in some type of spiritual discipline. This humble invitation to practice a spiritual discipline that Jesus practiced while he was on the earth helps the listener experience the transforming truth of the Gospel of Jesus. In determining which spiritual discipline to lift up, the preacher should choose one that addresses a particular sin that the Scripture text may be addressing.

Continuing with the example of John 14:1-6, one could say that the sin John 14:6 addresses is idolatry. To walk in a way that is different than the way of Jesus is to pursue something other than God, which is idolatry. Some of the spiritual disciplines that help counteract idolatry are worship, meditation, and prayer. When people worship God they are turning their hearts away from idols and turning their hearts towards God. When people meditate on Scripture and pray to God they are turning their minds towards God and away from idols.

⁸ Tim Keller, “Preaching in a Secular Culture,” *gospelinlife.com*, http://static.squarespace.com/static/5315f2e5e4b04a00bc148f24/t/537a728fe4b0d45559686e07/1400533647273/Preaching_in_a_Secular_Culture.pdf (accessed February 7, 2014).

After proclaiming how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus provides the way for people to be reconciled to God one could say:

In gratitude for what Jesus has done for us we should listen to what Jesus said, and by the Spirit's power do what Jesus did. Jesus is the way not only because he paved the way for us to be reconciled to God through His death and resurrection, but Jesus proves to be the way, in that he showed us a way to live that is full of truth and life. If we want to experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring then we need to try walking in his way and do the kinds of things he did like worship, pray, and meditate on Scripture. As we worship God, pray, and meditate on Scripture we will hear God speaking to us. God will tell us what to do, and then we need to try to submit to what God says so that we can experience the abundant life that Jesus came to bring.

Once one has proclaimed the Gospel and humbly invited the listener to walk in the way of Jesus, the preacher can cast a vision of the Kingdom of Heaven and so move to the final stage of this new inductive sermon outline, Kingdom. Similar to Stanley's "We," Kingdom tries to cast a vision of grander living as the preacher encourages people to try to sow to the Spirit and practice a particular spiritual discipline for the sake of the Kingdom. Keeping with the example of John 14:1-6, the preacher could say,

What would our community look like if every church-goer committed to spending time in daily worship, prayer, and Scripture meditation? I bet we would all hear God speaking to us throughout our day guiding us in what we should do. And what would our community look like if we all decided to willfully submit to the promptings of God throughout our day? What would our community look like if we all submitted to the promptings of God when the Spirit told us to love our coworker, our classmate, our family member, by doing to them as we would have done to us. Of course we won't be able to hear God speaking unless we take the time we need to worship, pray, and meditate on Scripture.

Once one has developed a clear outline of the sermon using the Story, Relevant Question, Bible, Context, Gospel, Discipline, and Kingdom outline one is ready to write the sermon. The next section provides helpful tips for writing for the ear and the eye.

Writing for the Ear and the Eye

Quicke points out that, “From Augustine’s integration of rhetoric into preaching to Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech, people have been stirred by carefully crafted speech.”⁹ To ensure one’s sermon is a carefully crafted speech, it is helpful for the preacher to write out what she plans to say. After crafting a basic outline for the sermon, the preacher should write out a sermon that is crafted for the ear, but will also be easy to read from a pulpit or lectern.

When writing a sermon, Jacks says, “You ought to write for preaching the way you talk.”¹⁰ He provides some of the following rules to help guide a preacher in writing for the ear: “Active voice is more alive than passive, don’t use a 50 cent word when a 5 cent word will do, remove unnecessary occurrences of that and which, remove unnecessary or assumable information and get to the point, don’t waste words, remove forms of the verb to be whenever possible.”¹¹

When writing for the ear the key is simplicity. One should use simple words and sentences as much as possible. A short, simple sentence is generally preferred to complex, compound sentences in preaching because it is easier for the human mind to hear, process, and remember. Jacks points out, when writing for the ear one should review a sermon manuscript and “Do a double-take on any sentence longer than three

⁹ Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching*, 54.

¹⁰ G. Robert Jacks, *Just Say the Word! Writing for the Ear* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

typewritten lines. In the first place, it's likely to be a difficult sentence to deliver. In the second place, it's just as likely to be difficult for your listeners to 'get.'"¹²

Repetition and rhythm are also good for the ear. Repeating key words or phrases throughout the sermon will make it easy for the listener to remember a key idea or point. As Jacks points out, "Skillful use of repetition can underscore and intensify. It also enables listeners to grasp important elements possibly missed in a single hearing."¹³ For instance, in the example of John 14:1-6, the preacher established that Jesus can say he is "the way" because "no one has ever done what Jesus did." One could then repeat that simple phrase "no one has ever done what Jesus did" as she describes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For example one could say,

When Jesus was born in a manger from a mother who was a virgin, he proved to be a very unique child. No one has ever done what Jesus did. When Jesus cast out demons, gave sight the blind, allowed the lame to walk, and even brought the dead back to life Jesus proved to be someone special. No one has ever done what Jesus did. When Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the law of God and then died on a cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and rose again on the third day, Jesus made it clear to all that he alone was Lord because, no one has ever done what Jesus did.

To make sure the focus of the sermon is clear to everyone listening it is good to state the focus towards the end of the sermon and then repeat the focus at the very end for emphasis. As previously mentioned Long explains that, "The focus statement is a concise description of the central, controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon. In short this is what the whole sermon will be about."¹⁴ Using the new outline of Story, Relevant Question, Bible, Context, Gospel, Discipline, Kingdom, the focus in this outline is

¹² Ibid., 52.

¹³ Ibid., 67.

¹⁴ Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 86.

usually the answer to the Relevant Question that was asked near the beginning of the sermon. This focus should be revealed during the sermon and reiterated at the end for further emphasis.

Continuing with the example of John 14:1-6, the Relevant Question was asked, “In life how do we know which road to take? When we face a decision, and we face decisions everyday, how do we know what we should do?” Towards the end of the sermon this opening Relevant Question should be repeated and then answered with the focus statement that has been established through the movements of the sermon. To make sure that the focus is said clearly and consistently it is helpful to write it out in bold as a part of the sermon’s manuscript. See Appendix B for a good example of this style.

After restating the focus of the sermon at the very end, the preacher should then close with the function. As previously stated the “function statement is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers.”¹⁵ Basically, the function serves as a brief summary of what the listener should do in light of the focus of the sermon. Keeping with the example of John 14:1-6, the function of the sermon could be:

To experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring, we should try to walk in his ways by doing the things he did like worship, meditation, and prayer. How do you think God might speak to us and move through us if we spent time each day, worshipping God, praying to Jesus, and meditating on God’s word? How might God use us to do the work of his kingdom? /// Of course we will never know until we try.

In this example it is important to provide a dramatic pause after the closing questions so people can have time to think about “How do you think God might speak to us and move

¹⁵ Ibid.

through us if we spent time each day, worshipping God, praying to Jesus, and meditating on God’s word? How might God use us to do the work of his kingdom?” To make sure this pause takes place one can type in three nonverbal characters like “///” or “###.” This will remind the preacher to count to three before moving to the next sentence. This simple three-second pause will help the listener think about the answer.

Jacks encourages preachers to:

Watch your timing when using rhetorical questions. Here’s a brief example of a series of questions that sail by too fast to enable any kind of dialogue: “Is this a problem or a blessing—is it a problem, or is it amazing grace?” That’s an invitation to participation that doesn’t give us any time to participate. Hit it with pauses: “Is this a problem? /// Or a blessing? /// Is it a problem? /// Or is it amazing grace? ///¹⁶

Because sermons are meant to be heard not read, the preacher will want to preach the sermon not just read it. However, practicing the discipline of carefully outlining a sermon and then writing it out helps ensure that the preacher is concise and clear.

As previously argued, in the sound-byte dialogue culture of the US, congregants will prefer shorter sermons over long sermons. The preacher makes a big assumption if she believes people want to listen to her talk non-stop for thirty minutes or more. A well written, concise sermon can communicate the same transformative truth in twenty-two minutes, which is the average length of a television sitcom when one removes the commercials. A twenty-two minute sermon is about seven pages long when using double spaces, twelve point, Times New Roman font. By writing out one’s sermon the preacher makes sure that he doesn’t go too long, and that his humble words are concise, clear, and invite the listener to continue the conversation once the sermon has ended.

¹⁶ Jacks, *Just Say the Word*, 51.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation has argued that to help transform a postmodern heart and mind in the US today, sermons should be biblically faithful, insightful, relevant, conversational, short, and should serve as a humble invitation to participate in some type of spiritual discipline for further personal exploration. Through an initial overview of postmodernity and current trends in communication, the case was made that in today's sound-byte culture sermons should be shorter and ultimately serve as a conversation starter, not an exhaustive claim to truth. It was shown that in postmodernity, a dialogical style is preferred to a long monologue because a dialogical style, with rhetorical questions throughout, feels more interactive than simply listening to a long monologue.

Inductive preaching, where the main thesis is shared towards the end of the sermon, was also shown to be more effective among postmodern listeners because it invites the listener to join the preacher on a journey of discovery. The journey of discovery, which characterizes inductive preaching, is more of an experience as the listener wonders where the preacher is going. Deductive sermons simply ask the congregation to listen and believe as the preacher makes a truth claim at the beginning and then tries to prove that claim through the rest of the sermon.

Through a review of recent church studies it was also revealed that spiritual transformation most often happens when one faithfully practices various spiritual disciplines. It was then argued that in a postmodern context, where truth is ultimately based on experience, the sermon should invite its listeners to practice some type of spiritual discipline as a part of its application if it wants to help transform the listener.

Jesus's own Sermon on the Mount followed this basic format as he invited his listeners to practice various spiritual disciplines like: service, submission, sacrifice, giving, prayer, solitude, secrecy, fasting, and simplicity. Recognizing the similarity between the pluralistic nature of the first-century Roman Empire, where Jesus preached, and the pluralistic twenty-first century of the US, it was argued that preachers today would be wise to follow the model of Jesus who emphasized the faithful practice of spiritual disciplines in his own preaching. A list of the most commonly practiced spiritual disciplines was provided with brief descriptions of each discipline so that a preacher might know what kind of spiritual disciplines should be encouraged as a part of the sermon's application.

An exegetical process was then outlined that helped the preacher move from Scripture text to current cultural context. This exegetical process involved a series of conversations. The preacher begins by having a conversation with the Scripture. The preacher prayerfully asks specific questions of the Scripture text that is going to be preached. There were six questions proposed that the preacher should ask of the text: "What words or phrases stand out and why;" "Would these words or phrases have stood out to the original readers of this text and why;" "Why did the author of this scripture write these verses;" "What did they probably mean to the original audience;" "What does this text say about God;" and "How are people called to live today in light of this text?" These six questions help the preacher discover what the Scripture text originally meant to those who first read it, and what it means for the world today. Answering these series of questions helps insure that the preacher's sermons are faithful, insightful, and relevant.

Once the original meaning of a particular text has been clarified, and the preacher knows how this text applies to her current context, a series of inductive sermon outlines should be used to help organize the preacher's thoughts. By utilizing the inductive sermon outlines of Wilson, Long, Robinson, Stanley, and Lowry, the preacher is able to clarify what needs to be said and the order in which it should be said. Appendix A provides an example of how a preacher can use the exegetical conversation questions and the inductive outlines of these famous homileticians to organize a sermon on John 14:1-6. Appendix B is a sample of a sermon on John 14:1-6 that is ultimately born out of the sermon notes from Appendix A.

The final chapter suggested a new seven-step sermon outline that could be used by preachers that want to encourage their listeners to participate in some type of spiritual discipline for spiritual transformation. This seven-step sermon outline is represented by the following terms: Story, Relevant Question, Bible, Context, Gospel, Discipline, and Kingdom. The preacher opens with a Story that leads to a Relevant Question. The congregation is then invited to open the Bible to discover the answer to the Relevant Question. A key phrase from the Scripture is repeated after reading the entire pericope.

A new version of the Relevant Question is reiterated as one seeks to discover what the text meant for the original audience. The Scripture text is then placed in its literary and historical Context. A bridge is built between the ancient Context of the text and the current Context of the world today. The Relevant Question is reiterated in some form and the Gospel of the text is presented to help resolve the tension that was created by the Relevant Question at the beginning of the sermon. To experience the truth of this Gospel message a very practical way to practice a specific spiritual Discipline is

suggested. A vision of the Kingdom is then presented as the preacher discusses what the world might look like if every Christ follower put this discipline into practice.

As preachers in the twenty-first century try to craft sermons that will transform their listeners' hearts it will be critical that the sermon is biblically faithful, insightful, relevant, conversational, short, and should serve as a humble invitation to participate in some type of spiritual discipline for further personal exploration. The recent *Reveal* study of Willow Creek made it clear that spiritual transformation takes place most often in people who faithfully practice various spiritual disciplines. As one looks at the Sermon on the Mount it is clear that Jesus knew the importance of faithfully practicing spiritual disciplines like prayer, service, submission, fasting, and giving; that is why he exhorted his listeners to practice them in his sermon. In the postmodern information age of the US where experience is viewed as paramount in determining truth, it is a wise preacher who humbly invites her listeners to join her on a personal exploration of the disciplines.

Of course the law of the teacher according to Howard Hendricks is that, "You cannot impart what you do not possess."¹ Hendricks astutely points out that, "The effective teacher always teaches from the overflow of a full life."² To preach sermons that effectively invite the listeners to explore various spiritual disciplines the preacher will need to be one who practices the spiritual disciplines regularly in her own life.

In the fourth century B.C. Aristotle wrote his *Treatise on Rhetoric* where he explains that, "Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on

¹ Hendricks, *Teaching Changes Lives*, 17.

² Ibid.

putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.”³ These three modes of persuasion are often summarized by the ancient Greek terms of: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

According to Aristotle the *ethos* is the character of the speaker: “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible.”⁴ In Greek “*ethos*” literally means “a usual or customary manner of behavior, habit.”⁵ One cannot really preach persuasively about the importance of spiritual disciplines unless one has made these spiritual practices a habit in his own life. The English word “ethic” derives from “*ethos*.”

To apply this concept to preaching, the preacher must preach in such a way that the listener believes that the preacher practices what she is preaching. If a preacher exhorts the congregation to fast, but the congregation knows that the preacher has never fasted before, then the congregation will most likely not follow. In *ethos* the preacher is convincing the congregation of his credibility. In a postmodern context where truth is based on experience it is critical that the preacher communicate in such a way that it is clear she has experienced some element of the truth that she is preaching. It is only possible to communicate the transforming power of spiritual disciplines when one has experienced them for herself. If one wants to preach sermons that help transform lives in a postmodern context, she needs to regularly practice the spiritual disciplines that Jesus preached and encourage others to join him on this journey of spiritual transformation.

³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2004), 7.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Third Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “*ēthos*.” □

APPENDIX A

(SERMON NOTES ON JOHN 14:1-6)

John 14:1-6 – “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Conversation with the Text

1. **“What words or phrases stand out and why?”** – Verse six stands out, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This statement seems very countercultural and exclusive in the postmodern information age of the US where there are so many different religions and belief systems.
2. **“Would these words or phrases have stood out to the original readers of this text and why?”** – Jesus spoke these words to a room full of Jews, but they all lived under Roman rule. After being conquered by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans the Jews knew that there were many different religions that promised salvation and deliverance, so this statement would have stood out in the first-century Greco-Roman world as well as countercultural.
3. **“Why did the author of this Scripture write these verses?”** - According to John 20:30-31, the entire Gospel was written so that the reader might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and “in believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31). This exclusive countercultural claim of Christ was written because Jesus said it, and because John wanted to urge his readers to believe in Jesus and walk in the way of Jesus.
4. **“What did they probably mean to the original audience?”** - The original audience understood John 14:6 to mean that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus one has been given a way to be with the heavenly Father and experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring.
5. **“What does this text say about God?”** – There is only way to God, but because there are many rooms, Jesus welcomes many to come to God through faith in him.
6. **“How are people called to live today in light of this text?”** – We are called to believe in Jesus and live as he lived by doing the kinds of things that Jesus did. When we believe in Jesus we will be moved to walk in his ways as we seek to follow him. Then we will experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring.

Conversation with the Scholars

Leo the Great – “The cross of Christ, which was set up for the salvation of mortals, is both a sacrament and an example: a sacrament whereby the divine power takes effect, an example whereby one’s devotion is excited. For to those who are rescued from the prisoner’s yoke, redemption further procures the power of following the way of the cross by imitation. For if the world’s wisdom so prides itself in its error that everyone follows the opinions and habits and whole manner of life of him whom he has chosen as his leader, how shall we share in the name of Christ except by being inseparably united to him who is, as he himself asserted, “the way, the truth and the life” – the way, that is, of holy living, the truth of divine doctrine and the life of eternal happiness.”¹

Basil the Great – “We understand the ‘way’ to be the road to perfection, advancing in order step by step through the words of righteousness and the illumination of knowledge, always yearning for that which lies ahead and straining toward the last mile, until we reach that blessed end, the knowledge of God, with which the Lord blesses those who believe in him. For truly our Lord is a good way, a straight road with no confusing forks or turns, leading us directly to the Father. For ‘no one comes to the Father,’ he says, ‘except through me.’ Such is our way up to God through his Son.”²

John Calvin – “*The way, the truth, and the life.* He lays down three degrees, as if he had said, that he is the beginning, and the middle, and the end; and hence it follows that we ought to begin with him, to continue in him, and to end in him. We certainly ought not seek for higher wisdom than that which leads us to eternal life, and he testifies that this life is to found in him. Now the method of obtaining life is, to become new creatures. He declares, that we ought not to seek it anywhere else, and, at the same time, reminds us, that he is the way, by which alone we can arrive at it. That he may not fail us in any respect, he stretches out the hand to those who are going astray, and stoops so low as to guide sucking infants. Presenting himself as a leader, he does not leave his people in the middle of the course, but makes them partakers of the truth. At length he makes them enjoy the fruit of it, which is the most excellent and delightful thing that can be imagined.”³

D.A. Carson – “Jesus is the way to God, precisely because he is the truth of God and the life of God. Jesus is the truth, because he embodies the supreme revelation of God – he himself ‘narrates’ God, says and does exclusively what the Father gives him to say and do, indeed he is properly called ‘God’. He is God’s gracious self-disclosure, his ‘Word’

¹ Leo the Great, *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: New Testament IVb John 11-21*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 123-124.

² Basil the Great, *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: New Testament IVb John 11-21*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 124.

³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. Rev. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 84.

made flesh. . . . Only because he is the truth and the life can Jesus be the way for others to come to God, the way for his disciples to attain the many dwelling-places in the Father's house . . . even if John's language utilizes metaphors and images common amongst religions of the Roman world and well attested in diaspora Judaism, he does not mean for a moment to suggest that Christianity is merely one more religion amongst many."⁴

Raymond Brown – “When we turn to the exegesis of John 14:6, we find that in saying “I am THE WAY,” Jesus is not primarily presenting himself as a moral guide, nor as a leader for his disciples to follow. The emphasis here is different from that of 16:13 where the Paraclete/Spirit is said to guide the disciples along the way of all truth. Rather Jesus is presenting himself as the only avenue of salvation, in the manner of 10:9, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.” This is so because Jesus is THE TRUTH, the only revelation of the Father who is the goal of the journey.”⁵

RC Sproul – “I am the way because I am the truth and because I am the life. I am the way to the Father because I am the true manifestation or revelation of the Father. I am the way to the Father because I alone have the power of eternal life’ . . . Jesus said, ‘I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved’ (10:19) Elsewhere in the Scriptures we are told ‘there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12). . . . God has provided a road, a path, or a way of redemption, which was His plan from all eternity, and that divine *Logos*, the second person of the Trinity, took on Himself a human nature to make that way.”⁶

Leon Morris – “Jesus now introduces a somewhat different topic. He has been talking about leaving the disciples, and it is with this that Thomas is concerned. But Jesus is to go to the Father, and he now speaks of the way. He not only shows people the way (i.e. by revealing it), but he is the way (i.e. he redeems us). In this connection “the truth” will have saving significance. It will point to Jesus’ utter dependability, but also to the saving truth of the gospel. “The life” will likewise take its content from the gospel. Jesus is both the life and the source of life to believers. . . . “Way” speaks of a connection between two persons or things, and here the link between God and sinners. “Truth” reminds us of the complete reliability of Jesus in all that he does and is. And “life” stresses the fact that mere physical existence matters little. The only life worth the name is that which Jesus brings, for he is life itself. Jesus is asserting in strong terms the uniqueness and sufficiency of his work for sinners. We should not overlook the faith involved in both in

⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 491-492.

⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 630.

⁶ RC Sproul, *St. Andrews Expository Commentary John* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 264.

the utterance and the in the acceptance of those words, spoken as they were on the eve of the crucifixion.”⁷

Conversation with the Culture

In U.S., 77% Identify as Christian: Eighteen percent have no explicit religious identity by Frank Newport

PRINCETON, NJ -- The large majority of Americans -- 77% of the adult population -- identify with a Christian religion, including 52% who are Protestants or some other non-Catholic Christian religion, 23% who are Catholic, and 2% who affiliate with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Another 18% of Americans do not have an explicit religious identity and 5% identify with a non-Christian religion.

Religious Preference in the United States

	January-November 2011	January-November 2012
	%	%
Protestant/Other Christian	52.5	51.9
Catholic	23.6	23.3
Mormon	1.9	2.1
Jewish	1.6	1.7
Muslim	0.5	0.6
Other non-Christian	2.4	2.6
No religious identity	15.0	15.6
No response given	2.5	2.2

Gallup Daily tracking

GALLUP®

Figure 1 – Religious Preference in the United States

This breakdown is essentially the same as it was in 2011. Compared with last year, Protestant and Catholic identification dropped.⁸

⁷ Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John Revised* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995).

⁸ Frank Newport, “In US 77% Identify as Christian: Eighteen Percent Nave no Explicit Religious Identity,” *Gallup* (Dec. 24, 2012), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159548/identify-christian.aspx> (accessed February 4, 2015).

Analysis of more than 2,500 censuses, surveys and population registers – finds 2.2 billion Christians (32% of the world’s population), 1.6 billion Muslims (23%), 1 billion Hindus (15%), nearly 500 million Buddhists (7%) and 14 million Jews (0.2%) around the world as of 2010. In addition, more than 400 million people (6%) practice various folk or traditional religions, including African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions. An estimated 58 million people – slightly less than 1% of the global population – belong to other religions, including the Baha’i faith, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Tenrikyo, Wicca and Zoroastrianism, to mention just a few.⁹

Oprah Winfrey says, “There couldn’t possibly be just one way.”¹⁰

Sermon Outlines

Paul Scott Wilson: Four Pages of the Sermon

Trouble in our World Today - There are so many different religions in our world today how does one know which one to adhere to or follow?

Trouble in the biblical World - There were so many different religions and teachers in the first century, people didn’t know which one they should follow, or which one was true.

Resolution in the World of the Bible - Jesus invites people to follow him and walk in his ways because he is the truth.

Resolution in our World Today – We should walk in the way of Jesus which means trying to do the kind of things that Jesus did while he was on this earth like: praying, fasting, solitude, silence, service, meditation, etc. so we can experience the truth of Christ.

Thomas Long and Haddon Robinson: Focus/Big Idea and Function

FOCUS/BIG IDEA: We know that Jesus is the way to live and the way to salvation because through his life, death, and resurrection we can see that Jesus has done what no one else has ever done.

FUNCTION: To experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring, we should try to walk in his ways by doing the things he did like worship, meditation, and prayer.

⁹ “Global Religions Landscape” *Pew Research Center* (December 18, 2012), <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/> (accessed February 4, 2015).

¹⁰ Youtube.com, “Oprah Denies Jesus is the Only Way to Salvation and Heaven,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noO_dCWtB1E (accessed February 4, 2015).

Andy Stanley: ME, WE, GOD, YOU, WE

ME – “I was driving in the mountains of New Mexico, and I lost my map, and my GPS wasn’t working. I got to the fork in a road, and I didn’t know which road to take. I took the wrong road and I ended up in the wrong town.”

WE – “In life we often find ourselves at a fork in the road with our careers, relationships, our faith. With so many choices how do we know which road to take?”

GOD – “In John 14:1-6 Jesus tells us to take his road. Taking the road of Jesus means we trust him to lead us, and we seek to live the way that he lived by practicing some basic spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation on Scripture, and service. Then we will hear God clearly and know which road to take.”

YOU – “What would happen if you took just 5 minutes each day this week to read a saying of Jesus and then pray about how God might help you live it out?”

WE – “What do you think our community would look like if everyone just spent 5 minutes each day, reading a saying of Jesus and praying that God might help them live it out? I bet the hungry would get fed. The naked would get clothed, and violence would be greatly diminished in our community.”

Eugene Lowry: Oops, Ugh, Aha, Whee, Yeah

Oops – How can Jesus say he is “the way” when there seem to be so many ways out there?

Ugh – In ancient times like today there were numerous gods and numerous religions. There have been countless religious leaders like Muhammad, Buddha, and Bahulla. Everyone claims to be “the truth.” How could anyone claim to be “the way, the truth, and the life”? How can Jesus say he is “the way” when there seem to be so many ways?

Aha – Because no one has ever done what Jesus did.

Whee - Jesus lived in obedience to our heavenly father and then he died on a cross, and on the third day he rose again.

Yeah - What would the world look like if everyone who followed Jesus began to do the kinds of things Jesus did by praying, meditating on Scripture, and serving others.

New Outline: Story, Relevant Question, Bible, Context, Gospel, Discipline, Kingdom

Story – Getting lost in the mountains without GPS or a map, facing a fork in the road not knowing which way to turn, which path to take. Life can be a lot like that.

Relevant Question - “In life how do we know which road to take? When we face a decision, and we face decisions everyday, how do we know what we should do?”

Bible – The answer is found in John 14:1-6 with an emphasis on verse 6.

Context - How can Jesus be so arrogant to say that he is the way to *the* father when there seem to be so many ways? Were there no other great teachers or religions in the first century? Actually in the first century, when Jesus lived and when this gospel was written, there were a lot of different teachers and world religions.

Gospel - “How can Jesus be so arrogant to say that he is the way to the Father when there seem to be so many ways? I will tell you how Jesus can be so arrogant to say that he is the only way to the Father, because no one has ever done what Jesus did. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are truly unique. In life how do we know which road to take? When we face a decision, and we face decisions everyday, how do we know what we should do? We know what to do by looking at Jesus. We know that Jesus is the way to live and the way to salvation because through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus has done what no one else has ever done.”

Discipline – Jesus is the way not only because he paved the way for us to be reconciled to God through His death and resurrection, but Jesus proves to be the way, in that he showed us a way to live that is full of truth and life. If we want to experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring then we need to try walking in his way and do the kinds of things he did like worship, pray, and meditate on Scripture. As we worship God, pray, and meditate on Scripture we will hear God speaking to us. God will tell us what to do, and then we need to try to submit to what God says so that we can experience the abundant life that Jesus came to bring.

Kingdom – What would our community look like if every church-goer committed to spending time in daily worship, prayer, and Scripture meditation? I bet we would all hear God speaking to us throughout our day guiding us in what we should do. And what would our community look like if we all decided to willfully submit to the promptings of God throughout our day? What would our community look like if we all submitted to the promptings of God when the Spirit told us to love our coworker, our classmate, our family member, by doing to them as we would have done to us. Of course we won't be able to hear God speaking unless we take the time we need to worship, pray, and meditate on Scripture.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE SERMON ON JOHN 14:1-6

This past summer my family and I were driving through the mountains of northern New Mexico. We turned off the main road to take a side road that we understood was a shortcut to Angel Fire. However the road was winding and there weren't any signs. To complicate matters our GPS wasn't working and I was low on gas. I didn't have cell coverage, and it was starting to get dark. I was praying that I could find a main road soon, but there wasn't one to be found. Then all of the sudden there was a fork in the road. I had to make a decision to go either left or right. I didn't know which way to go and neither did my wife.

You know life is often like that fork in the road isn't it? Everyday we are forced to make decisions. Some decisions are minor like, "Where am I going to eat lunch today? What will I eat for lunch today?" But some decisions carry much larger consequences. Where will I go to college? What will I major in? Who will I marry? Where will I live? Where will I work? Should I apply for that new job or simply wait? Life is filled with decisions isn't it? There are different roads to take. **In life how do we know which road to take? When we face a decision, and we face decisions everyday, how do we know what we should do?**

To find out how we are supposed to know what we should do, which way we should go in any decision we make, please open your Bible to John 14:1-6. [Pray for reading of the Scripture and the preaching of the Scripture].

Did you know that there are reportedly over 4,000 different religions in the world today? I have a pie chart from the Pew Forum that shows the percentage of people who are a part of the major religions in the world today. **SHOW PIE CHART.**

As you look at this pie chart you can see that Christianity is the largest religion in the world with over 2.2-billion followers. Islam is the second-largest religion in the world with roughly 1.6-billion followers. Ironically, the third-largest religious group system is agnostics, atheists, or secular humanists, who believe there is no god or if there is a god they don't affiliate themselves with a particular belief system. There are roughly 1.1-billion people who claim to be agnostic, atheist, or secular humanists. This non-belief system is then followed by Hinduism and Buddhism.

So over 2/3 of the world's population would reject the idea that Jesus Christ alone is Lord, and yet in our text this morning Jesus says quite clearly in John 14:6, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

How can Jesus be so arrogant to say that he is the way to *the* father when there seem to be so many ways? Were there no other great teachers or religions in the first century?///

Actually in the first century, when Jesus lived and when this Gospel was written, there were a lot of different teachers and world religions. Now it is true that Jesus is in a room with Jews in Jerusalem when he makes this statement, but the Jews were under Roman rule. Caesar was treated like a god, and most Romans like the Greeks believed that there were many gods. Before Israel was under Roman rule they were under Greek rule. Before that they were under Persian rule. Before that they were under Babylonian rule. Before that they were under Assyrian rule. All of the foreign lands that conquered

Israel had foreign gods. In fact the people of Israel had been exposed to foreign gods for centuries. The Jews knew they weren't the only religion in the world. The first century was just as pluralistic as our culture is today, yet Jesus still insists on saying, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."**

With so many different belief systems in the first century, how can Jesus be so arrogant to say that he is the only way to the Father when there seem to be so many different ways? How can Jesus say he is the only way?///

I will tell you how Jesus can be so arrogant to say that he is the only way to the Father, because no one has ever done what Jesus did. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are truly unique. When Jesus was born in a manger from a mother who was a virgin, he proved to be a very special child. No one has ever done what Jesus did. When Jesus cast out demons, walked on water, healed 10 lepers, gave sight to the blind, allowed the lame to walk, and even brought the dead back to life Jesus proved to be a person with unmatched power. No one has ever done what Jesus did. When Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the law of God and then died on a cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and rose again on the third day, Jesus made it clear to all that he alone was Lord because, no one has ever done what Jesus did. Yes, we can say that Jesus is the way the truth and the life because no one has ever done what Jesus did. But what if the disciples who told the stories of Jesus were all lying?///

Well let's consider the evidence just for a moment, 10 of the 11 remaining disciples all die as martyrs for their faith in Jesus. They were killed for declaring Jesus is Lord and that Jesus rose again. If Jesus had not risen from the dead they would have known it, and it is unlikely that 10 men would be willing to die for a known lie. They

were willing to die for the proclamation that Jesus is Lord because they knew it was true, and they knew Jesus was Lord because they had seen the risen Jesus for themselves.

The most logical explanation for the life of the disciples and their commitment to preach that Jesus is risen, is that Jesus in fact had risen from the dead. No one would willingly die for a lie, and 10 of the remaining 11 disciples all die as martyrs for the proclamation that Jesus is Lord and He is risen. Now if Jesus really did rise again from the dead, then Jesus probably was who He says He was, the Son of God, the GREAT I AM, and in the case of this morning's text **“the way, and the truth, and the life.”**

Yes, Jesus proves to be the way, the road to our Heavenly Father, because ultimately He paved the road for you and me to be with God with his death and resurrection. In his resurrection Jesus defeated sin and death on our behalf. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection are all grace, God's unmerited favor towards us, a free gift to you and me. But like any gift we have to receive the gift in order to have the gift, and we receive this gift through faith. Have you accepted the free gift of Jesus Christ?///

If you are here this morning I imagine you probably have. Once we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior then what?///

Well, when Jesus says he is “the way” he probably means two things. First of all he means that he is the road to our heavenly Father, but if you look at how the term **“the way”** is used in the rest of the Scriptures we can see that **“the way”** means **“the way”** to live also. As we look at Deuteronomy 5 we can see that the people of Israel are told to walk in **“the way.”**

³² You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. ³³ You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has

**commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you,
and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.
(Deuteronomy 5:32-33 ESV)**

Through the Ten Commandments and the Shema, God has given us clear directions on how we are to live. And throughout the Old Testament the people of Israel are told to walk in the way of the Lord, to live according to God's law.

In Jesus we have been given a living example of how we ought to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus is the way because as God incarnate, God's one and only Son who was without sin, Jesus is the example of how we ought to live. Jesus walked perfectly in the way of God, and **we know that Jesus is the way to live and the way to salvation because through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus has done what no one else has ever done.** If we want to experience the truth and the life that Jesus came to bring we should seek to walk in the way of Jesus. So how do we do that exactly?///

Well, guided by the Holy Spirit we should seek to do the kinds of things that Jesus did. Jesus did a lot of things. He prayed. He worshipped. He spent time in solitude with His Heavenly Father. Jesus memorized God's word. **If we want to experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring, we should try to walk in his ways by doing the things he did like worship, meditation, and prayer.** As we worship God, pray, and meditate on Scripture each day we will hear God speaking to us throughout our day. God will tell us what to do when we face various decisions.

What would our community look like if every churchgoer committed to spending time in daily worship, prayer, and Scripture meditation so they could hear the Spirit telling them what to do?///

I bet if we all spent time each day worshipping, praying, and meditating on Scripture we would all hear Holy Spirit speaking to us throughout our day guiding us in what we should do. The Holy Spirit would tell us how we can best love our neighbor as ourselves by doing to them as we would have done to us.

What would our community look like if we all submitted to the promptings of the Holy Spirit when the Spirit told us to love our coworker, our classmate, our family member, by doing to them as we would have done to us? Notice that right before Jesus said these controversial words in John 14:6 he had just washed his disciples' feet. The way of Jesus is the way of service. How might we humbly serve our neighbor today?///

We can donate old clothes. We can give a bag of non-perishable food items to a homeless person asking for money for food. We can clean up the trash we see in our neighborhood. We can bring brownies to new neighbors when they move into our neighborhood to welcome them. A real simple question we should ask this week is, "How can I help?" Husbands when you come home from work and your wife is busy with the kids or working to get dinner ready simply ask, "How can I help?" When you have a friend going through a hard time simply ask, "How can I help?" When you are at work and you are talking to your coworkers ask them "How can I help?" When you are interacting with your children about school or sports ask them, "How can I help?" If we want to experience the truth and life that Jesus came to bring then we need to walk in the way of Jesus by spending time each day in worship, prayer, meditating on Scripture and prayerfully asking God, "How can I help?"/>///

You know as a pastor I have been to a lot of funerals, and I do a lot of funerals. At funerals I have never seen people celebrate how much stuff someone had. We

celebrate how much they gave away. We celebrate generosity and how they gave of themselves. We celebrate how the person was able to impact the lives of others by serving them. If the way of Jesus teaches us anything it is that greatness is found in serving not in being served. But we won't know how God wants us to serve unless we take time each day doing what Jesus did, worshipping, praying, and meditating on God's word.///

In life how do we know which road to take? When we face a decision, and we face decisions everyday, how do we know what we should do? We know what to do by looking at Jesus. **We know that Jesus is the way to live and the way to salvation because through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus has done what no one else has ever done.** Guided by the Holy Spirit this week may we seek to discover how we can walk in the way of Jesus by spending time in prayer, worship, and meditation of Scripture then we will hear God speaking to us telling us "How we can help." Let's pray.

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