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# Impact of Storytelling to Effect Life Change at Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church

Robert Louis Cundiff

*Andrews University*

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ABSTRACT

IMPACT OF STORYTELLING TO EFFECT LIFE CHANGE AT  
RALEIGH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: IMPACT OF STORYTELLING TO EFFECT LIFE CHANGE AT RALEIGH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Problem

The Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church is a large metropolitan congregation with many media saturated professionals, young adults and busy students. As such, spiritual growth is hampered and preaching is degraded from a transformational experience to an informational event. This result is often an inability to engage the preaching event so that life change can happen. Hearers need to listen actively to experience transformation.

## Method

Research was conducted in which new storytelling methods were field tested from the Raleigh pulpit. The program included these steps:

1. A hypothesis was developed to guide the research and provide a rationale for data collection and evaluation.
2. A baseline survey was administered to establish a benchmark regarding listener's perceived spiritual growth and appreciation of the stories they had previously heard from the Raleigh pulpit.
3. A four-part sermon series was preached in which two new storytelling methods were used.
4. An exit survey was administered to collect data from which to measure differences in listener response.
5. The data was evaluated, conclusions drawn and recommendations made.

## Results

One hundred and thirty-three participants completed the baseline survey while 128 completed the exit survey. The data collected is contrary to the hypothesis and suggests that the hypothesis does not hold. Listeners with Two Year or technical college degrees seemed to have the greatest appreciation of the series while more educated listeners seemed to have had less. Men responded more favorably to the series than they did on the baseline survey and reported less variance. The Latino population reported the most appreciation for the series, and the 18-30 year old population reported the least

appreciation for the series. The 61+ population had the reported the highest variances of any group.

### Conclusion

The project led to five recommendations; 1) I will develop a seminar on how to be a good pew listener; 2) More research needs to be conducted about how men grow spiritually; 3) Further study should be done to explore the potential response of men to more emotive matters; 4) In future research, I will be more mindful to isolate new Adventists as a separate population/demographic; and 5) More research needs to be conducted to understand how education affects listener response so that preaching can maximize its effectiveness with this population.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

IMPACT OF STORYTELLING TO EFFECT LIFE CHANGE AT  
RALEIGH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Robert Louis Cundiff

June, 2013

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RALEIGH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

A project document  
presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
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Robert L. Cundiff

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## DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Patsy Cundiff, whose unselfish life paved the way for my ministry and taught me innumerable lessons about the Kingdom of God, the value of which can only rightly be understood once we cross the threshold of heaven's gates.

*“...God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Adventist Christian Academy
ARC	Adventist Recreation Center
RC	Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church
RTP	Research Triangle Park
VBS	Vacation Bible School

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Lastly, I wish to recognize my cohort brothers and fellow pulpiteers, Roger Walter and Steve Reasor. Something truly soul nurturing would have been lost had we not had the pleasure of each other's company throughout the DMin program.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Personal History**

I was born in Los Angeles, CA in 1967. Our family moved to Louisville, KY six years later. At the tender age of 12 I sensed God was calling me to work for Him. I had an inner sense that one day I would do something special for Him. This call was exhibited as a gentle ache in my heart that I could not satisfy or quiet. I never told anyone about the call because I was a shy child. I doubted that I could ever stand up and talk to people and I thought that if I shared my desire people would laugh at me. Though I did not realize it at the time, I later came to understand that this was an early call to the Gospel ministry. That same year Evangelist Kenneth Cox conducted a crusade in Louisville and I was baptized. I remember listening attentively to his sermons and trying to remember everything he said. Though I had many doubts about ever becoming a preacher, I wanted to understand these messages because I knew they would be helpful if I was to work for God in some way.

The adolescent years, however, proved to be difficult for me. I was ambivalent about my spiritual life, rebellious and even hostile toward the church. When I was 17 years old another evangelist came to town. Lynn Powell and his wife Sandy were two of the kindest and most loving Christians I had ever met. Night after night he presented the Gospel with a balance of gentleness and persuasion that I found hard to resist. One

Friday night he gave a call that I accepted and I rededicated my life to Christ. This led to a deep conversion experience and brought radical changes to my life.

A few months after my rededication, I left for Highland Academy in Portland, TN to complete my senior year of high school. Within the first month of school; students and faculty were approaching me and telling me that I should go into the ministry. After several years of running from God and muting His call in my life, the call was now being presented with greater force. I still could not envision myself as a preacher so I continued to resist the call and look for other ways to serve God.

After graduating from Highland Academy I enrolled at Southern College as an undeclared major. There I found a whole new group of people who encouraged me to take up pastoral ministry. It was increasingly harder to deny that this topic was becoming a consistent theme in my social interactions.

In my sophomore year I left for the Marshall Islands to serve as a student missionary on the island of Majuro. I did this as much out of frustration about my indecisiveness in choosing a major as I did a desire to serve. On some level it was a Jonah experience for me. I secretly wanted to know if God would continue to chase me with this call if I ran away. Would I continue to receive the same message from God on a tiny island in the middle of the South Pacific?

One Sabbath afternoon, the hound of heaven finally outpaced my ability to run away. I was sitting in our rusty old metal church on a wooden pew with a hoard of shoeless, shirtless, bronze skinned Marshallese children on either side of me. I don't remember what the speaker was saying or even what the occasion was that drew us together. The inner dialogue of my heart wrestled with my resistance to God's plan in my

life. It was becoming apparent that I was on the verge of disobedience. In that moment, I understood that I really would not be happy doing anything else in life. I did not want to disappoint God and could hardly bear the thought that I was rejecting His plan for my life.

God had called me to preach the Gospel. It was for this reason that I was born. This was to be the task that I would dedicate my life too. God had finally won. In that moment, I made the decision that when I returned to Southern College I would declare myself a religion major.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to explore the ability of story to strengthen preaching and facilitate moments of life change for the listener. The project developed and implemented a research tool that gathered data concerning the effectiveness of two storytelling methods designed to assist listeners with the task of listening. Having established a baseline for the research, a four-part sermon series field tested the storytelling techniques. An exit survey was then administered to glean data for comparison and evaluation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church is a metropolitan church situated in the Capital of North Carolina. Its cosmopolitan membership consists largely of media saturated professionals, young adults and tertiary students who lead full and fast paced lives. The average worship attendee is 33 years old. The rapid pace with which many attendees live their lives degrades preaching from a transformational experience to a mere

informational event. But, as Dybdahl (2007) argues that the longing of the human soul is not for information about God as much as about the desire for an encounter with God.

Buttrick (1987) suggests that the result is an attention span of only four minutes. The impact is often an inability to focus on the sermon and appropriately engage in life change during the preaching event. Though the Word of God is sufficient in and of itself to bring transformation, I believe that many of my listeners need help listening so that the Gospel can do its transformational work in their lives.

### **Justification for the Project**

Media saturation and the bombardment of exciting entertainment train the mind to seek constant stimulation. This stimulation wars against one's ability to contemplate the spiritual and discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I felt that investigation of storytelling techniques that could help reverse this trend in my church was needed. I wanted to know if there were specific storytelling techniques that could assist members of the Raleigh Church in engaging in the preaching event in a way that would facilitate life change. The project sought to answer this question by testing two specific storytelling techniques and measuring their ability to assist listeners in the task of listening.

### **Expectations for the Project**

It is hoped that this project will advance the kingdom growth of the Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church by assisting members in maintaining focus during the preaching event. My sincere desire is that it would produce spiritual growth in many of my congregants through a better understanding of God's Word.

This project is expected to create a preaching atmosphere where members could more effectively practice the spiritual disciplines of worship and the study of God's Word. Furthermore, the project is intended to provide me with enhanced research skills that will help me grow personally, academically and professionally.

It is anticipated that this project will result in a project document that will contribute to a body of literature designed to advance the effectiveness of preaching. In addition, it is hoped that the project will position me to make a humble contribution to the practical discussion about how preachers can use story to increase their effectiveness as communicators.

It is also my intention that the project will clarify the validity of my hypothesis and help determine the direction for future personal study. Likewise, this project should shed light on the effectiveness of my preaching ministry both before and during the preaching of the "Portrait of a Healthy Family" series.

### **Delimitations**

The research portion of the project was limited to the Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church in Raleigh, NC. Even though I was in my eighth year in the Raleigh pulpit at the time the research was conducted, the baseline survey asked respondents to limit the reporting of their feelings and perceptions about my preaching to the previous four years. The exit survey asked respondents to limit the reporting of their feelings and perceptions about my preaching to the "Portrait of a Healthy Family" sermon series which was delivered in May, 2012.

In the course of the project I came to realize that my initial proposal to the Project Proposal Committee was too broad in scope. I initially included so many variables that it

would have been difficult to extrapolate justifiable and defensible conclusions from the data. My original proposal to the Project Proposal Committee indicated that I wanted to conduct research on the fundamental structures and techniques of storytelling. Specific techniques mentioned included flashback, pacing, voicing and contemporization. I had no desire to place myself in the position of defending conclusions that the data could not adequately support. I limited the scope of the research by restricting the study to two variables: open-ended storytelling and stories that imbed a strong emotional component.

I chose not to conduct research on minors because of the inherent difficulties associated with gaining parental consent and the additional responsibilities of meeting Institutional Review Board requirements. Other populations that were excluded were visitors and non-members as I felt the apparent irregularity of their attendance could threaten the integrity of both baseline and exit survey results. I also limited respondents to adult members who had heard or viewed (online) 3 of the 4 sermons in the series.

The study was not longitudinal in scope. It did not research the long term impact of incorporating these storytelling techniques into a steady diet of preaching.

Lastly, due to the subjective nature of sermon evaluation, I chose to limit the project to quantitative research. I felt this limitation would protect the integrity of the study and place me in a stronger position to defend any conclusions with numerical data.

### **Limitations**

As mentioned above, the evaluation of sermons is, at best, a subjective task. My second reader, Dr. Ben Maxson, voiced concern about the breadth of the original proposal. Specifically he was concerned about the ability of the project to measure spiritual growth from a single sermon series. It was hoped that by limiting the scope of



the project to only two storytelling methods and retrieving only quantitative data that any conclusions drawn would withstand scrutiny. Having employed these limitations I moved forward with the understanding that the data would have to speak to the validity (or lack thereof) of both the proposal and the hypothesis.

The evaluation is complicated by the personal relationship I hold with my church members. In general, I am well thought of and appreciated by the congregation. My sense was that they wanted me to do well in the DMin program and were anxious to be supportive of the research process. This generated a concern about how my relationship with my members might skew the data. I felt the best safeguard would be to collect as many surveys as possible. In addition, I never shared my hypothesis with the church until after the exit survey had been retrieved.

I recognized that any progress that may have been realized during this series only represents the progress that took place during the series. I have been careful not to be too generous with longitudinal projections, the basis of which is a one month study.

Similarly, I conducted the research with an awareness of the pitfalls associated with projecting the results of this study onto the denomination at large or other Adventist churches. Differing historical, regional, pastoral, and cultural factors may greatly alter the outcomes of a similar study in other settings, to say nothing of where a particular church lands on the theological and methodological spectrum.

Lastly, the nature of self-analysis and self-reporting is always suspicious. However, I wanted to discover something that would empower me and other preachers to change the world. I entered the project with the dream of doing just that. Limiting the survey results to quantitative data was intended as an internal control mechanism to help

hold me accountable to an honest evaluation of the project results.

### **Definition of Terms**

For purposes of clarity, the reader may find the following definitions of terms helpful.

*Baseline survey.* A survey administered to the congregation prior to the sermon series to establish baseline data for later comparison. The survey asked respondents to share feelings and opinions about the previous four years of my preaching ministry.

*Emotional Component of Storytelling.* A non-academic term I coined which refers to the ability of a story to connect with listeners' emotions in a way that is more likely to open them up to life change.

*Emotional Word Picture.* Gary Smalley and John Trent define this as, "a communication tool that uses a story or object to activate simultaneously the emotions and intellect of a person" (Smalley & Trent, 1991, p. 21).

*Exit survey.* A survey administered to the congregation at the conclusion of the series. It asked respondents to share feelings and opinions about the four week sermon series "Portrait of a Healthy Family."

*Metanarrative.* Synonymous with the terms, "Grand Narrative," and "Master Narrative." Also defined by John Stevens as "a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience" (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 6).

*The New Homiletic.* A general shift in the world of homiletics from propositional preaching to inductive preaching which occurred around the late 1960s.

*Open-ended Storytelling.* A term I coined to refer to Fred Craddock's technique of inviting listeners to participate in finding personal applications to the sermon (or story) that fits their individual life situation. It allows for multiple applications to be teased out of the same message and encourages listeners to choose the application that will be most meaningful to them.

*Portrait series.* An abbreviated version of the phrase "Portrait of a Healthy Family." This is the title of the four part sermon series in which the story telling techniques were field tested.

*RC.* An abbreviated version for the name of the Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church. Since this name is referenced repeatedly in the project document, this shortened title is used to make the document easier to read.

### **Methodology**

After the introductory chapter the project continues by laying a theological foundation for the research. This foundation seeks to understand what the Bible has to say about the power of story to assist the listener in hearing the message of salvation. It addresses the question, "Does the Bible actually teach that story can invite listeners into the transformative realm?" This second chapter examines how Nathan and Jesus used parable to communicate spiritual truth. Then it enters into discussion with current thinkers in the field of storytelling and examines key statements by Ellen White.

Chapter 3 embarks on a literature review which engages both seminal and contemporary authors in a discussion about the use of story in preaching. Special attention is paid to: (1) the ability of story to engage the hearer's emotions to assist the task of hearing so that life change can happen, (2) the development of a definition and

brief history of narrative preaching, and (3) a review of the contentions of the New Homiletic.

Chapter 4 explores the community and local church contexts in which the research was conducted. It then offers an eight stage narrative account of the conceptualization, development, assumptions, implementation and collation of the quantitative research project. It ends with an explanation of how the summary statistics were generated.

Chapter 5 offers detailed evaluations of the data. It reports on a variety of statistical tests and summary statistics which provide ample opportunity for reflection and deliberation within the chapter. It concludes by identifying new questions that were generated because of the research.

Finally, chapter 6 provides a summary of the entire project. This summary is followed by a review of the conclusions drawn from each chapter, as well as conclusions for the project as a whole. Attention is given to lessons learned which sets the stage for recommendations and suggestions for further reflection and research.

## CHAPTER 2

### A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF STORYTELLING

#### **Introduction**

The Raleigh Church has been through rapid growth and experienced significant change in the last five years. Though many see the church as successful, the high dropout rate of youth and young adults is disconcerting. As Dudley reports, “40 percent to 50 percent of those who are baptized members in their mid-teens will drop out of the church by the time they are halfway through their 20s” (2000, p. 60). These alarming statistics are being replicated in the Raleigh Church.

Why is more transformation not experienced by members of the Raleigh Church? One theory is that listeners are not properly engaging in (or listening to) the preaching of the Word. In other words many listeners need help listening. Research is necessary that will explore methods of attracting and holding the attention of worshipers during preaching so that life change can happen.

Recent studies suggest that the inherent power of story to hold the attention of worshipers may provide a partial solution. Walsh argues,

Most people born after the Baby Boomers receive information best in the form of stories...They want information, and they want it straight. But they want it in a way that holds their interest. Stories are the best way to reach this new breed of thinker. They are left cold if you try to impress them with outlines or by putting your main points in some order. (Walsh, 2003, p. 16)

Shaw agrees, but offers a deeper explanation to why narrative opens the possibility of life change.

Narration seems to be a universal human activity. People think, dream, enact, and tell stories. In so doing, they engage in the process of self-creation and meaning making that is an important condition of learning. Learners first engage a subject narratively, since experience is constructed through the narration that embeds it with meaning. In other words, narrative gives shape to experience and turns the raw data of experience into meaning. Therefore, narrative represents a primary or privileged form of discourse and a significant way of knowing.

The primacy of narrative in discourse and in learning suggests that narrative should be considered and used as a significant component of religious instruction. If the goal of religious instruction is religious living, narrative offers one important way for religious educators to facilitate integration of religious experiences, religious ideals, and religious living. Learners experience their lives narratively, and in many respects they live out their lives in accordance with the self-narratives they have constructed.

Because narrative is such a primary human activity, stories are powerful. Stories that are communicated well invite learners into a transformative realm in which old ways of living may be opened up to new possibilities. (Shaw, 1999, p. 7)

I wish to explore the use of narrative in my Doctor of Ministry project. I want to conduct research that will determine whether Walsh's and Shaw's claims are correct. Do stories have the power to hold a distracted and over stimulated audience? Will narrative invite learners into the transformative realm? The ministry setting of the Raleigh Church is a strong candidate to test this theory. I have entitled the project, *Impact of Storytelling to Effect Life Change at Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church*.

This theological reflection will exegete the parable of soils and examines key statements from Jesus about the importance of active and engaged listening. Then it will investigate how Jesus and Nathan used parable to communicate spiritual truth. Finally, it will reflect on important contributions from Ellen White while entering into discussion with current authors in the field of storytelling.

## **Theological Reflection**

### The Parable of the Sower

Of course the problem of paying attention to God is not new to preachers today. The old Prophet Samuel was saddened when the people asked for a King. He recognized that there were some things in life (in this case kings) that could distract people from paying attention to God. The problem of paying adequate attention to God has always been part of the human condition.

Jesus Himself recognized the problem of listeners who don't listen. Several times in the Synoptic Gospels He encouraged listeners toward active listening with the phrase, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (See Matt 11:15; 13:9; Mark 4:23; 7:16; Luke 8:8.) In Luke 13:9 Jesus does not use the exact phrase but expresses the same concept in the parable of the fig tree. The statement frequently came at the end of a parable. Rather than a ritualistic tag line that signaled the end of the parable, Quicke (2003) argues that this was a vigorous appeal for the listener to listen in a way that would lend toward spiritual understanding. Jesus is communicating that one must pay attention with urgency when spiritual truth is being presented. Failure to do so is likened to those who have no ears to hear when the word is presented. In Matt 13:13, Jesus expounded on this illustration of ears that cannot hear by adding that there are also those with eyes who cannot see.

The word "parable" is translated from the Greek "*parabolè*." It denotes placing two things side by side for the purpose of comparison. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* also uses the words, "juxtaposition," "illustration," and "proverb" to explain

“*parabolèn*” (Nichol, 1980, p. 203). Jesus often used parable as a vehicle to illustrate spiritual truth. In fact, Matt 13:35 says that through parable Jesus would, “utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”

Perhaps Jesus’ clearest teaching on the importance of listening comes from the parable of the soils in Matt 13:3-9, Mark 4:3-9 and Luke 8:5-8. One could, perhaps, make the case that the traditional title, “The Sower” is misleading for it directs attention to the farmer when the real point of the parable is the receptivity of the soils in which the farmer sows. (It should be noted that the titles associated with Biblical parables were not included in the original manuscript. Rather, they were later additions to the text. As such, the suggestion that a parable is mistitled in no way threatens the integrity of the text. As Kidder has pointed out, probably the most mistitled parable in all of scripture is, “The Prodigal Son” as the point of this parable is not the wayward son, but rather the compassion of the father) (J. Kidder, personal communication, May 11, 2009).

After Jesus told the parable to the people His disciples came to Him privately to inquire as to its interpretation. The Synoptic Gospels offer the following explanation of the symbolism.

*The Sower:* Jesus

*The Seed:* the Word of God

*The Soils:* various kinds of listeners

*The Wayside Soil:* listeners who hear the Word but do not understand what they are hearing

*The Birds:* Satan who snatches the word away



*The Stony Soil:* listeners who have no depth in themselves. Although they receive the word with joy, when trouble or persecution comes they stumble and lose their spiritual experience.

*The Thorny Soil:* listeners who allow the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches to choke the word. The result is unfruitfulness.

*The Good Soil:* listeners who receive the Word and understand it. They bear fruit and produce yields of 100, 60 or 30 fold.

When seeking to understand the meaning of the parable it is important to recognize that the sower sowed the same seed in all the soils. Likewise the seed was sown in the same way in all the soils. The only variation in the parable is the differing soils in which the seed was sown.

In His explanation to the disciples Jesus pointed out that just as the seed cannot mature in the wayside soil because the soil is too hard, so the Word of God cannot come to maturity in the life of listeners who do not understand what they are hearing. Likewise even though the seed that falls on stony soil may germinate, they cannot mature because the soil has no depth. The stony soil represents listeners who lack the depth of character required to be faithful to the Word through times of persecution. Finally, the soil which supports thorns represents listeners who place too great a value on the cares of this life and the pursuit of riches. Their consuming desire for material possessions drives them to organize their lives in a way that chokes the fragile plant before it can mature.

These first three types of soils represent three kinds of listeners in which the Word of God cannot produce the desired effect of spiritual growth. Just as the sower's seeds

cannot grow in these soils, neither can the Word of God grow to maturity in the listeners represented by these soils.

Lastly, the seed was sown in good soil. Just as good soil is able to accept the seed and nurture the seed from germination to maturity, so the good ground listener is able to receive the word of God and understand it in a way that will produce spiritual growth. In fact, Jesus describes the spiritual harvest in this listener as 100, 60 or 30 fold.

Good ground does not mean that the heart of the person was good before the Word did its transformative work of conversion and sanctification. Phil 2:13 points out that “it is God who works in you to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Romans 7:18 adds that, “in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.” This means that all listeners have equal opportunity to respond to the preaching of the Word. Jesus’ point is not that some people are especially favored and have the ability to receive the word while others were not given the same ability. Rather, the ground is designated by Jesus as good simply because it yields itself to the growth of the seed that is planted in it. Jesus is saying that listeners can choose which type of soil will represent them.

Since the sower sows in all types of soil, all seem to be on equal footing in the ability to hear the Word in a way that will lead to spiritual growth. The listener is the one who gets to decide what type of listener he or she will be. The Markan account begins the parable with the admonition, “Listen!” and concludes with the phrase, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” The implication is that the hearer bears responsibility for what the word is able to do in the listener’s heart. The point of the parable then is to be a good ground listener.

The parable of the soils is instructive in that it clarifies that Jesus was concerned about the quality of listening that took place among listeners. Those who listen to the preaching of the Word can do so in a way that leads to spiritual maturity, or in a way that represents wasted effort on the part of speaker and listener.

### Definition of Terms

Having highlighted the urgency of good listening it will be helpful to define terms that will be used in this theological reflection. I begin with a definition of the term “story.” What is a story? What does it mean to tell a story? What is the difference between telling a story and simply talking to someone? When does the reporting of an event cross a threshold that qualifies it as storytelling?

According to Perry (1973) a story has three elements: situation, complication and resolution. In all great storytelling you will find these three elements in varying degrees. Pollard goes on to add, “Stories, like music, create tension and bring resolution all within a reasonable span of time. Just like music, it goes back and forth between tension and resolution” (L. Pollard, personal communication, September 2, 2009). Another description of this process commonly found in speaking and writing circles is known as “problem, cause and solution” (Lucas, 1998, p. 1).

**A Working Definition of Story:** The combination of these three elements leads us to a working definition of a story. “A story is a chain of events that include a description of a situation, a complication within that situation and a resolution of that complication.”

**Scripture as Metanarrative:** With a working definition in place, we turn to the Bible’s use of story. One could argue that the whole of scripture is one great metanarrative. A metanarrative is defined by Stephens as “a global or totalizing cultural

narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience” (Stephens & McCallum, 1998). So a metanarrative is the larger story in which a given story is set. Others have referred to the metanarrative as the grand narrative or master narrative.

Adventist theology has a unique phrase that it commonly uses to refer to the metanarrative of the Bible: the Great Controversy. In the Bible we learn of the Great Controversy which is the struggle between good and evil. It is arguably the ultimate metanarrative, not only of the Bible, but of all human history.

Applying our working definition of story to the metanarrative of Scripture, we can identify the three elements of story. In Gen chapters 1 & 2, we find the situation. In seven days God created a perfect world and placed man and woman in their Edenic home. God was pleased with all that He had made and commanded the man and women to, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth,” Gen 1:28.

In chapter 3 we are introduced to the complication of the metanarrative as Adam and Eve wavered in their allegiance to the Creator. In this single act of disobedience our first parents invited sin and pain into the lives of their descendants. The face to face relationship between God and humankind had been stripped away. Humanity was now infected with a deadly virus known as sin. Sin is the complication of the ultimate metanarrative of human history.

The third element of story, resolution, is promised as early as Gen 3:15. Here, God delivers the earliest messianic prophecy which hints of the eventual coming of a Savior. However, it would be millennia before the Savior would arrive. As we follow

the metanarrative of scripture through the Old Testament, we find numerous messianic prophecies that further flesh out the resolution God devised to the complication of sin. With each successive prophecy God unveils another detail in the plan of salvation which will save humanity from sin.

The Gospels bring a climactic moment to the metanarrative of scripture as the long awaited Messiah steps onto the Biblical stage. The whole of salvation history leads to this single event when God Himself pays the penalty for human sin. God's Son is nailed to a tree. The imagery presses the grievous nature of sin home to the attentive reader as never before.

But after the gift of Golgotha the final resolution of the complication of sin still remains in the distant future. The metanarrative of scripture continues on through the New Testament as the early Christian church is established and enters a period of severe persecution.

Just as the first two chapters of the Bible introduce the situation, so the last two chapters describe the resolution. Revelation 21-22 are rich with the imagery of Christ's return, the New Jerusalem's relocation to earth, Eden restored, and the end of sin and human suffering.

In Rev 22:7, 12, 20 Jesus Himself promises, "I am coming quickly." The resolution of the Bible's metanarrative is assured to God's people but remains a future reality.

As discussed earlier, metanarrative must, by definition, have many smaller narratives embedded within it. The Bible is no exception. Within the framework of the Great Controversy are hundreds of smaller stories also designed to communicate spiritual

truth and foster Christian growth. As we move away from the metanarrative and further explore the Bible's use of story, we begin by turning our attention to Jesus.

### Jesus as Storyteller

Of course there is no more visible storyteller in the Bible than Jesus Himself. Jesus never sat at the feet of the intellectuals of His day, attended seminary or donned the cap and gown of a college graduate, yet he is the most well-known teacher in humanity. His use of parable employed familiar vocations and situations from everyday life. He set stories against the backdrop of the tiller of the soil, the builder, the shepherd, the traveler, the housewife, the courtroom, the wayward son and others. His use of story to share the metanarrative of Salvation history demonstrates the inherent value of story in communicating the Gospel.

He commonly used the phrase, "The Kingdom of heaven is like..." to signal to His listeners that He was about to tell a story. Matthew 13 records more stories than any other chapter in the Gospels. Set in the middle of the chapter, we find that "Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them," Matt 13:34.

It is important to explore why Jesus used, and perhaps more importantly, did not use stories in His preaching. After telling His first parable in Matt 13 the disciples came to Him privately to inquire, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Matt 13:10. Jesus responded by saying, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given," Matt 13:11.

The Nichol comments on Jesus' use of the word "mystery" in verse 11 by explaining,

**Mysteries.** This is, things that are hidden from those who are not sincerely interested in knowing the truth. They are not mysteries in the sense that they cannot be understood or that they are deliberately withheld from some and bestowed upon others. The gospel is “foolishness” to some (see 1 Cor. 1:23) because “the natural man,” unconditioned by the influence of the Holy Spirit, has no capacity for receiving “the things of the Spirit of God” (see 1 Cor. 2:14). The reason he cannot know them is simply that they are spiritually discerned,” and he lacks the discernment, or insight, necessary to grasp their meaning. Spiritual perception comes only by the operation of the Holy Spirit (see Jn 16:13; cf. Mt. 16; 17). (1980, p. 405)

In His response to the disciples, Jesus went on to quote a familiar Messianic prophecy from Isaiah 6. His use of this prophecy is potentially problematic to the casual reader.

Hearing you will hear and shall not understand. And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their heart and turn, So that I should heal them. (Isa 6:9, 10)

At first glance Jesus’ response could be interpreted as using parable to disguise truth and make it inaccessible to the common listener. But Ellen White suggests that quite the opposite is true. “Parable teaching was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations. No more effective method of instruction could He have employed” (White, 1941, p. 12).

She goes on to explain that, “If His hearers had desired a knowledge of divine things, they might have understood His words, for He was willing to explain them to the honest inquirer” (White, 1941, p. 12).

As discovered in the exegesis of the parable of the soils, Jesus’ use of parable in no way inhibited the authentic seeker of spiritual truth. Parable would prove to be an effective conduit in which God’s message of salvation could be communicated to His hearers.

The case could be made that the message contained in the parables was not intended for those who did not hunger for a true knowledge of God. Commenting on the same conversation between Jesus and the disciples, Mark records Jesus as saying, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables,” Mark 4:11. So Jesus’ purpose in speaking to the people was only to minister to those who were hungering and thirsting for righteousness. His parables accomplished this task.

Notice how Jesus applies His own teaching. This discussion between Jesus and the disciples takes place during His private explanation of the parable of the soils. His response was a practical application of the parable just told. There are stony ground hearers where the Word of God can have no influence and there are good ground hearers where the Word of God can take root and grow. When we see Jesus answering the disciple’s question, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” we see that Jesus is treating them as good ground hearers.

Lest one press the question even further as to why Jesus did not speak more plainly of Kingdom life, it should be highlighted that Jesus’ preaching ministry took place in a hostile church setting. The church leader’s ongoing mission was to find occasion to accuse Jesus. When no such occasion presented itself their practice was to manufacture an accusation by framing a discussion where they could entrap Jesus. They were masters at crafting questions of which the answers could only reflect poorly on Jesus. Innuendos, insinuations and deliberate misinterpretations were their tactics. Parables protected Jesus from a response that would open Him up to being misrepresented, and bringing a premature end to His ministry. White states that,



He presented truth in such a way that they could find nothing by which to bring His case before the Sanhedrim...while He evaded the spies, He made truth so clear that error was manifested, and the honest in heart were profited by His lessons. (White, 1941, p. 13)

So we could conclude that rather than using parable as a way to inhibit people from understanding the truth of God, Jesus embraced parable as the most effective communication tool for the setting in which He ministered. He used stories to plant seeds that would later germinate when a more direct message would be misunderstood. His use of parable was designed to minimize risk to Himself and His disciples.

### Nathan as Storyteller

Next we turn our attention to the Old Testament prophet Nathan. Nathan was a priest of Israel and the mouthpiece with which God often spoke to King David. In 2 Samuel 12:1, God instructed the prophet to confront David for the sin of adultery and murder.

It's important to note the broader context of this chapter. This is not the David that God referred to as "a man after his own heart," 1 Sam 13:14. During this era of his life, he became a man of a different character: an ungodly character. Ortberg says,

This is not the same David that shepherded sheep or fought Goliath. This is a ruthless man. This is a liar, and adulterer, and a murderer. He did not scruple to sacrifice the life of Uriah, or the life of who knows how many other soldiers. (2000)

White adds her commentary to this period of David's life by stating,

It was when he was walking in the counsel of God that he was called a man after God's own heart. When he sinned, this ceased to be true of him until by repentance he had returned to the Lord. (White, 1913, p. 723)

She further elaborates that "as he departed from God and yielded himself to the wicked one, he became for the time the agent of Satan" (White, 1913, p. 719).

So, in 1 Samuel 12:1, the prophet finds himself in an unenviable position. God has instructed him to confront a powerful king for a sin that the king was willing to commit murder to cover up. The Nichol says that the prophet's very life was in danger. "Unless the rebuke went home to the heart of the king, it might bring about the death of the reprover" (1976, p. 651).

In light of the King's hardened heart and the prophet's precarious position, Nathan imbeds his reproof in a story. He chooses a story about a ewe lamb to identify with David's professional experience and emotional connection to shepherding. His story was artfully designed to awaken David's righteous anger against the perpetrator as well as his compassion for the animal's owner.

The King's swift verdict gives evidence of the story's effectiveness. The Bible says that, "David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die!'" 2 Sam 12:5. So skillful was the prophet's presentation that the king failed to see the connection between his sin and the story. His empathy for the victim of the story prompted a swift judgment of death to the perpetrator, notwithstanding his own sin was more severe.

In his verdict, the King had sentenced himself to death. "David the judge had found David the transgressor worthy of death. He could not go against his own judgment, because it was he himself who had pronounced the sentence" (Nichol, 1976, p. 651).

White describes the next moments in the throne room. "Nathan fixed his eyes upon the king; then, lifting his right hand to heaven, he solemnly declared, 'Thou art the

man.’ ‘Wherefore,’ he continued, ‘hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?’” (White, 1913, p. 721).

Ortberg describes David’s response,

And then this miracle happens that sometimes does. And a heart that had been hard, and cold, and stony, and dead, for so long, just melted. And the soul that had been walking in darkness for so long, took its first feeble step into the light. (Ortberg, 2000)

David hid his sin of adultery and murder for more than a year without any apparent consequence from the Lord (White, 1913). He had quieted the voice of conscience. He had seemingly contained any negative consequence of his sin by managing Bathsheba, the baby, Uriah, Joab, the army and the royal court. Deception and deceit had now become commonplace in his character.

Nathan’s use of story to confront David’s sin demonstrates how story can penetrate defenses and mold the inner recesses of the heart. It illustrates the power of story to awaken conscience and act as a change agent in a hearer’s life. “The boldness and suddenness of Nathan’s words brought a shock to David that woke him from the evil spell that his crimes had cast upon him,” (Nichol, 1976, p. 652).

The result was that David prayed for forgiveness and asked God to “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” Ps 51:10. The confession and restoration expressed in Psalm 32 may also have been written in response to this dark chapter in David’s life.

## Emotional Word Pictures

Nathan applied a technique in his story that psychologists Gary Smalley and John Trent refer to as an emotional word picture. “An emotional word picture is a communication tool that uses a story or object to activate simultaneously the emotions and intellect of a person” (Smalley & Trent, 1991, p. 21). The use of emotional word pictures in communication seeks to intentionally engage the hearer’s emotions while sharing information. Smalley theorizes that activating this emotional component opens the person up to the speaker’s influence on a far deeper level than the sharing of information alone. He explains that, “In so doing, it causes the person to experience our words, not just hear them” (Smalley & Trent, 1991, p. 21).

Smalley and Trent are describing in contemporary and psychological language what Nathan did in David’s throne room 3,000 years ago. In light of the Biblical evidence, it may be logical to conclude that, rather than being the developers of the emotional word picture, Smalley and Trent are simply the first authors to identify and name it as such.

Nathan’s inclusion of a strong emotional component in his story caused David to become reacquainted with reality in a way that he had previously resisted. (As early as the fourth century, Aristotle (1926) argued that a powerful speech could be determined by the emotional impact it had on the audience.) Based on Nathan’s success one could argue that such story telling techniques have the ability to transport information beyond the intellect to also touch the heart. The implications for preaching are obvious in that heart connections are imperative when seeking to elevate preaching from an informational event to a transformational experience.

Mulligan and Allen agree when they report research findings from a 28 congregation study that concludes, “Stories from the preacher’s own life are among the materials in the sermon that congregations often find emotionally moving. For some listeners, the experience of such emotion is engaging” (Mulligan & Allen, 2005, p. 27).

Several years ago I visited the Fletcher Church where I had served as Associate Pastor for almost 10 years. While chatting with a former member I asked the question, “What do you remember most about my preaching?” Her immediate response was to recall two personal stories I used as illustrations. Both stories were about my young children.

The first was a humorous story about my son. This story drew a full 60 seconds of laughter from the congregation. The second was a frightening story about a time I thought I had lost my 5 year old daughter in a crowded mall. It left the congregation somber and as still as a photograph.

The common thread in these stories was that they both involved small children and they both invoked strong emotion. As my former member’s intellect and emotions were engaged in these stories, they were locked into her memory. So vivid was the memory that she could easily recall the stories years later.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This theological reflection seeks to demonstrate how a story that is skillfully delivered opens a window to the heart. Such a story’s influence on the soul prompts a person to action. The action may be positive; as illustrated by the story of David. Or the action may be negative; as illustrated by the church leaders who sought to entrap Jesus. However, action is the likely result. Solomon says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of

gold in settings of silver,” Prov 25:15. This text may also find application in the preacher’s skillful use of story.

Am I saying that the Gospel needs to be enhanced with story? Does this paper presume to suggest that the Word of God needs the preacher’s help in accomplishing it’s work of transformation in a person’s life? The obvious answer is ‘no.’ Paul writes, "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” Heb 4:12.

If scripture can accomplish this transformation in a person’s life, then why do a project researching the use of story in preaching? Because though the Word of God needs no help in its own right, listeners still need help listening. The parable of the soils demonstrated that if people cannot engage in the preaching event by careful listening, then the Word that is preached will never produce a harvest in their lives. As Carter, Duvall and Hays point out,

Remember, the goal of our preaching is to translate the meaning of the text in the time of the biblical audience to the time of the meaning of the text in our time, connecting this meaning in a relevant contemporary way. I’m suggesting that story can help with that. (2005, p. 26)

So rather than a misguided attempt to enhance the Word of God’s ability to bring transformation, the focus of the project is on the listener who struggles in the task of listening. Perhaps story can help move wayside, stony and thorny ground listeners into the good ground listener’s realm. The project is not an attempt to strengthen the Gospel, but rather an attempt to strengthen the listening skills of the listener. If this is accomplished it is hoped that the Gospel has a higher probability of doing a transformative work in the person’s life.

This theological reflection examined the Bible's use of story as a precedent for the use of story in preaching. It explained how the Bible is one great metanarrative that is replete with smaller stories that helped people pay attention to God. Next it offered an exegesis of the parable of the soils and Jesus' concern for the listener's ability to listen. Then, Jesus' and Nathan's use of story were examined with an emphasis on understanding how their stories impacted their listeners. Finally, key statements of Ellen White were surveyed and numerous contemporary authors were called upon to help clarify and validate the use of story and help chart a course for research to be conducted in the RC.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

The Church in North America is embedded in an over stimulated, media saturated culture. The success of the entertainment industry has programmed the public to require rapid stimuli to maintain attention span. Harvey points out that, “The average television commercial lasts fifteen to thirty seconds, with the images changing at least once per second” (1998, pp. 302, 303). Buttrick (1987) suggests that the modern hearers’ attention span is only four minutes. A resulting challenge to modern hearers of the Gospel is a decreased ability to give sustained, focused attention to the sermon.

This literature review will explore the contribution of story in helping listeners hear the Gospel so that life change can happen. Though recent sources make up the bulk of the chapter, several older works will be referenced due to the nature of the author’s seminal contribution to storytelling in preaching. The chapter will: (1) examine the ability of story to engage the listener’s emotions thus assisting the task of hearing so that life change can happen, (2) give a definition and brief history of narrative preaching, (3) review contentions within the New Homiletic and, (4) offer a summation and recommendations. As we engage these authorities in the field in dialogue it will be seen that storytelling in preaching helps position hearers to hear the Gospel so it can do its transformative work in their lives.



## **The Ability of Story to Engage the Hearer's Emotions**

Long recognized as the father of rhetoric, Aristotle (trans,1991) was among the earliest to suggest that public speaking carried the greatest impact when the speaker connected with the audience on a deep emotional level.

Modern authors have come to see the wisdom of Aristotle's position. For example, Greidanus (1988) warns against neglecting the emotions of the audience in preaching. He decries the sermon whose application focuses solely on the hearer's intellect and urges that the totality of the person should be addressed during preaching. Further, he points out that the speaker's willingness to be emotionally engaged in the sermon has a strong impact on the hearer's level of emotional engagement.

Edwards (2004) posits that it is this engagement that draws the hearer toward a commitment to the truths being taught. He argues that in order for preaching to be effective, preaching must lean heavily on quality storytelling. Rather than entertainment, Edwards sees dramatizing, voicing and timing as essential ingredients to maintaining hearer's attention.

Weighing in from the field of psychology, Smalley and Trent (1991) concur when they assert that engaging the hearers emotionally causes them to experience the speaker's words rather than just hear them. Such engagement between speaker and hearer move the hearer past the point of intellectual assent. Only then is the hearer's heart influenced by what they have heard. Gillman (1994) carries this thought further when he says that emotion plays a more central role in influencing the hearer's decisions than what many in modernity are willing to concede.

Perhaps British novelist Bennett said it best when he asserted that, “There can be no knowledge without emotion. We may be aware of a truth, yet until we have felt its force, it is not ours. To the cognition of the brain must be added the experience of the soul” (Bennett & Flower, 1932). He acknowledges that one can be cognizant of a truth while not owning the truth. If truth is to function as more than an intellectual event, he says, the hearers must have felt the truth somewhere deep within themselves.

Humanistic Educator Rogers agrees when he says, “The only kind of learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered or self-appropriated learning – truth that has been assimilated in experience” (Rogers, Kirschenbaum, & Henderson, 1989, p. 302).

Mitchell carries this thought further when he says that, “People live by emotion. Emotions move people, while ideas which do not generate some emotion are powerless to change anybody’s life” (Mitchell, 1970, p. 195). He then aptly applies the phrase “burned into the consciousness of the hearer” to describe how this complimentary interaction between the emotions and the intellect work together to move the hearer to a point of life change. Buttrick (1987) employs the creative phrase “storied identity” to describe how stories are powerful because they are part of us (p. 11).

In seeking to understand why this is so, Lehrer (2009) has written about the relationship between a person’s intellect and emotions. His research explores the intricate linkage between these complimentary facets of personhood and seeks to understand how each contributes to the process of decision making and ultimately life change. He concludes that unless both cognitive and affective reasoning are engaged, the hearers will likely walk away unchanged by what they have heard.

The implications for preaching are obvious since, as O. Allen (2010) has pointed out our task as preachers is not only to shape the belief system of the hearer but also their spiritual experience.

Edwards (2004) argues that preaching narratives as story not only captures the attention of the congregation, but also facilitates greater retention of the sermon in their memories. He points out that this impact is strongest when the sermon is told as a story as opposed to the sharing of propositional truths. Carter, Duvall and Hays (2005) suggest that the sermon can become this change agent when the speaker has engaged in audience exegesis. They assert that when the speaker does audience exegesis outside the pulpit, it increases the likelihood of engaging the hearer's emotions while in the pulpit. In this way, they say, preaching addresses the whole person in the same way that God's word addresses the whole person.

R. Allen (2008) agrees when he points out that narrative theologians place strong value on understanding the life stories of both the individual and the community. In doing so, they increase the likelihood of teaching systematic theology in a meaningful way in people's lives.

More and more scholars are accepting that such audience exegesis is needful if narrative is to have its maximum effect on hearers. Miller (2003) has argued that this exegesis will enable the speaker to communicate in the language of the audience. The value, he says, is that communication in their language will enhance the probability of reaching past the intellect into the emotional world of the congregation.

## **Narrative Preaching**

### Proposition vs. Narrative

Having examined the ability of story to engage the hearer's emotions, we may find it helpful to move toward a definition of narrative preaching. According to R. Allen (2010); and Buttrick (1987) homiletics was dominated by propositional preaching until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For nearly 500 years propositional preaching sat unchallenged as virtually the only method in which sermons were delivered. It tended toward the sharing of proofs often referred to as points. It followed the logical sequence of deductive reasoning in which (1) a thesis was shared, (2) specific examples were offered, and (3) applications were made. It sought to carry listeners on a journey toward the conclusion the speaker intended the audience to embrace.

Propositional preaching's supremacy over the pulpit is illustrated by the success of Broadus's (1870) release of *On Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. The book went through revisions in 1897, 1943, and again in 1979 culminating in a full century of publication.

In recent years, as Miller (2003) claims, preaching has shifted from the sharing of propositional truths to narrative. Rather than follow the steady plodding of deductive logic, narrative presents the message inductively. According to Miller, it relies more on intuition and democracy. He argues that a resulting benefit is that it broadens application potential as the story will speak to listeners on multiple levels. This increases the likelihood of reaching hearers of differing spiritual maturity levels and creates an environment where each person can take benefit from the sermon.

Robinson (1980), however, has pointed out that the New Testament is full of narrative sermons which are to suggest that narrative preaching is not a contemporary phenomenon in the art of preaching. Rice agrees when he says that, “narrative preaching is neither new nor novel” (1970).

In search of a definition of narrative preaching Lowry suggests “Whatever the diversity of types of contemporary New Homiletic preaching, all involve a sequencing strategy in which the arrangement of ideas takes the form of a plot involving a strategic delay of the preacher’s meaning” (Lowry, 2001, p. 57).

Graves (2008) writes about the relationship between narrative and parable. He says there is overlap between the two, but they are not necessarily synonymous terms. For example, there are parables that do not fit our working definition of a story in that the parables do not have a situation, complication, and resolution. Some parables simply give a situation and stop.

R. Allen (2008), goes on to identify four ways in which narrative preaching is often expressed from the pulpit: “(1) sermons that are actual stories, (2) sermons that move in a way that is similar to a story, (3) doing theology by telling stories and reflecting on them,” and (4) telling Biblical stories in a way that is relevant to a contemporary audience.

## **Brief History of Narrative Preaching and the Resulting New Homiletic**

### Five Pillars of the New Homiletic

With an understanding of how story engages the hearer’s emotions and a working definition of narrative preaching in place, we move on now to examine the rise and development of what has come to be known as the New Homiletic. (The term “New

Homiletic” was first used in 1965 by David James Randolph, Drew School of Theology homiletics professor). Fosdick (1924) may have laid the ground work for modern narrative preaching as early as 1924 when he urged a reevaluation of the dogmatic exposition of the text in favor of *life situation* preaching. His contemporary, Wilder is recognized as one of the first to establish a linkage between narrative as the primary speech language of the Gospels and the need to utilize narrative in the pulpit. In his work *Theopoetic* (1976), he identifies 12 trends in early Christian communication that lend toward narrative (Wilder, 1976). In 1955 radio preacher Edmund Steimle introduced America to a conversational preaching voice that leaned heavily on narrative.

Davis’s (1958) *Design for Preaching* also complained against the tendency of preachers to coerce every aspect of the Gospel into the predetermined three point outline. His central idea is that content should determine form and not vice versa. As such, preaching should lend toward narrative.

Mention should be made of the contribution of Martin Luther King Jr. in raising the general awareness of narrative preaching. Though narrative preaching has long been a part of the African American context, King’s visibility as a civil rights leader gave him a broad stage on which to demonstrate the value of narrative preaching to a wider audience. His 1963 published sermon series entitled *The Strength to Love* illustrates his talent at blending the story of Israel with the African American story in a way that speaks to the contemporary hearer.

The 70s and 80s were the decades when modern narrative stormed the pulpit and forced a revolution upon modern homiletics. So significant were these changes that they have come to be known as the New Homiletic. The New Homiletic can best be

understood by examining the contributions of five of its most outspoken theorists: Charles Rice, Fred Craddock, Henry Mitchell, Eugene Lowry and David Buttrick.

### **Charles Rice: Interpretation and Imagination**

Rice's (1970) release of *Interpretation and Imagination: The Preacher and Contemporary Literature* posits that the task of preaching is to decode and communicate an ancient faith. This decoding must then be shared in a way that is understandable and culturally relevant to the modern audience. He answers the "how" question by following Fosdick's lead of beginning with the hearers experience, then showing the relevance of the Biblical paradigm to that experience. His 1980 release of *Preaching the Story* (Steimle, Niedenthal, & Rice, 1980) develops this thought further when he argues that good preaching must seek to bring a convergence of four stories: the Biblical story, the congregation's story, the preacher's personal story, and the world's story.

Rice's seminal contribution to the New Homiletic is that *story interprets story*. This means that as the sermon uncovers the four stories, the stories begin a dialogue with each other. At times, this sermonic dialogue is interpretive, argumentative and overlapping. The combination is always enlightening.

### **Henry Mitchell: Black Preaching**

The second pillar of the New Homiletic is Henry Mitchell. He has been referred to as the father of African American homiletics. In 1970 he published a study entitled *Black Preaching* which offered a careful defense of this culturally unique preaching style. His work recognized black preaching's rootedness in the African griot-- a travelling tribal historian, poet, storyteller, singer, and musician who functioned much like a pastor-- and

its development in the context of slavery. He argues that pride, rather than embarrassment, is the appropriate response toward the uniqueness that defines African American preaching. He contrasts the freedom of the African American narrative with the intellectual transfer of information that often characterizes the white pulpit. Rice (2008) goes so far as to ask whether every narrative sermon that is spontaneous, free flowing and emotionally provocative owes a debt to the African American preaching tradition.

While Mitchell agrees with Fosdick, Rice and Craddock that preaching must emerge from the culture in which the hearer lives; perhaps his most significant contribution is to insist that good preaching embraces celebration. For Mitchell, celebration frees the preacher and the congregation from the clutches of propositional preaching with its resulting overemphasis on the intellect. To preach to the whole person, he asserts, is to move beyond the confines of rationalism. It assists the hearer in following the Biblical injunction to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

He argues furthermore, that celebration in the midst of suffering bears witness to the sovereignty of God. This witness becomes particularly powerful in the African American context. In the face of economic oppression, inequality, segregation and even a history of slavery Mitchell intends to lead the congregation in a time of recognizing and celebrating God’s sovereignty in every sermon. In this way, celebration charts the course for the conclusion of the African American sermon.



## **Fred Craddock: As one Without Authority**

Others have pinpointed the major shift toward narrative to the 1971 release of Fred B. Craddock's *As One Without Authority*. Craddock (1971) was primarily concerned with the *movement* of the sermon. He points out that while most sermons embrace deductive movement; most preachers create sermons through a series of inductive movements. He then suggests that the sermon should reproduce the inductive journey for the congregation. His prediction is that if the preacher will open his study and serve as a tour guide, the congregation will arrive at the desired destination.

He notes several advantages of inductive movement: it is closer to the way people think and live, it follows the sequence of the sermon's preparation, and it may allow for fewer applications (illustrations) as the hearers can arrive at their own conclusions. In this way the congregation follows the footsteps left during the speaker's preparation. They become participants in the preaching event, rather than mere hearers. By providing a framework through a series of concrete images the participants are able to draw the most relevant applications to their individual life situations. Craddock believed that if you showed the hearer their lives, then showed them the Gospel, they would know what they needed to do.

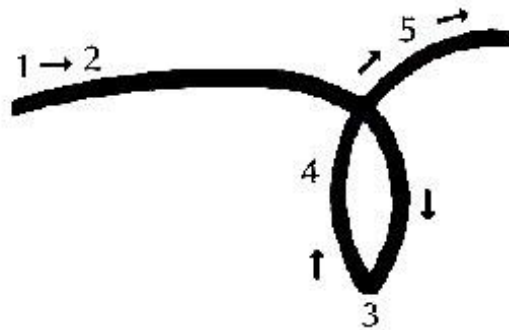
Craddock's emphasis on inductive movement led him to stress the importance of creative imagery. For him, imagery was the primary mode of transportation in inductive preaching. As the congregation identified with familiar images from their own experiences, the Gospel could then be applied in a way that would help them see new possibilities.

For Craddock inductive preaching communicated a respect for the listener that was lacking in old style homiletics. He felt that deductive preaching devalued the intellectual capabilities of modern hearers and disrespected their ability to apply the Gospel to their own lives. Craddock found such spiritual spoon feeding and intellectual handholding offensive on the part of the listener. He asserted that the New Homiletic would, in fact, communicate a new respect for the hearer.

### **Eugene Lowry: The Homiletic Plot**

The single most significant year for the New Homiletic was, perhaps, 1980. Significant essays were published in *Preaching the Story* by Steimle, Niedenthal and Rice. These paved the way for Lowry's groundbreaking, *The Homiletical Plot*. In it, Lowry (2001) shared the five moves that he felt every sermon should make before the preacher sits down. They are: (1) upsetting the equilibrium, (2) analyzing the discrepancy, (3) disclosing the clue to resolution, (4) experiencing the gospel, and (5) anticipating the consequences. He later abbreviated the moves with the (1) Oops; (2) Ugh; (3) Aha; (4) Whee; and (5) Yeah.

Lowry contributed the following visual image (Figure 1) to help illustrate how the Homiletical Plot unfolds.



*Figure 1: Lowry's Homiletical Plot*

He posits that his plot line causes the sermon to be understood as a timeline rather than the traditional outline. The result is that the sermon moves from being a static image to a forward moving dynamic image. In his view, "The sermonic plot is time oriented -- an event in history with a beginning and an ending. We deal not with parts of a whole but with stages of a sequence," (Lowry, 2001, p. 26).

This emphasis of the sermon as a time oriented event should be viewed as a significant contribution to the development of narrative preaching and the formation of the New Homiletic. Lowry taught that a good sermon, like a good story, follows a logical sequence of movements. For him, true narrative implied that the plot would be present in both the presentation and the preparation of the sermon.

The great value of Lowry's model is that his final movement positions the listener to embrace the possibility of the future that has now been changed by the Gospel. The conclusion of the sermon leaves listeners with a challenge to decide what difference the Gospel will now make in their lives.

In this way, Lowry further develops the trajectory of Craddock with an emphasis on the listener and the listener's response. He builds on Craddock's model by giving a specific sermonic form in which induction can be embraced. As such, Lowry's influence on narrative preaching can hardly be overemphasized.

### **David Buttrick: Homiletic: Move and Structures**

The fifth pillar of the New Homiletic is David Buttrick. He entered the dialogue in 1987 with the addition of his voluminous *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Buttrick (1987) is primarily concerned with how human consciousness works. He is interested in the way people listen to sermons.

Whereas earlier pillars focused on a single listener, Buttrick instead argues that the focus should be on how the entire community listens. Conversation with an individual is entirely different than preaching to a congregation. He employs the creative word picture of addressing the "interhuman" as opposed to American individualism (1987, p. 77).

He complains that making rational points places the speaker and the hearer too far outside the way we take in and process information. He bases this argument on years of research into the way groups listen, assimilate and understand information.

Buttrick's approach to homiletics has come to be known as the "Phenomenological Approach." By phenomenological it is meant that there are predictable common denominators in the way human beings hear ideas and develop faith. Homiletic goes on to give various examples of how faith forms in community consciousness.

His subtitle, *Moves and Structures*, is more telling than his main title. By *Moves* he means the various components that make up the sermon. He sometimes employs the synonymous phrases *Rhetorical Units* and *Language Models*. These are the words, images and ideas that move through a sermon in much the same way they would a conversation. His nomenclature demonstrates departure from the traditional deductive language of points. Buttrick is in agreement with Lowry when he argues in favor of language as a linear event.

For Buttrick a move begins with a statement of the idea. The idea is presented at least three times during its development, but in different ways to mask the repetition. Then a central image is called upon to fasten the idea in the community's consciousness. Finally a summation is offered in which the idea is repeated yet again.

He departs from Craddock and Lowry, as well as traditional wisdom, when he deemphasizes the need for smooth transitions. Rather, he prefers that the various ideas be laid side by side to assist the listener with comparison and evaluation. In this way, Buttrick suggests the speaker can move through five or six ideas in as little as 20 minutes.

By *structures* he means the overarching rhetorical theory on which his model is based. Visually, this can be laid out as a grid in which the grid is populated with the images and ideas of the sermon. His structure lends toward three modes of impression in which the community consciousness can be led to respond to the message. They are *The Immediacy Mode* (first impressions), *The Reflection Mode* (reflecting more deeply on the idea) and *The Praxis Mode* (deciding what to do with the message).

Yet another departure from his colleagues occurs in his insistence that personal stories detract from the image grid by placing a spotlight on the speaker. He feels that

such stories distract the community's consciousness from the image grid. This distraction lessens the possibility that the three structural modes will make their impression.

These five pillars, Rice, Mitchell, Craddock, Lowry and Buttrick have come to be seen as the seminal authors of the New Homiletic. In summary, the New Homiletic can be described as (1) a rediscovery of and focus on the listener, (2) a shift toward inductive forms and, (3) an emphasis on creative imagery that leads listeners into an experience with the gospel (O. Allen, 2010).

#### Contentions Within the New Homiletic

Not all homileticians, however, place the same value on the New Homiletic. Some argue that the New Homiletic's best days are behind us. Sleeth (1986) complained as early as the mid-70s about the New Homiletic's loss of the traditional thesis statement. His concern was that this new emphasis on narrative would result in sermons that were entertaining, but unclear. He warned that when you drop the thesis statement, you lose the main idea that guides the message. This leaves listeners confused and opens the door for multiple big ideas to be introduced in a single message.

Of the same opinion is Long (2005) when he says that narrative is, "too soft, too doctrinally unclear, too ethically ambiguous and too shy about evangelism." He fears that stories have added layers of fat to sermons in a way that makes the gospel ambiguous and preachers undisciplined in their study of scripture.

Thompson (2001) recognizes that narrative is most effective when preaching to a congregation that is well acquainted with the Christian message. Therefore, he argues, our post Christian culture no longer lends toward narrative. He points out that Craddock

(2002) himself conceded that induction assists hearers in better understanding what they already know. Thompson also warns against the narrative pitfall of elevating form above function or what he calls, “the larger theological agenda of preaching” (p. 11). He is concerned that narrative’s emphasis on good storytelling will interfere with either the message or the preacher’s preparation.

Weighing in on the topic of performance in the pulpit is Shuster. She urges that we respect the listener when we pay attention to speaking in a manner that is both interesting and pleasing to the ear. In this way, she asserts that we stand the greatest likelihood of being heard by those whom we address (Shuster, 2008).

Childers (2008) agrees when she posits that connectivity between preacher and congregation relies on something deeper than the words that are spoken. Sermons breathe with life when something deeper than words connect the congregation to the preacher. She contends that narrative holds great promise in accomplishing this goal.

Perhaps the last word should be given to R. Allen (2008). In sensitivity to the pluralism of society, Allen makes allowance for a multiplicity of preaching forms. But he maintains strongly that narrative still has established itself at a dominant form and will, most likely, continue to hold this position for some time to come.

#### Other Benefits of the New Homiletic

##### **The Language of Contemporary Culture**

Still others have argued that the great value of the New Homiletic is that it lends toward speaking the language of modern culture. A recent trend in Homiletical writing points out that modern preaching addresses hearers in an emerging oral-aural culture.

According to Jensen (1993) we are now a post literate culture. By this he does not mean that people cannot read. Rather, the written word, with its silent and static limitations, is no longer the dominant mode of communication in society. He notes that since deductive preaching developed out of a print based culture the inductive method of the New Homiletic finds greater relevance with today's post literate audience.

Miller (2003) agrees when he urges preachers to consider how technology has changed the way people are influenced. As new literacies develop, preaching must be willing to adapt if it is to maintain cultural relevancy. These new learning modalities open a world of creativity for preaching Miller says.

Harvey (1998) concedes that this is true only in part. Instead of an oral-aural culture, he sees us primarily as an aural-visual culture. Craddock takes this thought further when he writes about the visual element of learning becoming so prominent that it creates a crisis between the eye and the ear.

Whether or not this is true, the addition of the visual element partially validates Miller's (2003) argument that effective preaching must now become a multi-sensory event. He coins the term *Experiential Storytelling* and offers the following definition. Experiential Storytelling is, "creating an environment that allows others to participate in the telling of the story through sensory interaction" (2003, p. 7).

Wells and Luter (2002) concur and add that this is especially true for young audiences. They assert that as non-print modalities of communication are replaced by more face to face communication, narrative is closer to the indigenous language of the modern hearer. The implications for preaching are considerable.



Lest one be discouraged or confused by this development, Nolde (2001) points out the similarities between our post literacy and the oral-aural culture of the first century. Estimates of first century literacy range between 2-15%. This highlights the fact that the original sharing of scripture was primarily an oral-aural event. The estimate seems to suggest that the value of the Bible, in Jesus' day, was to the ear rather than to the eye (i.e. a print based culture). This means that though oral-aural learning is a relatively new phenomenon in our day, the Bible is well equipped to speak to the post literate learner. Nolde (2001) goes so far as to suggest that preachers who cannot adapt to this new literacy will be unprepared to speak to the modern hearer.

### **The Attraction of Women Speakers and Hearers**

Another benefit of the New Homiletic is that it is attracting women both as speakers and hearers. Zink-Sawyer (2008) suggests that the increase in narrative sermons is, in part, due to the increased presence of women in the pulpit. She argues that women think in narrative. Narrative is, therefore, a natural preaching style for women. As such, narrative has helped women find their own preaching voice, as is evidenced in Taylor's (1986) published sermon series entitled *Mixed Blessings*. Zink-Sawyer elevates this strength in women in a way that encourages admiration of women's pulpit strengths.

### **The Ability to Connect With Postmodern Hearers**

Finally, a third benefit of the New Homiletic is its ability to connect with the postmodern hearer. Stiller (2005) comments on the challenge of preaching metanarrative to postmoderns when he recognizes the postmodern assumption that the metanarrative was designed by those in power for self-benefit. Craddock (2008) points out the obvious

challenges of preaching the Bible as absolute truth in an age of moral relativism.

However, Miller (2003) offers a word of encouragement by pointing out that narrative (though not necessarily metanarrative) holds great appeal to postmoderns and can still be used as an effective communication tool for sharing the Gospel in our religiously pluralistic society. Indeed, Wright (1992) asserts that the most fundamental questions surrounding human existence can be effectively addressed through narrative.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The preceding literature review has given voice to authors who have written about the impact of the New Homiletic on the modern pulpit. First, it explored writers who have made contributions about how story engages the hearer's emotions. Next it explored how leading thinkers in the field identify narrative preaching. Third, it examined the rise of the New Homiletic while bringing authors into dialogue that question the veracity of the New Homiletic's contributions.

The chapter intentionally included proponents and opponents of the New Homiletic in an attempt to capture the tension that exists within the literature. As such, it is hoped that an honest portrayal of the dialogue as it exists among leading thinkers in the field was presented.

Having evaluated the arguments of both sides I find myself most sympathetic to the proponents of the New Homiletic. Upon reflection I find there are three reasons for this.

First, in my opinion, the arguments against the New Homiletic appear reactionary. Rather than assuming a proactive posture where the authors sought to engage a contemporary audience (with all of its anti-authoritarian, morally relativistic, postmodern,

post literate and Biblically illiterate mindsets) I felt the authors were largely grieving the loss of propositional preaching. Could it be that preachers who were weaned and trained in propositional preaching's catchy outlines, clever acronyms, crafty alliterations and tightly packaged applications could not process the homiletical paradigm shift needed to embrace the New Homiletic? There was very little in their arguments that convinced me that their reticence was more than the resistance to change that is common to us all.

Second, the observations I have made in my own ministry setting seem to lend credibility to the New Homiletic. I sense a greater level of connectivity with my congregation when I preach narrative. Their responses to the sermon argue in favor of narrative. In short, I can make a strong case that such narrative "works" in my church.

Third, as I evaluate the impact of the New Homiletic on me personally, I recognize that I am fed spiritually by narrative. If I were to occupy a pew instead of a pulpit, I would look for a preacher who would utilize the strengths of the New Homiletic.

In light of the literature reviewed and the reasons above, I conclude that narrative preaching provides assistance to the preacher who seeks to preach Biblically to a contemporary audience such as greets me each Sabbath at the RC. I also conclude that stronger and more regular narrative preaching will be of great benefit to my congregation.

I recognize that such a conclusion is subjective and that personal history, exposure to the works of various authors and even the individual personality of the preacher or the congregation may lead others to a differing conclusion. I further recognize that additional research is needed to clarify the value of narrative preaching in the RC.

The literature review has spawned two topics that are of special interest to me. First is Craddock's (1971) suggestion that good narrative preaching should not attempt to lead the listener all the way to the final conclusion or application of the message. Rather it should make allowance for the audience to tease out the application they find most relevant. This is both true for the sermon as a whole and the individual stories imbedded within the sermon (1971). O. Allen (2010) agreed when he pointed out that a reticence to allow the audience this freedom is to reduce preaching to a dictatorial event.

In addition, White (1940) makes this interesting observation about the teaching of Jesus,

He did not make a direct attack on the errors of the people. He saw the misery of the world on account for sin, yet He did not present before them a vivid delineation of their wretchedness. He taught them of something infinitely better than they had known. Without combating their ideas of the kingdom of God, He told them the conditions of entrance therein, leaving them to draw their own conclusions as to its nature. (p. 299)

I sense that my sermons have often been too thorough with regards to application.

Perhaps this is why Craddock's theory (1971) is so intriguing to me. A field test of Craddock's theory would qualify as a new storytelling technique for my congregation. Is it possible that more narrative with less application on the part of the speaker could assist hearers at the Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church in the way that Craddock asserts?

Secondly, I am interested in further exploring the topic of the emotional component of storytelling. What impact would the inclusion of stories that contain a strong emotional component have on my preaching and the congregation's attentiveness? Is there a place in my preaching for Smalley's emotional word picture? Are Smalley and Miller correct when they assert that stories which connect on a deep emotional level help move the sermon from an informational event to a transformative experience?

What if I combined the best of both worlds by field testing Craddock's theory of open-ended application with stories that contained a strong emotional component?

Would these combined techniques result in assisting hearers at the Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church in hearing the Gospel more effectively so that life change can happen?

My research will focus on discovering the viability of this hypothesis.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will present an account of the research project implemented in the RC. The reader will notice that the chapter builds on the foundations laid in both the theological reflection and literature review chapters. It will begin with profiles of the community context and the RC which will seek to give an overview of the environment in which the project was conducted. Next it will offer a detailed narrative of the development and implementation of the project. This narrative will be broken down into eight stages that will walk the reader through my personal journey to develop and execute the project. The narrative will conclude with the final stage of data collation which will explain the method used to generate summary statistics that will be used for the evaluation of the project in chapter five.

The sequence of the chapter is as follows:

1. Profile of community Context
2. Profile of the RC
3. Stage 1: Development of the hypothesis
4. Stage 2: Conceptualization of the project
5. Stage 3: Assumptions and expectations
6. Stage 4: Development of the baseline and exit surveys
7. Stage 5: Administration of the baseline survey
8. Stage 6: Presentation of the four part sermon series

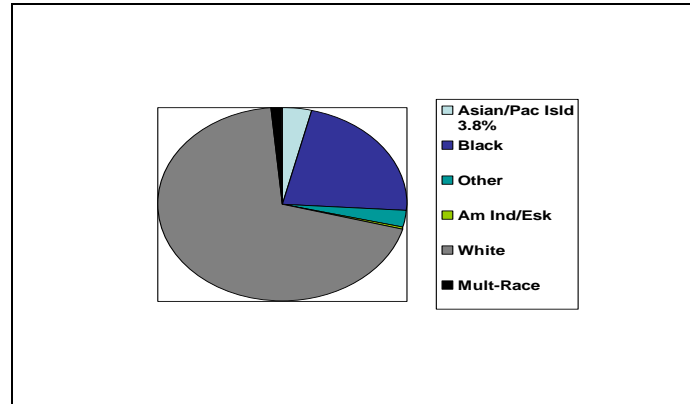
9. Stage 7: Administration of the exit survey
10. Stage 8: Data collation and generation of summary statistics
11. Conclusion

### **Profile of Community Context**

Raleigh has three significant influences that contribute to its uniqueness as a community: 1) it is the state capital; 2) it is a central hub for technological, medical and pharmaceutical research; 3) there are three major universities as well as numerous colleges. There are over 70,000 college and university students in the Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill).

A study was conducted by the Center for Metropolitan Ministry to determine the demographic make-up of the community within a 45 minute drive of the RC. In 2006, the population was 1,339,420. Raleigh experienced a rapid growth of 39.5% from 1990 to 2000, with 49.6% of the population being male and 50.4% female. The median age for the study area is 34.3 with a population density of 560.1 people per square mile (Raleigh Community Care Package, 2008). The data demonstrate that this community is unique and diverse with regards to ethnicity, education and income level.

Ethnicity: The population within the designated study area is 69.4% White and 22.3% Black (Figure 2) (Raleigh Community Care Package, 2008).



*Figure 2: Pie Chart representing ethnicity.<sup>1</sup>*

Education: In 2006, 46% of the population over the age of 25 had Bachelor or Graduate degrees. This compares with the 2000 census which reports statewide average of just 28% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Another 8.6% of the population holds Associate Degrees with 16.4% having some level of college training (Raleigh Community Care Package, 2008). These statistics shed light on one way the Triangle is a unique community in North Carolina. The value of education emerges as a clear priority within the community and the local culture.

Interestingly, though many nationalities are represented in the study area, the Latino population makes up only 8.9%. This is lower than the National Average of 15.1% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

One possible conclusion is that the local economy is driven largely by technology and education. These skill sets are not yet available to large segments of the Latino population.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This does not include Latinos as they are counted independent of race.



Research Triangle Park (locally known as RTP) is a 25 minute drive from the RC and is one of the largest science parks in the world. Its 7,000 acres are home to more than 170 companies employing over 40,000 full-time knowledge workers and an estimated 10,000 contract employees. Large corporations such as Glaxo Smith Kline, Sony and Alltell are located there. IBM's largest campus worldwide, with over 20,000 employees finds its home in RTP. Academia and RTP are known as the major economic drivers of the region.

### **Profile of the Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church**

The RC is a 589 member congregation located in the capital of North Carolina. RC began with 52 charter members who officially organized into a company in 1932. Church status was granted in 1933. The next year the RC began a Christian school in the basement of the church with six or seven students. It was simply called the Seventh-day Adventist Church School.

The early years found RC members renting various facilities for worship. Their first permanent facility was located at 208 St. Mary's Street, in the heart of downtown Raleigh. Longtime member, Margaret Beckwith, describes these early years as "... a happy group that was one big family. In those days the second coming of Jesus was emphasized very strongly and everyone really looked forward to the second coming!" (M. Beckwith, personal communication, November 18, 2008).

In 1982, the congregation purchased 5 acres at 4805 Dillard Dr. in southwest Raleigh and immediately began construction on a 3-room school. The building was completed in 120 days with all labor being completed and donated by members of the

congregation. This allowed the school, now named Adventist Christian Academy of Raleigh, to relocate from the basement of the church and occupy the first building on the new campus.

Construction on the current worship facility began in 1985 and was finished in August, 1986. The dedication service for the new building was held on September 6 of that year. The facility has a seating capacity of 299. In addition to the sanctuary, the main level has two adult classrooms, a library, a prayer chapel and offices for the pastor and office administrator. The lower level of the church has six classrooms which are used for children's Sabbath School departments and a fellowship hall with seating for 150 persons.

In 1989, the church purchased an adjoining nine acres with plans of pursuing a long time dream to build a School/Family Life Center. The vision for this facility went through numerous revisions with architectural plans being finalized in 2005. Construction began later that year and the Certificate of Occupancy was granted in July, 2008. This latest addition to the campus, known as the Adventist Recreation Center (ARC), was dedicated on November 22, 2008.

In 2005, the church developed the following mission statement, "As members of the body of Christ the Raleigh Seventh-day Adventist Church is passionately focused on seeking Christ, living His values daily and proclaiming His imminent return." This mission statement is highlighted regularly as a guiding principle for the future direction of the church and its ministries.

The church is an accurate representation of the broader community in which it is located.

As such, the data help one gain an understanding of the social fabric that makes up the RC. The church is largely made up of well educated professionals and people from various nationalities and ethnicities. College and university students are plentiful as are families with young children.

In January of 2006 a second worship service was instituted. It launched with 16 people in attendance. The average attendance at this service has increased to 35 with second service averaging 325. The average age of first service attendees is 38.4 with a median age of 23.5. The average age for second service is 33 with a median age of 36.5.

It has been my observation throughout my tenure at the RC that the median age of our church has decreased. I find this encouraging as it defies the aging trend of the Adventist Church in North America and is a sign that the church is reaching a younger population.

**Total Participation:** It is estimated that 1,000 people are involved in the ministry of RC. This is the sum total of membership, prospective members, spouses of non-members, semi-regular attendees, sports ministries and ministry volunteers that enjoy activities such as Vacation Bible School, ladies choir, the Easter pageant and Community Services.

**Volunteer Involvement:** According to the 2011 Nominating Committee Report, a total of 101 people hold official offices in the RC. This means that less than half our attendees are actively involved in an official ministry of the church. It is estimated that an additional 100 people are serving in ministries such as greeting, basketball, VBS, Easter Pageant and Christmas Cantata. These are not included in the official Nominating Committee Report.

The ministry climate at RC allows one to hold a serving position without holding formal membership in the church body. We view serving as an important component of growing disciples and eventually leading to deeper commitments such as church membership. Of course, membership is required to hold administrative levels of church leadership such as Church Board and departmental directors. We are, however, always finding new ways to get people involved in serving.

Church Plants: In my eight year tenure at RC, I have been involved in three church plants. In June of 2006, the first SDA group was started in the bedroom community of Knightdale. This group currently has a weekly attendance of 15 and has been given official group status by the Carolina Conference.

In June of 2007, a group of individuals from RC met and began to lay plans to plant a church in the bedroom community of Clayton. The Clayton church quickly moved from Group status to Company status and now has an average weekly attendance of 100. In September of 2012 they held the grand opening of their newly built fellowship hall/sanctuary.

In January of 2012, a Haitian Group that was meeting in a rented facility in Clayton approached RC and requested we become their mother church. It had a desire to become associated with the Carolina Conference and be a recognized ministry of the SDA church. In March, the group moved onto our campus and chose the name Bethel Haitian SDA Group. They were granted official group status in May and have an average weekly attendance of 15.

RC also operates the usual ministries found at large Adventist Churches including Pathfinders, Adventurers, Community Services, Senior Ministries, Men's and Women's Ministries and active Sabbath School Classes.

Adventist Christian Academy: Adventist Christian Academy (ACA) is a K4-8 grade school and is the most visible ministry of the RC. ACA holds the largest line item in the church budget and has 21 students and two full-time staff members.

The RC constituency is a reflection of the ethnically diverse population within the triangle. RC is only 40% Caucasian and has 26 nationalities represented. This is regularly cited as a strength by both members and visitors. In recent years, diversity has surfaced as a strong recruiting tool for attracting new members.

As can be inferred by the above profiles of the community and the RC, the area is cosmopolitan, urban, growing, fast-paced and has a younger population. As such the RC is a prime candidate for a research project that will explore ways to assist listeners in the task of listening well so the Gospel can do its work of transformation in their lives.

### **Conceptualization and Development of the Project**

The research process and implementation can be described in eight separate stages:

1. Development of the hypothesis.
2. Conceptualization of the project.
3. Assumptions and expectations.
4. Development of the baseline and exit surveys.
5. Administration of the baseline survey
6. The presentation of the four-part sermon series.

7. Administration of the exit survey.
8. Data collation.

### Stage 1: The Development of the Hypothesis

The problem of preaching to exhausted, unengaged and distracted listeners had long been weighing on my mind. I often asked myself how the Gospel could do a work of transformation in a group of people who struggled with attentiveness during the sermon. Like many preachers, when I got that sinking feeling that I was losing the audience, I would often tell a story. It is certainly no surprise that stories are easier to listen to than many sermons.

But even within the context of storytelling, I sensed a difference in my ability to connect with the audience based on the type of story that was being told. The lack of connection often left me with the nagging question of how beneficial the sermon (or the story) could be if people had trouble listening to the message. How could I increase the probability that the story would assist the listener in listening so that life change could happen?

Upon further reflection I began to realize that the stories that connected with the audience on an emotional level held far more promise than the stories that were told because they were nice stories and people were tired of listening. A combination of Miller's "experiential storytelling," Smalley's "emotional word picture" and Fosdick's "life situation preaching" kept coming to mind. I had a growing sense that such stories would insure that the story was elevated to a more noble function than that of the congregational entertainment that Thomas Long complained of.

As I began to experiment with this emotional component of storytelling I found myself looking for stories that would open people's hearts and, thereby, assist them in the task of hearing. Could it be that such stories would leave them more impressionable to the transformation that I believed the Gospel wanted to bring to their lives? What if I were to conduct research that combined Craddock's model of open-ended application with stories that connected with the listener on a deep emotional level?

These observations led me to develop the hypothesis that, sermons that imbed an open-ended story that connects on an emotional level significantly assist the listener in the task of listening; thus increasing the probability of the Gospel creating moments of life change.

This hypothesis led to somewhat of a departure from my original proposal to the Project Proposal Committee. At this point in the journey I began to realize that my original proposal was too ambitious. There were too many variables to research and quantify. The presence of so many variables and the many relationships that could be formed between them would make it difficult to attribute any statistical variance to a specific story telling technique.

Through the lengthy process of research, reflection, and writing the theological foundation and literature review chapters, I now realized that what interested me most were the dual aspects of open-ended application and the emotional component of storytelling. Though these two aspects of storytelling represent only a portion of my original proposal, they had emerged as more realistic candidates for research that would establish a cause and effect relationship with regards to the hypothesis.

## Stage 2: Conceptualization of the Project

I chose to test my hypothesis with a quantitative research project. The project would consist of the development and implementation of a Baseline survey, a four-part sermon series to test the hypothesis and an Exit survey. Baseline and exit data could then be compared to determine if a statistical variance presented itself in support of the hypothesis.

## Stage 3: Assumptions and Expectation

My interaction with Fred Craddock generated considerable interest in seeing if the data would demonstrate variance in generational response. My assumption was that older generations who were mentored without the benefit of the New Homiletic would be less appreciative of my hypothesis. I made this prediction because my literature review revealed that older generations received decades of deductive preaching and application that are, by nature, more directive.

By directive I mean that the application was often specific, tightly packaged and spoon-fed to the congregation. My impression is that the preaching received by previous generations did not leave as much room for making a personal application or an adaptation of that application to fit the individual hearer's life situation. If this is true, then they have been conditioned to expect a specific and clear application from the pulpit rather than an open-ended story that may leave room for a broader application to be made through the lens of one's own life experience.

Furthermore, storytelling has found its most visible role in the New Homiletic. Though storytelling and illustrations have always been a part of preaching, was it not fair to assume that older generations were not accustomed to story having such prominence in



the message? After all, the New Homiletic even makes allowance for story to become the vehicle in which the message is delivered.

Additionally, I assumed that less educated hearers may not be as appreciative of my hypothesis. I made this assumption from a personal observation that they often seem to be more responsive to specific and clear application from the pulpit rather than a broader application that leaves room for personal adaptation. I also assumed that open-ended application in storytelling would require cognitive reasoning skills that would be most prevalent among those with higher education.

I was, therefore, going into the project with the assumption that postmoderns, younger listeners, and more educated listeners would exhibit greater appreciation of a more emotionally connecting, open-ended application in preaching.

#### Stage 4: Development of the Baseline and Exit Surveys

The baseline survey sought to establish a baseline from which the hypothesis could be measured at the conclusion of the series. I began by writing a series of preliminary questions that I felt would gather data relevant to the hypothesis. The exit survey was developed simultaneously and followed the baseline so closely that only slight modification was needed. The data for both surveys would be collected using a 10 point Likert scale. These questions were then compiled into what would become the skeleton of the surveys.

Next, I sent the hypothesis and first draft of the surveys to a diverse group of colleagues and asked for input. After several revisions and seemingly endless rounds of editing the final products were completed and submitted for approval by the Institutional Review Board (See Appendices A & B).

One challenge I recognized at the outset was that, in general, my congregation already liked my preaching. In addition, they also saw me as an effective storyteller. For this reason, I never shared the hypothesis with the congregation. No one knew that I was researching the impact of open-ended storytelling to assist the listener in hearing the Gospel (except as could be surmised by reading the survey—as seen in Appendix A).

During the series, I had several members inquire as to the specific nature of the research. Many guessed that it must have something to do with storytelling, but I refused to answer these inquiries until the exit surveys were completed and collected. This was my best effort to maintain the integrity of the research and insure that the exit results would not be tainted by what survey respondents may have assumed would be the desired result.

Though I was nearing the end of my eighth year in the Raleigh pulpit, the baseline survey instructed participants to limit their responses to the feelings and opinions of the last four years. I did this for two reasons. First, since preachers grow as they preach, it would be natural to hope that I am a more effective preacher now than when I first stepped into the Raleigh pulpit in 2004. Second, the four year time period corresponds to the DMin program. This seemed a logical line of demarcation from which to establish a baseline for comparison with the upcoming four week series.

#### Stage 5: Administration of the Baseline Survey

I administered the baseline survey on two consecutive Sabbaths so I could collect as many responses as possible. The first survey was administered on April 28, 2012. The second was administered at the launch of the sermon series the following Sabbath. A total of 133 baseline surveys were returned. This was a strong sampling of the

congregation since we have an average weekly attendance of 325. Though I was excited by the high rate of return, I knew this number was irrelevant as only those who also completed the exit survey would be included in the research.

In my instructions, I was diligent to point out that respondents should fill out the survey in as impartial a manner as possible. I assured them that my grade did not depend on a certain outcome of the research, but rather that the research was completed. I also assured them that if they were a part of the group that liked me and wanted me to do well; they would only skew the research by trying to fill the survey out in a way that would generate what they may perceive as the desired response.

The surveys were handed out inside a manila envelope with a pencil and instructions for completion. Each envelop carried an identifying number on the exterior which corresponded to an identical survey number that was printed on the survey. Respondents were instructed to write their names only on the outside of the envelope. Once the baseline surveys were completed the respondents were instructed to place the survey and pencil back inside the envelope which was collected and taken home by one of my elders for safe keeping and to ensure anonymity.

#### Stage 6: The Presentation of the Four-Part Sermon Series

I chose to anchor the series in Titus 2:1-11. In this passage, Paul gives Titus counsel on how to teach sound doctrine to new believers in the church plants on the island of Crete. He gives specific counsel to four groups within the church: older men, older women, young women and young men.

The series followed the logical flow of the passage and consisted of a sermon dedicated to each group. I entitled the series “Portrait of a Healthy Family.” The thesis

of the series stated that “If the mature man, the mature woman, and the young woman and the young man will accept Paul’s counsel and adopt it as a guide for life, then what you will have is a portrait of a spiritually and emotionally healthy family.”

The series complemented a broader theme in our church’s ministry as we had designated 2012 as “The Year of the Family.” Throughout the year, we have focused on men’s and women’s ministries, small groups, peacemaking ministries, marriage seminars and various sermon series designed to strengthen families. In this context, the Portrait series was simply another component of the annual ministry theme.

I complemented the series with a power point presentation that shared various texts and the basic outline of the message (See Appendix B). The master slide was of a silhouette of a family of four in a relaxed family portrait pose. There was a mother, a father, a son and a daughter. Each week as the series progressed, the respective family member that Paul addressed in Titus 2 had details added to their profile. This left listeners with the sense that, as the series unfolded we were literally building a portrait of a healthy family.

The stories were generally imbedded throughout the sermons concluding with a longer story that was obviously open-ended and had a strong emotional component. Though I have often concluded sermons with stories, what was different about this series was the deliberate attempt to leave the application open for unique interpretation and application on the part of the listener. Since this has not been my usual practice, it qualified as a new technique that I felt was worthy of exploration from my pulpit and would provide a research opportunity to test my hypothesis.

One temptation I chose to resist was the urge to make this the best series I had

ever preached. I felt that if I had succumbed to this temptation it would invalidate the baseline data. However, I found this an awkward task. What is the alternative exactly? Not to preach well? How can you make yourself preach in exactly the same way that you have for the last four years? It goes against my nature to not preach as well as I can. Suffice it to say that I did my best to maintain a similar quality to earlier series in my preparation and preaching of the Portrait series.

The sermon preparation process followed the usual process of prayer, reflection, word studies, commentary perusal and manuscript development. While I was very excited about the series I was careful not to exceed my usual amount of study time and sermon development time than what I had spent in previous series.

Though I preach from a manuscript I am known to depart from it occasionally as the Spirit prompts me. This departure can be identified in the discrepancy between the manuscripts and the actual presentations (available on YouTube©) which are respectively referenced in appendix B. The actual presentations and the manuscripts are fairly similar and represent nothing unique from the way I ordinarily handle myself in the pulpit.

#### Stage 7: Administration of the Exit Survey

During the third week of the sermon series our office administrator retrieved the surveys and placed correspondingly numbered exit surveys inside the respective manila envelopes. This allowed us to return the envelopes, with the completed baseline and the blank exit surveys to the original baseline respondents. The exit survey was then administered immediately after the concluding message of the Portrait series on May 26, 2012. Deacons and greeters were on hand at the beginning of the worship service to distribute the survey envelopes back to their original respondents. Original survey

respondents could be correctly identified because they wrote their names on the outside of the manila envelope when they initially completed the baseline survey.

After completing the exit surveys, both surveys were collected and the respondents were instructed to take their manila envelope home and destroy them. In this way the anonymity of the respondents was protected since their names had only been written on the outside of the manila envelope and never on the survey. At no time during the series did I ever have possession of or inspect any baseline survey. Of course, only those who completed the baseline surveys were able to participate in the exit survey.

Upon collection of the surveys I was left with was a stack of completed baseline and exit surveys that could be traced to single, but anonymous, respondents because of the corresponding survey numbers. I chose this method because it eliminated the need to reproduce demographic data on the exit survey. I felt this was important because it shortened the survey but still yielded the demographic data which was of particular interest in my research.

Exit surveys continued to trickle in for the next three weeks. My office administrator called baseline survey respondents who had not yet picked up their exit surveys to encourage them to do so. Of the 133 people who completed and returned baseline surveys, 128 completed and returned exit surveys. I was delighted with the rate of return.

My church was overwhelmingly supportive of this project and was excited to participate in doctoral level research that would add to the body of instructional literature for homileticians. I was deeply touched by their support of me personally and their willingness to participate in the research.

## Stage 8: Data Collation and Generation of Summary Statistics

Once the final surveys were turned in, I spent several hours in my office looking over the responses. It was exciting to finally be looking at data collected in the largest and most detailed research project I had ever conducted. My time was spent perusing and comparing the baseline and exit surveys from single respondents and looking for trends and significant differences in the baseline and exit data. I was also fascinated to be able to cross reference surveys of similar gender, age, educational levels and ethnicities. Of course, the exercise was of little value in that the data had not been collated and no real patterns could be identified. I remember feeling somewhat overwhelmed with the upcoming task of evaluating the data that had been gleaned from 261 surveys. In all, the surveys yielded 4,181 pieces of data that must now be collated, entered into an excel spreadsheet and evaluated so that summary statistics could be generated.

My next step was to engage the skills of a qualified and knowledgeable statistician. Dr. Donald Martin serves as an elder in my church and teaches statistics at North Carolina State University. He consented to assist me in generating the summary statistics.

My office administrator then entered the responses into an excel spreadsheet. After several revisions to meet Dr. Martin's specifications she emailed the final product for his approval. He uploaded the spreadsheet to STATCRUNCH – a statistical analysis software -- ran various statistical tests and generated over 50 pages of summary statistics for my evaluation.

In October, I met with Dr. Martin who walked me through his findings and we discussed the best approach of how to read and interpret the summary statistics. In our

discussion, it became apparent that there were additional sets of data that would be helpful, particularly as it pertained to cross referencing responses from people of differing demographics. Since the RC is so ethnically diverse the data sets that categorize various responses according to ethnicity are particularly fascinating.

By the end of October, I had the remaining summary statistics in hand, which represented the conclusion of the project development, implementation and data collection phases. It was a confidence building experience to know that I had successfully maneuvered my way this far into the project. The realization that I had now completed my project seemed somewhat surreal as this was a goal I had been pursuing for five years. I was filled with energy and enthusiasm for the writing tasks that awaited me. I realized that data evaluation and writing were all that remained before I could apply for defense of the project. It was time to begin the task of data evaluation and interpretation

### **Conclusion**

This methodology and implementation narrative recounted my personal journey of executing a research project in the RC. It sought to demonstrate how earlier chapters of this project document contributed to my internal dialogue in which the hypothesis was developed, assessment tools were created and research was conducted. It accomplished this by first surveying the community context in which the RC is located. Next, it examined the local church setting where the actual research took place. Third, it walked readers through the research project by breaking it down into eight separate stages beginning with the development of the hypothesis and ending with the collation of the data that was retrieved.



## CHAPTER 5

### DATA EVALUATION AND OUTCOMES

#### **Introduction**

The driving force behind this project was a desire to strengthen my preaching ministry at the RC. Through years of general observation, monitoring audience response during preaching and post-preaching evaluative interviews, I was left with a nagging feeling that my preaching ministry could be more effective. Much of what I was preaching was not getting through to people's hearts. My great desire was to see lives transformed through the preaching of the Gospel.

Since the Gospel is perfect, I concluded that the problem must be a combination of the sermon and the audience's willingness and ability to listen. After a theological study on the preaching ministries of Jesus and Nathan, I began to conduct a literature review. The review focused on the problem of the audience's inability to focus on the sermon and the types of sermons that were most likely to increase retention so that life change could happen. I chose literature that paid special attention to the power of story to affect life change on the part of the listener.

In my study, I discovered the technique of open-ended storytelling. Since this was a new idea to me it represented a new skill in my homiletical skill set. In addition, I became interested in the effect that stories with a strong emotional component could have on helping listeners listen so that life change can happen. As these two ideas took shape in my mind, a hypothesis evolved which stated that, sermons that imbed an open-ended

story that connects on an emotional level significantly assist the listener in the task of listening; thus increasing the probability of the Gospel creating moments of life change.

With the hypothesis in place, the project began to take shape as a sermon series that would field test these two storytelling methods. The intent was to conduct research to determine whether the hypothesis was a viable tool with which to assist listeners with listening so that life change could happen.

The research consisted of four stages: 1) A baseline survey, which established a benchmark, as well as captured demographic information from respondents; 2) a four-part sermon series in which the storytelling methods were field tested; 3) an exit survey that contained several of the questions from the baseline survey for comparison purposes, as well as questions asking the respondent to compare whether they preferred the new storytelling methods to the previous practice; and 4) data summary and evaluation.

In what follows I present basic information and summary statistics for the baseline and exit surveys, and results of hypothesis tests to determine if there were statistically significant differences between baseline/exit survey responses for those questions that were common to the two. Following that are analyses of responses where respondents are grouped by personality types and by demographic characteristics. The chapter ends with observations for future research and reflection.

## **Summary and Evaluation of the Project Data**

### **Baseline Survey Questions and Summary Statistics**

The data evaluations had two purposes. The first was to see what differences emerged between the baseline and exit surveys and determine whether these differences offered support in favor of the hypothesis or went against it. The second was to isolate

the various populations within the surveys to see if differing trends emerged with respect to personality traits, gender, age ranges, ethnicity and levels of education.

In the interest of brevity I will shorten the wordage used to refer to specific questions in the surveys. For example “Question 1 of the Baseline Survey” will be shortened to Q1B. Similarly “Question 1 of the Exit Survey” will be shortened to Q1E. The third question of the exit survey had four parts and will be referred to as Q3Ea-Q3Ed. With the exception of demographic information, all but one question of the baseline survey utilized the 10-point Likert scale. The surveys were written as to suggest that the distance between Likert items is equidistant. The surveys are partially reproduced below to assist the reader in connecting the questions to the summary statistics and are included in their entirety as Appendices A and B.

1. Based on what you have seen, heard and experienced in the last four years of Pastor Bob’s preaching, please rank how much you feel you have grown spiritually as a result of his preaching ministry. (To avoid redundancy within the body of the paper, the Likert scale is only included in Q1B.)

Very Little			Neutral				Very Much		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Q1B sought to understand how much people have grown spiritually as a result of my preaching ministry. The average response of 8.3 seems to indicate that people considered themselves, to a large degree, blessed by what they have heard from the pulpit.

2. To what degree do you feel the stories he tells in sermons have helped you be able to *Listen* to the sermons?

Q2B honed in more specifically on the storytelling I have done from the pulpit and the impact of those stories in helping listeners listen. The average response was 8.8.

3. To what degree do you feel the stories he tells in his sermons have helped you be able to *Understand* the message of the sermons?

Q3B made inquiry about the connection between previous stories and their effectiveness in helping the listener understand the message of the sermon. The average response of 8.9 suggests that the congregation generally finds story valuable in terms of helping clarify the message.

4. To what degree do you feel the stories *Enhanced* the sermons?

5. To what degree do you feel the stories have helped you *Apply the Message* of the sermon to your life?

Q5B probed further into the relationship between stories and the application of the message to the listener's life. An average score of 8.5 could suggest that most listeners see stories as a viable assistant in helping them make application of the message to their lives.

6. When Pastor Bob tells a story in a sermon and makes an application, do you feel the application is too little, right amount, too much?"

Q6B utilized the Likert scale in a different way than the previous 5 questions. The more favorable response is reflected at the middle of the scale rather than at the highest value of the scale. As such, the optimal response is 5.5. The average response to Q6B was 6.5 indicating that respondents may feel that slightly too much application is made from stories. Q6B responses also resulted in a variance of 2.5, which was the largest of any non-demographic question on the baseline survey. This result is of interest

as one of the storytelling techniques being tested is open-ended storytelling which, by definition, calls for less application. The result also confirmed my suspicion that I often dwell too much on application. Perhaps this is why Craddock's theory was of such interest to me. I was actually glad to see this response as I interpreted it as validating, somewhat, the open-ended storytelling portion of my hypothesis.

7. When Pastor Bob tells a story in a sermon, how well do you understand the application?

It can be argued that Q7B is very similar to Q3B. The intent was to verify the validity of earlier questions on application and understanding by providing an additional data set. The average response of 8.9 was the same as Q3B.

8. When Pastor Bob tells a story in sermon, do you feel the amount of time spent on the application is...

Q8B is similar to Q6B. The average response of 6.15 is closer to the optimal value of 5.5. These two questions indicate that improvement can be made in minimizing the amount of time spent massaging a story for application. I felt this further legitimated the field testing of open-ended storytelling as a viable project on which to conduct research.

9. How do you describe yourself as a listener?

Distracted Listener  
(It's hard for you to listen)

Active Listener  
(It's easy for you to listen)

Q9B produced an interesting average result of 7.75. I say this is interesting because I would have assumed a lower result based on my personal observation and feedback from members of the congregation about their ability to sustain focused attention during the sermon. In retrospect, the data generated from this question would

have been more helpful had I asked respondents to put themselves into either the distracted listener category or active listener category.

Table 1 shows the average response to questions on the baseline survey.

Table 1

*Baseline Summary Statistics*

Column1	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Q1B	8.3	2.3	8	8
Q2B	8.8	1.9	9	6
Q3B	8.9	1.6	9	5
Q4B	8.8	2.3	9	9
Q5B	8.5	1.9	9	5
Q6B	6.5	2.5	6	6
Q7B	8.9	1.5	9	5
Q8B	6.2	1.7	6	6
Q9B	7.8	3.6	8	9

The data suggests that the RC seems to be generally happy with my preaching ministry. Having reviewed the baseline results, I was concerned that the scores did not allow significant room for upward movement on the exit survey. I recognize that this was optimistic on my part and that the exit results could always move in a less favorable direction, however, I entered the project excited about my hypothesis and anticipating positive results.

10. Would you describe your personality as...(circle one from each line).

1) Extroverted or Introverted

2) Sensing or Intuition

3) Thinking or Feeling

4) Judging or Perceiving

Figure 3 give respondents responses to Q10B as percentages.

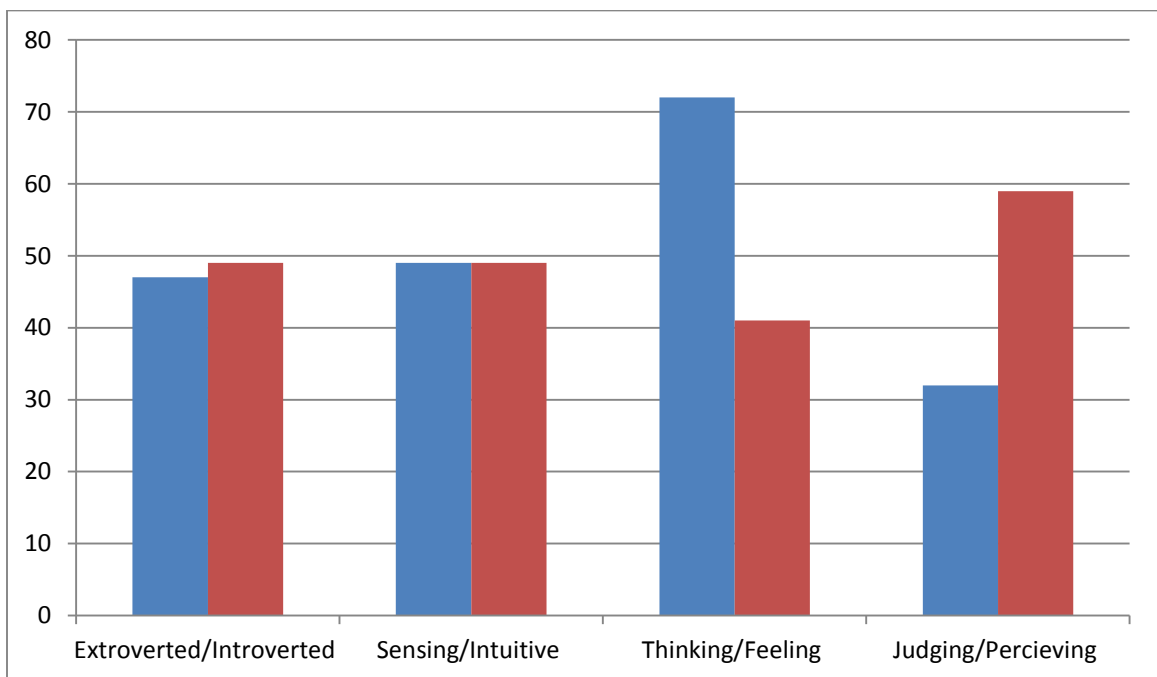


Figure 3. Barplot representing responses to Q10B in percent.

11. What is your gender?                      Male    Female

Q11B: 52 respondents indicated they were male and 79 indicated they were female.

12. Please circle your age range?

18-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50
51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+	

Figure 4 shows the age breakdown of the respondents. After evaluating the data it became necessary to collapse the age ranges from 5 year increments to decade increments.

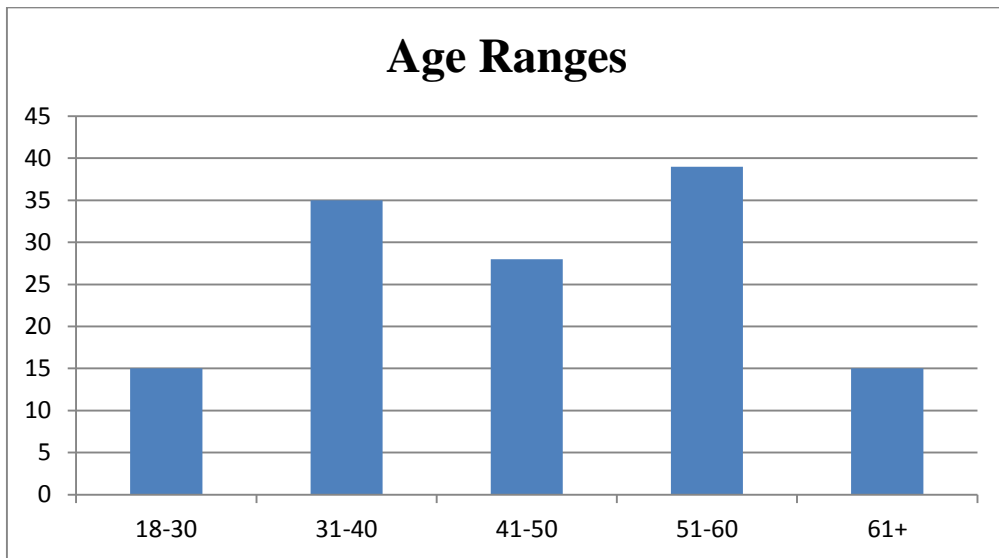


Figure 4. Barplot representing number of people in various age categories.



13. Which of these race/ethnic groups describes you?

- 1) White
- 2) Black/African American
- 3) American Indian
- 4) Asian
- 5) Hispanic/Latino
- 6) Other

Of respondents who indicated their ethnicity: 75 were White, 27 were African American, 1 was Indian, 9 were Asian, 14 were Latino and 6 chose Other.

14. Please circle your highest achieved level of education.

- 1) Less than High School
- 2) High School
- 3) Some College
- 4) Two-year or Technical College Degree
- 5) Bachelor's Degree
- 6) Master's Degree or Higher

Figure 5 represents a breakdown of the level of education of the respondents.

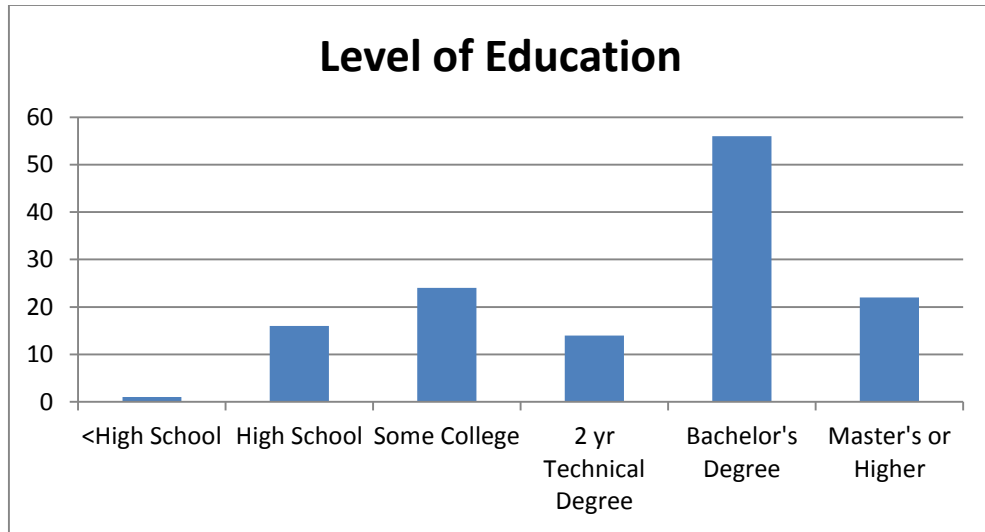


Figure 5. Barplot representing education levels.

### Exit Survey Questions and Summary Statistics

As noted in Appendix B the first two questions clarified whether respondents had participated in the baseline survey.

- Based on what you have seen, heard and experienced, please rank the following sermons according to how much they have helped you grow spiritually. If you did not hear a particular sermon, leave that section blank.

#### May 5: *Portrait of a Healthy Family: Mature Men*

Story Key Words “*Deacon Jones, Presbyterian Church*”

Very Little				Neutral					Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

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Q3Ea-Q3Ed asked respondents to rate how much they felt the four sermons in the Portrait Series helped them grow spiritually. The letters a-d are used to distinguish the four consecutive sermons in the series. The average results for Q3Ea was 8.0.

May 12: *Portrait of a Healthy Family: Mature Women*

Story Key Words “*Who is the Best Preacher in the Family?*”

May 19: *Portrait of a Healthy Family: Young Women*

Story Key Word “*Disney Cruise*”

May 26: *Portrait of Healthy Family: Young Men*

Story Key Word “*Paco*”

4. How does this month’s sermon series compare to other series by Pastor Bob?
5. To what degree do you feel the stories he told this month have helped you be able to ***Listen*** to the sermons?
6. To what degree do you feel the stories he told this month have helped you be able to ***Understand*** the message of the sermons?
7. To what degree do you feel the stories he told this month have ***Enhanced*** the sermons?
8. To what degree do you feel the stories in this month’s sermons have helped you ***Apply the Message***, of the sermons to your life?
9. To what degree do you feel the preaching of this series has had an impact in your spiritual life compared to previous sermons by Pastor Bob?
10. When Pastor Bob told a story in a sermon this month, how well did you understand the application?

11. In your opinion did the stories you heard this month detract or enhance the message of the sermons?
12. Based on your experience in this series, how much do you prefer stories like these in the future?

Respondents' average responses to the questions on the exit survey are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

*Exit Summary Statistics*

Question	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Q3Ea	8	3	8	9
Q3Eb	8.2	3.1	9	9
Q3Ec	8.3	3	9	9
Q3Ed	8.7	2.6	9	9
Q4E	7.3	2.8	7.5	9
Q5E	8.2	3.3	8	9
Q6E	8.4	2.4	9	9
Q7E	8.5	2.4	9	9
Q8E	8.2	2.7	9	9
Q9E	7.8	2.7	8	9
Q10E	8.9	2.5	9	9
Q11E	8.7	2.2	9	6
Q12E	8.7	2.2	9	9

I find a curious relationship between Q9E and Q12E. Q9E inquires about perceived spiritual growth and has an average response that is 0.4 less than baseline counterpart (Q1B). However Q12E delivers a strong 8.7 indicating that listeners would

like to have more stories like this in the future. Why would listeners want to hear more stories like these if the stories did not contribute to spiritual growth?

Upon reflection, I conclude that that the Q12E was unclear. The question did not specifically designate what the stories in the Portrait series should be compared to. A stronger question would have been, “Based on your experience in this series, how much do you prefer stories like these compared to the stories you have heard Pastor Bob tell in the four years previous to this series?” Though the responses from this question suggest that these types of stories are much more preferred, the safer conclusion would be to disregard this question in favor of the stronger evidence elsewhere in the survey. I say this because the conclusion from Q12E appears to be opposite than that drawn from the majority of the data in the surveys.

#### *A Comparison of Baseline and Exit Summary Statistics*

Once I had the exit data in hand, I went immediately to the four questions on the baseline and exit surveys that were essentially identical questions. I wanted to see if there was a difference in the results in either direction. Table 3 shows the comparison of these questions.

Q2B (Table 3) corresponded with Q5E and inquired as to how effective the stories were in helping the listener **listen** to the sermons. Q3B corresponded with Q6E and inquired as to how effective the stories were in helping the listener **understand** the sermons. Q4B corresponded with Q7E and inquired to what degree listeners felt the stories **enhanced** the sermons. Q5B corresponded with Q8E and probed the effectiveness of the stories in helping the listener **apply** the message of the sermons to their lives.

Table 3

*Comparison of Corresponding Questions*

Corresponding Questions	Baseline	Exit
Q2B/Q5E	8.8	8.2
Q3B/Q6E	8.9	8.4
Q4B/Q7E	8.8	8.5
Q5B/Q8E	8.5	8.2

On all four comparison questions respondents gave less favorable responses to the stories they heard during the Portrait series. This data is contrary to the hypothesis that, sermons that imbed an open-ended story that connects on an emotional level significantly assist the listener in the task of listening; thus increasing the probability of the Gospel creating moments of life change.<sup>2</sup> Of course I found this result disappointing. However, in the interest of credible research, I understood that my job was to conduct the research and allow the data to speak for itself. Because all data is meaningful, the study still offers insights that I, and I hope others, will find valuable.

#### Hypothesis Test Results

I further studied responses on the baseline and exit surveys to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in mean responses. For each set of corresponding questions and each respondent, a new data column was formed consisting of the

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<sup>2</sup> I understand that since the value of the Likert scale is arbitrary it would be difficult to prove any conclusions. However, the data do reflect certain trends which provide a reasonable basis for the interpretation of data.

difference in response (exit – baseline). Note that I have added in comparisons of questions 1 on the baseline survey, which asks about how much the respondent has grown spiritually from my past sermons, and the four parts of question 3 on the exit survey, which asked how much the respondent had grown from the respective sermons of the new sermon series. The Wilcoxon signed ranked test was used to test if the median difference in this derived variable is significantly differed from zero. The statistical software package STATCRUNCH was used to carry out the test. Output for the various hypothesis tests are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Hypothesis Test Results*

Variable	n for test	Median Est.	Wilcoxon Stat.	P-value	Method
Q3Ea-Q1B	79	-0.5	1050.5	0.0088	Norm. Approx.
Q3Eb-Q1B	77	0	1098.5	0.0389	Norm. Approx.
Q3Ec-Q1B	86	0	1536	0.1448	Norm. Approx.
Q3Ed-Q1B	83	0	1885	0.5157	Norm. Approx.
Q5E-Q2B	80	-0.5	648	<0.0001	Norm. Approx.
Q6E-Q3B	80	-0.5	685.5	<0.0001	Norm. Approx.
Q7E-Q4B	78	-0.5	882.5	0.0009	Norm. Approx.
Q8E-Q5B	91	-0.5	1375.5	0.0039	Norm. Approx.
Q10E-Q7B	80	0	1503	0.5665	Norm. Approx.

In the table, the derived variable with a difference in responses for the corresponding questions is indicated in the first column. The column labeled “n for test” is the number of respondents that answered both questions so that their response was used

for the respective test. The remaining columns of the table contain the estimated median of the differenced responses, the corresponding Wilcoxon statistic, the p-value (the probability of seeing a value of the test statistic as large as the one that has been observed) associated with the statistic, and the method used to compute the p-value.

### Analyses of Response Grouped by Personality Descriptions

In what follows I give a breakdown of responses based on personality types, followed by comparisons based on demographic categories.

Extroverts or Introverts: The surveys had a nearly equal distribution of extroverts (47) and introverts (49). The results of the baseline survey suggest that there was little difference in the way these two groups listened to my stories (Tables 5, 6). The greatest difference in any mean response between the groups was 0.4 on Q1B with the introverts reporting a slightly higher degree of perceived spiritual growth from my preaching ministry.

Table 5

#### *Baseline Summary Statistics for Introverts*

Question	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Q1B	8.5	1.7	8	6
Q2B	9.1	1.2	9	4
Q3B	9.1	1.1	9	4
Q4B	8.9	2.8	9	9
Q5B	8.7	1.5	9	5
Q6B	6.3	2.4	6	5
Q7B	9	1.2	9	4
Q8B	6.1	1.6	6	5



Table 6

*Baseline Summary Statistics for Extroverts*

Question	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Q1B	8.1	2.7	8	8
Q2B	9	1.2	9	4
Q3B	9	1.3	9	4
Q4B	9	1.2	9	4
Q5B	8.5	1.8	9	5
Q6B	6.6	2.7	6	6
Q7B	9	1.1	9	4
Q8B	6.1	1.7	6	6

The largest difference for the exit survey was for Q3Ed (Table 7). On Q3Ed the average response for introverts was 0.6 higher. This was the sermon targeting young men and was the sermon which generated the most positive response throughout the surveys.

Table 7

*Q3Ed Summary Statistics for Extroverts and Introverts*

	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Extroverts	8.4	2.4	9	6
Introverts	9	1.3	9	4

Sensing or Intuitive: The baseline respondents who described themselves as intuitive reported slightly more favorable responses on all questions. The greatest difference between the two groups occurred on Q1B and was 0.5.

However, on the exit survey those who described themselves as sensing contributed responses that were slightly more favorable on twice as many questions as those who reported they were intuitive. I suggest that those who describe themselves as sensing were drawn into the sermon by the strong emotional component that was present in the stories of the Portrait series. As emotions engage the senses this may have played a role in eliciting a more favorable response from those who described themselves as sensing.

Thinking or Feeling: Those who described themselves as feeling reported higher mean responses on all baseline questions than those who described themselves as thinking. The greatest difference between the thinking and feeling groups (0.5) emerged from question Q6B (Table 8). I found this interesting as I also consider myself a feeler. As such, I assume that the feeling group may have sensed a stronger emotional connection with a story told by a fellow feeler.

Table 8

*Q6B<sup>3</sup> Summary Statistics for Thinking and Feeling Groups*

	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Thinking	6.6	2.6	6	6
Feeling	6.1	1.6	6	5

On the Exit Survey the thinking group only reported more positive mean responses than the feeling group on Q3Ea and Q10E (Tables 9, 10, 11). Though the

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<sup>3</sup> As a reminder, the most favorable response for Q6B is a 5.5.

differences are not remarkable, they are noteworthy in that they reflect a slightly different trend in the responses of the thinking group and the feeling group. Q3Ec yielded the largest difference in favor of the feeling group at .8.

Table 9

Q3Ea<sup>4</sup> *Summary Statistics for Thinking and Feeling Groups.*

	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Thinking	8	2.8	8	9
Feeling	8	3.3	8	7

Table 10

Q10E *Summary Statistics for Thinking and Feeling Groups*

	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Thinking	9	2.1	9	9
Feeling	8.9	1.6	9	4

Table 11

Q3E *Summary Statistics for Thinking and Feeling Groups*

	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
Thinking	8	3.7	8	9
Feeling	8.8	1.4	9	4

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<sup>4</sup> The mean for feelers was 8.04 while the mean for thinkers was 7.97. However, both scores averaged to 8 which appear in the table.

The responses to Q3Ec had a variance of 3.7 within the thinking group. This was the highest variance of any question for both thinkers and feelers. The thinker's group consistently had a higher variance in responses than the feelers, with the exception of Q1B and Q3Ea. There was, however, an outlier -- a white female from the 51-60 year old group and had a high school education-- that responded with mostly 5's on the baseline and mostly 1's on the exit. Though this contributed to a greater variance, the fact that the thinking group's data included 72 respondents minimizes the impact of the outlier.

These results seem to confirm the observation made from the baseline survey that feelers more readily connected with the stories and placed greater value on them as a teaching tool. Not only did they have more consensus as a group, but they consistently reported more favorable responses.

Judging or Perceiving: Those who described themselves as judging or perceiving submitted average baseline responses that were very similar. On Q4B and Q8B, those who described themselves as perceiving recorded a more favorable mean response that was 0.6 more than those who described themselves as judging. On the other hand, the mean response of 0.6 was reported in favor of those who describe themselves as judging on Q6B.

Likewise, the average exit survey responses for these groups were very similar with the exception of Q4E where the mean response for the perceiving group was 0.9 more than the judging group. It would appear that those who describe themselves as judging or perceiving listened to and processed the stories before and during the Portrait series in similar ways.

### *A Comparison of Summary Statistics Isolated by Demographics*

The demographic studies were of particular interest to me. I was anxious to see if there were significant differences in the way listeners in the various demographic groupings connected with the messages and related to the stories. For instance, would the data suggest that there were significant differences in the way men and women listened to the stories? If so, would there be large differences when the responses were grouped based on age, ethnicity or education? Similarly, I expected the various relationships between demographic data sets to render interesting results.

#### **Gender**

On the baseline survey women responded slightly more positively on average on all questions except for Q4B. Interestingly, Q4B asked how much respondents felt the stories enhanced the messages and the males reported a 0.2 more favorable response on average. As such, the data for Q4B seems to be somewhat inconsistent. The responses of males also had higher variances to all questions on the baseline survey except Q4B.

On the exit survey, the women gave the more favorable mean responses to the two sermons targeting women, while the men gave the more favorable responses to the two sermons targeting men. The men's most favorable average response (8.9) was the sermon targeting young men and was the most favorable average response of either group to any sermon.

What was surprising is that on the remainder of the exit survey, the women only gave the more favorable response than the men on Q9E, Q10E and Q11E. In addition, the women's responses now showed greater variances on all questions except Q5E, Q10E

and Q11E. Clearly, the level of consensus among women dropped during the Portrait series.

I have wondered how my own gender may have played a role in the women's satisfaction with the series. Since half of the series was, essentially, on Christian womanhood, perhaps my gender limits my credibility more than I understand. I had hoped that this would not be a factor as the message was rooted in Scripture rather than the messenger, but the data may suggest that this may not be completely true.

I would suggest, however, that there is another explanation for the increase in men's appreciation of the series from previous sermons. I believe the contemporary male lives in a culture that is frequently hostile toward manhood. As such, many men are confused about their role as men. More will be said about this in chapter 6.

### **Age Range**

When the initial summary statistics were generated, I realized that the five year increments separated the age ranges too narrowly. Several of the groups did not have enough respondents in their grouping to offer statistically valid results. I asked Dr. Martin to collapse the age ranges into full decades and re-run the analysis of the responses. The collapsed groups are 1) 18-30 year olds, 2) 31-40 year olds, 3) 41-51 year olds, 4) 51-60 year olds, 5) 61+ year olds.

Comments on data from 18-30 year olds: Fifteen respondents indicated they were part of this age group. Q2B caught my immediate attention in that the most favorable mean responses came from the youngest group and response ratings steadily declined as respondent groups got older (Table 12). I was quick to embrace this result as evidence that my chapter 4 assumption was, most likely, correct. Here I theorized that younger

audiences would have the greatest appreciation for open-ended storytelling and stories with a strong emotional component.

In addition, this group submitted the lowest variance (0.6) of any group with the 31-40 year olds having the next lowest variance at twice that. Each successive age group had increasingly higher variances with the 61+ age group having the highest variance of 3.7. The 18-30 year olds also had the lowest range (2) while the second lowest range (31-40 year olds) was also twice that. Since they emerged as the group that most liked the stories of the previous four years and felt the stories helped them listen to the sermons more than the other respondents, I was eager to believe that my hypothesis was on the right track.

Table 12

*Q2B Summary Statistics Grouped by Age<sup>5</sup>*

Age	Mean	Variance	Median	Range
18-30	9.1	0.6	9	2
31-40	9.1	1.3	9	4
41-50	8.7	2.1	9	5
51-60	8.7	2.1	9	6
61+	8.5	3.7	9	5

I was further encouraged when I found that this group gave the least favored mean response to Q3B, which makes inquiry about how the stories helped them be able to understand the message of the sermon. It appeared they liked stories, but not the way the stories were being used to help them understand the spiritual principles they were designed to illustrate. My excitement gathered further momentum when they gave the

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<sup>5</sup> The unrounded means beginning with the 18-30 year olds were 9.13, 9.09, 7.71, 8.66 and 8.46.

least favored response to Q5B which made inquiry about what degree the stories have helped them apply the message of the sermon.

However, the 18-30 year olds gave the second most favored mean response to Q6B, which asked about the amount of application that is drawn from the stories, and the most favored response to Q8B, which asked about the amount of time spent drawing the application from the story. Though these last two responses dampened my enthusiasm, they heightened my interest of how this group would respond to the stories in the Portrait series.

Imagine my surprise when the Exit survey results came in and the 18-30 year olds submitted the least favorable mean responses to three of the four sermons. On the sermon targeting young women, only the 41-50 years olds gave a less favorable response. On Q4E, which inquired how the series compared to other series, they tied the 31-40 year olds for the least favorable response. They gave the second lowest mean response to Q5E (comparison), Q6E (helped understand), Q8E (application), and Q10E (detract or enhance). On Q7E, which asked how much the stories helped enhance the message, they again had the least favorable mean response.

As I reviewed the data I felt my weakening hold on my hypothesis falter. The responses of the 18-30 year olds provides ample evidence that the hypothesis test was accurate when it suggested that the hypothesis does not hold.

One bright spot that encouraged me was Q9E where they submitted the second highest responses regarding the positive impact of this series on their spiritual lives compared to previous series. However, it should be pointed out that Q9E does not make inquiry about the stories within the series, but rather, the series as a whole.



Comments on data from 31-40 year olds: Thirty-five respondents indicated they were part of this age group. On the baseline they had the second lowest variances for Q1B, Q2B, Q3B, Q5B, Q7B and Q8B. On the exit they only had the lowest variance on Q3Ea, but they did have the third lowest variances on Q3Eb-Q3Ed, Q5E, Q6E, Q7E, Q8E and Q10E-Q12E. This suggests a fairly high degree of consensus within the age group.

On Q4B they submitted the most favorable response of any age group with a mean of 8.9. However, on the same question they also generated the widest range (9) of any age group to any question on the baseline survey. On the exit survey they only had the highest mean (9.1) on Q10E.

Comments on data from 41-50 year olds: Twenty-eight respondents indicated they were part of this age group. On Q3Eb they reported the most favorable average (8.7) with the lowest variance (1.8) of any age group. In fact, all other groups had a variance 3.2 or above for the same question. Since about two-thirds of all respondents were women and this question targeted mature women, I interpreted this as evidence that mature women were appreciative of the sermon. A cross referencing with gender data revealed that women had a mean response of 8.4 compared with 7.9 for men. I found these statistics encouraging as this is the sermon I felt the most insecure about based on my own age and gender.

This group also had the lowest variance for questions Q3Ea, Q3Eb, Q3Ed, Q4E-Q7E and Q10-Q12E. They had the second lowest variance on Q3Ec and Q8E. Clearly there seemed to be more consensus in responses among this age group.

Comments on data from 51-60 year olds: Thirty-nine respondents indicated they were part of this age group. On Q6B the 51-60 year olds gave the least favorable mean response of all the age groups indicating that they feel too much time is spent on application. Correspondingly, they also gave the least favorable response on average to Q10E, which asked how well they understood the applications made during the Portrait series.

On Q3Ea the 51-60 year olds had the highest variance at 3.9. They also had the highest range on this question at 9, with the next highest range of 6 coming from the 18-30 year olds. I found this interesting as this was the sermon that targeted mature men. Why does this age group have the highest variance on a sermon that targets them? One factor may be that the outlier mentioned under the gender section also identified with this age group.

Comments on data from 61+ year olds: Fifteen respondents indicated they were part of this age group. On the baseline survey the 61+ year olds responses generated the greatest variances of any age group on Q1B, Q2B, Q3B and Q7B. They also tied with the 31-40 year olds for the greatest variance on Q4B.

On the exit survey they had the second largest variance of the entire study on Q3Ec at 6.9. This number was closely followed by Q10E for which the responses had a variance of 6.4. These numbers are remarkable because they are unusually high within the context of the study. The entire study only reported one variance of 7, two variances of 6 (reported above), one variance of 5, and two variances of 4. As such, it seems logical to conclude that the 61+ year olds were lacking consensus more than other groups.

In spite of this apparent lack of consensus, they submitted the most favorable mean response on Q2B and the second highest average response on Q5E. This would suggest that they place significant value on the stories they have heard both before and after the Portrait series. The data's impact on the hypothesis would seem to confirm earlier evidence that the hypothesis does not hold with regards to its assumption that younger listeners would respond more positively and older listeners less positively.

### **Ethnicity<sup>6</sup>**

The most surprising finding with regards to ethnicity came from the Latino population. Latinos recorded the most favorable mean responses with the exception of Q4E and Q8E-Q12E where the category "other" had the most favorable response. But even on these responses, the Latinos had the second highest mean response on all questions except Q12E. On Q3Ec the average Latino response was a full 1.1 more favorable than the next highest response. In addition, they recorded the lowest variance of any group from Q3Ea-Q3Ec, and Q5E. Though I have pondered this data and thought about the Latinos in my congregation, I have no insight to offer as to why they emerged as the population that was the most favorable toward the series. Of course, this observation is made in light of the fact that this population returned a total of only 12 responses.

Incidentally, the White population gave the least favorable responses on seven of the 12 questions on the exit survey (Q3Eb, Q3Ec, Q4E, Q5E, Q7E, Q9E and Q12E).

Similarly, the Asian population frequently reported less favorable responses. The lowest response of any ethnicity to any question was the Asian response to Q5E which

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<sup>6</sup> For analysis purposes I discounted the singular respondent who indicated he/she was American Indian.

resulted in an average of 6.6. This question inquired as to how respondents felt the Portrait series compared to previous series they had heard me preach. This is consistent with the Asian response to Q9E (7.75) where they recorded the second lowest mean response, second only to the White population. This question asked about the impact of this series on their spiritual life compared to previous sermons.

### **Education Level<sup>7</sup>**

Education was another area of the demographic portion of the study that was of particular interest to me. In chapter 4 of the project I theorized that those with higher levels of education would be more appreciative of the new storytelling method I was to test. I made this prediction based on Fred Craddock's influence, which led me to anticipate that more educated listeners would sense my respect of them if I did not spoon feed the sermon application to them.

On the baseline the Two Year or Technical College Degree group submitted the most favorable mean responses on all questions except Q6B, Q8B and Q4B where they had the second highest mean response. The Master's Degree or Higher group only submitted the most favorable response on Q8B and the Bachelor's Degree group only submitted the most favorable response on Q4B (on which the Master's Degree group gave the least favorable response). The data seems to suggest a trend in which the more educated listeners were less appreciative of the stories told in the four years prior to the Portrait series.

This baseline analysis could be interpreted as providing support for my theory that the more educated listeners needed less application from me and more freedom to draw

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<sup>7</sup> For analysis purposes I discounted the singular respondent who indicated he/she was American Indian.

their own application from the sermon. I was open to the idea that I may have been isolating the more educated listeners by telling them what to think instead of inviting them into the sermon development process and allowing them to discover the most relevant application for their own lives.

But Q9B became problematic in this regard. It asked listeners to describe their listening style on the Likert scale with Distracted Listener on the lower end of the scale (1) and Active Listener on the higher end of the scale (10). Notice the descending values of the responses from Some College onward.

Table 13

*Q9B Summary Statistics for Education*

Education	Mean
High School	7.9
Some College	8.3
Two Year/Technical	7.9
Bachelor's Degree	7.7
Master's Degree	7.3

The table suggests that the more education respondents had, the more distracted their listening style. Since this had nothing to do with stories, the data seemed to suggest that there may be other reasons why the more educated listeners were not engaging in the sermons and stories. If this is true then the listening style of more educated listeners may have sounded a prophetic note as to how they would respond to the Portrait series. For me, the discovery of this trend was one of the more surprising findings of the baseline

survey. However, if the hypothesis would hold, then I could expect to see this trend reverse in the exit data.

Imagine my surprise when the Two Year or Technical College Degree group submitted the most favorable mean responses for every question of the exit survey except Q4E. They also had the least amount of variance for every question except Q4E. In addition, they also had the lowest range on 11 of the 14 questions and tied for the lowest range on the remaining three questions.

The Bachelor's Degree group submitted the least favorable responses to Q3Ea-Q3Ed, Q7E, Q11E. They also tied with the Master's Degree group for the least favorable response to Q5E. The Master's Degree group submitted the least favorable responses to Q4E, Q8E, Q9E.

The trend that emerged in the baseline data seemed to continue in the exit data. For example, when the Bachelor's Degree and the Master's Degree respondents were collapsed into a single group, their mean responses were lower than the combined mean responses of the High School and Some College group on 9 of the 13 questions.

In general, the overall trend of the data suggests that the more educated listeners had less appreciation for the stories they heard before and during the Portrait series. This realization placed the final nail in the coffin in which my hypothesis is now interned, but also opened an intriguing line of questions as to why more educated listeners gave less favorable responses to the stories and sermons before and after the Portrait series.

## Conclusion

The research project was born from a desire to see hearts transformed through the preaching of the Gospel. My heart often ached when I didn't sense the connection with listeners that demonstrated they were engaged in the sermon as active listeners.

My study for the chapter 3 literature review stimulated my curiosity with regards to how story could help listeners with the task of listening so that the Gospel could create moments of life change. I began to focus on the dual storytelling methods of open-ended storytelling and stories that imbed a strong emotional component.

As the project evolved it became clear the research would consist of four stages: 1) a baseline survey 2) a four-part sermon series in which the storytelling methods were field tested 3) an exit survey for comparison purposes and 4) data summary and evaluation.

The data evaluations accomplished the two-fold purpose of measuring the differences between the baseline and exit survey responses and grouping respondents into various personality and demographic groups for analysis.

When the summary statistics were evaluated and a hypothesis test conducted it was found that the data did not support the hypothesis. However, because all data is meaningful, observations were drawn from the data that attempted to shed light on why the storytelling methods seemed to assist or hinder the listeners of the RC.

In the personality comparisons, introverts and extroverts listened to the stories before and during the Portrait series in similar ways. Those who described themselves as intuitive reported slightly more favorable mean responses on the baseline, while those who described themselves as sensing did so on the exit survey. Feelers reported more

favorable mean responses than thinkers on both surveys. Respondents who described themselves as judging or perceiving had similar mean responses on both surveys.

Women had more favorable mean responses than men on the baseline but men gave the greatest number of favorable mean responses on the exit survey.

The 18-30 year olds had the most frequent favorable mean responses on the baseline but gave the least favorable mean responses to three of the four sermons on the exit survey. This was one of the biggest surprises of the study. The 41-50 year olds emerged as the group with the strongest consensus in their responses to the baseline survey and the second highest on the exit.

On the other hand, the 61+ group had the highest variances of any group.

Latinos reported the greatest appreciation for the Portrait series while Caucasians seemed to appreciate it the least.

A second major surprise of the study came to light when those with Two Year or Technical College Degrees emerged as the educational group that had the greatest appreciation for the new storytelling methods. A general trend emerged in the data in which those with the most education seem to have less appreciation for the stories and sermons before and during the portrait series.

The data evaluations helped clarify directions for further reflection and research. As always, answering a research question leads to new questions. New questions that emerged in light of this research include: 1) If the new storytelling methods did not help listeners listen better, then how can I help listeners listen? What would happen if the responsibility for listening was placed back on the listener instead of the preacher? 2) What happened in men's hearts that led to a greater consensus in response to the Portrait



series? How can this be understood and harnessed for the future benefit of men's ministries? 3) Why did the more educated listeners give some of the least favorable responses on both the baseline and exit surveys? How does education affect listener response?

Upon reflection I wish I had included questions designed to generate qualitative data on both surveys. As indicated in the second footnote in chapter one I initially thought it important to limit the research to quantitative data in hopes that hard numbers would be easier to defend. But having completed the research and quantitative data evaluations I longed to hear more from respondents about how they felt about the series and wish I had allowed them the freedom to express themselves in their own words. It would have been interesting to see if a qualitative research method would result in responses that were more favorable to the hypothesis.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The inception, development, execution and evaluation of this project have had a significant impact on my personal and professional growth. The project sought to enhance my preaching ministry by conducting research that would strengthen the connection between myself and the people that listen to me preach. The hope was that I would demonstrate methods of storytelling that would assist listeners in the task of listening, thus positioning the Gospel to create moments of life change. Though the data suggested that the hypothesis does not hold, the data also generated insights into how my church members listen, understand, apply and interact with the stories I tell in sermons.

This chapter will offer a brief summary of each chapter of the project, as well as overarching conclusions for the project as a whole. It will conclude with a list of recommendations and offer suggestions for myself and others who would continue research on the use of story in preaching.

#### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter one identified the problem the research was designed to address. It offered insight as to why members of the RC may struggle to maintain attention span during preaching. Attendees of the RC are metropolitan, cosmopolitan, fast paced and information bombarded. The average attendee is 33 years old, is often a student and lives in a media saturated environment. As such, the transformational experience the sermon is designed to facilitate is often reduced to another informational event tacked onto the end

of an already overcrowded week. The chapter built a case for why the RC is a strong candidate for research that explores ways to help listeners stay focused during the preaching event.

Chapter two sought to lay a theological foundation for the project by exploring the Biblical use of story to assist the listener in hearing the message of salvation. It did this by offering an exegesis of the parable of the soils, as well as case studies on the storytelling of Nathan and Jesus. It also examined key contributions by Ellen White.

The chapter offered a definition of story as it is used in this study. Further, it explored the concept of metanarrative and drew a parallel between metanarrative and the Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy. Finally it considered the role of the emotional word picture in good storytelling and offered examples of how this storytelling method assists the listener with attention and retention.

Though the theological reflection seeks to demonstrate how a skillfully delivered story opens a window to the heart, it also clarifies that stories do not save people. Stories, in and of themselves, have no redeeming qualities, nor do they enhance the Gospel. Since only the Gospel can redeem, the value of story is to help the listener pay attention so that the Gospel can do its work of transformation.

Chapter three went on to report on a literature review in which key thinkers in the field of storytelling were engaged and brought into dialogue. It began by examining the power of story to engage hearer's emotions and the relationship between this emotional component and hearer retention. Next, it offered a definition and brief history of narrative preaching with special emphasis given to leading thinkers of the New Homiletic. Lastly, it recognized the contentions within this preaching genre and those

who have written against it.

The chapter culminated with three of my own observations about the veracity of the New Homiletic. These observations led me to conclude that the New Homiletic is of great value to the preacher who seeks to preach to a contemporary audience. In the course of the literature review, I became most interested in the dual storytelling methods of open-ended storytelling and the impact of stories with a strong emotional component. These two storytelling methods would later emerge as the foundational building blocks of my hypothesis.

Chapter four offered a methodology and implementation narrative of the project. It began by providing readers with a profile of the community and local church settings in which the research was conducted. Next, it organized the research journey into an eight stage narrative account: 1) Development of the hypothesis 2) Conceptualization of the project 3) Assumptions and expectations 4) Development of the baseline and exit surveys 5) Administration of the baseline survey 6) Presentation of the four-part sermon series 7) Administration of the exit survey, and 8) Data collation and generation of summary statistics.

Of course stage one was a major contribution of this chapter and charted the course for the remainder of the project. The hypothesis asserted that, sermons that imbed an open-ended story that connects on an emotional level significantly assist the listener in the task of listening; thus increasing the probability of the Gospel creating moments of life changes. The chapter culminated in an explanation of how the summary statistics were generated.

Finally, chapter five delivered evaluations of the data. It did so by reporting basic

information and summary statistics for both surveys, as well as the results of the hypothesis tests. Next it provided analysis of responses where respondents were grouped by personality types and demographic characteristics. Throughout the chapter comments and observations were made as the data was analyzed and cross-referenced.

The data evaluations uncovered two major surprises. First, though the younger audience (18-30) gave the most favorable mean responses on the baseline survey, they gave the least favorable mean responses to three of the four sermons in the Portrait series. This response was contrary to the expectation stated in chapter 4 that younger audiences would respond more favorably to these new storytelling methods.

The second major surprise was in regards to educational groups. In chapter four I also theorized there would be a direct correlation between respondent's levels of education and their increased appreciation of the new storytelling methods. However, the Two Year or Technical College Degree group was the group that reported the most favorable responses to the Portrait series. In addition, the data revealed a general trend in which appreciation of the series decreased as the respondent's levels of education increased. Chapter five ended with hints about directions for further research and reflection.

When considered as a whole, the culmination of the previous five chapters provides several overarching conclusions for the entire project. First, the project has taught me that the judicious use of story requires that we guard against the use of storytelling for the sake of telling stories. Preachers must remember that the story is not the point; rather, it merely illustrates the point. I recognize the need to keep this entire discussion about storytelling in its rightful place as a servant of the Word rather than its

master.

Second, I have come to realize that it is not necessary to illustrate every point of the sermon. In fact, the tendency to do so may expose a weak outline. If the outline is cohesive and has unity, then we could expect the second point to flow out of the first in a way that is easily understood by the listener. Such an outline positions the preacher to use illustrations more sparingly which leaves more time for preaching of the actual Word. Since it is this Word (and not the story) that brings transformation, preachers must maintain vigilance in keeping the story in its proper place.

Third, even though the data retrieved from the surveys suggests that the hypothesis does not hold, the survey responses still encouraged me by validating the effectiveness of story in helping listeners engage in the message of the sermon. For example, one female listener e-mailed me after the first sermon and said, “I’m trying to imagine myself even now getting down on the floor to sit by a young person who is new to the church.” Interestingly, this was in reference to the story in the first sermon in the Portrait series that targeted mature men. In this comment she imagines herself as the protagonist of the story. In spite of a hypothesis that yielded little change, her comment demonstrates the value of story in helping members engage in the sermon and find practical application to their own life experience. It also suggests an oversight on my part in limiting the study to quantitative data.

Finally, I wish to warn the general pastoral audience of the temptation of attempting to turn preaching research into pure science. Near the conclusion of the research journey I realized that I made the mistake of trying too hard to quantify my storytelling and its results. In my enthusiasm to apply the research methods I had learned

in the DMin program I functioned too much like a researcher in a laboratory setting. However, the work of preaching cannot always be handled as a specimen to be placed in a test tube for experimentation and analysis.

The project reminded me that preaching is an art rather than a science. There is no single method, technique, homiletical system, sermon illustration or story that will connect with all the people all the time. Good preaching, rather, is a combination of a preacher's well-tuned heart, a well-studied outline, the Holy Spirit's leading and an audience that longs to experience Christ. Though these elements can be studied, they cannot always be quantified.

### **Recommendations**

In response to the summary and conclusions, seven recommendations for research and further reflection arise. My first recommendation is that I develop a seminar on how to be a good pew listener. This current project focused singularly on what the preacher can do from the pulpit to assist the listener in the task of listening. During the execution of the project, I realized that more remains to be said about the effort that should be put forth on the part of listeners to cooperate with the efforts of the speaker and the Holy Spirit in the preaching event. In 1976, Sweazy claimed that "The skills of the hearers are more important than the skills of the preacher" (1976, p. 310). Though he may exaggerate his point he, nevertheless, highlights the fact that the hearer, as well as the speaker, must be willing to expend energy if preaching is to have its intended result.

My second recommendation arises from the data collected on gender. On the baseline survey the women clearly had more consensus in response and consistently gave the most favorable responses to my preaching and stories. However, the exit data

points to a clear shift toward the men reporting higher mean responses and more consensus as a group. As I reflected on the data, I began to theorize that this may be because the role of manhood in our culture is in crisis. In a media culture that so frequently downplays the role of manhood and seeks to blur gender roles, one might expect men to respond with more consensus to a clarification of what the Bible says about the roles of both men and women. I believe this data gives evidence of the truth that men are hurting. If this is correct, then there is an opportunity for pulpites to respond to this need from the authority of God's Word. Whether or not this pain is the culprit behind the men's response, my heart goes out to men who struggle with living in a culture that is often hostile toward manhood. I would like to see further study done to clarify whether this suspicion is true, as well as a ministry plan developed to help men in this regard. I would be honored if this research were used to add to the body of literature on how to strengthen men's ministries.

Third, more research should be conducted to explore the potential responses of men to more emotive matters. Though men do not generally characterize themselves as emotive creatures they did report a more positive response to the Portrait series than they did the sermons of the previous four years. Could it be that the emotional components of the stories touched something in men that longs for freedom of expression and exploration?

Third, I very much wish I had included questions in the demographic section about how long people have been Seventh-day Adventists. In recent years our church has been fairly successful at evangelism. During the data evaluation phase I realized how valuable it would have been to note whether people's tenure in the denomination had any



bearing on the way they heard and understood the series. I would have been fascinated to compare data between life-long Adventists and those who have been a part of the church for less than 10 years. I recommend that future research by myself or other researchers include this inquiry.

Fourth, I'm curious to know more about how education affects listener response and how preachers can maximize their sermon time to reach the hearts of the most educated listeners. As I evaluated the data from this project a clear trend emerged in which the more educated listeners had less appreciation for my preaching and stories both before and after the Portrait series. To theorize why this is so is beyond the scope of this project. However, I am aware of the irony that this data presents in light of the fact that I am finishing a doctoral level degree designed to help people listen. Of course, the reason may simply be that the most educated listeners are more aware of the challenge of listening that is common to all listeners. Further research is necessary to clarify whether this is so.

Fifth, I wish to know more about the large variances that occurred in the responses of the 61+ population. Does this lack of consensus point to a need in this population that was previously unidentified? How can the pulpit ministry be adjusted to meet the needs of this population in the RC? What other kinds of ministry could help insure that they are being properly cared for and welcomed into the general rhythm of congregational life at the RC? Clearly, their responses generate a valid research question for further inquiry.

Finally, I wish to encourage my fellow pulpiteers to be ever vigilant to choose heart work over sermonic form. This journey through the DMin program has served to

remind me that it is such heart work that truly prepares one to stand before God's people. While such academic pursuits are beneficial to the personal and professional growth of the preacher, it is heart work that provides the greatest contribution to Spirit filled preaching.

As a parting thought, I believe that human beings have always been, and will always be storytellers. Sacks writes, "We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative-whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a 'narrative,' and that this narrative is us, our identities" (1985, p. 110). If this is true, then those of us who share the Gospel should use every portion of our speaking gifts, every quip of language, and every reasonable effort to communicate the Gospel through story. For as we tell these stories we participate in the re-telling of the greatest story ever told.

## APPENDIX A

### BASELINE AND EXIT SURVEYS

# Peaching Evaluation and Baseline Survey for Pastor Bob Cundiff

There are no risks in participating in this study. Return of this survey serves as implied consent. This is an anonymous survey and participation is voluntary. Participants may discontinue at any time without explanation or penalty. You must be 18 or older to participate in this survey.

Please place the completed survey back in manila envelope and seal the envelope. Then write your name in the upper right hand corner of envelope and return it to Dr. Donald Martin.

Questions regarding this survey or its related research should be directed to:

Pastor Bob Cundiff  
4805 Dillard Dr  
Raleigh, NC  
27606  
(919) 851-1302  
[pastorbobis@yahoo.com](mailto:pastorbobis@yahoo.com)



8. When Pastor Bob tells a story in sermon, do you feel the amount of time spent on the application is...

Too Little					Right Amount					Too Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

9. How do you describe yourself as a listener?

Distracted Listener										Active Listener
(It's hard for you to listen)										(It's easy for you to listen)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

10. Would you describe your personality as... (circle one from each line)

- 1) Extroverted                      or                      Introverted
- 2) Sensing                              or                      Intuition
- 3) Thinking                              or                      Feeling
- 4) Judging                              or                      Perceiving

11. What is your gender?                      Male                      Female

12. Please circle your age range?

18-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50
51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71+	

13. Which of these race/ethnic groups describes you?

- 1) White
- 2) Black/African American
- 3) American Indian
- 4) Asian
- 5) Hispanic/Latino
- 6) Other

14. Please circle your highest achieved level of education.

- 1) Less than High School
- 2) High School
- 3) Some College
- 4) Two-Year or Technical College Degree
- 5) Bachelor's Degree
- 6) Master's Degree or Higher

# **Exit Survey**

## **May Sermon Series**

### ***Portrait of a Healthy Family***

There are no risks by participating in this study. Return of this survey serves as implied consent. This is an anonymous survey and participation is voluntary. Participants may discontinue at any time without explanation or penalty. You must 18 or older to participate in this survey.

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**Instructions:** Please circle the **number** (or answer) that best describes your feelings and opinions.

1. Did you complete the baseline survey that was given on April 28<sup>th</sup> or May 5<sup>th</sup>?      Yes      No

2. How many of Pastor Bob’s sermons have you heard, or viewed online this month? (Circle One)

1                      2                      3                      4

3. Based on what you have seen, heard and experienced, please rank the following sermons according to how much they have helped you grow spiritually. If you did not hear a particular sermon, leave that section blank.

**May 5: Portrait of a Healthy Family: Mature Men**  
**Story Key Words “Deacon Jones, Presbyterian Church”**

Very Little                      Neutral                      Very Much  
 1           2           3           4           5           6           7           8           9           10

---

**May 12: Portrait of a Healthy Family: Mature Women**  
**Story Key Words “Who is the Best Preacher in the Family?”**

Very Little                      Neutral                      Very Much  
 1           2           3           4           5           6           7           8           9           10

---

**May 19: Portrait of a Healthy Family: Young Women**  
**Story Key Word “Disney Cruise”**

Very Little                      Neutral                      Very Much  
 1           2           3           4           5           6           7           8           9           10

---

**May 26: Portrait of Healthy Family: Young Men**  
**Story Key Word “Paco”**

Very Little                      Neutral                      Very Much  
 1           2           3           4           5           6           7           8           9           10

---

4. How does this month’s sermon series compare to other series by Pastor Bob?

A lot Weaker                      About the Same                      A lot Stronger

1           2           3           4           5           6           7           8           9           10



5. To what degree do you feel the stories he told this month have helped you be able to **Listen** to the sermons?

Very Little			Neutral				Very Much		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

6. To what degree do you feel the stories he told this month have helped you be able to **Understand** the message of the sermons?

Very Little			Neutral				Very Much		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

7. To what degree do you feel the stories he told this month have **Enhanced** the sermons?

Very Little			Neutral				Very Much		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8. To what degree do you feel the stories in this month's sermons have helped you **Apply the Message**, of the sermons to your life?

Very Little			Neutral				Very Much		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9. To what degree do you feel the preaching of this series has had an impact in your spiritual life compared to previous sermons by Pastor Bob?

Very Little			Neutral				Very Much		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10. When Pastor Bob told a story in a sermon this month, how well did you understand the application?

Not Clear			Neutral				Very Clear		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

11. In your opinion did the stories you heard this month detract or enhance the message of the sermons?

Detract			Neutral				Enhance		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

12. Based on your experience in this series, how much do you prefer stories like these in the future?

Not at All

No preference

A Lot More

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

*Pastor Bob is sincerely grateful for your participation in this survey*

## APPENDIX B

### *PORTRAIT OF A HEALTHY FAMILY* VIDEO LINKS AND MANUSCRIPT NOTES

The sermons can be viewed in their entirety at the following YouTube© addresses.

Portrait #1 Mature Man:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5kpcivPK\\_o&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5kpcivPK_o&feature=relmfu)

Portrait #2 Mature Woman:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_detailpage&v=zWB2aZ7jF0E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=zWB2aZ7jF0E)

Portrait #3 Young Woman:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klJiCVNx7Sk>

Portrait #4 Young Man:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4clLwXdZUY>

#### **Portrait #1 Mature Men**

Intro series

(Show some funny family portraits)

Today we begin a four week series entitled, *Portrait of a Healthy Family*. And we will anchor this series in the little New Testament book of Titus. This is a book that often gets passed over. Perhaps because it's so small. It's only three chapters long. Or perhaps it's because it's near the end of the New Testament.

The book is a letter that was written by the Apostle Paul to a man whose name was Titus. Titus lived on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. Crete is the largest island of what we now know as the Greek islands. And though we don't know

a lot about Titus, we will eventually discover a hint in the text that he may have been a fairly young man at the time he received Paul's letter, but we're really not sure.

Paul opens his letter to Titus with the usual greeting in verses 1-3.

In verses 4-5 He addresses Titus specifically and Paul reminds him that he left Titus on the Island of Crete to organize the churches they had planted there. He was to ordain elders and teach the people what it means to follow God.

In verses 6-9 He goes on to discuss the qualifications for the Elders he was to choose. He says, these are the kinds of people that you need, to serve as leaders for each church.

Then in verse 10, this first chapter takes an abrupt turn that continues through the balance of the chapter. Listen to the tone.....(read 10-16)

And it's here that we gain insight into Titus' ministry setting and challenge. Paul is giving us some important clues about the Island of Crete and the social and spiritual condition of the people. Even the people in the church.

And Titus' job was to address those concerns, choose leaders, mentor the leaders, organize the churches and be involved in a teaching ministry that would help the people grow spiritually. Paul had a special work for Titus to do. And this work begins in chapter 2:1

V.1 "But speak thou." Let's stop right there.

Rather than mere introductory words, these words hold a clue that something important is about to happen. Paul uses these three words to transition Titus to a new topic. So something different is about to take place from what we have seen in the previous section.

What is the previous section? Its verses 10-16 of chapter one. The section that identified what ungodly people do.....Paul is saying to Titus, "You don't speak like that. You don't do that. You speak differently. And you teach the people of God to act differently. They do 'this,' but you do something else."

What is Titus supposed to do? Verse one says, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:"

In other words Titus you are going to speak differently than they do because you are going to speak sound doctrine. This will distinguish you. This will set you apart from those who behave in ungodly ways.

And what does that mean? What is sound doctrine Paul? How do you define it? What do you have to say about it? How do we develop sound doctrine in our lives? That is the question that we will ask of Paul, and allow Paul to answer in this series.

And to do that, we are going to spend the four weeks of this series on the next 10 verses of chapter 2.

We are going to spend the next four weeks learning what it means to live a life according to sound doctrine.

And in these next 10 verses we will find that Paul gives a specific message to four groups of people within the body of Christ. They are; 1) the aged man, or the mature man, 2) the mature woman, 3) the young woman, 4) and the young man. And when you study these 10 verses, what you find, is you find a formula for spiritual health, or as we are calling it in this series, a portrait of a healthy family.

If the *mature man*, and the *mature woman*, and the *young woman* and the *young man* will accept Paul's counsel and adopt this counsel as a guide for life, then what you will have is a portrait of healthy family.

And wouldn't this be neat? Wouldn't it be neat if we got to attend a church family that was a spiritually and emotionally healthy church family, because it was made up smaller family units that were also spiritually and emotionally healthy families? Because that's the vision that Paul is going to lay out for us.

And the first thing we need to know is that when Paul uses this word, 'doctrine' he's not using it the way we often use it. He's not talking about the doctrines of the church...for instance the Seventh-day Adventist Church has 28 doctrines, or 28 fundamental beliefs that it teaches. That's not what Paul means when he uses the word. Rather, he uses the word in a broader sense. He uses the word to talk about how a Godly person is to organize and live their life if they intend to follow God. He uses it not so much in the sense of 'this

is what you need to believe' but more in the sense of teaching 'how you need to live your life.'

So you want to know how to live your life as a Christian? Paul is getting ready to tell us. Do you want to know about what it means to be a 'man of God,' or a 'woman of God,' or a young woman, or a young man of God? That's what we are going to discover together here in the month of May.

And I will tell you that I think it's very exciting.

With that as an introduction to the series, let's unpack verse 2. We are in Titus, chapter 2:2 and we are taking our first steps in this series about how to be a spiritually and emotionally healthy family.

## **SOBER**

The first of these four groups that Paul addresses is the mature man. This is what he writes, "That the mature man be sober." Paul's first comment as he develops the portrait of a healthy family is that the mature man must be a sober man.

Let's talk about this one. This is a bit of a hot potato in Christian circles. To drink or not to drink? Was the wine fermented or was the wine unfermented? Isn't it OK if you just use it on social occasions? Or, isn't it OK as long as you don't get falling down drunk on it? After all, Paul himself tells Timothy that you should use a little wine for your stomachs sake. I mean wine has medicinal value, right?

Well the Greek word used here is 'nephalioi.' Translated literally it means, 'abstainers from wine.'

Let's stop and think this one through. Fermentation is required to make alcohol. Fermentation comes from decay. Decay is about death. Death is representative of all that is wrong with this world. So do you think that we will have fermentation in heaven? Will there be signs of death and decay in heaven? Something about that just doesn't feel quite right does it?

But wait a minute, am I suggesting that in heaven, if you pluck up a plant, or cut off a limb from a tree or even pick a flower it will never die? “Come one...that’s outlandish! Of course it will die!”

Really?

Listen to this from Early Writings page 18....

“I saw another field full of all kinds of flowers, and as I plucked them, I cried out, "They will never fade." Next I saw a field of tall grass, most glorious to behold; it was living green and had a reflection of silver and gold, as it waved proudly to the glory of King Jesus... Mount Zion was just before us, and on the mount was a glorious temple, and about it were seven other mountains, on which grew roses and lilies. And I saw the little ones climb, or, if they chose, use their little wings and fly, to the top of the mountains and pluck the never-fading flowers.”

Turn over to Revelation 22:1 (read 1,2)

Here’s the picture. God sits on His throne with Jesus at His right hand. Out of the throne springs forth a river. And because the river originates with God, it is a river of life. We would expect that of God wouldn’t we? Because God is the Creator and Sustainer of life. And this river of life flows right down the middle of Main Street in heaven. And over top of this river is the tree of life. The trunk of the tree, as it nears the base, actually splits in two and the roots of the tree straddle the river and find soil on either side of the river. No wonder it’s a tree of life. It’s so close to the river of life and it’s so close to God’s throne.

The imagery is just magnificent. And you know what I think? Now there’s no way to prove this, it’s just personal speculation, but I think the river of life will flow to various places all over heaven and it will be the source of water for all living things in heaven. Plants, animals and humans. And that’s one of the reasons there will be no death. Because we are nurtured from this water that issues forth from the very throne of God.

So yes, in heaven, even when you *Pick* a flower, it will never die.

But didn’t Jesus drink wine at the last supper with His disciples?

Does it make sense to you that Jesus, about to begin the tremendous temptation and suffering of the cross event, would have allowed His senses to be dulled by

alcohol? On this night of all nights, would He have voluntarily subjected Himself to the mental compromise that fermented wine brings to the mind?

You see on this very night He would have to resist one of the greatest temptations of His life. On this night He would pray three times to “let this cup pass from me” which means that He was in a place of significant temptation. He did not want to go to the cross. He was tempted *not* to go. But in the end He prayed, “nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done.” Do you think He would want to go into that a little tipsy?

And if the disciples were getting sloshed, no wonder they fell asleep in the garden later that night. Jesus knew that they too would be tempted and He wanted them to stay up and pray with Him. Does it make sense to you that on that same night, He was leading the way in consuming alcohol? That makes no sense to me.

1 Peter 1:19 says that He is the Lamb without blemish and without spot.” He is not about death. He is not about decay. Jesus is about life. He said, “I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.”

The flow of His life, the teaching of His life, the point of His life was to teach us the way to God. And God is the author of life. I’m just not understanding where consumption of alcohol comes into play there.

## **GRAVE**

Let’s move on. The mature man of God is to be sober, but he is also to be ‘grave.’ Now there’s a scary sounding word. What does that mean? Men would you like to be described as ‘grave’? It almost sounds a little creepy because a grave is where you bury dead people.

Perhaps a more modern translation is ‘dignified,’ or even ‘worthy of honor.’ A mature man of God is to be worthy of honor.

And remember who Paul’s audience is in this verse. Paul is talking to the mature man. So this is not a ‘respect your elders’ verse. This is not for the wife, or for the son, or for the daughter. The admonition is not for other’s to honor the mature man. This is not a repeat of the fifth commandment to honor your father.



Rather Paul is talking directly to the men and he's saying, *you need to be worthy of this honor*. In other words you need to behave in a way that deserves this honor. Make it easy on those around you to honor you, by being a person to whom honor is due.

Men, don't just stand around and demand it. Earn it.

## **TEMPERATE**

Next Paul says that the mature man is to be a temperate man. This word expounds on the sobriety that Paul first mentioned but it is also broader than that. Translated literally the word means to be sound minded. It speaks of wisdom.

Older men in the church ought to be respected for their wise counsel. Let me diverge from the text momentarily to say this to the younger folks in the congregation. When a man is disciplined in the ways of God, when he is wise in the ways of righteousness, when he is, what Paul calls, 'sound minded,' then his counsel should not be taken lightly.

Popular culture and the media mentor young people to reject the counsel of those who are older and wiser. And Paul warns you against that mistake. But we will talk more about that in weeks to come.

## **SOUND IN FAITH, CHARITY, PATIENCE**

In addition to wisdom, these men are to be 'sound in faith.' What does that mean exactly? The next two words tell us. A sound faith will produce *charity* and *patience*.

Paul reiterates this in 1 Timothy 1:5 when he says that, "The goal of the commandments is love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith."

Men, . . . to be mature in the faith we must be men of love and patience. There is no way around it. It occurs to me that those qualities are not so much about what you know, as they are about what you do with what you know. This is more about the application of the faith, than the faith itself. This is the result of mature faith. And this result is so important, that if you don't have this result, it calls the very faith into question.

Do you remember this interesting story about Jesus cursing a fig tree? It's in Mark 11. Jesus and His disciples were walking along and they see a fig tree with bushy leaves on it. And Jesus was hungry so He went to the fig tree. But there were no figs on it. So he cursed the tree and said, no one will ever eat fruit from you again.

The next day He and His disciples were coming back by that way and Peter noticed that the tree had withered and was dying.

For Jesus to curse a tree, of all things, was a strange act. Jesus came only to restore and heal, never to destroy. And this act stands alone in Jesus' ministry.

But as with everything He did, Jesus had a point. He had something to teach us by this act.

You see fig trees are in the habit of producing fruit before the leaves appear. So a tree with leaves is a sure sign that it would have mature fruit on it. But this tree was a mess of deceiving foliage.

The pretentious tree flaunting its leaves in the face of Jesus was a symbol of those of those who know the right stuff, say the right stuff, sing the right stuff, carry the right stuff to church and even follow the appropriate religious rituals, but still don't live the right way. To live in the right way means that the stuff we believe, results in *living* a Godly life. "The goal of the command is love from a pure heart."

Men, if that's not happening in you, then the command is not achieving its goal in your life. You can't wrap this faith just around yourself. A self-serving faith is no faith at all.

Love and patience are qualities that are *other centered*. Listen to what the Desire of ages, page 584 says about this...

DA 584 "No one can live the law of God without ministering to others. But there are many who do not live out Christ's merciful unselfish life. Some who think themselves excellent Christians do not understand what constitutes service for God. They plan and study to please themselves. They act only in reference to self. Time is of value to them only as they can gather for themselves. In all the affairs of life this is their object. Not for others but for themselves do they minister. God created them to live in a world where unselfish service must be performed. He designed them to help

their fellow men in every possible way. But self is so large that they cannot see anything else.”

Some of you here...your claim to Christianity is that you come to church. That is the whole of your Christian experience. And that's not living the Christian life.

If your weekly experience in the Kingdom of God is limited to the Pastor's sermon, and hanging around some religious folk on Sabbath, then you are not living the Christian life. Even if you come to church and Sabbath school. Even if you faithfully, come to church and Sabbath school and study your lesson, that's not living the Christian life. Living the Christian life requires service to the Kingdom of God.

You remember what Jesus said. He said, “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you keep the Sabbath. No it was if you attend church faithfully. No, no, it was if you are a moral person and return tithes.

Not that's not it. In John 13:35 He said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.”

In other words, Jesus was saying, ‘you are not identifiable as my disciple if you don't demonstrate love, through unselfish service to others.

Living the Christian life requires Love and patience.

## **PATIENCE**

Let's talk about patience. Now there's an unmanly word. Right up there with Pansy, and Pretty and Pamper, Panties. Don't you wish Paul had saved that word for next week? Isn't that word more suited to the mature women?

And let's talk about this. Men, God created us as warriors. The protectors and the providers of our families. I'm not really made out of stuff that lends toward patience. That's not in my raw material.

And how am I supposed to be patient in this wicked world that I live in? How when people mock your faith and accuse it of being unmanly. Don't you just want to straighten them out? How do you be patient when someone is bullying your kid at school? I mean that whole turn the other cheek thing gets a little harder when you are the only person in the room who practices that rule.

Well men let me encourage you. Because the word that Paul uses that is translated ‘patience,’ also translates as ‘endurance.’ I like that. Paul calls me to

endurance in my faith. He calls me to endurance in loving God. He calls me to endurance in my pursuit of God and in living a Godly life.

Men, there is a temptation as we get older to allow our faith to become complacent. As the years go by, we may become weary in our faith. Or our faith may be weakened by repetition, tradition or by lack of exercise.

It can be weakened into mere sentiment or apathetic acquiescence. Paul says, “Don’t do it. Resist the urge.” And Paul gets to say that to us this morning, because Paul’s life was a clear example of how not to let that happen.

Here’s a story.

A pastor was sitting in a committee meeting and things weren’t going well. An antagonist was waging a full frontal assault on the Pastor as he slung provocative and angry words that were designed to bait the Pastor and draw him into an all out slug fest. It had the potential to be embarrassing to the Pastor because it was such a public display.

But the Pastor resisted the urge to respond in kind. He rose above the emotion in the room and kept his cool. He decided that it was more important to honor God than to protect his ego or his image.

The man, not getting the response he wanted from the Pastor finally provoked him with, “So you don’t have anything to say back to me? You are a coward!”

And this is what the Pastor said. “My dear brother, do not confuse my strength with your weakness.”

He was redefining manhood. He was enduring in the faith, the way Paul calls us to. He was practicing love in a way that demonstrated great strength of manhood, of character and of a commitment to honor God above all else.

This is not patience in the sense of being too weak to stand up. Rather, this is patience that rises above the conflict and values honoring the Prince of Peace, over protecting ones ego, and managing ones image.

It was the moment when things began to turn around in the meeting.

Proverbs 19:11 says, “A man’s wisdom gives him patience. It is to a man’s glory to overlook an offense.”

Men, God calls you to be the pacesetter in your homes. He calls you to emotionally and spiritually healthy leadership, modeling and mentoring about what it means to live the Christian life. And as you embrace Paul's counsel, here in Titus chapter 2, you import emotional and spiritual health into your own family portrait.

The story was told of an old, and well established Presbyterian Church on the outskirts of town. At least it used to be on the outskirts of town. That was before the University grew and gobbled up every piece of real estate in the vicinity. What was once a quiet countryside was now dotted with administrative buildings, classrooms, dorms and parking lots. Even the front yard of the church was bustling with backpack laden students, laptop carrying faculty and study groups camped out on the lawn.

But the stodgy old church continued on. Undaunted by its changing surroundings it committed itself to be a beacon in the community. They held to their formal liturgy, organ music and traditional hymns.

The church seemed none the worse for ignoring its changing surroundings. Most Sundays it was hard to find a seat. Its congregation was made up of longtime members who came from families that had been attending the church for generations with few being connected to the University

The church was prolific with grandmas, grandpas, blue haired bouffant hairdos and toupees.

One Sunday morning about 11:20, after the worship service was in full swing, a college student wandered into the sanctuary. It was clear that he was not a regular attendee. Donned in T-shirt, shorts, sandals, and a backpack he scanned the last few rows but could not find a seat.

So, he moseyed up the center aisle scanning left and right for the elusive seat that never materialized. It attracted the attention of many just about everyone because it was...unusual.

Having walked the distance of the sanctuary he took a left at the front of the church and walked in front of the Deacons perched comfortably on the front pew. And would you believe that he plopped right down on the cold stone floor just between the front pew and the stage?

It was OK. At least most folks thought it was probably OK. They weren't completely sure. No one ever really did that before.

Just then a familiar sound was heard echoing off the stone walls of the old sanctuary. It was the sound of click, shuffle, click, shuffle, click, shuffle. Everyone knew immediately what it was. It was Deacon Jones. Deacon Jones was the oldest deacon in the church. He walked with a cane and had to drag his left foot due to a stroke suffered some years ago. Deacon Jones had been around longer than anyone could remember and was staunch in his view that there needed to be at least one thing in this world that did not change and that was the church.

He was now tracing the young man's footsteps right down the center aisle of the church. Click, shuffle, click, shuffle, click, shuffle. People began to whisper, knowing that there was not a seat to be found. What's he going to do?

The poor Pastor may just have well quite preaching right then because no one was listening to him. The further he walked up the aisle, the higher the tension rose in the congregation. Nearing the front of the sanctuary now, people began to hope in vain that someone was saving him a seat, or that someone would think to intervene. This had the potential not only to interrupt the worship service, but to be embarrassing. What was he going to do? Was he going to confront this kid and give him a lesson on appropriate church attire and etiquette?

Some noticed that the Pastor was now beading sweat on his forehead. His voice was getting a little high pitched the way it always did when he was under stress. No one seemed to know what to do. Click, shuffle, click shuffle, click shuffle.

He was covering the last few now. Yep. There he goes. He just made the left turn. There could be no doubt in anyone's mind. Click, shuffle, click, shuffle, click..... Everyone cringed.

Then deacon Jones did a curious thing. Leaning on that old cane he bent down lower, and lower, and still lower, until he plopped on the ground, right next to the visitor. He didn't want him to sit alone.

Men, how does that story speak to you today? Join me in the writing the conclusion of this sermon. What does the story say to you? And what is its strongest application as it applies to your life today?

Let's pray.

Father, teach us about fatherhood, about manhood and about what it means to be a mature man of God. We love you.

## **Portrait #2 Mature Woman**

So this high powered, successful, good looking CEO of a large corporation pulls his Lexus up to the full service gas pump. And he tells his wife that he's going to run in for a cup of coffee while the gas station attendant fills up the car. 'Oh and have him check the oil' he says over his shoulder as he bounces out of the car and into the gas station.

A couple minutes later he comes out and notices that his wife is smiling, even laughing as she converses easily with the attendant who was just shutting the hood and wiping his hands off on a towel. The attendant then walked over to the passenger side and continues the conversation with his wife. As the guy approaches his car his curiosity of peaked and he strains to hear but the conversation is just out of reach. What he did hear, as he got back in the car was his wife say, "It was really nice to see you. I enjoyed our talk."

Well he drives away and he's naturally curious. But his wife doesn't offer any information so finally he says, 'Who was that? You acted like you knew each other.' And his wife says, 'Oh that was Tony. You remember I told you about him. We dated in college.'

'Oh.' The guy says.

Then a smug smile comes over his face. 'I know what you are thinking,' he gloats. 'You are thinking about how lucky you are to have married me, because I'm a CEO of a large corporation, and if you had married 'Tony' you would be married to a gas station attendant.'

She replied, 'No that's not what I was thinking at all. I was thinking about how lucky you were to have married me. Because if I had married Tony, *he* would be the CEO of a large corporation and *you* would be a gas station attendant.'

It's probably more true that not...isn't it. The influence of a wife and a mother will only accurately be assessed once we get to heaven. But the Bible has a lot of good things to say about a Godly wife, and a Godly mother. Abraham Lincoln once said that no man is poor who has a Godly mother. There's an old Spanish proverb that says 'an ounce of mother is worth a ton of priest.'

Happy Mother's day ladies!

Today we move into part two of this four week series entitled ***Portrait of a Healthy Family***. Our series is anchored in chapter 2 of Titus where the Apostle Paul gives specific counsel to four groups within the church. They are 1) the mature male



2) the mature woman

3) the young woman and

4) the young man. And we are learning that those who will accept Paul's counsel here in Titus chapter 2 will position themselves to be a part of a spiritually and emotionally healthy family.

And last week we examined the counsel Paul gives to mature men.

Verse one begins with this....(read 1-2).

### **Likewise**

He then continues on in verse 3 to address the second of these four groups. He begins with this. "The older women likewise." Let's stop right there. It would be easy for us to blow past this word 'likewise,' but if we do, we miss something important from the hand of Paul. What does 'likewise' mean in this verse?

Just quickly glance back over these first 2 verses and the beginning of verse 3. Likewise is an important word in this text. (Re-read the text)

What do you see there? It means that everything that is said of mature man also applies to the mature woman. So Mothers, wives, mature women, today we start out on the platform that the Bible built last week for the mature men. Mothers, God's Word also admonishes you to be sober. It admonishes you to be dignified. It admonishes you to be temperate. It calls you to also be sound in faith and to express that faith, just like the mature man, through the exercise of love and patience.

Let me tell you why this word 'likewise' is so important.

You may be aware that Christianity elevated women to a status that was far superior to what women had previously enjoyed. In the ancient world, and right up through the New Testament period, women were viewed as only slightly better than cattle.

Most Jewish men prayed a daily prayer that said, "I thank you God that I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." Women were viewed more as an object, or a piece of property than as an equal or an individual with the full rights of personhood. Christianity was a significant force that began to change all that.

An interesting study is to trace down the ways that Jesus interacted with, elevated and respected women. And when you place that study in its appropriate cultural backdrop, it

further accentuates the beauty of Who Christ was. He was a true Renaissance man on many levels, and His elevation of women was only one of them.

Christianity elevated women to a status of equality with men. That does not mean that they don't have different roles to play. But it does mean that they were equal. At the time of Paul's letter to Titus, this was a whole new idea.

It was a good idea.

It was a God's idea.

'Likewise' is a good word for women.

But this new status that Christianity afforded to Christian women also brought a corresponding responsibility to Christian women. They were now being called upon to fulfill God's original purpose of femininity. They were to demonstrate tenderness and devotion and serve as a pattern of purity in the home and the church.

How? Paul goes on.....

### **Reverent in Behavior**

They are to be reverent in behavior. Another translation says "as becomes holiness." What that means is that they are to be engaged in sacred service for the Kingdom. Translated literally this means, 'as priestesses.' And it's good for us to pause, at this moment in the text, and recognize what a new idea this was and how far women advanced because of Christianity.

In the space of just a few years, that is during Jesus' public ministry, women had gone from possession, to priestess. That meant that they had a contribution to make to the Kingdom. It meant that they could reflect what God is like. That God had not only called them, but gifted them to teach others about His character. Paul's counsel that women are to be reverent in behavior, or to develop as priestesses in the Kingdom, is a tremendously elevating thing for Him to say.

And that important because many have misunderstood this text and they have read the text as though Paul is putting women down. Nothing could be further from the truth. So, ladies, be encouraged.

### **Slanderers**

“The older women, likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers,” or not false accusers. Some translations use the word Gossip.

Do you know why are women more prone to gossip? It’s because women have a strong relational component built into them.

Women think relationally. They feel relationally. And yes, they talk relationally. Gentlemen, if you want to have a good marriage, then you had better learn to speak woman. It’s its own language. And if you are going to learn to speak women then you will have to learn how to speak in a relational context.

Guys do you know how to get your wife to watch football with you? Have you ever tried that and failed? And maybe you think she just doesn’t know enough about the game so you introduce her to the game. And you try to tell her about the team and why they have their name and what city they hail from and about their new stadium and all she hears is blah, blah, blah....

Let me share a great marital secret with you. If you want your wife to watch football with you, then introduce her to the players.

Oh and you see that guy he just threw the ball to, he has four children. Yeah and the oldest one is captain of his high school football team. And he and his wife were high school sweethearts. By the time you get to that part she will be seated on the couch beside you yelling at the kids not to block the TV.

Women are relational creatures. They help men make up for this area of their lives where they are often lacking.

But ladies, there is a potential pitfall of being the relational creature that God has created you to be. Because when relational talk gets out of whack, it can quickly degenerate into gossip, slander or false accusation.

The Greek word Paul uses here is ‘diabolov.’ Translated literally, it translates as ‘accuser.’ But this is the same word, that in other places in scripture is translated ‘Devil.’ In Revelation 12:10 The devil is called, ‘the accuser of the brethren.’ Pretty serious accusation for gossiping.

Paul says, “don’t do it.” And he likens the behavior of gossiping to that of devilish behavior.

Isn't it just like the devil to take one of woman's God given strengths, her relational component, and turn it away from Godliness to something that reflects Him rather than God. Paul warns against it

### **Not Given to Much Wine**

Next Paul says that the older women should not be given to much wine. By my count, that's the third time we have heard that. We heard it last week in Paul's counsel to mature men, then again at the beginning of verse three with 'likewise,' which was a restatement of verse two, and now we find that it's so important that Paul sends this message in triplicate.

Seems a little funny doesn't it? Telling the older women to lay off the bottle. But this was quite common in first century Cretan culture. It was common for people to have a slavish addiction to wine. And as such, it bore repeating in Paul's letter.

### **Teachers of Good Things**

And he rounds out the verse with *teachers of good things*. Older women are to be teachers of good things. Isn't that beautiful? God wants you to share what you have learned. The life lessons, the mistakes, the successes and even the failures are not to be kept to yourself, but they are to be used to bless the Kingdom. You are to use them to offer guidance, counsel and encouragement to others.

A teacher was trying to teach her class a lesson about fractions. After the lesson she tested one of the boys who was in a large family. Johnny, she said, There are 6 people in your family. Your mom bakes a pie, and she cuts it up for you, what percentage of the pie will you receive?

Johnny, thought for a minute and said, One-fifth. The teacher said, Now, remember there are 6 people in your family, how big would your piece of pie be. And again the boy said, One-fifth. The teacher said, No, you don't understand fractions. And Johnny respectfully said, You don't understand my mom. She would have said, that she didn't want any

Think about the lesson she was teaching him regarding selflessness and service to others. Do you think that when she had to talk with him about sharing his toys, or taking turns on the

playground, that she was able to speak with credibility? This thing Paul talks about it caught as much as it is taught.

‘Teachers of good things’ Paul says. Let me give you an example. My wife and I married young. And then we had kids right out of the gate. We were one of those unique families that had three kids in diapers at the same time.

My whole house smelled like a pamper. A dirty pamper.

That was a difficult phase of life. We were young. We were inexperienced, we were in debt, and we were exhausted.

You know what I wish? I wish someone had told me that it really was a short phase of life that would be over very soon. We just needed to hear someone say, ‘Bob and Tanique, you won’t always have kids in diapers. This too will pass. So be slow and thoughtful in your responses to your children and don’t say words that you will regret later. Be patient. Be kind. Be gentle.’

But I really had a hard time seeing it at the time. Now that it’s over, I understand it better. I get it now. And I understand things that I couldn’t understand at the time. I wish someone had told me in language I could understand.

So now you know what I do? I encourage young couples with this all the time. In fact, there are undoubtedly some of you here that have heard me encourage you. “Hang on. You’re doing good. Be patient.”

In his portrait of a healthy family Paul reaches out to mature women and he tells them to be reverent in behavior, don’t be gossips, be sober, and be teachers of good things. We could derive from the text that these things would be taught not just in the sense of sharing information, but in the sense of living as an example. In other words they should be caught as much as taught.

For this reason, and other reasons, the mature ladies in our congregation have incredible value in God’s sight. You are needful to the development on the Kingdom of God. And God has provided a platform, a space, an arena for you to contribute in incredible ways.

There is nothing more beautiful or saintly, than a women of experience, the presiding genius of her family circle, speaking the words of charity, softness, and kindness to all within her reach.

Here's a story. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was a preacher who had four sons. The four sons all followed in their father's footsteps and became preachers. Someone once came into the family living room when the entire family was present and decided to put one of the sons, named Howard, on the spot. They asked him this question: "Howard, who is the greatest preacher in your family?" Howard had a great admiration for his father and he looked straight across at him, and then without a moment's hesitation he answered, "Mother."

Mothers who is the greatest preacher in your family?

## **Portrait #3 Young Woman**

### **Introduction**

Let's play a game. This game is for the young ladies of our congregation only. I will let you decide if you are a young lady or not. Because I am smart enough not to touch that one! And this will be a fun game because the winner of this game actually gets a prize. The prize is a \$15 iTunes gift card.

Here's the game. In just a moment, I'm going to run a slide here on the screens. And it's going to have a single word on it. This word is actually a name. This is a real name, of a real person who is alive and well today. She is a young Caucasian who lives in Murphy North Carolina. And this is her legal name as it appears on her birth certificate. This is what her mother named her.

And this is how the game will work. The first person to pronounce the name correctly wins the prize. It's a simple little name. It only has four letters....so be ready.

Are you ready? Let's roll the slide. "La-ah."

Do you need a hint? Don't forget the dash.

(The name is "Ladasha." Find a winner)

Don't forget the dash. You know what that reminds me of? That reminds me of this (Show a slide of a tombstone). Where's the dash in this picture?

Isn't it interesting how a tombstone marks the birth and the death, but it says very little about what's in between? I mean the point is not so much that a person was born, or even that they died. The point is that they lived. And the life is represented by nothing more than a dash.

When you look at this marker it's important not to forget the dash. The dash represents the life that was lived. When your Maker calls you home, your dash is important. How you live your life is important. And that's what we are learning about in this current series. We are learning about how to live our lives well, for the Kingdom.

### **Review**

Let's take a moment to bring everyone up to date. I know that some of our young people have been at WIT for the last two weeks so you may be out of the loop on this series that we

started two weeks ago. It's called *Portrait of a Healthy Family*. It comes to us from the little New Testament book of Titus chapter 2.

And in the first 11 verses of chapter 2, Paul is teaching Titus, a young Pastor, what it means to teach sound doctrine to the people in the new churches they have just planted.

Paul has just finished a missionary journey that included the Island of Crete and he left Titus behind on the island to choose leaders, ordain elders and organize the churches.

Now in the 11 verses that we are looking at in this series, Paul addresses 4 groups of people that he wants Titus to reach out to. They are, 1) the mature man, 2) the mature women, 3) the young woman and 4) the young man. And when all four of these groups, accept Paul's counsel, and import that counsel into their lives, then they contribute emotional and spiritual health to their own family portrait. In other words, spiritually and emotionally healthy families grab on to the stuff Paul is teaching here.

## **Body**

This week, week 3, we come to the verses where he gives instruction about how a *young woman* is to live her life in a way that is pleasing to God, and that builds His Kingdom. Young ladies, if you will accept Paul's counsel, and live by Paul's counsel, then you will contribute emotional and spiritual health to your own family portrait.

That is true whether it's the portrait that you are a part of now, if you still live with your parents, or if you will one day start your own family, or even if your family portrait is a portrait of one. It applies, whatever your situation.

With that as an introduction, let's jump into the text. Let me start at the beginning of the chapter so we can get the context. (Read 1-3).

Then we come to the third group that Paul addresses, the young women.

## **Love Their Husbands**

"That they admonish the young women to love their husbands. Ah this one is important. A big part of contributing emotional and spiritual health to your family portrait is that when you marry you love your husband.

Someone is saying.... "Duh. Why else would you marry?" You would be surprised. Let me say it another way that may shed light on the text. Marriage is an 'other centered'



endeavor. And a lot of people don't go into marriage as an 'other-centered endeavor,' because their real agenda is as a 'self-centered endeavor.'

Many people do not focus on what they can contribute to the marriage, but only on what they can get from it. For them the marriage is almost like a consumer item. That is to say that it is something they consume, to feed themselves, or to meet their needs, or to make them happy, or to entertain themselves.

And the truth is, that marriage does not work very well that way.

Think about this. When someone says, "I love you." What does that actually mean? Are they saying, "I love you for what you do for me?" Are they saying, "I love you because of how you make me feel?" Are they saying, "I love you because of the way you meet my needs. Or, "Because of the way you look, or the way you solve my boredom problem?" What do those words mean exactly?

You don't really know, do you? So when someone says those words to you, you have to do a little bit of filling in the blanks don't you? And a wise young woman will fill in those blanks by looking at other aspects of that romantic relationship and searching for clues about whether he is 'other centered,' or 'self-centered.'

Understand that there is a world of difference between saying, "I love you- for you" and "I love you because of what you do for me." Can someone love you because of what you do for them, or how you make them feel? Yes they can. And it can be a genuine love, as far as that kind of love can go. But that's not the stuff that good marriages are made out of.

There is a world of difference between "I love you, for you." And, "I love you for what you do for me, or because of how you make me feel, or because of the way you meet my needs."

And the difference is the difference between joy and misery in a marriage. The happiest marriages, are the marriages where both parties are 'other centered.' The most miserable marriages, are the ones where there is self-centeredness.

I was listening to the radio just a couple of weeks ago and I heard a Christian therapist say this. He said, you can throw all the therapy in the world at a problem, you can surround the couple with counselors, people with certifications, and even people with PHD's, and they can make all kind of diagnosis that the average person can't even pronounce. But at the end of the day, selfishness is the root of almost every problem in the family.

It's an age old problem. It's called sin. The Bible talks about it; identifies the problem and offers the only real lasting solution. His name is Jesus.

And what Jesus will do, is He will teach you how to stop being self-centered, not only in your romantic relationships, but in every area of your life.

Let me tell you why I think this part of the text is so important; this counsel that you are admonished to love your husbands. It's because from the ungodly, comes ungodly counsel. Young ladies, please remember what I just said to you. Please incorporate that into the fabric of your life and remember it always.

Last week we talked about how women are relational creatures and that that's a beautiful thing because that's how God made them. They view the world through the lens of relationships. When you speak in a relational context, you speak women. And because they are relational creatures, when they are in crises, or when they are hurting, they often reach out for support, encouragement and counsel. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? It depends on where you get it. Why?

Because from the ungodly, comes ungodly counsel.

Look at Psalm chapter one with me. (Read 1-5).

So what happens when you listen to the counsel of the ungodly? The same thing that happens to the ungodly. And you don't want that to happen to you.

So when a women, be they young or old, is in crisis, it is natural for them to reach out for relational support. And that's OK. Just be wise about where you go to get that support.

I have sat with many a weeping husband, whose heart breaks over the bad counsel their wives get from a group of friends who do not know the Lord, or who are not exhibiting evidence that they know the Lord. And what kind of counsel do you think they will get from them?

"It's all about you girl. If things are bad why are you still in this thing? You know what I told my ex-husband.....blah, blah, blah"...and they are off and running.

Where's that going to go?

Listen, if you are in a relationship or a marriage that is in trouble and you go to a girlfriend for advice who is president of the divorcees, men haters club, then what kind of counsel do you think you are going to get?

Let me tell you this story. It's a true story. I'll call her Cindy. Cindy had been married for two years. They had a baby right away and that brings a lot of change, and exhaustion, and uncertainty to a new marriage. And what's worse is that her husband was a busy Pastor who worked too much.

And one day they had a fight, and it was the last straw for her. She had had enough. That was it. She was done. She was throwing in the towel.

So she gathered up the baby, packed a bag and left. She was going home to mama. She arrived on mama's doorstep later that night. And fell into mama's loving arms and cried.

And here's what mama did. She took her into the living room and sat her on the couch. She gave her a box of Kleenex and then put on a pot of tea. Then she said, "Sweetie, we are going to sit down and I want you to tell me all about it and cry as many tears as you want to. And then you are going to pack up that baby and turn yourself right around and get back in that car and drive home and go back to your husband."

Cindy was not happy. But that's exactly what happened. After 30 years of marriage, she was willing to admit that her mother saved her marriage that night. Instead of telling her what she wanted to hear she gave her Godly counsel. She encouraged her to love her husband.

Paul says that young women need to be admonished to love your husbands.

### **Love Their Children**

Next Paul says that they are to be encouraged to love their children. Dads, you can be the best dad in the world, but you still can't be a mom. There is just something deeply heart warming, and soul nurturing about a mother's love. God created women that way.

He created them that way because children *need* a mother's love. And when a mother loves her children with a Godly love, she fulfills the Lord's will for her life.

### **Be Discreet**

Next he says young women should be discreet. This comes from the same root word as 'sober.' It means to be sound minded, prudent or self-controlled. Self-control is the opposite of selfishness. So when we exhibit self-control we demonstrate that we are not being selfish. Personal desires stand aside for what is best for the marriage, or for the family as a whole.

## **Be Chaste**

Then he says that young women should be chaste. That means, be sexually pure. Aside from your love for the Lord, this is probably the single most important gift you could bring into your marriage. It is immensely important both before and after marriage. The wounds left from mismanaging this part of your life hurt for a long time. It is far more powerful, and far more important than most young people understand.

Let me share this by way of illustration. When my son was less than a year old he used to wander around our house in this little chair with wheels on it. You know the kind, the baby can sit in it, but their little feet can touch the ground so it's kind of like a Flintstones car.

Well on this particular day he wandered into the living room where my stereo was. Now remember I was a much younger man then, so I had to have a stereo with speakers that were bigger than me. And somehow he got a hold of the remote dropped it in his chair and sat on it. Now the thing has like a hundred buttons on it, but you know which one he sat on right? The volume button. And do you think it was the 'volume up' button or the 'volume down' button? Of course.

And he was sitting right in front of the speaker. So I'm all the way across the house and I hear the music getting louder, and louder, and louder, and still louder. So I took off running. And by the time I got to him he was sitting right in front of the speaker looking like this (shocked face). His hair was blowing all around. And he was gripping the sides of the chair with little white knuckles.

He touched a button and set something in motion that was very powerful. Something that he did not understand. And something that he could not reverse. It scared him to death.

That's the way your sexuality is. In the proper context, it is beautiful, powerful and wonderful. But when you mismanage this area of your life, you set powerful forces in motion that have the ability to hurt you, and others, very deeply for years to come.

Paul knows this. So he says, "be chaste." Dodge all that hurt. God's plan for your life is the plan that will lead to the closest, most intimate, most wonderful, most joyful, and soul nurturing relationship you can ever know.

Now someone is listening and you're thinking, "Well Pastor that's irrelevant for me because I have already made choices in that area of my life that were not the best. So what about me?"

Ah yes! That wonderful thing called God's grace. There is forgiveness. There is restoration. And in the midst of this forgiveness and restoration God has this wonderful gift of spiritual virginity that He would like to bestow on you. One day you can enter into a marriage relationship as a spiritual virgin. God wants that for you. So be encouraged.

### **Homemakers**

Next Paul talks about homemakers. This does not preclude a woman from working outside the home. But it does suggest that you should not do those things to the neglect of the home. Here's the balancing principle. Don't do anything outside the home, to the exclusion of the influence and service that God calls you to provide in the home.

The idea in the Greek is, 'workers at home.' This is part of that relational atmosphere, and loving of her husband, and loving of her children. Women are gifted for this. They are called for this. A home just feels more like a home when the queen cares for the kingdom.

Proverbs 14:1 says, "Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands."

Let me illustrate. I can make a sandwich. I can make a man sized sandwich. I can make a sandwich so big you will have to sit on it first before you can get it in your mouth. Guys are you feeling me? I can make a good sandwich.

But when my wife makes a sandwich.

I don't understand it. I can stand right next to her and watch her, and copy her every move. She gets out the bread, I get out the bread. She cuts the tomato and I said, "wait, wait, wait!" and I take the knife and I cut mine just like hers.

Her sandwich will be better than mine every time. It will taste better. It will look better. It won't fall apart when you eat it. It will even have less calories. It will make you younger.

OK. I made that last one up. But you get the idea.

Let me tell you how bad this gets at my house. When I am misbehaving, my wife has been known to sit down right next to me and eat a sandwich that she made, just to antagonize me.

And when I say, “Sweetie, would you make me one of those please?” she says, “I left the stuff out for you.”

“Oh, OK Pastor, so you are saying that we are supposed to be like servants!?”

Yes I am. And I say that unapologetically. Servant hood in the body of Christ has nothing to do with gender. We all are to serve.

That’s a theme that runs throughout the text that is applicable to all four groups. It’s a theme that contributes significantly to the portrait of a healthy family. The mature men and the mature women get this message too. Remember it? “Love and patience” for the men. You can’t have that, without service to the one’s you love. And “Likewise” for the mature women. This counsel applies to all of us.

### **Obedient to Their Own Husbands**

And would you look at this next part of the text? “Obedient to their own husbands.” Now why would Paul throw that in there and mess up an otherwise good sermon? I know, some of you were wondering if we would get to that part of the verse. Oh my, where has our time gone....let’s bow our heads for prayer.

Let me suggest that this phrase, when properly understood, is not scary for women. Let’s do this. Let’s start with Jesus.

In John 10:10 Jesus said that He came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly.

Let me ask this question, does devaluing a person lead to more abundant life or less abundant life? Then is Titus 2:4 about devaluing women? It can’t be. Logically it cannot be. That is clear, is it not? Then how should we understand the text?

Did you ever see Jesus devalue a woman? But do you think maybe He could have done it and that part just got left out of the text? Ahh, now there’s an interesting question. How would we answer that?

Here’s the answer. When a man devalues women, does it repel women or attract women into his circle?

And were women repelled or were they attracted into His circle?

Case closed.

Here's the secret to understanding the text and reconciling the tension that often accompanies this verse.

*Submission and inferiority are not the same thing.* There can be submission among equals. I hope that I am not inferior to the people that I work for. But I am voluntarily submissive to them. I choose to recognize the fact that God had called them to serve in a leadership role. Does that sting? No. Could it sting?

Yes, if either my heart were wrong or they abused their authority. But when those two things are not present, then my working relationship with my administration can be very comfortable.

What Paul is talking about here is not inferiority, it is about roles. Now the words, 'submission' and 'obedience' have some baggage attached to them in our language so the translation is a little funny for us. But they do not have to mean inferiority. There is such a thing as voluntary submission, that is equally valuing, elevating, appreciative and cooperative....but that recognizes that there are various roles to be filled.

Harmony in a home means, that both people understand, that the strength and integrity of the home depends upon cooperation as a companion, rather than a competitor. That's not so bad is it? God knows what He's doing. We can trust Him in this.

### **Not to Blaspheme**

Finally Paul says that for a young woman to accept this counsel is to insure that the word of God will not be blasphemed. In other words, this is important

We need to be very careful about dismissing these verses because when we do that we blaspheme the word of God. We need to be very careful about thinking that, we, in our contemporary, enlightened, educated minds can know better than God on this.

(Change Tone and Slow Down)

Ladies if you will love your husbands and your children. If you will be discreet, chaste, take care of your homes and families and be a cooperative marriage partner, you will be immeasurably enriched as a person. God's word promises this to you.

This is the best plan for your life. You cannot improve on God's plan for you. Anytime you step outside of God's plan for you, you have signed up for less joy, less fulfillment and less intimacy.

Here's a story to illustrate how following God's counsel will help you develop into the beautiful person that God designs you to be.

Have you ever heard of a Disney Cruise? Disney has several ships now that cater to families with young children.

And there is one particular ship that has a dining room that is not exactly what you would expect.

What would you expect to see in a dining room on a Disney cruise ship? All the guys are thinking, "Food!" They are totally missing the point.

Color. Lots of color. Bright, vibrant, vivid colors of every variety. You would expect to see lots of artwork on the walls with various Disney characters striking their most famous poses.

But not this dining room. This particular dining room is two colors. Its white and its black. That's all. Kind of boring really. It's just stark white and black walls. Most folks are a little disappointed when they go to dinner that first night.

But as the evening continues, there are subtle changes that begin to occur in the room. The changes are slow...so slow, that the conscious mind fails to comprehend what the subconscious mind perceives.

A faint hue here, a hint of color there, finally a full blown dash of color on a wall that highlights emerging the outline of a well-known Disney character.

Around the dining room, children begin to point... "Mommy look there. What's that? Where did it come from? I remember him from the movie!"

As the meal unfolds the once hidden artwork on the walls, comes to life. Colored accent lighting is added, and the dining room is transformed into a veritable wonderland of visual brilliance, vibrant color and larger than life size cartoon characters.

The very walls that once seemed, uninteresting, un-engaging, and even disappointing now transports children into the cartoon land of their dreams.

Young lady, God's wants to add that kind of color, beauty and brilliance to your life.

Let's pray....



## Portrait #4 Young Man

### Introduction

The ancient story is told about a father and his son who were walking along a road one day with their donkey. Soon they met a man who told them how foolish they were to walk when they had a donkey that could be ridden. So the father and son hoped on.

They hadn't gone very far, however, when another man criticized them for both riding on the donkey. They were too heavy for it, he contended, and were being inhumane. So the boy got off.

It wasn't long before the third traveler accused the father of being inconsiderate because he made his son walk while he rode. So the two switched places.

Soon they met another person who charged that the son was not respecting his father, who was so much older than he.

When last seen, the two were trudging down the road carrying the donkey.

I want to talk to the young men in our congregation today. Young men, this world is a confusing place to live isn't it? How do you know *what* you are supposed to be doing? How do you know *who* you are supposed to be listening to?

How do you know what it means to be a *young man*? Where do you go to learn that? Who do you look at? Who teaches you about that? Especially when there are so many voices calling out for your attention. And what's confusing is that the voices are often opposing voices.

For instance, are you supposed to be a warrior or a poet? You go out to the movies with your buddies and you see a guy movie. Action...adventure...excitement. Wow! And you think....I want to be like that! I'm joining the army! And it just kind of wakes up the warrior in you. And you come away feeling like... "Yeah that's what it all about!"

But then you take a girl to a movie and she picks the movie. You know it's true love when you let a girl drag you to a movie where there is no killing in it. And she doesn't seem to value the same things that you do. She's into relationships and romance and girlie stuff. And she doesn't seem to celebrate the warrior in you that your friends do.

So.....Are you supposed to be an emotional rock, a tough guy, or are you supposed to be in touch with your emotions? The strong silent type, or the touchy feeling type? Which one defines real manhood?

Or you go to school and there's one group to whom sports are the ultimate pursuit in life. If you are not an athlete then you just don't matter and you can never be accepted into that circle.

But there's another group that says, no it's not sports...it's computers. It's gaming man! The only thing that matters is whether you can rank in the top 100 nationally in HALO. And if you don't have the latest and the coolest post of Facebook, then you just may be shunned by the entire world!

But still someone else is quick to correct that and say... "No you've got it all wrong. It's recreational pharmaceuticals man! That's where it's at. It fixes all your problems and helps you cope with life. It's fun. It's cool."

Still others are completely lost in the pursuit of a romance that causes their world to shrink and they lose touch with broader reality.

Is that what's important? How do you know? Who are you supposed to you listen to?

So what's the real deal? White collar or blue collar, Democrat or Republican, Geek or Jock? Pursue wealth or pursue your dreams? UNC or DUKE, PC or Mac, Pepsi or Coke, Lowes or Home Depot? And by the way, where does God fit in to all that?

Young men let me tell you a secret about life. An old man told me this once and I thought about it for a long time before I realized he was right. Here's what he said. "You can't kiss all the girls."

What that means is that you can't meet every expectation that this world lays on you. You can't respond every voice that calls out to you. You can't keep everyone happy and you can't always be the hero. And that's OK.

But it begs a question. Which girl do you kiss? Or we could say which voices do you listen to? That's one of the most important questions you, as a young man, will ever have to ask yourself. In fact, the answer to that question, largely determines the course of the rest of your life.

And this morning, the Apostle Paul wants to help you with that. In your quest to understand and pursue manhood, Paul wants to offer counsel.

We are wrapping up this four week series today entitled "Portrait of a Healthy Family." In the first 5 verses of Titus chapter 2 he has constructed a portrait of what it means to be a part of an emotionally and spiritually healthy family unit. He has addressed mature men,

mature women, young women, and today we come to verse 6 where he talks specifically to young men.

Here's what he says. "Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded."

## **Sober**

Now we have bumped into this word 2 times already in this series. In fact, in verse 2 Paul tells the mature men to be 'sober' and we spent quite a bit of time in the first week of the series talking about what the Bible teaches about drinking and about alcohol, and why that's a bad idea for the Christian. Then Paul repeats the counsel to the mature women.

And here we are now in the fourth week of the series and would you believe that he says the same thing again?

Well, not really.

Let me tell you why. It's not the same Greek word as what we find in Verse 2. The word in verse 2 is "Nephalioi" which translates literally as 'abstainers from wine.' But the word here in verse 6 is "Sophron" which translates literally as "sober minded," or "mature minded."

We could use the term, "emotionally mature" or "emotional intelligence" to describe what Paul is getting at here.

Young men, in Titus 2:6 Paul is encouraging you to be an emotionally intelligent person.

What does that mean?

Let's start with a definition.

A simple definition of emotional intelligence is that "emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, assess and control your emotions."

Now do you think that that would be a good thing? Do you think that that would help you get along with other people? With teachers, parents, siblings, and one day with a spouse?

Sure it would. But let me ask you this question. Which is more important? Emotional Intelligence or your IQ? IQ stands for intelligence quotient? We often hear about people taking an IQ test, which is supposed to tell you how smart you are.

So which is more important, the Emotional intelligence, or the IQ? Daniel Goleman has studied this and has learned that the most successful people in life are not necessarily the

people with the highest IQ but the people with the highest Emotional intelligence.  
Interesting isn't it?

Have you ever heard this said that the A students will work for the B students?

How could that be true? Because emotional intelligence leads to success in relationships and a general success in your life. So emotionally intelligent people have a greater chance of having success in marriage and parenting, and career, and fulfilling relationships with friends, in-laws, bosses and others.

So in the time that remains, let's do this. Let's discover what it means to be an emotionally intelligent person. Here's what Paul says in the next two verses. (read 7 & 8).

Some commentators suggest that this is a hint to the fact that Titus was probably a young man at the time Paul wrote this letter to him. So Paul is talking to young men, but he is also talking to Titus. And the hope is that because Titus is a young man, he will be able to counsel other young men more effectively. Remember that Paul says in verse 1 that this counsel is sound doctrine. That means that it's a good way to live. It's a God honoring way to live.

### **Emotionally Mature People Communicate Well**

What do we glean from the text? First let's talk about how we communicate with others. Verse 8 said, you should use "sound speech that cannot be condemned."

Emotionally intelligent people develop the skill of communicating well. They learn to communicate in ways that give their message the highest probability of being understood, accepted and appreciated.

For instance, have you ever had something really important to say, but you said it in such a way that people could not listen to it or accept it? In other words, you may have had a good message, but your presentation of the message was so poor that people rejected the message?

Have you ever yelled at someone, and regardless of what you were saying, or how right it may have been, they simply would not accept it because of the fact that you were yelling at them?

You may have a good message, but the good message got lost in the poor presentation.

When you speak to someone, these two things take place simultaneously. There is the actual message, but there is also the presentation. And a bad presentation can mess up a good message.

Proverbs 15:1 says that “A soft answer turns away wrath but harsh words stir up anger.”

Emotional intelligence does this. It speaks in ways that can easily be heard. That means it pays attention to the hidden conversation. The hidden conversation is what we often call body language. And smart people are going to study, practice, pay attention and grow in that area of communication.

How do you do communicate well? By keeping your emotions under control. By not attacking. By not yelling. By not degrading. By being sure that your message is respectful. By making statements that begin with “I” rather than statements that begin with “You.”

When you talk about how you feel, it’s hard for someone to argue with that isn’t it? When you talk about what your own experience is, then people have a hard time saying that you don’t feel the way you do.

But when you are talking about the other person, and what they did, and what they think, and what they feel, then you’re setting yourself up for an argument.

In good communication we balance talk time with listening time. Listening is not a passive activity. Sometimes we get all engaged when we have something to say but we sort of check out and go on vacation when the other person is talking.

Or maybe we use that time to think of what we are getting ready to say next.

Emotionally intelligent people guard against that urge. They adopt a position that says that what you have to say, how you feel, what you think, and what you want to say is just as important as what I want to say.

The rest of verse 8 says, that when your speech is sound, then your opponent will have “no evil thing to say of you.” There have been several times in my life where someone is extremely angry at me. And they went on a public smear campaign against me, and let me just say that it got almost comical. Because they had nothing legitimate to say against me. And because they had nothing to say, they fabricated stuff.

And when a person starts fabricating stuff it can’t be very specific, or people will know that it’s not true. And the stuff they fabricated was so silly sounding, that rather than smear

me, and tear me down, it became clear that they were being foolish. It just couldn't get any traction because there was not truth in it.

It's a good feeling when you are being attacked to know that there is no truth in what is being said; to know that your speech is sound and cannot be condemned.

### **Emotionally Mature People Exercise Self-Control**

Next, verse 7 says, "in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works"

We could derive from that, that emotionally mature people exercise self-control.

Listen unless you learn to govern yourself, you stand little chance of being productive or happy in life. Not to embrace such discipline is to eventually bring ruin to the body and the soul. There is freedom in discipline.

You know about these horses down on Corolla Beach at the Outer Banks. It's pretty cool. Herds of wild mustangs that date back as far as 1521, and the Spanish occupation of the coast. But they have a very specific diet.

And last year a well-meaning tourist fed a horse some junk food. Do you think the horse enjoyed it? Yep. Think it tasted good? Yep. Wanted more? Yep. But the horse died a week later.

Not everything that tastes good, or feels, good, or looks good in life is good for you. Not everything that you feel like doing is something that you should be doing.

Listen to how Psalm 32:8 says it. (read through 10a.) Other versions translate that, "the way of the transgressor is hard."

Listen young men, be careful of this whole, "you gotta let me make my own decisions" thing. That's an arrogant attitude. It's an ungodly attitude. And it's an unwise attitude.

Solomon said, "There's wisdom in many counselors." Why would you not listen to people who have your best interest at heart? Does that sound smart when I say it that way?

"I'm not going to listen to someone who has my best interest at heart!" Really? Does that make you liberated? Because it doesn't sound very smart.

One of the reasons we have the Bible is to learn from the mistakes of those who have gone on before us.

Stop and think this thing through with me. If you are going to go down this road of, I have to make my own decisions, no one is going to tell me what to do, I'm the kind of person

who has to learn things for myself...then why would you even read the Bible? What would be the value in it. If you are not open to counsel, then why expose yourself to it.

The Bible is largely a collection of biographies of people who either pursued God, or they didn't. And when you read the Bible you get to watch their lives and see how that turned out for them.

I stopped in to see a friend who was working in a Carpentry shop one time. He was using a radial arm saw. I saw him doing something that he should not be doing with the saw. But when I tried to say something he really didn't want to hear it.

He went on to tell me about how his dad owned the company and he had been around these saws his whole life and he was an expert at using these saws.

The next month he cut his little finger off. Right hand.

Not accepting counsel is not wise.

A few years ago a certain city opened a new zoo. And they were excited to have one of the only elephant exhibits in the region. For their exhibit they imported several young, male, elephants. They intentionally chose young ones because they knew they would live for a long time and it's kind of expensive to buy a plane ticket for a full grown male elephant.

But they had trouble with these males. The elephants weren't really acting like elephants. They weren't doing the kinds of things that elephants aren't supposed to be doing.

They would tear up stuff for no reason. They would fight over nothing. They would push over trees and charge the zoo workers and fight with the females and the whole thing was turning out to be a disaster.

You know what they finally did? They finally brought in a full grown male, and all the nonsense and destructive behavior stopped.

The young elephants simply needed an older elephant around to teach them how to be good elephants. To teach them what it meant to grow up and be mature males.

So parents, if you're having trouble with your kids, buy them an elephant. I'm just kidding. That's not a very spiritual point.

But you know we live in a world where it is almost thought of as old-fashioned to accept counsel from those who are older. It's out of date. Of no value. What does that old guy have to teach you? He out of touch with the new generation.

An emotionally mature person is a person who is willing to accept Godly counsel from those who have their best interest at heart.

Listen to what Proverbs 3:5-8 says....(read)

So trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. Be willing to accept Godly counsel

God has a plan for your life. And if you will follow God's plan for your life, you will have the very best, happiest, most successful life that you can have. You cannot improve on God's plan for your life.

Young man let me tell you this, as we draw this series to a close. You have a God shaped hole in your heart. And only God can adequately fill the God shaped hole. You can attempt to fill that hole with many things, but they will never truly satisfy, because you were created for fellowship with God

And let me tell you what is even more amazing. God has a hole in His heart. It's a you shaped hole. And only you can fill the you shaped hole in God's heart. Because you were created for fellowship with your heavenly Father.

Emotionally intelligent people get that, and they pursue God. They develop a passion for God.

The story was told of a young boy named Paco who lived in a small village. Paco grew up in one of those homes that you don't want to grow up in. On his street, late at night, one could often hear the sounds of his father's drunken rampages: screaming, the crying of his mother, the sound of glass and furniture breaking as Paco's father vented his rage on his family.

And this went on....month after month. Year after year. Paco lived in a world of chaos and he was powerless to stop it.

Until one night, late in his teen years. When there was one last fight. One last series of the worst vulgarities that language has to offer. One last fist thrown. And Paco turned on his heel and he walked out of the house for the last time. He told his father, "you are no longer my father and I hope to never see you again."

His father showed no emotion, no remorse. He just let him go.

And no one saw Paco after that. He was just gone. No one seemed to know where he went.



And the years rolled by. One year unfolding into the next with no word. And in time, the father's heart began to long for his son. He had a lot of time now to reflect on the kind of father he had been.

And the more he reflected the more he regretted. And the more he regretted the more his heart longed for his son. So he began to take these afternoon walks through the village. And he would watch. He would listen. And from time to time he would even inquire.

With the passage of time and the increase in longing he became more bold. He began to seek out the neighborhood boys that Paco had grown up with. They would often walk the other way when they saw him coming. But he didn't care. He would simply quicken his pace and chase them down, driven by the desire for any news of his son.

But there was no word.

Now it was not uncommon for a young man in a small village to go to the capital city to find work and build a life for himself, so Paco's father packed a few belongings and a worn photo of his son made the long trip to the capital city.

He knew that it would be a daunting task finding one person among so many, but his heart was very soft now. The years of reflection, the years of loneliness, the years of regret urged him on.

Once in the capital city, he checked into a room at a shabby motel and then he began his quest. Systematically he began to walk the streets of the city with that old photo. "Excuse me sir. Beg your pardon ma'am. This is my son? Have you seen him? Are you sure? Oh, but please, take another look. I'm desperate to find him. Well if you do...."

He walked the streets day after day. Searching every face. Looking, straining, hoping. Longing for that moment of recognition that did not come.

Each morning he would leave his room hopeful and determined, and each night he would return exhausted and discouraged.

His growing despair threatened to overwhelm him. Until late one night, alone with the noise of his thoughts, it came to him. A final desperate plan.

The next morning he went to a bank and withdrew his life savings. He then went to the office of the largest news paper in the city. And he said, I want to place an ad. I want it on the front page. I want it in bold type. I want to place an ad that everyone in this city will see.

And this is what it said.

“Paco. I am so sorry. Please forgive me. Dad.”

And then in smaller type near the bottom of the page. It said, “If you want to see me, meet me in front of the newspaper office today at 5 o’clock.”

That was it. It was the whole front page.

It was his final desperate attempt to find his son.

He went back to his room that night. But he didn’t sleep. All night long he waited. He wondered. He fanaticized about a reunion he hoped would take place, and he fretted over the revenge he feared would take place.

Morning came slowly. He gathered his meager belongings, checked out of his hotel and spent the day like he had so many days before. “Excuse me sir, ma’am, this is my boy. Are you sure?” Several times he walked by newsstands and stood for long agonizing minutes looking at his ad. He only hoped Paco would see it.

That last hour must have been the longest hour of his life. He was in the vicinity of the newspaper office now. Not quite there, but close. He just couldn’t bring himself go just yet.

What if his son was not there? What if he did not see the ad? Worse yet, what if he did see it and did not come? Could the old man’s heart bear the pain of knowing he would never see his boy again? That he would never get to speak those words of confession that he had practiced so many times. That he would never hold his son, and tell him of the love that now replaced the rage in his heart.

It was almost time now. 4:55. 4:57. He was walking toward the office. Just one more street to go. 4:58. The sounds of the city were being drowned out by the pounding of his heart and the throbbing of the question, “Will he be there?”

He approached the final corner now. Just a few more feet and he would know. Just a few more steps. Just in front of him was an intersection. And he knew that when he stepped into that intersection he would take the final turn, and from there he would be able to see the front of the newspaper office.

It would be the single moment that would determine the course of the rest of his life. There would be no more waiting, no more wondering.

Step....step....step....he held his breath....and he turned.

And there standing in front of the newspaper office.....were 400 Pacos.

400 boys, who had a dad shaped hole in their heart that only a father could fill.

Young man you have a God shaped hole in your heart that only God can fill.

Be sober minded. And let God fill that place.

Let's Pray....

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1992-1994 MDiv, Andrews University Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, MI

1985-1990 Bachelor of Arts in Religion, Southern College

1973-1983 Louisville Junior Academy

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2004-Present Senior Pastor, Raleigh SDA Church

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