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CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING IN HIP HOP CULTURE

By

THURMAN L. WILLIAMS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that address the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context. The assumption of this study was that a significant need and opportunity exists for the church in ministering to the young African American male demographic.

The study focused on six pastors who are working with a significant number of young African American males in urban contexts, and who have had some measure of fruitfulness in reaching and retaining these men in their congregations. Each of the pastors has ministered in urban contexts for at least five years and is affiliated with a denomination that holds reformed theological beliefs. This study utilized a qualitative design conducting semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. The review of key literature and analysis of the six interviews focused on three key areas which affect pastors preaching to young African American males in urban contexts. These three areas of focus were: the core concerns of young African American males, Christ-centered preaching, and contextualization.

In the area of core concerns, the findings of this study identified dignity, identity, significance and empowerment as the core concerns of young African American males in urban contexts. The study also revealed several avenues these men turned to in order to have their core concerns addressed. The primary avenues were: the Nation of Islam, Hip Hop culture, nihilism, and entertainment.

In the area of Christ-centered preaching the finding examined several elements of Christ-centered preaching. These elements were: the meaning, necessity, enablement,

method, and mandate of Christ-centered preaching. The study also offered practical recommendations on how preachers go about preaching directly to the core concerns.

In the area of contextualization, the findings of this study explained the meaning and necessity of contextualization, in general. The study also discussed the need for contextualization specifically among young African American males in urban contexts. The study then listed several important elements of contextualization and gave practical counsel on contextualizing in preaching to young African American males.

Based on an analysis of the literature studied and the interview data, the study offered four recommendations for preparing and delivering Christ-centered sermons which address the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context. These recommendations are: (1) Recognize the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context, (2) Recognize the primary avenues young African American men turn to and why, in order to address their core concerns, (3) Preach Christ-centered sermons which address the core concerns of young African American males, and (4) Do the hard work of contextualization in preparing sermons for young African American males.

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First of all, I would like to dedicate this project to the memory of a great brother, friend, and inspiration to me, the late Allan M. Tibbels. He is one of my heroes of the faith, and went home to be with the Lord as I was beginning this paper.

I would like to thank my wife, Evie, for her prayerful support during the time that I spent away from home attending doctorate of ministry courses, interviewing pastors for this study and writing this dissertation. I'm also thankful for her picking up the slack at home in the times I had to be away and in my health situations during the year of working on this paper. I also give thanks for each of my children, Charvez, Shaquana, Joshua, and Caleb and their "sharing" their daddy during this time while he did "his homework."

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Finally, I thank most of all, Almighty God, for giving me the strength to complete this assignment. My prayer is that Christ would be preached even more, by me and any who benefit from this paper, and that young African American males in urban contexts would be blessed and transformed as a result.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A significant need and opportunity exists for the church in ministering to the demographic of young African American males in urban contexts. Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, a renowned African American psychologist, speaker, and author, is noted for his extensive work in ministry among these men. He believes there is spiritual warfare going on behind the scenes with these males: "There are demons, principalities, and rulers in high places destroying African American males."[1] In highlighting the effects of this warfare, Kunjufu notes the following statistics describing the plight of young African American males: one out of every three black males is involved in the penal system; blacks make up thirty-five percent of drug arrests, fifty-five percent of drug convictions, and seventy-four percent of drug prisoners, despite making up only thirteen percent of the population. Black males constitute sixty-seven percent of the juveniles in adult courts and seventy-seven percent of the juveniles in adult prisons. Additionally, seven out of every ten black babies are born out of wedlock.[2]

While these statistics describe the dangerous plight of young African American males, they also present the church with a tremendous ministry opportunity. Kunjufu notes the impact of Christian conversion on these men: "when a child accepts Jesus as Lord, four percent of the family will follow. When a mother accepts Jesus as Lord, seventeen percent of the family will follow. When a father accepts Jesus as Lord, ninety-

[1] Jawanza Kunjufu, *State of Emergency: We Must Save African American Males* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2009), iv.
[2] Ibid., 9-18.

three percent of the family will follow."[3] The urban church, in particular, is poised to capitalize on the opportunity to minister to young African American males. C. Eric Lincoln, former professor of Religion and Culture at Duke University, notes in his comprehensive work, *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* that "while white churches and synagogues have moved to follow their members to the suburbs, the vast majority of black urban churches have remained in the central cities."[4]

However, this opportunity has also been a challenge for the church. Authors such as David Murrow note that the church has had difficulty reaching men in general, regardless of race. Murrow is an award-winning television producer and an elder in a Presbyterian Church (USA) in Anchorage, Alaska. "I've worshiped in congregations of every stripe: Catholic, Orthodox, mainline Protestant, evangelical, and Pentecostal. No matter the name on the outside, there are always more women on the inside," he laments.[5] He adds that "women comprise more than sixty percent of the typical adult congregation on any given Sunday."[6] This struggle for the church seems to be magnified among young African American males. Kunjufu says, "I am concerned about Black males twelve to thirty-five years of age because of their under representation in the church. Despite their great personal and social needs, they are virtually invisible in the church."[7]

Why does the church have such a difficult time impacting this demographic? Carl Ellis is the founder and director of Project Joseph, a Chattanooga, Tennessee-based ministry that seeks to equip Christians with resources, tools, and techniques to reach

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[3] Jawanza Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2006), 1.
[4] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Maniya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 158.
[5] David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), vii.
[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*, ix.

Muslims and other non-Christian movements. Ellis postulates that the reason for the church's lack of success in ministry to this group is that it is not adequately addressing the "core concerns" of these men.

> Everybody has issues that they are seeking answers to. If the church does not address specifically the issues that people are concerned about, and another group comes along and addresses those issues, no matter how bizarre the answers are, you'll find people taking a strong look at that other group. Christianity has done a good job addressing personal and spiritual matters, but for too long the church stopped dealing with the area of cultural and social issues.[8]

Ellis believes those core concerns consist of an individual's values and issues. "Values are ideas or concepts we embrace as our guiding principles. Issues are problems that emerge within us or are imposed upon us."[9] Ellis then delineates two types of life concerns, outer and inner. Inner concerns include what Ellis calls "primary and core concerns."[10] The core concerns tend to be both life-controlling and life-defining, and are the focus of this study. Ellis describes three basic types of core concerns: personal, social, and cultural. His theory is that while women and men have similar personal core concerns, women tend to have a higher proportion of social core concerns and men tend to have a higher proportion of cultural core concerns. He believes that Christian ministries have tended to focus more on social core concerns such as education, health care, and the family, which are generally more important to women.

Meanwhile, core cultural concerns such as dignity, significance, empowerment, and identity are not typically addressed by ministries of the local church. The natural result is that women and children in the African American community have been more easily drawn to the church than African American men. Murrow has noticed what he

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[8] Carl Ellis, "How Islam Is Winning Black America," *Christianity Today* 44, no. 4 (2000): 52.
[9] Carl F. Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: An Analysis of Today's African-American Cultural Crisis," (Chattanooga, TN: Accord Publications, 2007), 1.
[10] Ibid., 1.

calls a "gender gap" in churches, i.e. the proportion of women in the church is larger than the male proportion.[11] He adds that with regard to this gender gap, "no one has it tougher than the traditionally black denominations. A staggering ninety-two percent of African American churches in America reported a gender gap, the highest of any faith group."[12] Kunjufu describes the reason for this state of affairs:

> Why don't Black men go to church? "Cuz they been!" Just because large numbers of men don't go to church doesn't mean they have never been to church. Most have been to church at least once. They are aware of what goes on in church. They have made a conscious decision, not based on lack of information, but because of what they experienced in church. They have decided that church is not the place they want to attend.[13]

Where are these young men turning in order to have their core concerns addressed, if not the Christian church? According to Murrow, they are turning to secularism and Islam, with Islam having the more significant impact on young African American males. "Islam is growing in the U.S.... and it has made its strongest inroads in the African-American community. More than ninety percent of the converts to Islam in the United States are African American men, he writes."[14] Regarding alternatives to church that African American men are seeking out, Kunjufu says, "There are a few institutions that have an adequate supply of Black men. They include jails and prisons, nightclubs, the corner, health clubs, bowling alleys, and basketball courts."[15]

Another significant contemporary influence on young African American males in the urban context is the hip-hop culture. Ralph Watkins is an urban pastor who has immersed himself in understanding hip-hop in order to reach those who embrace it for

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[11] Murrow, 53.
[12] Ibid., 56.
[13] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*, 56-57.
[14] Murrow, 47-48.
[15] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*, 48.

Jesus Christ. Watkins clarifies that hip-hop is more than just music; it is a culture. He states that it "involves morals, values, ideas, ideals, ideology, and a way of life."[16] Kunjufu explains that hip-hop holds so much sway in the Black urban community because "time equals influence. As a result, peers, rappers, and television are raising our children."[17] Kunjufu pointedly asks, "Does 50 Cent [a popular rap artist] have a greater influence on Black male youth than Jesus Christ?"[18] In the end, each alternative young males turn to is just a form of what pastor and homiletics professor Zack Eswine calls "devilish spin." He writes that "devilish eloquence recognizes felt and real needs, but offers a provision other than God to meet that need."[19]

The good news for the church is that the gospel of Jesus Christ provides hope for addressing the core concerns of every group, including young African American males in urban contexts. Second Timothy 3:16[20] implies that the Word of God is able to sufficiently and effectively address all the core concerns of life. In light of this, Ellis calls for a comprehensive biblical approach in applying the gospel to these core concerns. In an interview with *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Ellis asserted that "the growth of Islam is a measure of the weakness of the church. [The church is] not dealing with the core issues for African Americans like identity, manhood, human dignity. We need to tell our young

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[16] Ralph C. Watkins and Jason A. Barr, *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 6.
[17] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*, 3.
[18] Ibid., 3.
[19] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 236.
[20] "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

people that Scripture does deal with all of that."[21] Ellis added that "the Bible more than adequately addresses these issues, and it is time for Christians to apply God's word."[22]

While a comprehensive biblical approach must be applied to every aspect of the church's ministry, this paper will particularly examine the ministry of preaching. The specific method of preaching is referred to as "Christ-centered" preaching. Bryan Chapell, Covenant Seminary president and author of *Christ-Centered Preaching* characterizes this type of preaching as "standing not only for reference to Christ's incarnation or death on the cross but for the entire matrix of God's redemptive work, which finds its culminating expression in Christ's person and work."[23] At its heart, Christ-centered preaching bridges the gap between the world of the ancient text and that of the contemporary audience.

There are pastors in urban contexts around the country who are effectively reaching the demographic of young African American males. One group of these urban pastors has put together a collection of ministry counsel entitled *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation.* Ralph Watkins, the editor of this work, writes that his impetus for putting the book together was a desire to "find successful pastoral models, church and parachurch models that were reaching the hip hop generation."[24] While the insights of these pastors are very helpful, it should be noted that the pastors are not writing and ministering from a reformed theological perspective. There are works available from a reformed perspective that instruct preachers in crafting biblical sermons

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[21] Jim Remsen, "Taking to the Streets to Win Back Souls," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, March 25, 2001.
[22] Adam Edgerly and Carl Ellis, "Emergence of Islam in the African-American Community," *Reach Out,* 1994, 13.
[23] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 15.
[24] Watkins and Barr, xv.

for postmodern audiences, but there is still a need for research on preparing and delivering Christ-centered sermons specifically geared towards young African American males in urban contexts.

Problem and Purpose Statement

A common theme among pastors in the African American context is the challenge of reaching and engaging young black males with the message of the gospel. Statistics show that churches ministering in African American communities tend to include far more adult females, children, and older generations than young adult males. The need to effectively minister to young African American males in urban contexts is acute.

One reason for this problem is that there seems to be a disconnect between the ministry of the Church and the felt needs of young African American males, especially those residing in urban contexts. Thankfully, there is some valuable research available on the nature of "core concerns" young African American males identify as important. There are also some effective urban ministries and ministers who are addressing these "core concerns" with faithful contextualization of the gospel. What role has preaching– historically a vital tool in reaching and inspiring African Americans– played in ministering effectively to young African American males? Preaching methods successfully employed to reach this demographic need to be identified and shared with a broader audience so that more young African American males will be touched by the gospel, and so the Church can grow and mature.

The purpose of this study is to explore how pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that address the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context.

Research Questions

This study is focused on pastors who are working with a significant number of young African American males in an urban context, and who have had some measure of fruitfulness in reaching and retaining these men in their congregations. In order to discover and explore best practices in ministering to young African American males in an urban context, the following research questions will be used:

1. What are the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context?
2. How have young African American males in your area sought to address their "core concerns"?
3. How do pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons mindful of the needs of young African American males?
4. What principles and methods of contextualization do pastors utilize in preaching to the young African American male demographic?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for the demographic being studied, the families and communities these men belong to, and the Church as a whole. The insights gleaned from this study can help reach a demographic that is at risk in our urban centers. Much has been made of the dire statistics regarding young African American males. The men themselves will benefit if the lessons of the study can be implemented practically into churches and ministries seeking to reach and disciple them. And, when these men are reached, their families and entire urban communities will be positively impacted by the gospel. These men will be challenged and empowered to grow as faithful husbands and fathers. Their presence will provide a stabilizing impact for the communities they live and work in. The Church itself will also benefit because reaching young African

American males with the gospel and discipling them as men of God will bring their time, talents, and treasures to bear on the work of the local church. Currently the body of Christ is missing out on the gifts these young men could use in the service of Christ and his Church. Some of the most effective ministers to young African American men are undoubtedly other young African American men.

Many urban churches and pastors are aware of the need to reach these young African American men with the gospel, and they have a heart for doing so. The hope is that the findings from this study will provide tools for urban churches and pastors to preach the gospel in ways that bring transformation in the lives of these young men. The lessons learned in preaching to these young men's core concerns may also be applied to every aspect of ministering to them (not just preaching).

Definition of Terms

***Contextualization*:** A process by which the essential truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications are brought to bear in a particular culture in ways that do not alter the meaning of the gospel nor eliminate that culture's expressions of the gospel.

Core Concerns: Issues that are life-defining and life-controlling for a particular person or people group.

Hip-hop Culture: An urban subculture with its own set of norms, values, shared traditions, shared beliefs, and identity.

Islam: A monotheistic religion articulated by the Qur'an and by the Prophet Muhammad's teachings and normative example. The Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be the Word of God.

Nation of Islam: A religious organization founded in Detroit, Michigan by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad in July 1930. The Nation is a distinct sect of traditional Islam, holding to some beliefs but varying in other areas.

***Preaching*:** For this study, preaching refers to the sermons given by the primary pastor during worship services in a local congregation.

Urban contexts: For this study, urban refers to areas in the United States classified as cities. The author has in mind urban areas that are predominately African American and whose residents range from working-class to lower-income on the economic scale.

Young African American males*:* For this study, young refers to males between eighteen and thirty-five years old.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore how pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that address the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context. In this chapter, the literature related to this study has been arranged under the following three general topics: a) "Core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context, b) Christ-centered preaching, and c) Contextualization.

Core Concerns

What is meant by the term "core concerns"? Scholar Carl Ellis states that all people have both outer and inner concerns. The outer concerns may or may not capture our interest but the concerns Ellis refers to as "inner" demand our attention, because they are directly related to us. Among these inner concerns are what Ellis calls "core concerns." These are life concerns that tend to be life-controlling and life-defining in people's lives.[25] Ellis breaks down this idea even further in dividing concerns into personal, social, or cultural categories. Examples of personal concerns include loneliness, anxiety, and fear. Social concerns include matters such as education, health and family. Finally, cultural core concerns are those which directly pertain to particular situations. This last category of core concerns tends to be unique to each people group,[26] such as young African American males. Everyone has a distinct combination of core concerns.

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[25] Carl F. Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: An Analysis of Today's African-American Cultural Crisis," (Chattanooga, TN: Accord Publications, 2007), 1.
[26] Ibid., p. 2.

Gender seems to have an impact on an individual's core concerns. According to Ellis, there is little difference between the profiles of men and women in terms of personal core concerns, but women tend to have a higher proportion of social core concerns while men tend to have a higher proportion of cultural core concerns.[27]

Core Concerns for Men, in General

There are several core concerns that most men seem to share, regardless of ethnicity. Jawanza Kunjufu notes the desire of men to be involved in something that is meaningful:

> Men want to be great and want to make a difference. Men want their lives to count. They want meaning. They want to make an impact, a contribution. They want to do something important. They want to conquer. They want to be somebody. They want to be significant.[28]

Kunjufu shares similar thoughts from Patrick Morley, the author of *The Man in the Mirror*, on the core concerns of men:

> I want to make a difference. I want to make life count. I want my life to have meaning. I want to have an impact. I want to make a contribution. I want to do something important with my life. I want to conquer, achieve, excel, prove myself. I want to be somebody. I want my life to be significant.[29]

In his many dealings with men on retreats, Kunjufu has noticed common elements that reveal themselves in stories and insights men offer.

> The following are the keys to a man's soul:
> 1. His goals – what he wants most in life
> 2. His thoughts – what he thinks about most of the time
> 3. His finances – how he spends his money
> 4. His pursuits – how he spends his leisure time
> 5. His friends – the people with whom he associates

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[27] Ibid., p. 3.
[28] Jawanza Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2006), 67.
[29] Ibid., 65.

6. His attention – who and what he admires and appreciates
7. His humor – what amuses him[30]

Several writers point out the significance of the presence of a father in a man's life. John Eldredge is a noted author on biblical manhood and the founder of Ransomed Heart, a ministry that helps men and women discover the heart of God. He also seeks to speak to issues that he believes are core concerns of men. In his book, *The Way of the Wild Heart*, he writes:

> Every man shares the same core Question, and that Question runs something like, "Do I have what it takes?" Before and beneath that Question and a man's search for validation lies a deeper need—to know that he is prized, delighted in, that he is the Beloved Son. [This is] our need for a father's love.[31]

Eldredge expounds further on the need men have for validation from their fathers:

> A boy derives his identity, his masculinity, and the answers to his deepest questions about himself from his father. The deepest wound a man carries is his father wound. Whether through violence, or rejection, or passivity, or abandonment, most men did not receive the love and validation they needed as boys from their fathers.[32]

David Blankenhorn, founder and president of the Institute for American Values, writes extensively about the issue of fatherlessness. He calls being a father "society's most important role for men. Fatherhood, more than any other male activity, helps men to become good men: more likely to obey the law, to be good citizens, and to think about the needs of others."[33] Blankenhorn believes that the role of fathers began to change in the 20th century from what it had always been. He writes:

> Increasingly, men looked outside the home for the meaning of their maleness. Masculinity became less domesticated, defined less by effective paternity and more by individual ambition and achievement. Fatherhood became a thinner

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[30] Ibid., 64-65.
[31] John Eldredge, *The Way of the Wild Heart* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2006), 12.
[32] Ibid., 27.
[33] David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 25.

> social role. Paternal authority declined as the fatherhood script came to be anchored in, and restricted to, two paternal tasks: head of the family and breadwinner.[34]

David Murrow, in calling the church to see the importance of spiritual fathering, points to the impact of fatherlessness in our society:

> In the natural world, fatherlessness is devastating to men. Boys without dads are more likely to run away from home, be homeless, commit suicide, exhibit behavioral disorders, drop out of school, abuse drugs and alcohol and go to jail. Among adults, 70 percent of violent criminals and long-term prison inmates grew up without fathers. Fatherlessness is devastating in the spiritual world as well.[35]

Kunjufu speaks to the issue of fatherlessness as well: "Research confirms that the most significant factor in the life of a child is not race, family or income, but whether the father is at home."[36] He points out some alarming statistics on the devastation of growing up in a fatherless home:

> Sixty-three percent of youth that commit suicide are from fatherless homes. Ninety percent of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes. Eighty-five percent of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. Eighty percent of rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes. Seventy-one percent of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes. Seventy-five percent of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes. Seventy percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes. Eighty-five percent of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in fatherless homes.[37]

The core concerns of identity and significance have an influence on men's views and presence in the life of the local church. Murrow writes that "God made men for adventure, achievement, and challenge, and if they can't find those things in church, they're going to find them somewhere else."[38] Murrow further explains that,

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[34] Ibid., 15.
[35] David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), 215.
[36] Jawanza Kunjufu, *State of Emergency: We Must Save African American Males* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2009), 157.
[37] Ibid., 157.
[38] Murrow, 11.

> Both men and young adults skip church because many congregations ignore or vilify their values. Studies show that men and young adults tend to be challenge oriented. Some of their key values are adventure, risk, daring, independence, change, conflict, variety, pleasure, and reward. On the other hand, studies demonstrate that women and older adults tend to be security oriented.[39]

Murrow adds that every church has a "spiritual thermostat." He identifies six common settings found in today's congregations: "challenge, confrontation, comfort, conformity, ceremony, and control."[40] Men tend to be drawn to the "challenge setting" the most, while most churches tend to place more emphasis on the "comfort" and "ceremony" settings, which are greater priorities for women and older adults.

Kunjufu concurs with the idea that the values churches tend to emphasize are not as appealing to men:

> So why would a man find it necessary to go to church? Men are generally pragmatic and practical. They're problem solvers and solution finders. Many men see church as a bland, lukewarm society with no real relevance or agenda. If involvement in church makes no functional difference in the quality of life—if it does not challenge, invigorate, or empower a man—why attend?[41]

Core Concerns for Young African American Men

As mentioned earlier, Ellis believes that core concerns are unique to each demographic group. If so, what would be the specific core concerns unique to young African-American males, especially those in an urban context? Ellis identifies four primary core concerns: dignity, significance, identity, and empowerment. He references these issues in several of his writings. In a *Christianity Today* article from the year 2000 on the influence of Islam on Black America, Ellis says regarding what he terms "Black Nationalist-type Muslims," that "all these groups have a theology based on the historical core cultural issues of African Americans—dignity, identity, significance,

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[39] Ibid., 19.
[40] Ibid., 29.
[41] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*, 61.

empowerment—along with various doctrines that claim God is black and the white man is the devil."[42] *The Voice Magazine* also cites Ellis on the pervasive influence of Islam on young African American males:

> Ellis has learned that cultural core issues must be addressed to break through the Muslim mindset. Empowerment, he says, is one of those issues. "Anybody in a subdominant culture will always want to level the playing field," he says. "Empowerment is a core cultural issue among African-Americans. Other core issues are dignity, identity, and significance."[43]

In his recently-completed doctoral dissertation, Ellis analyzes the history of the African American church and its ability to address cultural core concerns. He asserts that, "traditionally, if American Christianity deals with core concerns at all, it tends to focus only on the personal dimension. The American church has yet to wake up to the need to address cultural core concerns. This is especially true for sub-dominant cultures like African American culture."[44] Ellis compares the influence on the African American church in the North during the post-Reconstruction period with that of the Southern church. Of the Northern church, Ellis notes that "a theology of empowerment drove the church in the North."[45]

> Like its southern counterpart, the theology of empowerment addresses personal and social core concerns as well as salvation by grace through faith in Christ. It also addressed three cultural core concerns: human dignity, African identity, and the divine significance of the African American experience.[46]

This lack of focus on the cultural core concerns of young African American males has led to a suspicion among these men towards the church. Pastor Eric Redmond, of

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[42] Edward Gilbreath, "How Islam Is Winning Black America," *Christianity Today* 44, no. 4 (2000): page(s).
[43] Elizabeth Sanchez, "Rescuing Black America from the Grip of Islam," The Voice Magazine.com, http://www.thevoicemagazine.com/culture/society/rescueing-black-america-from-the-grip-of-islam.html (accessed April 19, 2011).
[44] Carl Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: From 'I Have a Dream' to 'Sagging Pants'— an Analysis of the Current African American Cultural Crisis" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford Graduate School, 2010), 5.
[45] Ibid., p. 8-9.
[46] Ibid., 9.

Hillcrest Baptist Church in Temple Hills, Maryland, has written a booklet entitled *Where Are All The Brothers?* in an attempt to answer the questions of today's African American males regarding the church. Redmond invites men to dialogue about their concerns:

> You say church is for women and not for men. You are turned off by the preacher who fattens his purse through the giving of others. You think the church is weak compared to followers of Islam. You have found organized religion a hindrance to your faith in any God. You say that you do not know about the Jesus people preach.[47]

Kunjufu also has sought to identify and address the barriers to church for African American males. In a survey he conducted during a men's retreat, Kunjufu identified twenty-one reasons why most African American men do not attend church:

> Hypocrisy, Ego/dictatorial role of the pastor, Faith/submission/trust/forgiveness/ anger, Passivity, Tithing, Irrelevance, Eurocentric, Length of service, Emotional, Sports, Attire/dress code, Classism/unemployment, Education/literacy, Sexuality/drugs, Homosexuality, Spirituality/universalism/worshipping alone, Heaven, Evangelism, Lack of Christian role models, Streets/peer pressure, Double standards/forced on a child.[48]

Atlanta Journal-Constitution reporter Gracie Bonds Staples has also delved into this issue, with an article entitled "Why Are Many Black Men Staying Away From the Church, and What Would Bring Them Back Into the Fold?" In seeking to answer this question, she quotes one man as saying "the church today, in my opinion, is not about helping black men. It's a moneymaking business."[49] One Atlanta pastor Staples interviewed views the problem this way:

> You've heard the saying that the black man is in jail waiting for justice and the black woman is in church waiting for Jesus. Well, until the church projects the image of speaking truth to power, of being serious and aggressive about

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[47] Eric C. Redmond, *Where Are All the Brothers?: Straight Answers to Men's Questions About the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 14-15.
[48] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*, 47.
[49] Gracie Bonds Staples, "Faithful, but Absent: Why Are Many Black Men Staying Away from the Church, and What Would Bring Them Back into the Fold?" *Atlanta Journal - Constitution,* August 12, 2006.

> community uplift and economic empowerment, a lot of black men will remain uninterested.[50]

Touching further on the issue of not having the core concerns of young African American males adequately addressed, Staples shares the insights of Robert Franklin, a professor of social ethics at Emory University's school of theology:

> More than two decades before Kunjufu posed the question (Why don't black men go to church?), Franklin had written his senior thesis at Harvard University on why black men leave the church. The answers were both institutional and personal.
>
> For instance, Franklin said, many men were turned off by the promotion of virtues like humility, sermons that advocated turning the other cheek rather than resistance, including, if necessary, violence.
>
> In addition, the men said the services were too long, that there was too much emphasis on money, and moral hypocrisy by church leaders. Many men, he said, also focused on their own moral failure.[51]

Former *Washington Post* reporter John W. Fountain wrote first-hand of his own struggles with the church in a 2005 article entitled "No Place for Me." In addition to being a reporter, Fountain is also a licensed minister and veteran of the church. He laments his lack of involvement in the church:

> I now feel disconnected. I am disconnected. Not necessarily from God, but from the church. What happened? Probably the same thing that has happened to thousands, if not tens of thousands, of African American men who now file into coffee shops or bowling alleys or baseball stadiums on Sundays instead of heading to church, or who lose themselves in the haze of mowing the lawn or waxing their cars. Somewhere along the way, for us, for me, the church—the collective of black churches of the Christian faith, regardless of denomination—lost its meaning, its relevance. It seems to have no discernible message for what ails the 21st-century black male soul.[52]

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] John W. Fountain, "No Place for Me—I Still Love God, but I've Lost Faith in the Black Church," *Washington Post*, July 17, 2005.

Fountain reveals more of his heart when he confesses: "further contributing to my disappearing acts is that, after being put down and put upon in a society that relegates black men largely to second-class status, the last place I want to feel that way is at church."[53] He believes that other men have experienced the same thing and he wonders whether the church is even concerned about them.

> The church's finger seems farthest from the pulse of those black men who seem to be most lost and drifting in a destructive sea of fatalism and pathology, with no immediate sign of the shore or of search and rescue crews. Without the church, most of those men are doomed. But it seems clear to me that the church does not—will not—seek us black men out, or perhaps even mourn our disappearance from the pews.[54]

Michael Eric Dyson, an ordained Baptist minister, nationally-syndicated radio host, noted author, and professor of African American Studies at Columbia University, writes extensively on contemporary African American life. Regarding the impact of the church not adequately addressing the core concerns of young African American males, Dyson says:

> The plight of most black males is so bad that some social commentators have come to refer forebodingly to black males as an "endangered species." Trapped between statistics and stereotypes, however, the brittle textures and uncomfortable truths of black male life are too often smoothed over to fit easily into pat explanations of either their prosperity or failure.[55]

Alternatives for Addressing Core Concerns

There are various alternatives, apart from the church, that young African American males turn to in seeking to have their core concerns addressed. The alternatives addressed in this research are Secularism, the Nation of Islam, the Five Percenter sect, Hip-hop culture, and Nihilism.

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (New York: Oxford Unviersity Press, 1996), 68.

In his foundational work on the topic of secularism, *Christianity and Modern Man: The Crisis of Secularism,* Albert Mollegen defines this teaching as "a materialistic attitude toward God and the world."[56] He believes secularism is the chief obstacle to man's spiritual comfort. He adds that "the result is that man tends to live a life without meaning, and hence is in despair."[57] Eben Nhiwatiwa, a lecturer in Pastoral Theology at Africa University, mentions the threat of secularism in an essay on preaching for twenty-first century hearers. He writes that the term "refers to a situation in which religious faith for one reason or another is felt to be superfluous."[58]

Murrow also believes secularism is one of the alternatives men of all races are seeking out to have their core issues addressed. He writes:

> Secularism is the de facto religion in much of Europe today. Rationalism, materialism, anarchy, and radical environmentalism are a few of its common guises. It's on the rise in America was well. The Graduate Center of the City University of New York found the number of adults who say they subscribe to no religion doubled during the 1990s. The survey "detected a wide and possibly growing swath of secularism among Americans." The number of unchurched Americans (who don't attend services except for holidays or weddings/funerals) nearly doubled between 1991 and 2004.[59]

Finally, Kunjufu sees secularism as the root of the most significant problem he believes African American males face—not knowing God. He writes:

> I believe the greatest problem facing Black America is not racism, economics, or fatherlessness, but the lack of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Notice I did not say the greatest problem is that men do not go to church. In Black America we have a problem with the number and percentage of men in church, much less a percentage of men who are saved, and even less a percentage of men in regular fellowship with Jesus Christ.[60]

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[56] Albert T. Mollegen, *Christianity and Modern Man: the Crisis of Secularism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), 1,
[57] Ibid., 1.
[58] Eben K. Nhiwatiwa, "Preaching That Connects for the Twenty-First Century Hearer: An African Perspective," *Quarterly Review* 24, no. 3 (2004): 275.
[59] Murrow, 47-48.
[60] Kunjufu, *State of Emergency: We Must Save African American Males*, 154.

Another alternative African American males in particular look to in addressing their core concerns is the Nation of Islam. Reverend Josh Llano, a senior pastor and army chaplain with extensive ministry among Muslims, has written an apologetic guide, *Reaching African American Muslims for Christ*. On the growth of Islam, Llano writes:

> Islam is the second largest religion in the world. It is growing at an alarming rate in America, spreading the fastest in the African American population. African Muslims have become a dominant movement that makes up eleven percent of the African American community and about six percent of the American population.[61]

A *Christianity Today* article on the influence of Islam on the Black community notes that "Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in America, and the massive number of African American converts—in prisons, colleges, and inner cities—is a key factor."[62]

Llano delves even further into the influence of Islam on the African American community:

> Islam is gaining most of its converts in America in prisons and on university campuses. The majority of American converts to Islam—eighty-five to ninety percent are black. Of the estimated six million Muslims in America, two point six million are black. One out of every fifteen blacks identifies himself or herself as Muslims.[63]

What is the Nation of Islam and what are its beliefs? What distinguishes the Nation of Islam from Orthodox Islam? Ellis and his co-founder of Project Joseph, Adam Edgerly, describe the Nation of Islam as a religious organization founded in Detroit, Michigan, by Wallace D. Fard Muhammad in July 1930.[64] A primary belief of the Nation of Islam and its followers is that there is no other God but Allah, and that Allah

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[61] Josh Lee Llano, *Reaching African-American Muslims for Christ* (n.p.: Xulon Press, 2005), xi.
[62] Edward Gilbreath, "How Islam Is Winning Black America," *Christianity Today* 44, no. 4 (2000): 52.
[63] Llano, xi.
[64] Adam Edgerly, and Carl Ellis, "Emergence of Islam in the African-American Community," *Reach Out,* 1994, 9.

came in the person of W.D. Fard.[65] This belief is a distinctive from Orthodox Islam. Abraham Sarker, a convert from Islam to Christianity, identifies another distinction between the Nation of Islam and Orthodox Islam: "the Nation of Islam teaches that Black people were the original humans."[66] Sarker adds that while traditional Islam teaches the equality of all races and that a person of any race may convert to Islam, the Nation of Islam (NOI) "teaches that the Black man is the original man, and from him came all brown, yellow, and white people. The Nation of Islam does not believe that whites are worthy to be evangelized, and thus does not accept them into the NOI."[67] The Nation of Islam further teaches that "the original black race of man is superior, especially to the white man, a race of 'blue-eyed devils' created by the black man."[68]

In regard to the outworking of the faith:

> [Nation of Islam leader] Elijah Muhammad's program for economic development played a crucial role in the rapid growth of the Nation of Islam. With the money donated by members, Muhammad purchased land for farms, store fronts, bakeries, apartment buildings and schools. By owning businesses and land, Elijah Muhammad was able to provide both housing and employment for needy followers. Scarcity of employment for young Black males offers one explanation of why they were drawn to the Nation of Islam in such large numbers.[69]

These works performed by the Nation of Islam help explain why some men feel that Islam addresses their core concerns better than Christianity. In his ministry seeking to evangelize Muslims, Ellis "discovered that, like him, Islam appeals to God seekers because it answers their questions. He reports as many as 75 percent of American

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[65] Llano,18.
[66] Abraham Sarker, *Understand My Muslim People* (Newberg, Oregon: Barclay Press, 2004) , 90
[67] Ibid., 90.
[68] Ibid., 90.
[69] Edgerly and Ellis, 11.

Muslims his team reaches converted from Christianity because the church 'did not deal with their issues.'"[70]

When asked in an interview with *Christianity Today* what attracts *young* African American men, in particular, to Islam, Ellis answers:

> There's a lot of external discipline. These guys line up in military-like lines and do rounds of prayer. Many African American men long for that structure and order. And there's a wise, sage type of image that you find in a lot of imams (male leaders). Since 1970, one of the big issues that's really been a concern for African Americans is this whole quest for true manhood. Islam may be seen as a way to redefine one's manhood.[71]

Also writing on the Nation of Islam's effectiveness in attracting young men, Edgerly and Ellis explain:

> The majority of those who joined the Nation of Islam were young, economically disadvantaged, young African American males from Christian backgrounds. Up to 80 percent of a typical congregation were between the ages of 17 and 35. Traditionally, the church in the Black community has had difficulty attracting young males. In an article entitled, "Why Most Black Men Won't Go To Church," Reverend William Harris attributes the primary reason to economics:
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> "Many Black males won't go to church because today's church does not address their needs. The Black male needs money, job opportunities, business resources, and relevant skills training. The church collects money, but does little to create opportunities through which he can make more money. Jesus understood the need to feed people before preaching to them. Today's church must likewise set the table for the Black man before asking him to pay to have the dishes done."[72]

The alternative Islam presents in addressing the core concerns of young African American males has created competition for the local church in reaching these men. In the newsletter, *The Islamic Bulletin*, the author states that:

> Nearly 90% of converts to Islam in the United States are African American men, a statistic that doesn't surprise Amiri al-Hadid, a local sociologist who is himself a Muslim convert. "The church teaches you to be passive, but that's not how you survive in America," said al-Hadid, 48, a former Baptist who teaches at

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[70] Sanchez.
[71] Gilbreath, 52.
[72] Edgerly and Ellis, 11.

> Tennessee State University and helped organize a new mosque in Nashville. "Islam teaches self-defense. It teaches knowledge and discipline, and the African American male needs discipline. But there isn't an ambience of guilt. In church, there is sadness, a sense of guilt, the need to repent, an emotional environment. But men are just not going to cry in public. Islam appeals to your reasoning. It encourages a rational relation with God, not emotions."[73]

In his apologetic work written for African American men to win them to Christianity, Redmond includes a chapter entitled "Doesn't Islam offer more for black men?"[74] In this chapter he attempts to enter the mind of his readers who may be drawn to Islam:

> Islam seems to offer more for the black man than Christianity. Possibly the form of Islam with which you are most familiar is the Nation of Islam or an offshoot. If so, you may have been impressed by what you have seen of Islam for one or more of the following reasons:
>
> You have heard the leaders of local mosques be far more vocal on political issues that matter to you and to the majority of African Americans; you see drug dealers being run out of the neighborhood by the members of the local mosque, and you are appreciative; you are grateful for the cleanliness and productivity of young men you see in the median selling bean pies and *The Final Call* as entrepreneurs; you may have experienced the brotherhood of the Nation behind bars.[75]

Murrow quotes an African American male convert to Islam on why he left the Baptist church he grew up in and turned to Islam as an adult: "In Islam I found a stronger ideal of brotherhood and moral discipline—and of manhood."[76] Murrow postulates that the reason for the rise of both secularism and Islam is their ability to capture the hearts of men.

Another attractive aspect of the Nation of Islam for some men is the empowerment of men in leading roles in the mosque, as opposed to the opportunities for

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[73]"Many Black Men Leaving the Church for the Mosque," *The Tennessean* 89, no. 234 (n.d.), reprinted in *The Islamic Bulletin* no. 12 (March/April 1994; Ramadan 1414),http://www.islamicbulletin.com/newsletters/issue_12/islam.aspx#a4 (accessed November 16 2010).
[74] Redmond, 49.
[75] Ibid., 49.
[76] Murrow, 48.

leadership provided by the church. Edgerly and Ellis assert that "men were also drawn to the Nation of Islam because of the emphasis placed on male leadership. African American churches tend to be dominated by women, with one central male figure, the pastor in the pulpit. As a result, many men do not feel affirmed in the church environment."[77]

Jim Remsen's *Philadelphia Enquirer* article on the attempt of the evangelical church to target Muslims for conversion points out that "nowhere is the turf fighting between the two religions more pitched than in African American communities."[78] Remsen notes:

> Nation of Islam mosques and the more common Sunni Muslim mosques are entrenched in many black communities, and most of their members are either converts from Christianity or converts' children. The prisons also are a renowned mission field for Muslims, with an estimated 30,000 prisoners converting annually, many of them African Americans.[79]

Another attractive aspect of Islam is the focus on the learning process of discipleship rather than on merely a conversion event. Remsen adds:

> Many black men are drawn to Islam's strong-male culture and find they can have a close "brother relationship" with their imam, whereas they may feel out of place in churches with their majority-female membership led by aloof, intimidating, sometimes "flashy" male pastors. It is a black-church image that Muslims play up in their urban outreach.[80]

Llano believes it is imperative for the church to engage in ministry among black Muslims. He urges "there is a desperate need for evangelical Christians to take the time

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[77] Edgerly and Ellis, 11.
[78] Jim Remsen, "Taking to the Streets to Win Back Souls," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, March 25 2001.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

to understand Black Islam."[81] Llano highlights the increasing influence of Muslim groups in today's society:

> Today, Islam plays a major part in world politics, and in consistence with this trend, African and African American Muslims are increasingly turning to Islam to resolve their own social and political problems. With Islam on the rise in America, Christians must respond by reaching Black Muslims where they are. Christians are going to face Islam in their communities; that is, not in their churches, but on the streets.[82]

Another alternative young African American males turn to in addressing their core concerns is an offshoot of the Nation of Islam called The Five Percenters. This group is also referred to as The Nation of Gods and Earths, NGE, Allah's Nation, the Five-Percent Nation, or the Five-Percent Nation of Islam. The Five Percenters "was founded in 1964 in the Harlem section of the borough of Manhattan in New York City by Clarence Smith, known most commonly to the public at large as Clarence 13X, but referred to by his contemporaries and students as Allah (the Arabic word for God) or the Father."[83] This group was founded by Clarence 13X after he left the Nation of Islam's Temple Number Seven in Harlem, New York.

Regarding the impact of this group on young African American male culture, Edgerly and Ellis comment:

> The Five Percenters are very influential in today's youth pop culture. Many of the most influential 'Rap' artists today are Five Percenters. Among the rappers who propagate the doctrine of the Five Percenters are King Sun, The Supreme Team, Lakim Shabazz, Rakim Allah, Brand Nubian, and The Poor Righteous Teachers.[84]

Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson,both pastors of inner city churches reaching young African American males, add KRS-ONE, Busta Rhymes, and Public Enemy to this list of

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[81] Llano, xi.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Edgerly and Ellis, 13.
[84] Ibid.

Five Percenter hip-hop artists in their book *The Hip Hop Church*. They note that "one of the most prominent religious expressions that has arisen from hip-hop is the Five Percent Nation."[85]

In regard to the beliefs of the Five Percenters, Edgerly and Ellis share some of the background:

> Clarence 13X was a member in the Nation of Islam's Temple #7. He began to teach that the Black man was the god of the universe and had his origins in Mecca. His iconoclastic teachings resulted in his suspension from the Nation of Islam. In 1964, he founded the "Five Percent Nation of Islam." In 1969, Clarence 13X died of suspicious causes. Those who followed him referred to him as "Father Allah."[86]

Felicia Miyakawa, a professor of musicology at the Robert W. McLean School of Music at Middle Tennessee State University, has done an extensive study on The Five Percenter sect. In regards to how the group spreads their teaching, Miyakawa found that "to instruct new believers, Five Percenters rely primarily on the pedagogical technique of 'each one, teach one,' passing each lesson down to younger members through oral teaching, and more recently through photocopies."[87] She discovered nine tenets that The Five Percenters teach:

1. We teach that Black people are the Original People of the Planet Earth.
2. We teach that Black people are the Mothers and Fathers of Civilization.
3. We teach that the Science of Supreme Mathematics is the key to understanding man's relationship to the universe.
4. We teach Islam as a natural way of life: not a religion.
5. We teach that education should be fashioned to enable us to be self-sufficient as a people.
6. We teach that each one should teach one according to their knowledge.
7. We teach that the Black man is God and his proper name is Allah.

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[85] Efrem Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip-Hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping Our Culture* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 127.
[86] Edgerly and Ellis, 11.
[87] Felicia M. Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop's Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission*, Profiles in Popular Music (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 35.

8. We teach that our children are our link to the future and they must be nurtured: respected, loved, protected, and educated.
9. We teach that the unified Black Family is the vital building block of the Nation.[88]

Ellis and Edgerly describe the similarities and distinctions between the beliefs of the Five Percenters and the Nation of Islam:

> The Five Percenters agree with Elijah Muhammad's teaching that the White man is the devil. However, they also include all unscrupulous and deceitful people in this category, regardless of color. They believe that the Black race was the original race and the creator of civilization.[89]

However, there is much that is different about The Five Percenters' beliefs in comparison to the Nation of Islam. While the Nation of Gods and Earths uses terms that are similar to those used by Muslims, the NGE, being free thinkers, and Muslims, being theists, have very little in common. Authors have labeled the Nation of Gods and Earths as an Islamic group because of its origins from within the Nation of Islam, the terms it uses, and because of its practice of not eating pork. However, the Five Percenters do not follow the restrictive laws of the NOI, nor do they follow traditional Islamic teachings based on the laws written in the Qur'an or the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. Five Percent leaders claim theirs is not a religious movement, and that as self-proclaimed gods themselves (in the case of males), there is no higher power or being to submit to. In traditional Islam, this is considered a heretical, blasphemous concept and a violation of the most basic Islamic tenets, since it is considered a grave sin to associate any human being or object with God. The official stance of the Nation of Gods and Earths is that they are not Muslims, nor are they bound to any religious laws.[90]

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[88] Ibid., 35.
[89] Edgerly and Ellis, 11.
[90] Miyakawa, 30-35.

Edgerly and Ellis explain where The Five Percenters name comes from: "For the Five Percenters, the demographics of the African-American community break down as follows: 85 percent—the masses who are ignorant of true 'divine self'; 10 percent—the corrupt rulers over the 85 percent; and the 5 percent—the truly righteous followers of Father Allah."[91]

The Five Percenters, also known as the Nation of Gods and Earths, teach that "the Original Black man is God, the Original Black woman is the planet Earth, and through the inner esoteric powers of the Gods and Earths, people can transform and possess their true potential." Smith and Jackson note that the group's "members state that they are gods and use Psalm 82:4-8 as the foundational Scripture to support this belief."[92]

A fourth area of alternative for young African-American males in seeing their core concerns addressed is immersion into hip-hop culture. Ralph Watkins observes, "where the church was once that place of family and gathering, hip-hop is fast becoming today's alternative. Hip-hop culture brings young people together."[93] Former editor of Source magazine and author of *The Hip Hop Generation*, Bakari Kitwana, notes that "today, more and more Black youth are turning to rap music, music videos, designer clothing, popular Black films, and television programs for values and identity."[94] Kitwana uses the term "hip-hop generation" to describe those born between the years 1965-1984.[95]

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[91] Edgerly and Ellis, 11.
[92] Smith, 127.
[93] Ralph C. Watkins and Jason A. Barr, *The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 26.
[94] Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002), 9.
[95] Ibid., xiii.

In helping to understand the influence of hip-hop in the lives of young African American males in urban contexts, it is important to see that hip-hop is more than just a genre of music; it is a culture. Dr. Daniel White Hodge shed light on this in his recent work, *The Soul of Hip Hop*. Hodge is a former music industry professional, an adjunct professor at Azusa Pacific University and Citrus College, and a national speaker and trainer for the Christian Community Development Association and the Urban Youth Workers Institute. Regarding the concept of hip-hop as a culture, Hodge writes:

> Hip-hop, in the words of KRS-One, is "something that is being lived." Hip-hop is larger than the radio, larger than commercialized artists, larger than record industry branding. It is a culture, a people, a movement, a growing community of people that live, breathe, eat, love, hate and work just as anyone else does. Hip-hop cannot be easily understood or defined.[96]

As difficult as it may be to precisely understand all the nuances of hip-hop culture, there are some elements that have been identified to help form a definition of what this culture is. Watkins quotes popular rapper KRS-One in attempting to define hip-hop culture:

> According to KRS-One, the teacher of hip-hop, hip-hop culture is composed of nine elements: True Hiphop is a term that describes the independent collective consciousness of a specific group of inner-city people. Ever growing, it is commonly expressed through such elements Breakin' (Breakdancing), Emceein' (Rap), Graffiti art (aerosol art), Dejayin', Beatboxin', Street Fashion, Street Language, Street Knowledge, and Street Entrepreneurialism. Hiphop is not just music and dance, nor is Hiphop a product to be bought and sold. Discovered by Kool DJ Herc in the Bronx, New York around 1972, and established as a 404the Zulu Nation in 1974, Hiphop is an independent and unique community, an empowering behavior, and an international culture.[97]

Miyakawa also highlights some of these elements in her definition of hip-hop culture. She writes that "hip-hop is 'the culture' comprising the four elements of MC-ing,

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[96] Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 20.
[97] Watkins and Barr, 7-8.

DJ-ing, writing (graffiti), and b-boying (breakdancing). According to MC and hip-hop philosopher KRS-One, 'Rap is something you do, hip-hop is something you live.'"[98]

Hodge also looks to KRS-One to define hip-hop culture:

> The Temple of Hip Hop, run by KRS-One and his team, define Hip-Hop as the name of our collective consciousness and inner-city strategy toward self-improvement. In its spiritual essence, Hip-hop cannot be (and should not be) interpreted or described in words. It is a feeling. An awareness. A state of mind. Intellectually, it is an alternative behavior that enables one to transform subjects and objects in an attempt to describe and/or change the character and desires of one's inner being.[99]

Hodge then contributes his own attempt at giving a definition of hip-hop culture:

> Hip-hop is an urban subculture that seeks to express a lifestyle, attitude, or theology. Rejecting the dominant culture, it seeks to increase social consciousness, cultural awareness and racial pride. Rap music functions as the vehicle by which the cultural messages of Hip-Hop are sent, and the industry by which Hip-Hop culture is funded and propagated.[100]

Where did hip-hop culture originate? Author and former music producer Nelson George is described by *Rolling Stone* magazine as the most knowledgeable hip-hop writer in the world. In his book, *Hip Hop America*, George traces the history of hip-hop from its beginnings in the 1970s up to its present standing. He writes that "at its most elemental level hip-hop is a product of post-civil-rights-era America, a set of cultural forms originally nurtured by African American, Caribbean American, and Latin American youth in and around New York in the '70s."[101]

George considers the values of hip-hop culture to merely be a microcosm of the larger American mainstream culture.

> It is also essential to understand that the values that underpin so much hip-hop—materialism, brand consciousness, gun iconography, anti-intellectualism —are

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[98] Miyakawa, 143.
[99] Hodge, 37.
[100] Ibid., 38.
[101] Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), viii.

> very much by-products of the larger American culture. Despite the "dangerous" edge of so much hip-hop culture, all of its most disturbing themes are rooted in this country's dysfunctional values. Anti-Semitism, racism, violence, and sexism are hardly unique to rap stars but are the most sinister aspects of the national character.[102]

There are differing perspectives on the nature of the spirituality of hip-hop culture. Hodge views this spirituality in a positive light with regards to its compatibility with Christianity:

> Hip-hop addresses the crisis of urban America and begins to seek spiritual answers connected to Jesus, while challenging the institutionalized church and questioning the centralization of power in pastors to bring about a higher involvement with God.[103]

Smith and Jackson, however, believe that "a relativist view of truth and God has developed and is seen clearly within hip-hop" spirituality. [104] They further explain that:

> You see a mixture of Islam, Christianity and New Age within hip-hop culture. Today we could very well be in a post-black church culture, as many in the African American urban community look to other places besides the black church for a sense of spiritual truth. Add to this the number of African and Asian immigrants coming to the cities of the United States, bringing with them other cultural values and religious beliefs outside of Christianity.[105]

While having a positive view of the compatibility of Christianity and hip-hop "theology," Hodge also points out that there are similarities between the beliefs of hip-hop culture and those of African American humanism. Hodge qualifies his observations to some degree: "I am not suggesting that Hip-Hop is entirely humanistic. However, humanism is not without some educational and theological positives."[106] Hodge identifies five themes from African American humanism that also find expression in Hip-hop culture:

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[102] Ibid., xiii.
[103] Hodge, 73.
[104] Smith, 108.
[105] Ibid., 110.
[106] Hodge, 24.

1. Humanity is understood to be fully (and solely) responsible for the human condition and the correction of its plight—especially as it pertains to social justice.
2. Supernatural claims and explanations are viewed with suspicion and even rejected.
3. Both religiosity and cultural production are seen as having importance, as opposed to an attitude of "just pray about it" or even worse, "just go to church."
4. Individual and societal transformation is a high commitment.
5. Human potential and humanity's capacity for destructiveness are both recognized, along with an openness to the notion that God might intervene, at times, in the lives of humans.[107]

Hodge also spends time in his book examining where hip-hop culture fits in with postmodernism. He writes that "modern social theory sought a universal, historical and rational foundation for its analysis and critique of society. Postmoderns have rejected such foundationalism and tend instead to be relativistic, nonrational and nihilistic."[108] Hodge adds "Russell Potter argues that Hip-Hop and rap were among the leading agents for postmodern culture to develop; indeed, rap was the music for the postmodern generation."[109] Hodge argues that "black gospel music set a liberating tone for not only Blacks but anyone in an oppressed context; Hip-Hop is its postmodern, urban equivalent, articulating liberation, authenticity and freedom from the shackles of modernity."[110]

Regarding the connection between hip-hop culture and postmodernism, Hodge asserts that "Hip-Hop has four key postmodern elements to it":

1. Restoration. The goal of Hip-Hop culture, especially in many spoken word venues, is that the authentic self be restored and built up from its broken state.
2. Self-awareness. For Hip-Hoppers, to be self-aware simply means to go deeper into who you are as a person while continually being transparent and open to new ideas.

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[107] Ibid., 24.
[108] Ibid., 66.
[109] Ibid., 67.
[110] Ibid., 25.

3. Power, control, and institutions. Hip-Hop continues to ask the question, "Whose authority/power/institution should we follow? And what makes them right?"
4. Recovering empty answers. Hip-Hop is about making some "right" in a world that is not "right."[111]

Smith and Jackson also point out common perspectives between hip-hop culture and postmodernism. They suggest that "these traits can help us draw some connections between it and urban culture: a culture of questioning everything, a culture where truth is relative, a culture where relationships mean more than institutions, a culture that values storytelling, and a culture of emotion and experience."[112]

Tommy Kyllonen is the pastor of the first church ever to specifically target the hip-hop culture. He serves as the lead pastor of Crossover Community Church in Tampa, Florida. In his ministry he has also observed common elements shared by both the hip-hop culture and postmodernism. Kyllonen writes:

> When I think about the hip-hop worldview, the spiritual aspect jumps out at me the most. I can't remember a time when I had to convince someone from hip-hop culture that God exists. Most of them consider themselves to be spiritual and believe there is a God. Which God or how many gods is where the dilemma comes in. The universal fifth element of hip-hop is known as knowledge or knowledge of self. I've heard some take this to a spiritual level and say they look inside themselves to find God. Many say they are Christians, as do several popular artists, but then they live however they want since they believe there are no absolute boundaries. Some people with ethnic backgrounds connect better culturally with Muslim beliefs, Five Percenters, or the Nation of Islam. These belief systems focus on their racial pride and the oppression they have faced. All three belief systems share allegiances to Allah and the Qur'an but vary on some details and the ethnic emphasis.[113]

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[111] Ibid., 68.
[112] Smith, 103.
[113] Tommy Kyllonen, *Un.Orthodox: Church. Hip-Hop. Culture.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 127.

What specific things about hip-hop culture are attractive to young African American men? How do they seek to have their core concerns addressed through hip-hop? Hodge offers insights into these questions:

> Hip-hop offers its adherents community and a voice—as well as, for many (including myself), a safe, productive alternative to the streets. Hip-hop transcends age, political status, socioeconomic status, social standings, even gender, offering an alternative source of identity and social status for young people in a community that has abandoned them. One interview subject told me that rap music helped him through nights in which he felt lost and abandoned by all, including "church folk."[114]

While hip-hop culture appeals to youth of all ethnicities and social classes, there is a particular identification with African American males. Hodge points out:

> The Black male image and Black youth are the foundational piece to Hip-Hop culture when it emerged within the inner city. Hip-Hop has embraced many different ethnicities, but overall, the Black image, particularly the Black male persona, is still referred to when Hip-Hop culture is discussed.[115]

The genre of hip-hop music known as "gangsta rap" seems to resonate most significantly with the core concerns of young African American males, especially those in urban contexts. Miyakawa defines this type of rap music as "a type of conscious or reality rap with west-coast origins. Gangsta rap differs from black nationalist rap in that the former tends to address the "reality" of ghetto life (including frequent references to guns, gangs, and illegal drugs), while the latter looks more to social issues (such as racism, illiteracy, and drug and alcohol abuse) for lyrical inspiration."[116]

On the nature of gangsta rap and its use of expression of the experiences of young African American urban males, Dyson writes:

> But before we discard the genre, we should understand that gangsta rap often reaches higher than its ugliest, lowest common denominator. Misogyny, violence,

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[114] Hodge, 42.
[115] Ibid., 59.
[116] Miyakawa, 143.

> materialism, and sexual transgression are not its exclusive domain. At its best, this music draws attention to complex dimensions of ghetto life ignored by many Americans. Of all the genres of hip-hop—from socially conscious rap to black nationalist expressions, from pop to hardcore—gangsta rap has most aggressively narrated the pains and possibilities, the fantasies and fears, of poor black urban youth.[117]

The hip-hop culture seems to have found a greater level of acceptance in other religions outside of Christianity and outside the structure of the local church. Hodge points out that "the Nation of Islam has embraced the Hip-Hop culture and has provided the needed room for it to grow in its religious traditions."[118] He adds that "from the onset, there was opposition to Hip-Hop from the church. The Nation of Islam and the Five Percenters, by contrast, offered Hip-Hop a warmer reception and have since been shown appreciation in lyrics from artists such as Common, Nas, and Tupac."[119]

Why may the church have struggled with connecting with the hip-hop generation? Smith and Jackson believe "the absence of teaching about the humanity of Jesus hinders hip-hop heads, as they assume that Christianity does not connect to real life."[120] They write further on the need to preach and teach on the humanity of Christ:

> If there is not solid teaching on the humanity of Christ, we see him as a God who is supposed to fix stuff in our life but not a God who can emphathize with temptation we face. This failure in the church's teaching of Christ makes more attractive hip-hop's claim to the physical, mental and emotional toll of life with self-knowledge, as well as the Black Muslims' confrontation of life challenges and social issues. Again, this is one reason hip-hop doesn't always fit in with the church: the church tends to skirt the issues brought up by hip-hop.[121]

Nihilism is the final topic to be examined in considering alternatives young African American males in urban contexts turn to in seeking to have their core concerns

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[117] Dyson, 184-185.
[118] Hodge, 184.
[119] Ibid., 42-43.
[120] Smith, 126.
[121] Ibid., 126.

addressed. What is nihilism? First of all, it is a particular worldview. Ellis notes that a worldview seeks to answer seven basic questions:

1. What is really real?
2. What is the nature of the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right or wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?[122]

Ellis defines the nihilistic worldview as "a total rejection of established laws and traditions. It is a belief that all existence is senseless and that there is no possibility of an objective basis for truth. It also is a denial that anything is valuable."[123]

The Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes nihilism as "the philosophical doctrine suggesting the negation of one or more meaningful aspects of life. Most commonly, nihilism is presented in the form of existential nihilism which argues that life is without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value."[124] The authors add that "the term nihilism is sometimes used in association with anomie to explain the general mood of despair at a perceived pointlessness of existence that one may develop upon realizing there are no necessary norms, rules, or laws."[125]

In Dyson's *Between God and Gangsta Rap*, he shares the text of a personal testimony he gave before the presiding judge in the murder trial of his older brother. In the speech, Dyson attempted to draw out some of the sociological factors that bred a sense of nihilism in his brother, leading to his involvement in crime:

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[122] Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: From 'I Have a Dream' to 'Sagging Pants'— an Analysis of the Current African American Cultural Crisis", 50.
[123] Ibid., 50.
[124] Alan Pratt, "The Dark Side: Thoughts on the Futility of Life," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Donald Borchert, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA and Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 5:514.
[125] Ibid., 5:514.

> I understand the societal forces—such as poverty and joblessness and structural unemployment and limited social options and opportunities for legitimate employment—that many people of our culture, particularly black men, face. It is also ironic that I'm here because I write in my professional life about … social forces which often leave young black men feeling they have no other options but to engage in … criminal activity in order to sustain their lives. Unfortunately many make that choice.
>
> I grew up in the urban poverty of Detroit, as did the other members of my family. Therefore I understand not only from a scholarly viewpoint, but from a personal viewpoint, limited life options and the kind of hopelessness and social despair they can breed in a person.[126]

Dyson is not alone in sensing the effects of nihilism in the African American urban context. Hodge quotes Harvard scholar and renowned speaker Cornel West on the influence of this kind of philosophy on youth culture. Hodge writes that West "sees a powerful current of nihilism among youth in the inner city. Some young people have already dismissed life as of no value; consequently, death is welcomed as better than what is in front of them."[127]

Ellis terms the nihilism that is present in the urban African American context as "ghetto nihilism" or "thug spirituality." He writes that "thug spirituality is a manifestation of nihilism that became a major cultural influence in the mid-1980s. The 'thug' has become the ideal for many Black youth. It represents for many a way of living ('thug life') and even a social vision."[128] Ellis points to popular rap artists as the primary propagators of the nihilistic worldview. He describes "gangsta rap" as "the voice of ghetto nihilism."[129]

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[126] Dyson, 8-9.
[127] Hodge, 91.
[128] Carl F. Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: From 'I Have a Dream' to 'Sagging Pants'— an Analysis of the Current African American Cultural Crisis" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford Graduate School, 2010), 55.
[129] Ibid., 72.

Rap artist Tupac Shakur, murdered in 1996, is seen by Ellis as one of the most influential cultural figures. Ellis says that Shakur "was for the hip-hop generation what Malcolm X was for the baby-boomers. While Malcolm articulated cultural core concerns related to empowerment, Tupac articulated cultural and personal core concerns related to dysfunctionality."[130] Ellis believes that with the release in 1991 of Tupac's first solo CD, he became "the leading interpreter of the ghetto nihilistic worldview."[131]

What are some distinctive elements of the ghetto nihilism worldview? Ellis writes that "ghetto nihilism itself is a strong and toxic culture that intimidates residents of the 'hood'—a culture of non-achieverism, victimology, dysfunctionality, dependence, helplessness, hopelessness, and death."[132]

Dr. R. Elliott Greene, an Associate Professor of Biblical and Practical Theology at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, Texas, gives insightful commentary on the nature of ghetto nihilism:

> The recipe for ghetto nihilism is simple. As a base, start with original sin, then mix in disenfranchisement, racism, poverty, drugs, violence and general lawlessness. Next carefully blend in an adequate amount of federally funded pity that induces communal lethargy and immobility. Bake at the intense heat of everyday existence in this harsh oven of sin, then top it all off with a glaze of music that valorizes a sinful addiction to the ghetto life, and the result of this toxic recipe is something called "ghetto nihilism."
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> Of course the word "ghetto" serves as a synonym for slum. Nihilism is the rejection of all religious and moral principles, often believing that life (itself) is meaningless, or philosophically defined, it is skepticism maintaining that nothing in the world has real existence. Put these two words together and an interesting syntagm is formed. The term "ghetto nihilism" means the idea that sex, drugs, booze, and bling constitutes the good life; that violence is the way to deal with challenge; that the oppression forced on them by whites, real or imagined, is the only thing holding them back from achieving their desires; and that authority is always to be despised and resisted.

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[130] Ibid., 55.
[131] Ibid., 55.
[132] Ibid., 69.

> Ghetto nihilism intoxicates and molds its subjects into its schema in a radically systemic way. Although the neighborhoods where this genre of life dwells sit in the midst of American prosperity in the land of opportunity, ghetto nihilism convinces its subjects and converts to reject opportunity and achievement and adopt a non-achievement mentality. Effort and a work ethic, in the traditional sense, have no place in its platform. Decades of despair brought on by lack of opportunity, resources and human capital have finally socially engineered a community made in the image of futility, and ironically thoroughly soaked in an angry hubris.[133]

Despite the formidable challenge posed by ghetto nihilism in capturing the hearts of young African American males in urban contexts, Greene is optimistic that the people of God, preaching and living out the good news, can impact this culture.

> Ghetto nihilism poses a great danger both for people who live in the "hood," and for the broader society that is being morphed by gangsta rap. For Christians, the concern is not just that such a philosophy of life makes America a worse place to live, but because fatalistic self-indulgence constitutes a hindrance to the gospel and a life that pleases God. For the church, the thug life is a missions opportunity, to seek praise for God from the likes of those seemingly hardened like granite in their sin.
>
> The hardness of heart need not be the basis for evangelistic despair, for the Bible teaches ... that God has demonstrated his great power and love through the election of such souls. The people of God need only be faithful with the good news, for how will they believe if no one preaches to them? (Romans 10:14)[134]

Young African American males in urban contexts have core concerns of empowerment, significance, dignity, and identity. Many of these young men have turned to other alternatives, outside the church and the gospel of Jesus Christ, to have their core concerns addressed. The alternatives of secularism, the Nation of Islam, the Five Percenters' sect, Hip-hop culture, and nihilism have been considered. These all provide great challenges to preachers who are attempting to preach Christ to these men in ways

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[133] Ibid., 69-70.
[134] Ibid., 92.

that address their core concerns. The next section will examine the subject of Christ-centered preaching, beginning with a review of biblical and theological materials.

Christ-Centered Preaching

Biblical Theological Review

Saying that preaching is Christ-centered means, first of all, that Jesus Christ is the content of preaching. This idea does not refer exclusively to preaching sermons on the Gospel texts. The proper text for preaching Christ is the whole Bible. This was an idea taught by Jesus Himself. In an exchange with Jewish opponents regarding Jesus' treatment of the Sabbath and calling God His Father, Jesus gave challenging testimony about his relation to the Scriptures: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."[135] The notes about these verses from the English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible comment that, "the study of Scripture does not by itself impart life. The Scriptures rather bear witness to the One who gives life, namely Jesus."[136]

Jesus also pointed to Himself as the content of preaching in a post-resurrection appearance with two of his disciples. Walking together with these men along the road to Emmaus, Jesus revealed His previously hidden identity to these disciples and engaged them in the ultimate Bible study. Gospel writer Luke reported that "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."[137] "Moses and all the Prophets" was a way of describing the whole Old Testament. So what Jesus was doing was pointing to the whole of the Old Testament

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[135] John 5:39-40.
[136] *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2032.
[137] Luke 24:47.

in speaking about him. The ESV Study Bible notes, "Jesus explained to them how not only the explicit prophecies about the Messiah but also the historical patterns of God's activity again and again throughout the OT looked forward to Jesus himself."[138] Later in Luke 24, the author added that Jesus taught this lesson to the rest of his disciples: "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."[139] The ESV Study Bible comments on this verse:

> When the Bible says that "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45), it cannot mean just a few scattered predictions about the Messiah. It means the OT as a whole, encompassing all three of the major divisions of the OT that the Jews traditionally recognized. At the heart of understand all these OT books is the truth that they point forward to the suffering of Christ, his resurrection, and the subsequent spread of the gospel to "all nations" (Luke 24:47). The OT as a whole, through its promises, its symbols, and its pictures of salvation, looks forward to the actual accomplishment of salvation that took place once-for-all in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[140]

Author and Westminster Seminary (California) professor Dennis Johnson challenges preachers in light of Jesus' words in Luke 24: "Preachers who believe in the gospel revealed through the apostles should proclaim that gospel in the light of Christ's fulfillment of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings."[141]

After Jesus' ascension, the apostles continued to affirm in their ministry that Christ was the content of their preaching. Regarding the nature of his preaching, the Apostle Paul shared with the church in Corinth that, "when I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about

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[138] *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, 2013.
[139] Luke 24:44-45.
[140] *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, 23.
[141] Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 12.

God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."[142] In the Corinthian context, which placed a high value on skillful rhetoric, Paul didn't want to preach in a way that took the focus off of Christ. The ESV Study Bible notes comment that "Paul avoided Greek rhetoric and focused on the message of the cross, so that the Corinthians would put their faith in Christ who was crucified rather than in the ability of human messengers."[143]

David Prior, a former pastor and a commentator on 1 Corinthians writes of Paul that "he made a conscious, deliberate and determined decision to abandon any natural or worldly wisdom, and to concentrate on Jesus Christ and him crucified."[144] This does not mean, however, that Paul only preached sermons on the crucifixion. Craig Blomberg, a distinguished professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, comments on 1 Corinthians 1:2, "verse 2 cannot be taken absolutely as if the only doctrine Paul taught on was the crucifixion but refers rather to its centrality in his preaching."[145]

Paul's Christ-centered focus is evident also in the letter to the Colossians. After a lengthy description of the supremacy of Christ, Paul simply states "we proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."[146] Commenting on this verse, F.F. Bruce, one of the most respected New Testament scholars in the world, explains:

> This Christ, whose life flows in all his people, is the one whom the apostle and his associates proclaim. He is the sum and substance of their message, whether in the

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[142] 1 Corinthians 2:1-2.
[143] *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, 2194.
[144] David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 1985), 49.
[145] Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 54.
[146] Colossians 1:28.

> saving news which they announce in the world to bring men and women to faith, or in the teaching which they impart to those who have believed.[147]

The book of Acts provides many helpful examples of preaching Christ. One such illustration is Philip's ministry with an Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Philip was led by the Holy Spirit within earshot of the eunuch reading a passage of Scripture from the Old Testament, Isaiah 53:7-8 to be exact. Perplexed by the meaning of this text, the eunuch asked Philip to explain the identity of the subject in the Isaiah passage. The writer of Acts tells us, "Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."[148] Regarding this passage, Michael Green, respected author and senior research fellow at Oxford University, writes:

> And don't you love the way Philip majors on the person of Jesus? "Beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news of Jesus" (8:35). What other good news is there, but Jesus incarnate, Jesus crucified for us, Jesus alive and inviting us to come and follow him?[149]

The sermons in the book of Acts serve as good practical examples of Christ-centered preaching. These messages vary greatly in their listening audiences; some of the sermons are preached to predominately Jewish audiences, some primarily to Greeks, some given in households, and others given before Roman courts. But despite the difference in the makeup of the hearers, it was Christ who was preached. The words taken from Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch summarize the nature of the preaching throughout Acts: "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent."[150] The "message of salvation" is what is consistent throughout. In Dennis Johnson's book, *The Message of Acts in the History of*

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[147] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 86.
[148] Acts 8:35.
[149] Michael Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 138.
[150] Acts 13:26.

Redemption, he notes four common themes present in all the preaching in the book of Acts: Jesus the Messiah has brought the promised kingdom, Jesus the Messiah bestows the blessings of the kingdom, Jesus the Messiah will return to deliver and to judge, and the call to repent and trust in the name of Jesus.[151] Green also has identified key themes in the preaching of the ministers in Acts: they adopted a flexible approach, they concentrated on the person of Jesus, they offered a gift, and they expected a response.[152] The preachers in the early church knew that Jesus Christ is the content of truly Christ-centered preaching.

Christ-centered preaching also means that not only does Jesus serve as the content, but that He also provides the enablement. Paul writes of his preaching ministry in Corinth, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."[153]

In fact, the book of Acts opens with Jesus, just prior to his ascension, instructing his disciples on the necessity of the Holy Spirit for the ministry he had called them to: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[154] Green comments on this verse:

> The Spirit and the church belong together, but it is noteworthy in Acts that the Spirit always takes the lead. The church can only live by evangelizing, and by following the paths that the Spirit indicates. It was not the church leaders who decided on an evangelistic campaign. It was an ex-Pharisee, converted through

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[151] Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 143-151.
[152] Green, 77-88.
[153] 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.
[154] Acts 1:8.

> opposing them, who was the main agent in that outreach under the prompting and the power of the sovereign Spirit of God.[155]

On the importance of Christ enabling the preacher, renowned Christ-centered preacher, Ed Clowney, writes that "gospel preaching presents Jesus Christ. Preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit is preaching in the presence of Jesus."[156] Describing being reminded of his need to preach in the power of Christ himself, Clowney adds, "I had to learn again that my salvation comes, not by my grip on him, but by his grip on me. The Lord saves us by the wonder of his own personal presence with us. So it is with preaching."[157]

Eswine asks a challenging question: "Does our approach to preaching reflect our active dependence upon the Holy Spirit?"[158] He adds that "preaching in a post-everything world must regain the conviction that if greatly improved quality of preaching is to be experienced in our time, it will stem from the renewing power and presence of the Holy Spirit."[159]

The Meaning of Christ-Centered Preaching

What does it mean that a sermon is Christ-centered? Chapell instructs that "Christ-centered preaching, rightly understood, does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ."[160] In an article for *Presbyterian Review* on the future of expository preaching, he explains that "the term 'Christ-centered' is synecdoche for the matrix of ways in which God discloses

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[155] Green, 254.
[156] Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 45.
[157] Ibid., 589.
[158] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 246.
[159] Ibid., 246.
[160] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 279.

his redeeming nature and work, including the revelation of false hopes and forward hints that make his people long for, recognize and worship their Redeemer."[161] Chapell also says that "a message is Christ-centered not because it makes a creative mention of an aspect of Jesus' life or death but because it discloses an aspect of God's redeeming nature (evident in the text) that is ultimately understood, fulfilled, and/or accomplished in Christ."[162] Finally, in another helpful distinction, Chapell adds, "Christ-centered preaching is not merely evangelistic, nor is it confined to a few gospel accounts. It perceives the whole of Scripture as revelatory of God's redemptive plan and sees every passage within this context—a pattern Jesus himself introduced (Luke 24:27)."[163]

Sidney Greidanus, professor of preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, writes both on what Christ-centered preaching is and what it isn't. Regarding preaching Christ, Greidanus explains that "to preach Christ is to proclaim some facet of the person, work, or teaching of Jesus of Nazareth so that people may believe him, trust him, love him, and obey him"[164] Clarifying what Christ-centered preaching "isn't," Greidanus adds:

> Preaching Christ is not, of course, merely mentioning the name of Jesus or Christ in the sermon. It is not identifying Christ with Yahweh in the Old Testament, or the Angel of Yahweh, or the Commander of the Lord's army, or the Wisdom of God. It is not simply pointing to Christ from a distance or "drawing lines to Christ" by way of typology.[165]

In an earlier work, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, Greidanus described Christ-centered preaching in this way:

> Christocentric preaching is the preaching of God's acts from the perspective of the New Testament. In other words, Christocentric preaching requires that a

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[161] Bryan Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," *Presbyterion* 30, no. 2 (2004): 73.
[162] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 15.
[163] Ibid., 40.
[164] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament : A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 8.
[165] Ibid., 8.

> passage receive a theocentric interpretation not only in its own (Old Testament) horizon but also in the broader horizon of the whole canon. In this way one can do justice to two sets of biblical testimonies: on the one hand, Christ as the eternal Logos is present and active in Old Testament times, and, on the other hand, Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.[166]

Clowney was a preeminent teacher on the connection between preaching Christ and biblical theology. In his work, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, he asserts, "not only do the four Gospels tell the story of Jesus. So do the five books of Moses, who gave God's promise of the Prophet to come. So does the rest of the Old Testament."[167] In an earlier work, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, Clowney instructs:

> Biblical theology serves to center preaching on its essential message: Jesus Christ. Preaching must be theological. Salvation is of the Lord, and the message of the gospel is the theocentric message of the unfolding of the plan of God for our salvation in Jesus Christ. He who would preach the Word must preach Christ.[168]

Another scholar who has contributed much to the teaching of Christ-centered preaching is Alec Motyer, a veteran pastor, Old Testament editor, and former principal of Trinity College. In his book, *Look to the Rock*, Motyer explores the unity of the Bible as it is expressed in what he sees as its central theme: Jesus Christ. Regarding the Christ-centeredness of not only preaching but the Bible itself, Motyer writes

> There is an old jingle which is certainly simple and verges on the simplistic, but our forebears were fundamentally right when they taught that: the Old Testament is Jesus predicted; the Gospels are Jesus revealed; Acts is Jesus preached; the Epistles, Jesus explained; and the Revelation, Jesus expected. He is the climax as well as the substance and centre of the whole. In him all God's promises are yea and amen (2 Cor. 1:20).[169]

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[166] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text : Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 119.
[167] Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture,* 9.
[168] Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 74.
[169] J. A. Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 22.

Dennis Johnson, academic dean and professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary in California, has also contributed to the understanding of Christ-centered preaching. In his recent book on preaching, *Him We Proclaim*, Johnson argues for the importance of understanding that Christ-centered preaching is not merely holding up Jesus as our example. Johnson writes:

> Apostolic preaching must be Christ-centered. Yet, Christ-centeredness in preaching must not be reduced to portraying Jesus as example, to the neglect of the good news in which Peter's exhortation is embedded: "Christ also suffered for you … He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:21, 24). To focus on Jesus as example is to reduce him from sovereign Savior to ethical coach, and to transform his gospel into law.[170]

Graeme Goldsworthy, author and lecturer in Old Testament, biblical theology, and hermeneutics at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, is also a noted proponent of Christ-centered preaching. His book, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, which teaches pastors how to apply a consistently Christ-centered approach to each of their sermons, was awarded the Preaching magazine Book of Year award in 2000. Goldsworthy writes, "That the whole Bible testifies to Christ is what we mean when we say that Christ is in all the Scriptures. It is because of this that the preacher must ask the question of every sermon, 'Did the sermon show how the text testifies to Christ?'"[171]

Goldsworthy is concerned to help pastors and students learn to craft and preach Christ-centered sermons that do not fall into the trap of what he calls "the Jesus bit." He relates a story about a Sunday school teacher who was concerned that the children she was teaching were becoming bored with her lessons.

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[170] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, 15.
[171] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 138.

> She decided on a new tack to try to rectify matters. The next Sunday, once the preliminaries were over, she stood before the class of five-year olds and asked, "Who can tell me what is gray and furry and lives in a Gum tree?" The children were completely taken by surprise by this totally unexpected and new approach. They thought there must be a catch and stared blankly at the teacher. "Come on," she coaxed, "someone must know. What is gray, furry, lives in a Gum tree – has a black leathery nose and beady eyes?" Still no answer. "Oh, surely you know." She was nonplussed by this reticence. "It lives in a Gum tree; eats Gum leaves; it has big beady eyes and furry ears." Silence. She was about to switch tactics and to go on to something else when a small girl gradually raised her hand in the air with much hesitation. Delighted, the teacher asked, "Yes, Suzie?" The child replied, "I know it's Jesus, but it sounds like a Koala!"[172]

Goldworthy's concern was that in an effort to not fall into moralistic interpretations in preaching on Old Testament narratives, some were falling into a predictable pattern of including "the Jesus bit" in their sermons. His book helps preachers and students legitimately point to Christ as the fulfillment of all of Scripture. He encourages his students in their biblical interpretation to always ask "how does this text testify to Christ?"[173] Goldsworthy asks a rhetorical question of his readers, "Can I preach this sermon, lead this study, discuss the meaning of the daily Bible reading, without mentioning Jesus?"[174] He answers that question himself:

> The simple answer, based on the principles discussed thus far, is a resounding "NO!" No Bible passage yields its true significance without reference to Jesus Christ in his gospel. That is so basic that I sometimes wonder why we even need to raise the question. However, the strategy we use may differ from situation to situation.[175]

In communicating the importance of preachers understanding the meaning of Christ-centered preaching, Goldsworthy challenges:

> To the evangelical preacher, then, I would address one simple but pointed question, a question every one of us should ask ourselves as we prepare to preach (and certainly the answer should be crystal clear in our minds before we get up to

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[172] Ibid., xi.
[173] Ibid., 122.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

> preach): How does this passage of Scripture, and consequently my sermon, testify to Christ?[176]

The Necessity of Christ-Centered Preaching

With regards to the necessity of preaching Christ-centered messages, Chapell cautions that "unless we identify the redemptive purposes of a text, it is possible to say all the right words and yet send all the wrong signals."[177] Chapell adds that "preaching that is not Christ-centered ultimately promotes a faith that is not of Christ, even if it thinks of itself as Christian."[178] To illustrate this point, Chapell shares his experience from seminary classes when he had students listen to a preacher on a local radio station in his area:

> I have played tapes of these meditations to seminary classes and asked if anyone can discern error. Rarely does anyone spot a problem. The speaker quotes from the Bible accurately, he advocates moral causes, and he encourages local behaviors. Thus, students are usually astonished when I point out that the radio preacher is not a Christian. He actually represents a large cult located in our region.[179]

Chapell points out that "the radio speaker has not hidden his heresy; he exposes it every time he speaks by what is missing from his message."[180] Chapell's greater concern is that he believes many evangelical preachers give sermons that are not all that different from the cult speaker. He writes:

> A message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian even if the preacher can prove that the Bible demands such behaviors ... But a message that even inadvertently teaches others that their works merit God's acceptance inevitably leads people away from the gospel ... Preaching, when truly Christian, is distinctive. And what makes it distinctive is the all-pervading presence of a saving and sanctifying Christ ... All edificational preaching, to be Christian, must fully take into consideration God's grace in salvation and in

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[176] Ibid., 21.
[177] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 273.
[178] Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," 79.
[179] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 273.
[180] Ibid.

> sanctification … Exhortations for moral behavior apart from the work of the Savior degenerate into mere Pharisaism, even if preachers advocate the actions with selected biblical evidence and good intent.[181]

In emphasizing the necessity of Christ-centered preaching, Chapell warns of what he calls "The Deadly Be's."[182] He says that these messages "exhort believers to strive to 'be' something in order to be loved by God."[183] He does not accuse preachers of preaching "be" messages intentionally but writes, "what they do not see is the erosion of hope they cause weekly by preaching messages biblical in origin but not biblically complete."[184] Chapell divides these "Deadly Be's" into the sermon categories of "Be Like," "Be Good," and "Be Disciplined."[185] "Be Like" messages, Chapell writes, "focus the attention of listeners on the accomplishments of a particular biblical character."[186] Regarding these kinds of messages, he adds:

> The commendable aspects of biblical characters function in Scripture like aspects of God's law: They are necessary to know, proper to follow, and are the instruments of God's blessings in our lives. But these same righteous standards become spiritually deadly when they are perceived or honored as the basis of God's acceptance.[187]

Chapel writes of "Be Good" sermons that "similar to focusing on biographies apart from enabling grace is an emphasis on behaviors alone that also results in nonredemptive messages … Again the problem often lies not in what preachers say but in what they fail to say."[188] He further states that:

> Evangelical preaching that implies we are saved by grace but kept by our obedience not only undermines the work of God in sanctification but ultimately casts doubt on the nature of God … The natural tendency of all believers is to

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[181] Ibid., 274.
[182] Ibid., 289.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., 289-292.
[186] Ibid., 289.
[187] Ibid., 290.
[188] Ibid., .291.

> base our estimation of our justification on our personal progress in sanctification.[189]

"Be Disciplined" messages, according to Chapell, are similar to those of the "Be Good" classification. He adds that "close kin to 'be good' messages are sermons that exhort believers to improve their relationship with God through more diligent use of the means of grace."[190]

Eswine warns of similar dangers that he terms as "moralism" and "simplism." Eswine explains that "simplism refers to the simpleton described in the wisdom literature of the Bible. The simpleton is one who 'lacks sense' regarding life."[191] Eswine likens moralism to the idea of following the "theology" of the Christmas song, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." "Moralism" explains Eswine, "says that God is watching, making a list, and noticing who is bad or good. To be good, therefore, is to muster one's strength, try hard, and overcome in order to gain a spot on God's 'good' list and gain presents as a reward."[192] Eswine summarizes the challenges of simplism and moralism to Christ-centered preaching:

> In contrast to the gospel, both moralism and simplism conspire to reduce dependence upon God. Simplism fosters self-dependence by reducing complexity. Reality is made manageable. Consequently, simplism overestimates our ability to offer answers to reality. Moralism fosters self-dependence by reducing morality. Moralism is made manageable by human effort. Both make the fundamental error of unconsciously assuming "that one can go back to the Father apart from the Son."[193]

Chapell adds the threat of religious pluralism as another reason for the necessity of Christ-centered preaching. He believes that "the greatest threat to orthodox faith in our

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[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid., 292.
[191] Eswine, 38-39.
[192] Ibid., 54.
[193] Ibid.

lifetime is and will be religious pluralism: the presumption that because all truth is relative, all worship essentially the same God."[194] Chapell also connects this religious pluralism with moralism:

> We feed this pluralism whenever our preaching reduces Scripture to mere moral or behavioral instruction. Jay Adams boldly makes the following point: "If you preach a sermon that would be acceptable to the member of a Jewish synagogue or to a Unitarian congregation, there is something radically wrong with it."[195]

Goldsworthy also is adamant about the necessity of Christ-centered preaching. He writes that "every sermon, to be biblical, must include Jesus."[196] He challenges:

> Any sermon, then, that aims to apply the biblical text to the congregation and does so without making it crystal clear that it is in Christ alone and through Christ alone that the application is realized, is not a Christian sermon. It is at best an exercise in wishful and pietistic thinking. It is at worst demonic in its Christ-denying legalism.[197]

Michael Horton, author and professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California, has recently written a provocative book, *Christless Christianity,* concerning what he views as a shift in the American church to a watered-down version of the gospel. He emphasizes a return to Christ-centered preaching as one of the solutions to this problem. In writing of the causes of "Christless Christianity" and the necessity of Christ-centered preaching, Horton explains:

> It is easy to become distracted form Christ as the only hope for sinners. Where everything is measured by our happiness rather than by God's holiness, the sense of our being sinners becomes secondary, if not offensive. If we are good people who have lost our way but with the proper instructions and motivation can become a better person, we need only a life coach, not a redeemer. We can still give our ascent to a high view of Christ and the centrality of his person and work,

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[194] Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," 78.
[195] Ibid., 78.
[196] Goldsworthy, 123.
[197] Ibid., 124.

> but in actual practice we are being distracted from "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).[198]

Horton's argument is that the American church is drifting towards being more human-centered than Christ-centered. He contends that preaching is one of the primary places where this is being communicated. Horton writes:

> Let me be a little more precise about what I am assuming to be the regular diet in many churches across America today: "do more, try harder." I think that this is the pervasive message across the spectrum today. It can be exhibited in an older, more conservative form, with a recurring emphasis on moral absolutes and warnings about falling into the pit of worldliness that can often make one wonder whether we are saved through fear rather than faith ... At the same time, more liberal bodies could be just as shrill with their "do more, try harder" list on the left and their weekly calls to action rather than clear proclamation of Christ.[199]

On the importance of preaching Christ-centered messages in the midst of this environment, Horton summarizes:

> Preaching is central, not because we value the intellect to the exclusion of the emotions and the will, but because it is God's action rather than our own. The God who accomplished our salvation now delivers it to us.[200]

The Method of Christ-Centered Preaching

The preferred method for preaching Christ-centered sermons is "expository," which is distinguished from "topical" or "textual" sermons. A topical sermon takes its theme or main subject from a passage, but the sermon is organized according to the subject's nature rather than according to the text's distinctions. In textual messages, preachers glean the topic of a sermon and the main points from ideas in the text, but the development of those main ideas comes from sources outside the immediate text. An expository sermon derives its meaning, main points, and implications for the present day

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[198] Michael Scott Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2008), 15-16.
[199] Ibid., 17.
[200] Ibid., 218.

directly from the text itself. Chapell defines an expository messages as, " a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text."[201] Put more simply, "the meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon."[202]

Greidanus notes that there seems to be some confusion about the meaning of "expository preaching." He believes that this misunderstanding has arisen because "some homileticians brought confusion into the terminology when they contrasted the category of 'expository preaching' not only with the category of 'topical preaching' but also with that of 'textual preaching.'[203] Greidanus fears that "the term expository preaching has lost its original, plain meaning—'to exposit the Word of God.'"[204] Greidanus thus gives his own definition of the meaning of expository preaching: "Expository preaching is 'Bible-centered preaching.' 'Expository preaching' is more than a mere synonym for biblical preaching; it describes what is involved in biblical preaching, namely, the exposition of a biblical passage (or passages)."[205]

Longtime preacher and teacher of preachers, Haddon Robinson proposes the following as a definition of expository preaching:

> Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage

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[201] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 31.
[202] Ibid., 32.
[203] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, 10.
[204] Ibid., 11.
[205] Ibid.

> in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.[206]

Goldsworthy also recognizes that defining what is meant by expository preaching can also be somewhat elusive. His simple definition is that "expository preaching is essentially the practice of explaining the meaning of a passage of Scripture."[207] Goldsworthy is hesitant to follow the suggestion of some scholars to drop the term "expository" in favor of "biblical" preaching. His reasoning is thus:

> Most would agree, though some preachers seem to be slow to learn, that an expository sermon is not merely an exegetical exercise. The nature of the sermon is to apply the word of God to the wills of the hearers with a view of moving them to want to conform to that word. Exegesis is an important aspect of preparation of any sermon, but exegesis is not the sermon.[208]

Author of *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, Steve Mathewson, agrees with Goldsworthy that "exposition is more than an exegetical lecture."[209] Mathewson is a senior pastor as well as an instructor in preaching and Old Testament studies at Montana Bible College. He writes that expository preaching is preaching "that exposes the meaning of a text of Scripture and applies that meaning to the lives of the hearers."[210]

Another advocate of expository preaching is renowned preacher and scholar John Stott. He describes his view of the meaning and importance of expository preaching in his best-selling preaching book, *Between Two Worlds*:

> It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching. Of course if by an "expository" sermon [one means] a verse-by-verse explanation of a lengthy passage of Scripture, then indeed it is only one possible way of preaching, but this would be a misuse of the word. Properly speaking,

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[206] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 20.
[207] Goldsworthy, 120.
[208] Ibid., 121.
[209] Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 21.
[210] Ibid., 21.

> "exposition" has a much broader meaning. It refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view ... In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.[211]

John Bohannon, an authority on preaching and church planting and an adjunct professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, has written a book entitled *Preaching and the Emergent Church,* which analyzes the preaching philosophies of four leading figures in the emergent church movement. One of the leaders he examines is Mark Driscoll, pastor of a fast-growing church in Seattle, Washington. Driscoll is committed to expository preaching. Describing Driscoll's belief in expository preaching, Bohannon writes:

> Driscoll, desiring to exalt Jesus as the hero of the message, exhorts expositional preaching as the primary means by which to accomplish this goal. By definition, expository preaching seeks to expose and explain the original meaning of the text with the preacher having placed himself under, not over, the text...Driscoll holds that one of the benefits to expository preaching is that "it forces the authority to reside in the text and not the teacher."[212]

In making a case for the use of expository preaching, Chapell points out that "the ethic of expository preaching is plain: because we believe that the power of spiritual transformation resides in the Word of God, the goal of the preacher is to say what God says."[213] Further defining the goal of expository preaching, Chapell adds that "the goal of expository preaching that has a future is to preach him—regularly, pervasively, truly—from all the Scriptures."[214]

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[211] John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 1st American ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 125-126.
[212] John S. Bohannon, *Preaching and the Emerging Church: A Homiletical Analysis and Critique of a Select Number of Emerging Church Pastors—Mark Driscoll, Dan Kimball, Brian Mclaren, and Doug Pagitt—with Contemporary Implications for Evangelical (Expository) Preaching* (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace, 2010), 138-139.
[213] Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," 65.
[214] Ibid., p. 80.

Greidanus summarizes the benefit of expository preaching, as opposed to other forms: "the outstanding characteristic of expository preaching is that it uses the Bible as the source for its preaching; it seeks to give an exposition of a biblical passage."[215] Greidanus specifies benefits he believes the local church receives from expository preaching:

> First, expository preaching causes the Scriptures to be heard in church, thus enabling the members to gain an understanding of the Scriptures. Second, more so than topical preaching, expository preaching gives the hearers a measure of assurance that they are hearing the word of God. Finally, expository preaching aids the critical functioning of the church since it provides the hearers with textual limits for testing the spoken word against the written word; thus the hearers can decide more responsibly whether a message deserves acceptance.[216]

Stott also finds several benefits in expository preaching. He regards the principal benefits of expository preaching as setting appropriate limits, demanding integrity, identifying the pitfalls preachers must at all costs avoid, and giving pastors the confidence to preach.[217]

In addition to Christ-centered preaching being expository, it is also approached from a redemptive-historical perspective. Chapell explains that "the process of interpreting the redemptive truth evident throughout biblical history is known as the redemptive-historical method."[218] Clowney describes this form of preaching in the following way:

> Preaching Christ from the Old Testament means that we preach, not synagogue sermons, but sermons that take account of the full drama of redemption, and its realization in Christ. To see the text in relation to Christ is to see it in its larger context, the context of God's purpose in revelation.[219]

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[215] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, 15.
[216] Ibid., 16.
[217] Stott, 126-132.
[218] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 306.
[219] Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 11.

On the importance of this redemptive-historical perspective to expository preaching, Goldsworthy writes:

> Expository preaching can only proceed if it places the text into the salvation-historical context so that its inter-textual relationships can be seen. Without a sense of this unifying structure in salvation history the Bible becomes fragmented and the road from text to hearer is a matter of the preacher's intuition, preference, or prejudice.[220]

Johnson also advocates the redemptive-historical perspective in preaching Christ-centered sermons.

> Redemptive-historical hermeneutics, therefore, offer a framework for preaching Christ from all the Scriptures (cf. Luke 24:44-49) in a way that treats each text's and epoch's distinctiveness with integrity and at the same time does justice to the progressively unfolding clarity by which God sustained his people's hopes for the redemption that has now arrived in Jesus.[221]

Applying this method specifically to the preaching of narrative texts, Johnson notes that "redemptive-historical preachers oppose the moralistic, particularly the exemplaristic, preaching of biblical historical narratives."[222] Finally, he explains that "the purpose of Old Testament historical narrative is not to teach moral lessons, but to trace the work of God, the Savior of his people, whose redeeming presence among them reaches its climactic expression in Christ's incarnation."[223]

Dan Doriani, pastor and former professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, writes that redemptive-historical preaching "emphasizes the unity of the history of redemption and the centrality of Christ in that history."[224] Doriani suggests that preachers examine each passage of Scripture in its historical context and ask

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[220] Goldsworthy, 99.
[221] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, 49.
[222] Ibid., 50.
[223] Ibid., 51.
[224] Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 294.

the following helpful questions: "Where are this event and text located in the history of redemption? What are the traits of the covenant that govern that era? What do the people know about God's character, redemption, and ethic? How does this text add to that knowledge?"[225]

Sidney Greidanus writes that "redemptive-historical interpretation seeks to understand an Old Testament passage first in its own historical-cultural context."[226] Greidanus has examined the paths by which New Testament writers proclaimed Christ from the Old Testament and, from their example, has identified six different ways for contemporary preachers to preach Christ from Old Testament texts as well. He lists these as the ways of "redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, longitudinal themes, and contrast."[227]

The Mandate of Christ-Centered Preaching

Christ-centered preaching is not merely concerned with developing biblically accurate sermons but also with applying the texts in ways that will be transformative in the lives of the hearers. Chapell explains that "the goal of preaching is not merely to impart information but to provide the means of transformation ordained by a sovereign God that will affect the lives and destinies of eternal souls committed to a preacher's spiritual care."[228] He adds that "the exposition of Scripture remains incomplete until a preacher explains the duty God requires of us."[229]

Dennis Johnson makes a similar point about the mandate of application in Christ-centered preaching in his book *Him We Proclaim*:

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[225] Ibid., 294.
[226] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*, 228.
[227] Ibid., 203.
[228] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 25.
[229] Ibid., 210.

> The core conviction of this priority is that preaching must aim to elicit change in the lives of hearers by proclaiming the telos (purpose) of the text … This purpose is never merely to reveal information but always to bring hearers into greater conformity to Christ and his commands, especially in the establishment of new, godly patterns of behavior.[230]

Chapell offers the following guidance to help preachers write sermon application points:

> Expository messages require preachers to ensure that the applications they make answer four key questions: What does God now require of me? Where does he require it of me? Why must I do what he requires? How can I do what God requires?[231]

The first of Chapell's questions deals with the practical instructions derived from the biblical principles found in the sermon text. The "where" question helps the preacher to specify where in real life the biblical principles of the text apply. The third question moves the preacher to disclose the motivation for heeding the instruction given. The final question directs the preacher and congregation to where they find the power to carry out the instructions presented.

Chapell advocates seeking to tie the sermon applications directly with what he terms "the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF)" of each text. He defines the FCF as "the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him."[232] Determining the FCF of each sermon text helps both the preacher and the listeners see their need for Christ and God's provision of Christ. In connecting the application with the FCF, Chapell explains that "the application points to the FCF,

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[230] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, 38.
[231] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 214.
[232] Ibid., 50.

saying, 'This is what you must do about that problem, need, or fault on the basis of what the passage means.'"[233]

Dan Doriani has devoted an entire volume on the theory and practice of biblical application. In *Putting the Truth to Work,* Doriani has developed a matrix of twenty-eight application options for every biblical text.[234] One side of this matrix examines the different ways in which the Bible instructs. Doriani writes "biblical texts instruct us seven ways: through rules, ideals, doctrines, redemptive acts in narratives, exemplary acts in narratives, biblical images, and songs and prayers."[235] The other side of Doriani's application matrix, opposite that of the biblical means of instruction, is made up of four questions people ask in sorting out how they will apply truth to their lives. He says, "while texts generate applications seven ways, people invite applications by asking four types of spiritual or ethical questions: questions concerning their duty, their moral character, their goals in life, and the need to discern the truth among competing worldviews."[236] Doriani frames the four questions as follows:

1. What should I do? That is, what is my duty?
2. Who should I be? That is, how can I become the person or obtain the character that lets me do what is right?
3. To what causes should we devote our life energy? That is, what goals should we pursue?
4. How can we distinguish truth from error? That is, how can we gain discernment?[237]

This mandate of application does not conflict with the concern that Christ-centered preaching also be redemptive-historical in its perspective. Clowney addresses this potential concern: "It has been assumed by some that a choice must be made between

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[233] Ibid., 212.
[234] Doriani, 96.
[235] Ibid., 82.
[236] Ibid., 94.
[237] Ibid., 98.

ethical preaching and that which is redemptive-historical. The New Testament, however, not only sanctions both but does not set them in opposition."[238] Clowney adds that "the redemptive-historical approach necessarily yields ethical application, which is an essential part of the preaching of the Word."[239] At the conclusion of a point Clowney makes regarding the good deeds of the patriarchs, judges, and kings in the Bible, he explains that "all these not only testify of Christ but provide a deeper understanding of our own obedience to him. The redemptive-historical may by no means be contrasted with the practical."[240]

Christ-centered preaching is concerned also that the application be Christ-centered, meaning that the sermon must point the listeners to Christ as the One who provides the enablement to follow the application. Chapell writes concerning this that "the power to do what God requires resides in God."[241] Regarding what he believes to be the absence of reliance on the Spirit's power in application, Chapell explains, "one reason that so much of our application has so little effect is that it is divorced from its source of spiritual power."[242] He believes that "ultimately, the Spirit alone can apply the truths of his Word, and therefore, sermonic application succeeds only when preachers preach for his purposes and in dependence on his work."[243]

Johnson also emphasizes the importance of Christ-centered application being undergirded by reliance upon the grace of God. He writes that "apostolic application

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[238] Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 78.
[239] Ibid., 80.
[240] Ibid., 81.
[241] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 221.
[242] Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," 77.
[243] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching : Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 234.

builds exhortations on grace."[244] Writing about the difference between legalism and grace in exhorting to obedience, Johnson says:

> Contrary to legalists' expectations, attempts to motivate obedience through making God's favor (and favors) contingent on human performance actually work against the law's central objectives, love of God and neighbor, by encouraging self-trust, judgmental competition, and legalistic pride (on the one hand) or instilling self-condemnation, unrelenting guilt, and hopelessness (on the other) … Apostolic preaching, however, reverses the order that makes sense to human wisdom. Instead of motivating obedience by offering God's favor as contingent on human performance, the apostles spoke for a God who had begun the process of new creation by extending unmerited mercy and who thereby evokes from renewed people a grateful love and eager desire to obey.[245]

Chapell affirms Johnson's insistence on grace being the only proper motivation for obedience. Chapell adds that "consistent adulation of the mercy of God in Christ is preaching's most powerful mechanism to stimulate holiness and mission."[246]

Chapell summarizes the idea that Christ-centered application must be empowered by Christ Himself:

> Beyond the limits of our understanding of *how* to preach Christ in all the Scriptures, the primary reason that we do not do so is that we have failed to understand *why* we must. We have not recognized how truly helpless we are apart from him. If we really understood that we have no life or strength or hope apart from him, then we could not perceive of preaching his commandments without summoning his aid; we would never pronounce his expectations without pleading for his grace. If we truly perceived the degree of our inability apart from him, we would not dare proclaim any portion of his Word without searching for him.[247]

This literature area has examined Christ-centered preaching, beginning with a review of biblical and theological material, followed by an outline of the meaning, necessity, method, and mandate of Christ-centered preaching. The next section will cover literature on contextualization. This area is important to the overall work in drawing on

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[244] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, 264.
[245] Ibid., 265.
[246] Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," 80.
[247] Ibid., 78.

principles for applying the elements of Christ-centered preaching to preaching to the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context. This section begins with a review of biblical and theological material related to contextualization.

Contextualization

Biblical Theological Review

Christ-centered preaching not only possesses Christ as its content, and is dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit, but it is also meant to be contextualized for every audience that hears the message. Dean Flemming, who teaches New Testament and intercultural communication at European Nazarene College in Germany, describes the concept of contextualization this way:

> I take contextualization, then, to refer to the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation. This happens in such a way that the gospel both comes to authentic expression in the local context and at the same time prophetically transforms the context.[248]

Our greatest example of contextualization is our Lord and Savior himself, Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John tells us that "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."[249] Pastor Eugene Peterson has a poignant translation of this verse in his contemporary translation of the Bible, *The Message*. John 1:14 there reads "the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." The ESV Study Bible notes describe Jesus' contextualization in the following way:

> This is the most amazing event in all of history: the eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinitely holy Son of God took on a human nature and lived among humanity as one who was both God and man at the same time, in one person.[250]

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[248] Dean E. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19.
[249] John 1:14.
[250] *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, 2020.

Flemming notes that "the incarnation of Jesus serves as a key paradigm for a contextualized mission and theology. Through his incarnation, Jesus explained or 'exegeted' the Father to us."[251]

Paul writes in Philippians 2 of Jesus' condescension to come to humanity: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8). The ESV Study Bible note on verse eight adds that "Paul is stressing that Christ, who had all the privileges that were rightly his as king of the universe, gave them up to become an ordinary Jewish baby bound for the cross."[252] Flemming notes that in Philippians 2:6-8 "Paul describes Jesus' radical identification with humanity as a 'self-emptying,' a 'self-humbling' and a 'self-enslavement' on behalf of those he came to serve. In C. Rene Padilla's words, 'It may be said that God has contextualized himself in Jesus Christ.'"[253] Flemming expounds further on the contextualization of Jesus:

> Jesus' message and method of doing theology were context-specific. He mediated the good news in ways that were appropriate to particular people and occasions. The incarnation of Jesus makes contextualization not just a possibility but an obligation. It establishes a paradigm for mediating God's redeeming presence in the world today.[254]

After Christ, perhaps the most effective minister in contextualizing the gospel was the Apostle Paul. In modeling contextualization in his own ministry, Paul writes that "though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as

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[251] Flemming, 20.
[252] *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, 2283.
[253] Flemming, 21.
[254] Ibid., 21.

many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."[255] Blomberg interprets Paul's comments as an indication that the apostle wants to do whatever is needed "to clear the ground of unnecessary obstacles that might hinder unbelievers from coming to Christ."[256] An example of Paul's willingness to adapt culturally in ways that do not hinder the progress of the gospel is found in Acts 16. When Paul desired to have Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman and Greek man, accompany his party on a missionary trip, he had Timothy circumcised. Luke writes, "Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek."[257] Professor emeritus of New Testament exegesis at the University of Aberdeen, Howard Marshall, sheds light on the rationale behind Paul's actions:

> Timothy ranked as a Jew but because of his mother's mixed marriage he may have been regarded as illegitimate; in any case it was absolutely essential to give him good standing in the eyes of the Jews among whom he would be working.[258]

John Stott, an author, evangelist, pastor and Bible teacher, describes Paul's actions in Acts 16 in this way: "once the theological principle was firmly established, that salvation is by grace alone, and that circumcision was not required but neutral, he was prepared to adjust his practical policies."[259]

Paul's philosophy of ministry can be seen in his preaching of Christ to two culturally different audiences in Acts 13 and Acts 17. Paul's message in Acts 13 was

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[255] 1 Corinthians 9:19-20, 22.
[256] Blomberg, 183.
[257] Acts 16:3.
[258] I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 260.
[259] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, IL, 1994), 256.

given in Pisidian Antioch where his audience was made up primarily of Jews and Gentile God-fearers. Regarding this scene, Flemming points out that "the setting for Paul's address is the synagogue, the center of religious and community life and a focus of shared identity for Diaspora Jews. It is common ground for Paul and his audience."[260] In preaching Christ to this biblically-literate crowd in Antioch, he began his message by referring back to Israel's history from the book of Genesis through the time of King David. From there Paul pointed them to the greater David, Jesus Christ: "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised."[261] He then proclaimed Jesus and his death and resurrection, and challenged the audience to respond to the implications of these events: "Therefore, my brothers I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."[262] Summarizing this message in Acts 13, Flemming notes that:

> Paul's missionary sermon in Acts 13 is a masterpiece of contextualization for a synagogue gathering. When preaching to Jews, Paul incorporates his audience's history, its expectations, its Scriptures and its culturally accepted methods of interpretation in order to persuasively proclaim the good news.[263]

Paul's preaching in Acts 17 is vastly different in the manner in which it leads the audience to Jesus Christ. Flemming describes Paul's sermon in Acts 17:16-34 in this way: "Paul's address to the Athenians in Acts 17 is perhaps the outstanding example of intercultural evangelistic witness in the New Testament."[264] The audience for this sermon was a group of highly educated pagans. There were Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, as

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[260] Flemming, p. 58.
[261] Acts 13:23.
[262] Acts 13:38-39.
[263] Flemming, 65.
[264] Ibid., 72.

well as those attending a meeting of the Areopagus, the supreme governing council in Athens, which had the responsibility of deciding religious questions. In speaking to this biblically-illiterate audience in Athens, Paul didn't mention the Old Testament at all but instead referred to secular poets and objects of pagan worship. Flemming observes that "in contrast with the frequent use of language and quotations from the Greek Bible that we find in sermons preached to Jews in Acts, this discourse reflects a more Hellenized style, which is suited to the occasion and hearers."[265] Luke describes the scene as thus:

> Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."[266]

From that vastly different starting point, Paul also preached to this audience the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and its immediate implications. Luke recorded Paul's evangelistic challenge this way:

> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.[267]

Paul was a master of contextualizing the gospel to present Christ to various cultures and people groups. Summarizing the preaching of Paul in Acts 17, Flemming writes that "the genius of Paul's context-sensitive preaching in Acts 17 is that he intentionally uses the philosophical language of his audience, not simply to stake out common ground, but in order to transform their worldview."[268]

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[265] Ibid., 74.
[266] Acts 17:22-23.
[267] Acts 17:30-31.
[268] Flemming, 79.

Flemming, in comparing Paul's sermons in Acts 13 and 17, poses the question, "in what sense are Paul's missionary sermons patterns for modern Christians to follow?"[269] He answers his own question in the following manner:

> Luke probably intends Paul's evangelistic speeches in Acts to provide a model for how the gospel approaches various groups of people, which his readers can appropriate in their own witness to the world. These speeches model for us a magnificent balance between, on the one hand, an *identificational* approach that proclaims the gospel in ways the audience can understand and, on the other, a *transformational* approach that resists compromising the gospel's integrity in a pluralistic world.[270] [italics in original]

The Meaning of Contextualization

Dr. Anthony Bradley, a visiting professor of theology at the King's College and a sought after commentator on current issues for major broadcast media such as NPR and CNN/Headline News, defines contextualization this way:

> Contextualization is a dynamic process of the church's reflection, with the Incarnation and God's condescension in communicating to his people as ultimate paradigms, applied in obedience to Christ and his mission in the world. This includes interaction with the text of Scripture as the Word of God and the context as a specific human situation.[271]

Bradley explains more of the role of the interpreter in contextualization:

> Silva maintains that the question "is not whether we should contextualize, for we all do it, but rather how to do it without compromising the integrity of the Bible." Contextualization implies not that the interpreter creates meaning but that the interpretation of the biblical story involves its application to respective contemporary situations, including racial groups.[272]

Noted author on missions, Lesslie Newbigin, explains that "the value of the word contextualization is that it suggests the placing of the gospel in the total context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the

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[269] Ibid., 85.
[270] Ibid., 85-86.
[271] Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 144-145.
[272] Ibid., 145.

future."[273] Newbigin has served as general secretary of the International Missionary Council and as an associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches. He calls for the application of principles of contextualization employed in overseas missions to the modern Western culture.

Preacher Mark Driscoll seeks to carry out Newbigin's concern. Driscoll, "modeling what he believes to be the scriptural example ... states that 'the gospel must be contextualized in a way that is accessible to the culture and faithful to the Scriptures,'" notes Bohannon.[274]

Stott describes contextualization as "bridge building."[275] He writes that a bridge is "a means of communication between two places which would otherwise be cut off from one another by a river or a ravine."[276] He challenges preachers and students to build bridges by contextualizing:

> It is across this broad and deep divine of two thousand years of changing culture (more still in the case of the Old Testament) that Christian communicators have to throw bridges. Our task is to enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of the men and women of today.[277]

The late Harvie Conn, formerly a profession of missions at Westminster Theological Seminary and a missionary in Korea for many years, adds an eschatological slant to the definitions of contextualization:

> We are part of the eschatological history of redemption, living as we do in the tension between the beginning of the end and its consummation at Christ's return. Contextualization then is covenant activity taking place between the "already" of

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[273] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 2.
[274] Bohannon, 141.
[275] Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 137.
[276] Ibid., 137-138.
[277] Ibid., 138.

> redemption accomplished in Christ and the "not yet" of redemption to be consummated in Christ.[278]

Flemming grounds his definition of contextualization in the New Testament writers' example:

> When we listen to the New Testament witness to Christ, what we hear is not a theological monotone but a chorus of different voices, or, as David Hasselgrave and Edward Rommen put it "Holy Spirit-inspired 'contextualizations.'" These allow the one gospel to be expressed and applied in a variety of ways, using language, images and ideas that make sense to the audience.[279]

Flemming believes that all preachers contextualize, whether they realize it or not. He writes:

> We might even be tempted to think that our tried and true ways of telling the story are timeless expressions of the 'pure' gospel. But we would only be fooling ourselves. All theology is contextual theology, from the creeds of the early church to the modern 'Four Spiritual Laws.' All theologizing is done from a particular location and perspective whether we are conscious of it or not.[280]

Flemming identifies four criteria that emerge from the New Testament that set parameters for contextualizing. First, the biblical witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ is fundamental; second, theologizing must be guided by the Holy Spirit, who leads the Christian community into all truth; third, Christians in different local settings must be willing to test their theologies in light of the wider Christian community; and fourth, authentic contextualization bears fruit in the furtherance of Christian mission and the transformation of individuals and the community.[281]

In thinking about the relationship between contextualization and culture, Flemming acknowledges the complexity. He explains that "the relationship between the

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[278] Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 226.
[279] Flemming, 297.
[280] Ibid., 298.
[281] Ibid., 303-305.

gospel and culture is complex and multidimensional. The gospel is both at home in every culture and alien to every culture."[282] The effect of the gospel, Flemming believes, is to bring transformation to every culture. He suggests that "perhaps the most characteristic and suggestive response to the gospel's encounter with first-century Mediterranean culture is that of transforming engagement. New Testament writers sought to shape and reshape not just their readers, but dimensions of their cultural and social worlds as well."[283]

The Necessity of Contextualization

Regarding the necessity of contextualization, Bradley explains that "contextualization has been abused in discussions of hermeneutics, but the basic concept remains necessary because of the distance between the world of the Bible and our own."[284]

Newbigin asks, "How can the gospel 'come alive' in all these different cultural contexts, and still be the same authentic gospel? That is the problem of contextualization."[285] In thinking about what true contextualization really is Newbigin insists that "we must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture."[286] What he's getting at is that none of us, as Bible interpreters and preachers, are acultural beings; we all bring our own cultural values, perspectives, and leanings to every text of Scripture, which itself

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[282] Ibid., 306.
[283] Ibid., 308.
[284] Bradley, 145.
[285] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,1989), 142.
[286] Ibid., 144.

comes from a particular cultural setting in terms of its original audience. Finally, regarding contextualization, Newbigin argues:

> True contextualization accords to the gospel its rightful primacy, its power to penetrate every culture and to speak within each culture, in its own speech and symbol, the word which is both No and Yes, both judgment and grace.[287]

Stott writes of the importance of applying contextualization to the specific task of preaching: "A true sermon bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both."[288] This is not only important for the present study on preaching the gospel to young African American males, but for every context. Stott writes of the "trouble with preaching." By this he means "the failure to relate the Christian message to the everyday world. Many leave the church because the language flowing from the pulpit has no meaning for them; it has no connection with their own life and simply bypasses many threatening and unavoidable issues."[289] Finally, Stott writes of the preacher's responsibility to the congregation: "It is the preacher's responsibility to open up the biblical principles which relate to the problems of contemporary society. The pulpit should help them to develop their Christian thinking and so to penetrate their segment of the human community more deeply for Christ."[290]

Stott critiques both conservative and liberal theological paradigms for often neglecting to realize the necessity of contextualization. He believes that many conservative preachers "are not at home in the modern world on the other side, especially if we have reached—or passed—middle age. It bewilders and threatens us. So we tend to

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[287] Ibid., 152.
[288] Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 10.
[289] Ibid., 44.
[290] Ibid., 167.

insulate ourselves."[291] He further asserts that "our preaching is seldom if ever earthed. It fails to build a bridge into the modern world. It is biblical, but not contemporary."[292] Stott's criticism of liberal preachers casts them in the opposite extreme. He contends that "all their sermons are earthed in the real world, but where they come from (one is tempted to add) heaven alone knows. They certainly do not appear to come out of the Bible. On the contrary, these preachers have allowed the biblical revelation to slip through their fingers."[293]

Whether coming from more of a conservative or liberal slant, preachers, Stott believes, cannot afford to dismiss the necessity of contextualization. He maintains that "this earthing of the Word in the world is not something optional; it is an indispensable characteristic of true Christian preaching."[294] He adds that "the One we preach is not Christ-in-a-vacuum, nor a mystical Christ unrelated to the real world, nor even only the Jesus of ancient history, but rather the contemporary Christ who once lived and died, and now lives to meet human need in all its variety today."[295]

Bohannon explains how Mark Driscoll finds it necessary to contextualize not only the sermon but also the ways in which the sermon is communicated. Bohannon writes:

> A culturally appropriated message requires a culturally articulated form. The change, however, does not apply to the message. Guarding against dead orthodoxy (unchanging doctrine and practice) and living heresy (continual change in both beliefs and methods), Driscoll opts for living orthodoxy by holding on to unchanging doctrine wedded to constantly changing methods. Thus, his reformed message remains constant (Jude 3), while his delivery enjoys the freedom of not being bound to the same timeless rules (1 Cor. 9:22-23).[296]

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[291] Ibid., 140.
[292] Ibid. 140.
[293] Ibid., 143.
[294] Ibid., 145.
[295] Ibid., 154.
[296] Bohannon, 144.

In writing particularly to those concerned with preaching to African American audiences, Hozell Francis advises, "the context in which the preaching takes place must be considered before any strict conclusions are drawn. If preaching is to have contextual relevancy, it must address the audience under consideration. The cultural considerations of African people must be understood."[297]

Also commenting on the necessity of contextualization in preaching among the African American community, Bradley insists:

> Proper uses of contextualization and application can provide a platform for applying the biblical story to the unique particularities of the black experience without jettisoning orthodox understandings of the absolute authority of Scripture and the inerrant, inspired, self-attesting, condescended revelation of the triune God to his people.[298]

Bradley also says that "an approach is needed that is faithful to the text and faithful to applying the text to issues facing many black church communities today."[299] Bradley further describes this necessity of contextualization in the African American community: "what is required is the establishment of philosophical, methodological principles of a culturally applied hermeneutic that are broad enough to apply to the African American community to large."[300] Finally, Bradley urges "the African American community today is in desperate need of a fresh approach to theology—a theology that is true to the Scripture and, at the same time, speaks to (African Americans') current situation."[301]

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[297] Hozell C. Francis, *Church Planting in the African-American Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1999), 62.
[298] Bradley, 144.
[299] Ibid., 150.
[300] Ibid., 152.
[301] Ibid., 158.

Contextualization in Preaching to Postmodern Culture

Given that young African American males are a part of the larger American postmodern culture, many of the values of postmodernism coincide with those of these men. A few of the authors cited previously in the section on alternatives that young African American males turn to in order to address their core concerns mention commonalities with hip-hop culture and postmodernism. As a result, much of the current literature written on preaching to postmoderns has application to preaching to young African American males.

Flemming acknowledges the increasing need for contextualization in a postmodern world:

> One of the profound challenges facing the church in the current generation is how to come to grips with the transition from a twentieth-century world dominated by modernism, with its faith in radical individualism, rational and objective knowledge, and scientific progress, to a postmodern world that questions the entire modern project. Many churches in historic "Christendom" have begun to recognize that, just as missionaries contextualize the gospel in order for it to be meaningful in a new cultural situation, so the Christian message must be transposed into a new key for a postmodern world.[302]

Nailing down a precise definition of postmodernism is elusive, but there have been some characteristics authors find agreement on. Kyllonen writes:

> Some say that postmodernism represents a new historical period that we are entering, while others view it as an extension of some of the basic concepts of modernism itself. Still others see postmodernism as an in-between period when old ways are being questioned but the new era has yet to arrive. The Columbia Encyclopedia described postmodernism as "a term used to designate a multitude of trends—in the arts, philosophy, religion, technology, and many other areas—that come after and deviate from the many twentieth-century movements that constituted modernism. In general, the postmodern view is cool, ironic, and accepting of the fragmentation of contemporary existence. It tends to concentrate on surfaces rather than depths, to blur the distinctions between high and low

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[302] Flemming, 315.

> culture, and as a whole to challenge a wide variety of traditional cultural values."[303]

Drawing on theologian Robert Webber's work, Flemming adds that postmodern culture is shaped by globalization, historical nostalgia, spiritual hunger, mystery, oral, visual and interactive forms of communication, the longing for community, and the fear of terrorism. He describes this context as "a world of constant change and multiple perspectives, a world in which 'difference' is awarded celebrity status."[304]

Flemming poses the question: "What will it mean to proclaim and live out the gospel in a postmodern context?"[305] In reply to this question, Flemming points out several "points of contact for our attempts to contextualize the gospel for an emerging postmodern culture."[306] He lists these points of contacts as community, story, and imagination. Regarding community, Flemming writes, "in contrast to modernity's radical focus on individual autonomy, postmoderns yearn for an experience of genuine community and connectedness."[307] What Flemming means by story is that "a gospel contextualized for a postmodern world will concentrate on telling the biblical story."[308] As for imagination, Flemming explains that "in contrast to the word-and-reason based modern world, postmodernity easily embraces more imaginative, emotive, and aesthetic forms of communication. The church today must speak the language of metaphor and symbol."[309]

Dr. Tim Keller, author and pastor of the influential Redeemer Church in New York City, describes the postmodern generation in the following manner:

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[303] Kyllonen, 126.
[304] Flemming, 315.
[305] *Ibid.*, 316.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid.

> These persons are increasingly post-secular. They are much more open to the supernatural, to spirituality, and to religion but not necessarily to Christianity… The emerging culture is also post-modern. Our society increasingly is increasingly opposed to purely rationalistic explanations for experience, and does not accept the hard-nosed, scientific secularism of the past.[310]

In his sermon, Keller encouraged the pastors that "the next thing we must do is use the Reformed resources that God has especially granted this church to minister to the emerging culture."[311] Keller lamented,

> I see people who are desperately trying to reach the post-everythings who in their desperation are trying to throw out essential elements such as the substitutionary atonement, forensic justification, inputed righteousness, the Sovereignty of God, or the inerrancy of Scripture. Many of them are probably over-adapting to the post-everything situation.[312]

The resources available to preachers of the Reformed tradition that Keller highlighted were as follows:

> First, remember that post-everything people like narrative and story. If you know how to do Christ-centered preaching, then you turn every single sermon into a kind of story. Second, remember that post-everythings are experientially oriented. They do not just want intellectual propositions. For them life's meaning is grounded in what they experience. Third, remember that post-everythings are very much against moralism and self-righteousness. Fourth, take note of post-everythings concern for social justice. They innately sense that the church is not credible without care for mercy and justice. Fifth, recognize that post-everythings love art because they love the material world. Finally, remember that post-everythings are not strongly swayed by evidence and proofs.[313]

Ralph Watkins, in his book on preaching and teaching to young adults, *From Jay-Z to Jesus*, done in collaboration with Los Angeles pastor Benjamin Stephens, also advocates contextualization in light of postmodern concerns. Watkins and Stephens advise:

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[310] Timothy J. Keller, "Ministering to Post-Everythings," (Address given at the *National Conversation on Renewal and Outreach*,Nashville, TN, April, 2003).
[311] Ibid.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.

> The importance of postmodernism in regard to the way we preach cannot be overstated. We live in a postmodern culture that seeps into various areas of life. From the box office to the church office, the philosophy of postmodernism that thrives on the denunciation of absolute truth, the rejection of metanarratives (such as the concept of salvation history), and the embracing of relative truth influences countless people throughout the nation.[314]

In considering how to craft Christ-centered sermons aimed at the postmodern generation, Zack Eswine's recent work, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World,* is a great help. Eswine has done a tremendous job in exegeting postmodern culture and many of his insights seem to be directly applicable to the young African American male audience. Quoting Bryan Chapell, Eswine writes, "the best preaching takes truth to struggle." He adds that "when truth meets struggle, the result is substantial healing, and the substantial healing of reality is the business of preaching."[315] In his chapter on preaching redemptively, Eswine writes of four kinds of "echoes" that help us capture not only struggle but also beauty. He terms these "echoes of creation, echoes of the fall, echoes of redemption, and echoes of heaven."[316]

Eswine counsels preachers of this generation to spend time preaching the narrative texts of the Bible. Because "the postmodern age is an image-rich age" reasons Eswine, "postmodern preachers should draw on image-rich narratives and stories to present the gospel and make it clear."[317] He instructs that pastors should organize preaching around what he calls "the four stories," not only for narrative preaching but for all types of sermons. He poses four questions that help us think about the four stories:

> What does this text teach us about God? What does this text teach us about people (the religious and the irreligious)? What does this text teach us about the

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[314] Benjamin Stephens and Ralph C. Watkins, *From Jay-Z to Jesus: Reaching & Teaching Young Adults in the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), 83.
[315] Eswine, 25.
[316] Ibid., 42.
[317] Ibid. , 61.

> place (creation and cultures)? What does this text expose about our personal response to these?[318]

These questions remind us that each of our listeners has their own story, their own way of seeing the world.

Another helpful tool that Eswine recommends is what he calls the use of "cultural connection and biblical redirection." He uses Jesus as a model of this from his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, "You have heard it said … but I say to you…" Eswine suggests that preachers can follow Jesus' preaching method to

> make a cultural connection and then offer biblical redirection. We take into account how people typically think about the subject of our message, give a sense of this, and then counter with how God addresses this same subject in his Word.[319]

Eswine also gives counsel on the importance of testimony in preaching to today's postmodern generation. He challenges preachers to ask themselves the question, "Can I now reach who I once was?"[320] This is a call to preachers to remember the work of God's grace in their own lives as they consider sharing the Word of God with others. Eswine also shares, "I am realizing that for the younger people in the congregation my transparency is a must … credibility is tied to one's transparency."[321]

Driscoll also uses helpful questions to prepare sermons for postmodern audiences. First, after discovering what he believes is the original author's message, Driscoll asks "Why do we resist the truth?" The aim in this portion of his sermon preparation is to predict potential rejection points by the listener in order to counter possible objections

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[318] Ibid., 112.
[319] Ibid., 140.
[320] Ibid., 11.
[321] Ibid., 87.

with God's truth.[322] Driscoll's second framing question is "Why does this matter?" Here he seeks to counter inactivity by expressing the significance of why it matters, both individually and collectively, to be "missional" people.[323] His final question is "How is Jesus the hero/Savior?" of the particular biblical text. For Driscoll, this means lifting up Jesus before the culture as the centerpiece of the Bible and telling a unified story that highlights Jesus as the undeniable hero."[324]

Contextualization in Preaching to Young African American Males

Preaching still seems to play an important and influential role in African American culture. In a book written with George Barna on the best practices of high impact African American churches, co-author Harry Jackson writes of the priority of preaching in black churches:

> The importance of the sermon cannot be overlooked. That relatively brief examination of God's principles is the only exposure to Christian teaching that most churchgoing adults in America have in a typical week, rendering the sermon an important element in the faith development process.[325]

Jackson goes on to add that "regardless of the preaching style adopted, one of the most striking differences between worship in black and white churches is that the preaching at white churches is often analytic, directed at the head, while preaching in the black church context more often aims for both the head and the heart."[326]

One of the foremost national authorities on black preaching is Henry H. Mitchell. He is the author of numerous books on black preaching and has taught homiletics at Virginia Union University, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and the

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[322] Bohannon, 141.
[323] Ibid., 142.
[324] Ibid.
[325] George Barna and Harry R. Jackson, *High-Impact African-American Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004). 100.
[326] Ibid., 101.

Interdenominational Theological Center. His book, *Black Preaching: the Recovery of a Powerful Art*, contains a wealth of information on the subject of black preaching. Mitchell aims to persuade black preachers of their own need to contextualize even for African American audiences: "A great deal of learning from other cultural backgrounds is expressed in Black sermons, to be sure, but it is always most effectively communicated by being translated into the 'mother-tongue'—the imagery and idiom of the Black masses."[327] Mitchell observes that "the mainstream middle class churches of today are suffering decline, in part because their clergy have been taught to scoff at and war against the 'less intellectual' belief system of the average member."[328] In essence, he's saying that those clergymen disdain the need to contextualize their messages to their parishioners.

Mitchell has long been a proponent of the need for preaching to address the core concerns of the black community. He notes that "the proclamation of the Black pulpit survives likewise because, in its isolation from the mainstream, it spoke and it speaks peculiarly to the needs of Blacks."[329] A fundamental hermeneutic principle for Mitchell is "that the gospel must speak to a person's current needs."[330] Mitchell challenges preachers on the necessity of contextualization:

> There is a radical difference between listening to an essay designed to enlighten and listening to a Word desperately needed to sustain life … The Black ancestors and their offspring had and have little temptation to theorize; their culture and their congregations prefer useful, concrete visions to learned abstractions.[331]

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[327] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 15.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid., 20.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Ibid., 21.

Mitchell appeals to the history of strong African American preaching and calls modern day preachers to learn from them and incorporate strengths from that tradition:

> H. Dean Trulear and Russell E. Ritchey suggest that this amazing talent of the early African American Christians had as an important source the African culture and its marvelous storytelling art ... The resources of education and travel must be integrated into a gospel presentation that is still basically visual rather than abstract. And the sermon, which must have a sound theological message, must also be made to come alive in a meaningful experience for the hearer.[332]

Mitchell is deeply concerned that seminary-educated preachers must not allow their preaching to become inaccessible to their black congregations. He emphasizes the importance of black preachers being "bi-lingual":

> Seminary-trained Blacks must be models of all things to all people, helping the cultures to come closer together by being instruments of translation of each to the other. They must be fluent in Black language, for this is fundamental to their calling, and yet they must also be fluent in standard English, because they must communicate beyond the congregation. Their language must be Black enough to generate rapport with the congregation by means of an identity which is perceived as close. They must be able to touch the souls of Black folk with soul language, putting them at ease and gaining greatest access by avoiding the linguistic signals of social distance. Yet they must also be able to reinforce and keep alive the "standard" learnings of the young people of the congregation, which link them to the larger community.[333]

"In the Black preaching enterprise," Mitchell writes, "the preacher's preparation starts with close identity with the congregation."[334] He adds that

> The Black preacher must be ear deep in the condition of the people, and out of this comes the easy dialogue between the preacher and the people, whose lives are intimately close together ... this intimacy leads people to feel literally that they are being addressed personally.[335]

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[332] Ibid., 38.
[333] Ibid., 81.
[334] Ibid., 106.
[335] Ibid.

While Mitchell acknowledges that "it is impossible to establish a single definitive outcome for a Black sermon,"[336] he does draw out a few common elements in traditional black preaching: "we could cite as fairly typical, illustration, storytelling, Black language and style, and Black celebration."[337] In the introduction of the sermon, Mitchell explains that

> an effort is made to establish some issue or entity with which the hearers identify immediately. Rather than logically starting with a broad category and narrowing the focus, the best Black sermons start with an important issue, and the listeners get on board the experience.[338]

Mitchell is a proponent of expository preaching. In his view,

> Good expositional preaching in any culture will be focused or centered on one main idea and purpose in the passage. The task of the Black preacher, again, is simply to make it come alive ... The way that the passage is to come alive will be determined by the genre of the passage.[339]

Mitchell describes the "celebration" as "the one aspect of the sermon that most nearly deserves to be called typically Black."[340] Mitchell defines celebration as the dramatization of the main idea of the sermon in a way that supports the preacher's desired behavioral application or motivational goal for the sermon. He acknowledges that some have criticized the celebration aspect of black preaching:

> Black celebration has been criticized by some for being too emotional, manipulative of people, and unnecessary to the moves of the sermon. The latter challenge is met when the celebration is relevant to the purpose of the body of the sermon ... People relate to and remember what they celebrate, and it influences their behavior ... The cardinal sin of the Black pulpit is probably that of irrelevant celebration ... Good gravy is always made of the essence of the meat to be served, and the same is true of the good gospel feast ... It is vitally important that all

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[336] Ibid., 114.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid., 115-116.
[339] Ibid., 118.
[340] Ibid., 119.

> preachers conclude by lifting up the main concerns of the sermon in genuine, joyful celebration.[341]

Regarding the criticism of the celebration portion of black sermons, Mitchell clarifies that "it is the unrelated celebration that has earned the Black pulpit the bad reputation for being manipulative."[342] Nonetheless, Mitchell counters that "the Black pulpit tradition is so important because it has unashamedly addressed the whole person—the cognitive, intuitive, and emotive."[343] He summarizes his confidence in the celebration:

> No matter how misused by some or criticized by others, the celebration at its best is the goal to which all of the Black sermon is moving. In sermon preparation, it is often the celebration that is chosen right after a text and purpose have been selected. It is on the basis of the final celebration more than any other element that the sermon will be judged.[344]

Mitchell connects this celebration aspect of the sermon with the celebratory manner of the preacher himself.

> At their best, Black preachers must not only be teachers and mobilizers, parent figures and enablers, but they must also be celebrants. They must have a little of the joy themselves. It must be clear that they are filled with the same joy they declare to their congregations. If, indeed, preachers have not tasted and seen that it is good, they have nothing, really, to say. The goodness of God must not be a distant theory; it must be a present fact, which to experience is to celebrate.[345]

In contextualizing black preaching specifically to the demographic of young African American males, Ellis calls for a movement "toward a restored comprehensive biblical gospel."[346] He sees this as a solution to the problem of not addressing cultural

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[341] Ibid., 120-121.
[342] Ibid., 121.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid., 122.
[345] Ibid., 132.
[346] Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: An Analysis of Today's African-American Cultural Crisis" 46.

core concerns of young black males. Ellis specifically advises preachers in three areas involving ministry both inside and outside the pulpit:

> Phase 1 – Develop pre-conversion discipleship around unaddressed issues and needs.
>
> Phase 2 – Develop an integrated gospel in context.
>
> Phase 3 – Develop a restored "wholistic" biblical gospel addressing the totality of human issues and needs.[347]

Hodge lists six missiological essentials that must be incorporated in preaching to impact young African American males:[348] His first directive is to "prepare the way." This means that the preaching environment must be a place of "sanctuary, rest, and refuge." The second element is the announcement of good news. The preacher must present the good news of Jesus Christ not merely as simplistic advice but as knowledge that Christ listens, cares, and is present with the audience in times of crisis. Hodge's third missiological element is to be able to identify with sinners. This calls for both transparency in the preacher regarding his own struggles and also a willingness to enter into the comfort zones of young African American males who may be considered as outcasts. The fourth of Hodge's essentials is confronting social injustice. This must be done from both inside and outside the pulpit. Hodge's fifth missiological element is to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is to be true for the preacher not only in the moment of preaching but also during the time of sermon preparation. The final of the six missionary essentials is to "adequately accept and deal with the true nature of the 'hood." This does not mean that the church and preacher turn a blind eye to the sins of the streets,

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[347] Ibid., 46.
[348] Hodge, 218-222.

but it does mean that the preacher will seek to understand what lies behind and beneath the outward negative events.

Stephens and Watkins speak not only to the importance of contextualization among postmoderns, but also specifically to young African American males in urban contexts. They emphasize that "effective teaching and preaching with young adults occurs best when it is contextualized. Teaching young adults has to be contextual, with living-world examples that touch where they itch and where they hurt."[349] They point to Jesus as a model for being able to speak winsomely into different cultural contexts:

> Jesus knew the culture and used it as his background as he talked to people. He didn't use the culture as a whipping post or a poster child for what was wrong with people, but instead used it as a platform to talk to the people about the things of God.[350]

Several authors give helpful information in preaching to those who turn to Islam to have their core concerns addressed. Carl Ellis writes:

> The principles I use to reach Muslims are the same exact principles I use to reach anybody. There are three things that a Muslim, a Hindu, or anybody else has no resistance against: the prayers of the saints, the love of the saints, and the wise application of biblical truth to their core issues—whatever those issues are.

Llano highlights the importance of storytelling in preaching the gospel to Muslims. He writes that "the Scriptures are a noticeable source of material for stories."[351] Regarding the value of storytelling, Llano explains:

> Once meaningful dialogue has begun, a good way to present the Gospel is through storytelling. Stories can become an essential part of dialogue and also provide an inoffensive, non-threatening way of challenging one's basic belief and behavior. Christians might introduce their neighbors to the gospel and the Scriptures by telling an interesting story. This method is effective because it makes use of an ordinary Black Muslim practice of fashioning the truth in a story.[352]

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[349] Stephens, 76.
[350] Ibid., 78.
[351] Llano, 78.
[352] Ibid.

Llano also counsels that "in addition to understanding the beliefs of the Nation of Islam, a Christian should know and understand his own doctrines if he wants to be an effective witness."[353] The doctrines Llano insists must be known and shared are the uniqueness of Christ and that righteousness comes only through Christ and not by works. He also gives practical instruction that the King James Version of the Bible shouldn't be used in preaching to Muslims, but rather the New International Version or New American Standard Bible. Some members of the Nation of Islam will not listen to the King James Version because they believe that King James himself translated this version and corrupted it.

There are also numerous authors who offer practical insights that can be applied in preaching effectively to the portion of the young African American male demographic who are specifically drawn to hip-hop culture. Ralph Watkins echoes Eswine's earlier point on the importance of transparency:

> Hip-hoppers want leaders who are transparent, honest, and willing to share their struggles and how they overcame [them]. They inspect at first sight and have a wait-and-see attitude when it comes to those with whom they choose to share leadership. They want their leaders to speak from the heart and from experience.[354]

Watkins sees a natural correlation between the leaders hip-hoppers are drawn to and preachers they respect:

> What they look for in leaders says a lot about the type of preaching hip-hoppers will be attracted to. They are a people of truth stories. The rappers who have longevity and success are those who use their personal story as community story that shares the truth in struggle and what struggle produces. This translates into preaching that is authentic, honest, revealing—rooted in story that is practical and relevant. It works not just on Sunday but also on Monday through Saturday. Preachers who are going to be successful with the hip-hop generation will be preachers who reclaim the telling of the story—the old, old story and your story—

[353] Ibid., 85.
[354] Watkins and Barr, 17.

> as it relates to the hip-hop generation's story, in their language. In summary, effective preaching to the hip-hop generation is about truth, translation, and honesty.[355]

Watkins draws from the wisdom of hip-hop rappers to glean insights for preachers hoping to connect with the same audience the rappers do. He lists ten key components shared by great rappers that can be applied to preaching: "originality, concepts, versatility, substance, flow, flavor, vocal presence, live performance, poetic value, and lyrics."[356] Another pastor who preaches primarily to the hip-hop generation shares, "The approach I take to preaching to hip-hop is one of excellence and quality exegesis. Let me reiterate: it is just as important to exegete one's culture as it is to exegete the text to be preached."[357]

Like Watkins, Smith and Jackson also believe that the preacher can learn from the hip-hop emcee. Smith explains, "I believe that the church has an opportunity to better preach the gospel message to those outside the church if it will pay closer attention to hip-hop culture through the lyrics of the emcee."[358] Smith and Jackson find similarities between the rapping of hip-hop culture and the black church's tradition of preaching. They note that "the black preaching tradition, like rapping, has historically spoken into social movements and struggles."[359] Another similarity pointed out by Smith and Jackson is that "black preaching includes rhythm and song: it's the originator of the 'whoop.'"[360] They find several other connections between rap and black preaching:

> Both hip-hop and the black church have roots in the African American experience. Both rap and black preaching are rooted in the African storytelling

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[355] Ibid., 17-18.
[356] Ibid., 63-64.
[357] Ibid., 107.
[358] Smith, 161.
[359] Ibid., 158.
[360] Ibid.

> tradition. Both rap and black preaching speak to issues of injustice. Both rap and black preaching have great influence on European Americans as well as people of other ethnicities.[361]

Jackson gives personal illustration from his own ministry of the implementation of these learned elements into his crafting of sermons:

> You have got to study the Word in a totally new way, unlearning any comfortable routine you've already developed for sermon study and preparation. You must creatively develop your message so that hip-hoppers will want to listen to what you have to say, almost as if they were calling for an encore at a concert. In order to do this you must move from God's Word and hip-hop culture at the same time. Start with the present, with what is going on now and why it is going on, both in your hood and around the globe. Assume your listeners have never even heard of the Bible. That way, by the time you get to the text they are ready to hear you bring the answer. Then you go to the past: this is the Word of God, which, as I just noted, may be unfamiliar with to them. To keep people with you, you need to find a bridge in the text, the material that is relevant to the current situation you've highlighted.[362]

Both Kunjufu and Murrow mentioned the need for pastors to shorten their sermons if they want to retain the attention of men in the congregation. Kunjufu asserts, "If you know that males have a shorter attention span, then the sermon needs to be shortened." He also poses a question to those who disagree:

> If only 12 percent of the congregation remembers the sermon, 87 percent say their minds wander, 35 percent say the sermons are too long, and only 5 percent of men credit sermons as their primary source of knowledge, is this really the best way to teach the Word of God?[363]

Murrow concurs with Kunjufu on these thoughts:

> It's often more effective with men to make one point thrice than to make three points once. Men have an attention span of six to eight minutes, yet the average Protestant sermon is more than thirty minutes in length. Pastors and teachers, why not break your teaching into smaller bits so men can more easily digest what you're saying?[364]

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[361] Ibid., 162.
[362] Ibid., 211.
[363] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*. p. 55.
[364] Murrow, 177.

Murrow also insists:

> Men need challenging teaching, men appreciate forthrightness, men need great stories; [therefore preachers should] emphasize life transformation rather than moral improvement, present teaching that leads people somewhere, stay faithful to Scripture, and answer the questions men are asking.[365]

Other authors disagree with the idea of shortening the length of sermons to keep the attention of today's men. Stott writes:

> It is sad that in reaction against Victorian expansiveness many preachers have reduced their sermons to a ten-minute homily. Congregations will not grow spiritually healthy on an inadequate diet like that. "Sermonettes breed Christianettes," as both Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel and Stuart Holden of St. Paul's, Portman Square, who were contemporaries, have been credited with saying ... No hard and fast rules can be laid down about the length of sermons, except perhaps that ten minutes are too short and forty minutes too long. It has been wisely said that every sermon should "seem like twenty minutes," even if it is actually longer.[366]

Contemporary preacher Mark Driscoll leads a trend towards longer sermons. Bohannon reports:

> No matter the expositional method, the length of Driscoll's message typically stays the same, which represents the second methodological observation. Upwards of an hour or even an hour and a half is typical, with his longest sermon coming in at one hour and forty minutes—without notes. Although Scripture does not directly speak to the issue of sermon length, Driscoll embraces the occasional examples of Jesus or Paul preaching long sermons (Matthew 15:29-31; Acts 20:7-11). He also classifies this extended sermon trend with young reformed preachers in contrast to seeker or purpose-type evangelical churches who tend to shut down the message within the half hour ... Evidently, based on his preaching method having commandeered national interest—as the key to his draw—and the growth of Mars Hill pressing into the thousands, it does appear that he has figured something out, with the length of his sermons, rather than being a distraction, being an added bonus.[367]

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[365] Ibid.,. 178-180.
[366] Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 294.
[367] Bohannon, 145-146.

Importance of Contextualization Outside the Pulpit

While preaching is a vital aspect of ministry, to have an impact of young African American males in the urban context, the work of ministry must also go on outside of the pulpit. In their book, *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne argue that "Sunday sermons are necessary but not sufficient. Sermons are needed, yes, but they are not all that is needed."[368] They go on to clarify, "we do not want to see less emphasis on preaching or less effort go into preaching! It is the word of the gospel that is sufficient, rather than any one particular form of its delivery."[369] They go on to advocate for a ministry model where the pastor functions as a trainer of other leaders so that the work of ministry is shared by more than just one person. The pastor must apply the truths learned about the core concerns of young African American males to all aspects of ministry, not just the preaching. This will, in turn, add to the impact of preaching.

Chapell draws on three classic rhetorical principles that are said to compose every persuasive message: logos, pathos, and ethos."[370] He defines ethos as "the perceived character of the speaker, determined most significantly by the concern expressed for the listeners' welfare. Aristotle's belief (confirmed in countless modern studies) was that ethos is the most powerful component of persuasion."[371]

John Stott concurs with this idea:

> Preaching can never be isolated from the preacher. Ultimately it is who he is that determines both what he says and how he says it. He may glimpse the glory of preaching and grasp its theology. He may study hard and prepare well. He may

[368] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, N.S.W.: Matthias Media, 2009), 102.
[369] Ibid., 103.
[370] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 34.
[371] Ibid., 34.

> see the need to relate the Word to the world, and genuinely desire to be a bridge-builder. Yet still he may lack the vital ingredient (for lack of which nothing can compensate) of personal spiritual reality. Sincerity and earnestness are not qualities which can be attached to us from the outside, like the decorations we tie to our Christmas trees ... A good sermon is never worked up but worked out.[372]

Stephens and Watkins list the principle of "practice what you preach" as vital for effective ministry among contemporary adults.[373] They add that "we young adults are not concerned simply with biblical data, charismatic personality, or denominational liturgy. Instead, we are drawn to authentically spiritual people ... Probably the most important thing preachers can do to reach my peers is to live a life of spiritual authenticity."[374]

Through his ministry among black Muslims, Llano has found several key elements that preachers need to live out to give validity to their preaching, at least in the eyes of the Muslims. He lists "being a servant, loving others, living a moral lifestyle, and being committed to Christ"[375] as impactful traits that lend credibility to the preacher's message.

In addition to the life and witness of the preacher going hand-in-hand with the words the preacher proclaims, so also the ministry of deeds must also compliment the ministry of the Word. Staples asserts:

> Reversing the exodus of men—especially young men—from Christianity will take a cultural shift on the part of church pastors, who can not only preach but put the Gospel to work solving the social problems plaguing their communities.[376]

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[372] Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 295.
[373] Stephens, 84.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Llano, 70-73.
[376] Gracie Bonds Staples, "Faithful, but Absent: Why Are Many Black Men Staying Away from the Church, and What Would Bring Them Back into the Fold?" *Atlanta Journal - Constitution,* August 12, 2006.

Specifically regarding ministry among the incarcerated, Staples adds "because one out of every three African American males is in the penal system, either in jail, state or federal pen or on probation, it's imperative for churches to have a prison ministry."[377]

Newbigin echoes the call to the marriage of Word and deed ministry. He writes, "If we turn to the Gospels we are bound to note the indissoluble nexus between deeds and words."[378] Newbigin further explains:

> The preaching is an explanation of the healings. On the one hand, the healings—marvelous as they are—do not explain themselves … On the other hand, the preaching is meaningless without the healings. They are the true explanation of what is happening, but if nothing is happening no explanation is called for and the words are empty words.[379]

Llano speaks from his experience in ministering to African American men who have turned to Islam to address their core concerns: "In most cases, simply giving a verbal witness is not enough to bring a black Muslim to Christ because they need to see how Christianity is relevant and applicable to their lives."[380]

This literature area has covered contextualization, beginning with a review of biblical and theological material, and then explaining the meaning and necessity of contextualization. The section then moved to observe literature on contextualization within postmodern culture, followed by material on contextualization in preaching to young African American males. The last section of this literature area outlined the importance of contextualization outside the pulpit.

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that address the "core concerns" of young African American males in

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[377] Ibid.
[378] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 131.
[379] Ibid., 132.
[380] Llano, 63.

an urban context. In this chapter, the literature related to this study has been arranged under the following three general topics: a) "Core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context, b) Christ-centered preaching, and c) Contextualization. The next chapter describes the methodology used to conduct research among urban pastors who regularly preach to young African American males. Chapter three will present the research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, researcher position, and research limitations.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that address the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context. This chapter presents the research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, researcher position, and research limitations.

Design of the Study

This study was conducted through the method of qualitative research. In her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation,* Sharan B. Merriam describes qualitative research as "interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."[381] Merriam identifies four key characteristics of the nature of qualitative research: "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive."[382] The underlying philosophy behind qualitative research may be described as "interpretive." Interpretive research "assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event."[383]

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[381] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 2009),13.
[382] Ibid., 14.
[383] Ibid., 8.

The qualitative method is ideal for this particular study because it provides for the discovery of the most comprehensive and descriptive data from participant perspectives. The study used participant criteria in order to minimize variables for the proposed in-depth research. Therefore, all of the participants share the same type of institutional church structure and culture. Each pastor serves in an urban context and has done so for at least five years. Because the variables involved in the data analysis are more focused, the narrow criterion for participant selection allowed for enhanced exploration of the intricacies of preaching to young African American males in an urban context.

Sample Selection

The sampling strategy employed is called "purposeful sampling." Merriam describes this type of sampling as "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned."[384]

For this study, the researcher interviewed six pastors who have ministered in urban communities for at least five years and who have experience in ministering among young African American males. This experience gives them credibility in speaking with first-hand knowledge to the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context. Most of these pastors are currently working in the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) denomination, and the few who are not from PCA churches share many of the same theological distinctives. This is important because each pastor interviewed is familiar with the idea of "Christ-centered preaching."

All of the pastors interviewed have had some degree of fruitfulness in ministering to young, urban African American males. One measure of fruitfulness is that they have

[384] Ibid., 77.

trained at least one African American male who has gone on to serve in some form of ministry leadership. This measure is significant because it demonstrates that these pastors have been able to identify and effectively address the core concerns of these men with the gospel. The churches these pastors serve in vary in size and overall demographics: some of the pastors minister in multiethnic congregations while others pastor predominately African American churches. Additionally, most of these pastors were the primary church planters of their current congregations. This distinction provides them with experience in assessing the needs of their communities, as well as in reaching out to and retaining young African American males in their contexts.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. In these types of interviews, the researcher uses a mixture of more and less structured interview questions. The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues in order to explore them more thoroughly. As Merriam notes, "less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways."[385] She adds that "this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic."[386] Ultimately, these methods enable the researcher to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants.

This study focused on six pastors who are working with a significant number of young African American males in an urban context, and who have had some measure of

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[385] Ibid., 90.
[386] Ibid., 90.

impact in reaching and retaining these men in their congregations. In order to discover and explore their best practices in ministering to young African American males in an urban context, the following research questions were used:

1. What are the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context?
2. How have young African American males in your area sought to address their "core concerns"?
3. How do pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons mindful of the needs of young African American males?
4. What principles and methods of contextualization do pastors utilize in preaching to the young African American male demographic?

A pilot test of the interview protocol was performed to help evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature, but evolved in response to the explanations and descriptions emerging from constant comparison work during the interviewing process. Prior to the interview, each pastor received a letter explaining the purpose of the research, a consent form, and the protocol for the interview. The following questions were prepared for interviews with study participants:

1. How long have you ministered in your current location?
2. Were you the original church planter of the congregation where you serve now? How did the church begin?
3. What priority have you given to reaching young African American males in your context?
4. Tell me about successes and difficulties in ministering to young African American males in your context. What role, if any, did your preaching play?
5. What methods seem to be successful in reaching out to and retaining young African American males in your preaching ministry?

6. What have you identified as "core concerns" for young African American males in your context?

7. How do you take these "core concerns" into account in your preaching content and delivery?

8. How do you take these "core concerns" into account in your preparation for preaching?

9. Who have been your mentors and models in preaching to young African American males?

The interviews were recorded in-person by the researcher, using a digital voice recorder, and then transcribed. Recording the interviews ensured that everything said by the respondents was preserved for later analysis. Interview transcripts were formatted to facilitate analysis. Each page contains identifying information regarding when, where, and with whom the interview was conducted. The majority of the interviews took place in the fall of 2010 in urban areas in the Northeastern portion of the United States. One interview was conducted in September 2010 with a pastor in a Midwestern city.

Data Analysis

Merriam defines data analysis simply as "the process of making sense out of the data."[387] She adds that "the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your research questions."[388] The answers to these research questions are called "findings," "categories," or "themes." The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis. This method "involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data."[389] An underlying assumption behind the use of qualitative data

[387] Ibid., 175.
[388] Ibid., 176.
[389] Ibid., 30.

analysis is that this type of analysis is "inductive and comparative in the service of developing common themes or patterns or categories that cut across the data."[390]

The data set for this study consists of the transcribed interviews with the urban pastors. The recordings of the interviews stored on the digital voice recorders have been backed up on a laptop computer and transcribed via a word processing program.

The data has been organized and managed utilizing a system called "coding." Merriam defines coding as "assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data."[391] These codes were used to organize the data into specific categories. Categories are "conceptual elements that 'cover' or span many individual examples of the category."[392] Merriam instructs that the categories constructed during the data analysis must meet several criteria: categories should be "as sensitive to the data as possible, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and conceptually congruent."[393]

An important note about the process of qualitative data analysis is that it should be conducted along with, rather than after, the data collection. Merriam counsels that "collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research."[394] She adds even stronger words on the importance of keeping analysis and collection together: "you have undermined your entire project by waiting until after all the data are collected before beginning analysis."[395] Merriam explains:

> The much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection. At the outset of a qualitative study, the

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[390] Ibid., 269.
[391] Ibid., 173.
[392] Ibid., 181.
[393] Ibid., 186.
[394] Ibid., 169.
[395] Ibid., 170.

> investigator knows what the problem is and has selected a purposeful sample to collect data in order to address the problem. But the researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating.[396]

In order to analyze the data, I first read through the transcripts of the interviews and gave them descriptive coding tags. In my notes, I described the location of the quote so I could find it later. I sorted the data under the four research questions: What are the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context?; How have young, urban, African American males in your area sought to address their "core concerns"?; How do pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons mindful of the needs of young African American males?; and What principles and methods of contextualization do pastors utilize in preaching to the young African American male demographic? As I combed through the quotes and copied the descriptive coding tags under one of the four research questions, I developed subheadings to further sort the tags collected under each question. When necessary, I added a fifth heading of "Miscellaneous" for descriptive coding tags that did not seem to fit under any of the four research questions.

Research Limitations

Due to limited time and resources, only six pastors were interviewed for this study, and the participants were limited to those serving in theologically reformed churches in urban contexts. Each of the research participants also lives and ministers in cities in the Northeast region of the United States. Because all of the pastors are male,

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[396] Ibid., 171.

this study is limited by the absence of female considerations. As with all qualitative studies, the readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results of this study may have implications for pastors and leaders serving in different capacities and among different ethnic groups of young males other than African Americans.

Researcher Position

The researcher pastors a church in an urban context and ministers among young Africa American males. Thus the study has been written from the perspective of someone with a vested interest in the results. The researcher is also writing and ministering from a reformed theological perspective, which may cause some bias in reading about and hearing of ministry done among this demographic by those from a different theological viewpoint. Finally, the researcher himself is an African American male living in an urban context. While the researcher may no longer be described as "young," he nevertheless may resonate with some of the core concerns in the findings.

This chapter has outlined the research framework and methodology of this study to give the reader an understanding of the process involved. The data analysis of the material is reviewed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that address the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context. This study focused on six pastors who are working with a significant number of young African American males in urban contexts, and who have had some measure of fruitfulness in reaching and retaining these men in their congregations. In order to discover and explore their best practices in ministering to young African American males in an urban context, the following research questions were used:

1. What are the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context?

2. What are some avenues young African American males in an urban context have sought to address their "core concerns"?

3. How do pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons mindful of the needs of young African American males?

4. What principles and methods of contextualization do pastors utilize in preaching to the young African American male demographic?

The findings gleaned from the interviews with six urban pastors are presented below. The actual names of the pastors and their churches are not used.

Core Concerns of Young African American Males in Urban Contexts

The first research question addressed what the pastors perceive to be "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context. Ellis defines these concerns as "life concerns which tend to be life-controlling and life-defining in people's

lives."[397] Each of the pastors was asked if they were familiar with Ellis' work and the term "core concerns," and each indicated that they were. The pastors identified the following areas as core concerns: manhood, identity, direction, survival, navigating pain, community, and dealing with authority.

Manhood

Four of the six pastors interviewed identified manhood as a core concern. Included in this concern were aspects such as acceptance and fatherlessness. Pastor Bryant planted a church in a predominately African American community in a northeast city about ten years ago. From the very beginning of his ministry there, he found himself speaking to this core concern. He shared:

> When I thought about preaching to them it really was hands-on on man issues: "How do I be a man?" Nearly all of them came from backgrounds where they didn't have fathers who taught them how to relate to women well, they didn't really seem to have a clue as to how to live in this world with a good genuine biblical witness while living in this culture. So there was a lot of thought about how do I help the men think about doctrine and manhood.

Pastor Bryant lamented that he saw teen boys from the church youth group drift away from the church once they moved into adulthood. He explained:

> We didn't see the transition for them from youth group to young adulthood. They had a lot of the same things: no father, a lot of brokenness, a lot of pain in their lives. They just didn't connect and really see the small things, faith lived out in every area of life. They were just put off and didn't pick up anything else. They just dropped out of everything and life was just a parade against them. The city school system was not even near the best, so they weren't marketable. So they just struggled to survive, and they really didn't have a network of support other than brothers or cousins who also don't really know a lot about life either, so they just struggle with every area of life. They struggled with attachment and relationships with women. They couldn't really make a way for themselves.

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[397] Carl F. Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: An Analysis of Today's African-American Cultural Crisis," (Chattanooga, TN: Accord Publications, 2007), 1.

Another urban pastor, Pastor Daniels, ministers in the same city as Pastor Bryant and has also noticed this concern about manhood. He speaks of the connection of this core concern to fatherlessness. "I think one of the core concerns of the men in our context is identifiable fatherhood," said Daniels. "When I say the term, 'identifiable fatherhood', what I mean by that is them being able to identify with someone who's a dad." Pastor Daniels believes that these young men will seek to have that need filled by any means necessary. He explains:

> Now that can be done either redemptively or unredemptively. Most guys that do that unredemptively, all of them naturally have unredemptive daddy issues where whenever something that God provides is not made available to us we create idols to fill that gap. I think that everything from the philosophy of Jay-Z, P-Diddy, Baby, (that runs Cash Money), those are the three top millionaires in hip hop. Even the relationship between Baby and Lil Wayne is looked up to, in a way that makes guys desire that relative fatherhood. You've got Jay-Z and Memphis Bleak, who have a sort of father-son relationship. So you see it in unredemptive culture but you also see it in redemptive culture. We say one of the top core concerns of men is that need, that deep need, for adopting some level of father relationship with a man.

Daniels sees another related effect of fatherlessness on manhood: he believes another core concern for these young men is that they want "the spoils of adulthood and manhood without the maturity." He expounds on this thought:

> I don't know if I'm wording that right, but they're very concerned about wanting to maintain a level of autonomy, a level of freedom and entrepreneurialism (many young black men want to have their own business now). It's not really rooted in wanting to have their own business, but it's really that they want to decide who controls how free they are. And so if they own their own schedule then they can be a kid when I want. That's why the average age of guys who play video games is thirty-five years old. So I think that's a big core concern that needs to be addressed in helping men understand the responsibility of manhood. But it's deeply connected to that fatherhood wound.

A final aspect of this core concern of manhood, Daniels believes, is acceptance. He believes that "all of these are deeply tied together: fatherhood, manhood, and

acceptance. So I think that core concern of needing acceptance really impacts how they view church, how they view community, and how they view male relationships."

Pastor Bryant also touched on the desire for young men to be treated as men. In speaking to the core concern of manhood, he added, "Respect was another issue. The attitude they have is, 'You're going to respect me as a man; you're not going to talk to me any other way.'"

Identity

A second core concern area for young African American males in urban contexts is identity. Pastor Anthony, an urban pastor in the Midwest, speaks of questions he hears young people around him asking, including: "How do I make sense of and define myself in the midst of all these forces seeking to define me?" He thinks these questions are attempts to understand life in the midst of the hard realities of the inner city. Anthony reasons that "finding several different options for how to create meaning out of pain can provide bridges to healing and spark a freshness of their identity." His church's worship services utilize different artistic components (e.g. dance, rap, poetry), mixed in and around his sermons, in providing bridges to address the pain of young African American males.

Pastor Bryant noticed how this quest for identity may affect young peoples' relationship with their parents, but also with their parents' church. This was a reason Bryant saw young men in his context turning to hip hop culture. When asked what about hip-hop may have drawn these young men in, Bryant replied:

> That it wasn't their parents' culture. It was something that was theirs. It was something to help them see what it was to be a man and define their own way. They could express all of their immaturity and do their own thing, be their own person. This had a real attraction because they didn't really fit into mainstream

> culture or corporate culture. Definitely they didn't fit in with church culture. They saw the church as dissing them. They had their own lingo, their own dress, and they wore that as a badge of honor to say, "We're not one of them, we're our own culture."

Direction

Bryant identified a lack of direction in life as the primary core concern of young men in his city. "There is just no direction in terms of what are they going to do with their lives," he remarked. He compares this generation with his own peer group:

> One thing that was common for all of us was that there was a direction in life. Either you were going to go to school and do that as far as getting an education and getting a professional job (I was a psychology major), or you were going to work for a good company and get on a full-time, permanent, 40 hours per week job with benefits. There was also a basic path for life as far as getting married, being in the church, things like that. When I came in contact with the hip-hop group, there was none of that. There was "hip-hop is our culture, it's our life, and we don't really need anything outside of doing hip-hop. We don't really have a focus of really (a) going to school or (b) getting a job with a company in order to do something and continuing to do hip-hop on the side." They would say "I'm thinking about this school or that school," but there was no concrete plan and it just didn't happen. And then when they get to age twenty-one or twenty-two they feel like it might be too late, and they get married too early.

Bryant also thought this lack of direction he saw in the lives of young men he was working with was tied to the fatherlessness aspect of the manhood concern. He observed that these young men were not only lacking a father in their homes; they don't have father figures involved in their lives on any level. He contrasted that dynamic with his own upbringing, which was also in the inner city: "There was that role model in terms of 'I know what a man is supposed to be, even though I may not have one in my house.' But when it comes to the hip-hop generation, there's not a whole lot of men around period, so there's no way of giving direction." The young men Bryant works with also struggle to find answers in the church to this core concern of life direction.

> Most if not all grew up with the influence of Christianity. They do want some substance in their lives. A lot of them don't want to go with this whole type of

> "Let's live for pleasure for the sake of living for pleasure because that's all there is." They want structure, they want order, they want to see something that is effective at helping them deal with all the issues we have, but they just don't see it in the church.

Pastor Edwards, another pastor from a city in the northeast, sees the lack of direction in the lives of young African American males manifesting itself in what he calls a "lack of educational drive." Edwards explains further:

> "There is no goal, no concrete educational goal. You ask them, 'What are you going to do?'"
> "Well, I want to go to college."
> "Have you thought about applying?"
> "No."
> "Have you taken the SAT?"
> "No."
> "Are you pursuing anything?"
> "No."
> "What do you want to study?"
> "I don't know."
> "And then if you don't do that, then what do you want to do in life? You know, they just have no idea, no drive, just kind of living life haphazardly. That is a major concern."

Edwards also sees this lack of direction impacting the spiritual lives of the young men he comes in contact with. He laments:

> There is also a lack of a real zeal for the Lord, for the things of God. There is no drive. It's as if they think, "I could take or leave church, I could take or leave my walk with the Lord. I'm not excited about worship or excited about receiving the Word or excited about the city or discipleship or growing in the Lord or sharing my faith or any zeal like that." Their faith walk is just haphazard. It also comes out in that if we have no events for young African American men, they don't care one way or the other.

Survival

Half of the pastors interviewed named "survival" as a core concern for the young African American males in their contexts. Pastor Anthony defined this core concern as trying to figure out "how to live in this life."

Each of the pastors who identified survival as a core concern saw this issue as being tied directly to men being worried about having enough money to survive. Pastor Anthony said, "Money is an issue. How do I get paid? And at the same time though, and this is crazy, they want to get paid but have no skills to bring to the table." Pastor Bryant commented, "When you are the bottom of the economic food chain, and as a black man you're still on the bottom pretty much, survival is an issue."

Pastor Cox is the longest-tenured pastor interviewed for this project. He ministers in a southeastern city, and has served extensively among the poor. He also defined the core concern of survival in economic terms. He said young men in his community are deeply concerned "as to how they were dealing with the poverty of their lives. You know, it was a fairly typical situation where more of them were in single parent-situations and homes, and most of them were really struggling with whether or not they were even going to finish high school." He has seen a disturbing cycle of poverty perpetuating itself in his city:

> There has always been a segment of the poor, urban black community that has been continually creating another cycle of poverty. Young men impregnating young women who do not finish school, who become functionally illiterate, who fall into a pattern of gangs, drugs, and violence, and become a part of the criminal justice system. And it's just perpetuated, perpetuated, perpetuated. Since the 1960s the percentage of African Americans who have grown up in traditional homes, with a mother and father in the home, has continuously declined, unlike fifty years ago where you had a tradition in the black community of the extended family. In poverty, you have always had teenage girls getting pregnant out of wedlock, but when you have a strong community and when we have a strong enough extended family, you can take that child with uncles, grandparents, and still raise that child right. But when your grandmother is a crack addict, when your mother is a prostitute, when all your uncles are jail, and you don't even know who your father is, when nobody in those three generations—great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother—has gone to church, you are dealing with a very pathetic and dangerous population. And that's what we are dealing with now in 2010. We are no longer dealing with a community that had relatives who

> were in the church, who had stable families that they could go to in the summertime. It's getting worse.

Navigating Pain

A few pastors mentioned the core concern of young men learning to navigate through the pain they've experienced in their lives in the urban context. One of those who highlighted this was Pastor Bryant. In naming what he saw as core concerns, he shared, "It's not talked about, but another issue is how to navigate brokenness. All of us need to do that. There's a lot of brokenness and how do you deal with that?" Pastor Anthony has also seen this dynamic. He sees young men he works with asking the question, "How do I find meaning in my pain?" He further observed:

> African American boys they don't know how to really communicate their pain: they do and they don't. They may know how but they're unwilling to do it or show it so that they end up expressing it through different means, sometimes healthy and sometimes unhealthy. Finding several different options for how to create meaning out of pain can provide bridges to healing and spark a freshness of their identity of who they are.

Community

Pastor Daniels identified community as a core concern for young African American males early on in his ministry. He was one of the original church planters about five years ago of the work he serves in now. Building a strong community of men was vital to not only the beginning of the church but its current strength. At the outset of the founding of his church he spent time with eight young men building community and pouring his life into them. He explains his reasoning for this strategy:

> That was a priority, beyond just some kind of men's breakfast or Wednesday men's ministry or something, but a life-on-life expression because this generation values relationship with indoctrination. They don't mind indoctrination but they want relationship with it, or they feel like they could just read a book.

Daniels celebrates the fact that each of the young men he invested in and built community with is now serving in leadership, either in the church he pastors or other urban churches.

He saw community as a core concern for young men in his context as he related back to his own experience in college. He believes that men of every social status will seek community in some fashion. For those in poor neighborhoods, belonging to gangs can provide the male community men seek. Regarding young African American men living outside of lower income areas and their desire for community, Daniels observes:

> Upper class and middle-to-upper-class black men, tend to seek community in school, in their neighborhoods or in organizations. In other words, what they are really seeking is biblical community, although they don't really know that's what they're seeking in particular. I think guys seek it in different ways. I didn't realize how much belonging to fraternities is on the rise. I was in a fraternity back in my college days. So my core concerns, the reasons I became a part of a fraternity, were the big three things—fatherhood, manhood, and acceptance. And I saw the fraternity as a way of developing community, relationship, and that type of thing with men where I was accepted and where I knew that I was held in high regard. I think every man in his heart wants that.

Dealing with Authority

Four of the six urban pastors identified dealing with authority as a core concern of young African American males in their contexts. These authority figures include parents, teachers, police, and church authorities. Pastor Anthony spoke of the ambivalent feelings he saw in young men towards authority figures. He thought they both did and didn't want to submit to authority in their lives. He shared:

> It's crazy because a father or a man represents authority and so young men want that same authority but they've never been under that authority, they don't know how to navigate authority. Sometimes you find a male coach who they want something from and that creates a submissiveness. But when that isn't there, like with a male teacher or any other male, it becomes combative because they've never talked to a man. They've always talked to a lady and they never were told "no." But they want to have others submit to them as an authority figure. It's

> crazy because now, younger cats—there's always been this kind of struggle, this rift with authority— it seems like these days they think, "I'm co-equal with you. I'm going to diss you because I'm a man." I say all that because the male authority in the young man's life is missing, and yet they think they should have authority, and they need to learn how to navigate through that.

Pastor Bryant witnessed this same struggle with authority in a church setting recently, when one of the pastors at a local church came under discipline because of improprieties. He observed:

> I see big trouble with authority issues. We see that with a situation at Christ Our King Church. There was a huge problem with people saying "You're not going to tell us what to do." There was an incident that happened on Facebook. The combination of fatherlessness and hip-hop culture says, "I do what I want to do, and no one has any kind of real authority over me." So there is a rebelling against any kind of genuine authority, so that people set themselves up the way they want and do what they want."

Avenues Young African American Males Seek to Have Their Core Concerns Addressed

The second research question dealt with different avenues young African American males have turned to in order to have their core concerns addressed. The primary avenues the pastors identified were street life, hip-hop culture, the Nation of Islam, immorality, idolatry and entertainment. Pastor Franklin, who is now engaged in planting an urban church in a northeastern city, refers to these other avenues as "alternative religions." He believes that,

> Practically everybody has a pastor, and everybody has a church or a religion. Whether it's an organized one, an institutionalized one, or it's a boot-legged one like one of those bootleg DVD's. Now it may be a bootlegged one, with a bad picture on it, and the heads going by, but it's a movie nonetheless.

"Street Life"

The term "street life" refers to a number of related activities many of the pastors see young African American males turn to in order to have their core concerns addressed.

Pastor Anthony includes gangs, acts of violence, and drugs in this term. Pastor Cox has witnessed what he calls "a propensity towards violence, which could break out at any moment." Pastor Daniels refers to this "street life" idea as "thuggism," and has seen it more prevalently in low income areas. Pastor Franklin includes drug use, drug sales, violence, and robbery in the notion of street life. These things are what he calls "the loud sins of the inner city."

Pastor Cox related a horrifying story that illustrates the effects of street life:

> Recently in our neighborhood, an African American pastor was murdered. He lived three blocks from me. One of the young men who did it, he was twenty-two, and the other guy was sixteen. The twenty-two-year-old had a relationship with the pastor over a couple of years. He had evidently come to the church, come forward, made a commitment, later made a recommitment, but subsequently fell right back into drugs. So the pastor knew the guy. And one night, I guess it was on a Friday or Saturday night, the two young men showed up at his house. He must have let them in, because there was no sign of forced entry. They stabbed him about eighteen times. The police said it was one of the most brutal murders they'd ever seen. They beat him, strangled him, and stabbed him. And no one knew where the pastor was. The mother of the sixteen-year-old saw him driving a PT Cruiser and asked him, "Where did you get this car?" He changed his story about three different times, so she called the police. She said, "Look, my son is driving a car and he doesn't have a license." So the police put out a watch for the car. The next night about 3:30 in the morning, they saw the twenty-two-year-old driving it. The policeman pulled him over and said this is pastor so-and-so's car. So he sent another policeman over to the pastor's house and he found the pastor lying on the floor. He'd been dead for three or four days.

Some of the young men Pastor Bryant has worked with have been engaged in this street life. He lamented, that these men "struggled with attachment and relationships with women. They couldn't really make a way for themselves. They just do nothing, live in the hood, and eventually get shot. That is what happens. We heard about a guy who got shot just a few months ago."

Hip-Hop Culture

Pastor Franklin has observed a movement of young men towards hip-hop culture, especially the musical aspect of it.

> They're also turning to hip-hop, hip-hop being not just the culture but literally the music. Nowadays with a computer and a microphone you can get some beats, make a CD, and sell it out of your car or give it away and have it played in cars around the neighborhood.

Pastor Daniels has also noticed an increased desire of young men to not only listen to hip-hop music, but to become professional hip-hop artists themselves.

> Another big avenue is the arts. Right now everybody, I mean twenty years ago I don't think most of these cats would have been thinking of becoming a rapper, but now everybody wants to be a rapper. I can't believe how many people want to be emcees or artists. I mean half of our congregation of men either are, or want to be some type of artist. And every young church planter I know that has people under the age of thirty-five is dealing with the same issue. It's not just rap and dance that attracts them, but it's also the entrepreneurial aspect of it. Even guys that start businesses use the arts as a major marketing piece to start their business.

Pastor Bryant was surprised to learn of the seriousness with which young African American males he came in contact with approached hip-hop.

> But with the hip-hop generation I've seen this attitude more and more: "I'm doing hip-hop and this is what I'm going to do." I found out that hip-hop is a whole culture, and outside of getting saved, hip-hop is what they wanted to do. And now they say "I'm saved and I'm going to make a record and blow up {become famous}." I was taken aback by that. I knew enough through church that there was a focus on getting a job and still serving the Lord. So that was the one thing that stood out to me about the hip-hop generation.

Pastor Anthony sees hip-hop as a way of young men trying to answer the core concern of identity. When he asked about alternatives he saw young men turning to in addressing this core concern, he explained:

> Sometimes cats rhyming, you know, hip-hop and things like that. You find guys trying to redefine themselves through the music. And so having an album, an EP, or something out saying, "This is who I am, this is who I really am, and this is who I want to be" is an expression of identity. The art of hip-hop gives them a

> context to express themselves. I think the reality of what education has not done to help young African American men causes those kinds of responses.

Anthony named a number of hip hop artists who were particularly influential in the lives of the young men he works with.

> They listen to hip-hop artists such as Nas, Jay-Z, Lupee Fiasco and some Dead poets Society. You find a lot of social commentary from these guys and Young Jeezy, some other gangsta type of guys who are in the streets. They don't listen to 50 Cent that much anymore but they listen to Young Jeezy and Lil Wayne. Those artists are the ones that are either pumping more nonsense into what cats believe about their situation or themselves. In various ways, these artists help folks define their situation and themselves.

Pastor Franklin refers to some of these artists as "pastors of our kids." He said that "Jay-Z is pastoring our kids, Eminem is pastoring our kids, and they're giving them the gospel according to Jay-Z, the gospel according to Eminem." What he means is that many young African American males are turning to these hip hop artists to help them address their core concerns.

Nation of Islam

Pastor Bryant ministers in a city where the Nation of Islam has a particularly strong influence. "You see a lot of Muslims [from the Nation of Islam], even among young people going to school. You see it in every black neighborhood. In every black neighborhood you'll see Muslims there," he commented. Pastor Edwards has especially seen the Nation of Islam's influence among men who are incarcerated. He has written apologetic material that has been particularly effective among men in prison and returning home from prison.

One reason for the strong influence of the Nation of Islam, according to Pastor Anthony, is that their leaders make an attempt to address the particular core concerns of young African American males. He even seeks to learn from them in how to speak to

those core concerns from a Christian perspective. "I think you can learn from everybody," he explained. "You look at black Muslims, they deal with humanity; they deal with human issues."

Pastor Bryant saw believes that another reason for the Nation of Islam's influence among young black males is that it appeals to a more nationalistic mindset. He's heard a number of men claim that "Islam is the black man's religion" while Christianity is "the white man's religion." He noted that some black men have a mindset that essentially says, "Even if I don't don the uniform I'm going to live the principles of Islam, even if I don't even know the principles of Islam."

Pastor Bryant was concerned that the negative perception people have of the church in his city would drive more young black men towards the Nation of Islam. He has experienced this negative perception firsthand.

> We were giving a free outdoor event. People could come get some free food, they didn't have to do anything, but we were doing some surveys in the neighborhood. My intern related the story that there were two guys who were about to reach for a survey. They asked who he was with and when he told them, the guys said, "We won't even bother." Because it was a church, and the connotation is just so negative that the average brother who thinks of Islam as the original black man's religion isn't going to even consider the church. Their mother or aunt or older sister or whatever, if they're a member of a church, it's likely that there's been some foolishness at that church that their relatives can't explain.

Bryant further expounds on some of the perceived contrasts between Christianity and the Nation of Islam, and particularly the prosperity gospel version that is more prevalent in Christian churches now:

> Most if not all of them grew up with the influence of Christianity. They do want some substance in their lives. A lot of them don't want to go with the hedonistic notion of let's live for pleasure for the sake of living for pleasure because that's all there is. They want structure, they want order, they want to see something that is effective at helping them deal with all the issues they have and they just don't see it in the church. So the next option is to be a Muslim. I think it is structure and

> the order that are appealing. There is a sense that "now you are somebody, and we're going to do something about these things. We present ourselves as strong people who are moving out together, as opposed to the cowardly, timid, selfish Christians."

Immorality and Idolatry

Pastor Edwards has found himself dealing extensively with idolatrous and licentious activities because he has seen many young black men in his context turn to these things to attempt to address their core concerns. "I am actually, for the first time doing pastoral work, dealing with real idols," he said. "I would say the other thing, at least where I am, is just immorality, living with a girlfriend or something of that nature."

Pastor Franklin has been uncovering a number of formerly hidden responses to the core concerns of men he ministers to.

> One of the underlying things is sex. There's a hidden problem of molestation in the inner cities. Some claim that "Black folks don't do that," but they do. I think molestation is an issue and porn is an issue, particularly among African American men. There are porn addicts and there are masturbation issues that I've heard about in counseling. And so I think they're turning to those things.

Entertainment

Entertainment, including sports, gambling, television, and video games, is another area the pastors say young black men are turning to in an attempt to address their core concerns. Pastor Edwards noted that this is especially an issue in the large northeastern city where he ministers, where there are seemingly unlimited options for entertainment. He expressed what stands out to him about the young men he's in contact with:

> ... just their love for entertainment. And that's not just in terms of entertainment in church, I mean entertainment in general like sitting around watching TV and participating in things that provide temporary, earthly enjoyment. That's not a judgment against those things, but that's just what life consists of for them: video, etc. I'm very concerned about what that kind of focus produces in somebody at say ages twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, and forty.

Pastor Franklin also sees "pastors" of our young people in the entertainment industry. He believes that "the NFL is pastoring our kids and the NBA is pastoring our kids."

Preparing and Delivering Christ-Centered Sermons Mindful of the Needs of Young African American Males

The third research question explored how pastors prepared and delivered Christ-centered sermons that are mindful of the core concerns of young African American males in urban contexts. The answers the pastors gave are divided into three categories: being mindful of the needs of young African American males, sermon preparation, and sermon delivery.

Being Mindful of Needs

Each of the pastors tries to be mindful of the particular situations of young African American males when they are in the study preparing for their sermons. Pastor Anthony described his mindset when preparing for a message: "I'm seeing students and young men in my head and I'm asking, What is this person's issue? and What is that person's issue?"" Anthony further explained:

> When I'm preparing a message and thinking through a text, I'm looking at this kid who's in front of me right now, and asking myself, "How would he perceive that?" I see all the different people around me, a single female here, a young African American male with single mom here, an adult male here, a married couple, a high-school kid, etc.

Pastor Bryant tries to be particularly mindful of the manhood and identity concerns the men in his congregation deal with.

> When I thought about preaching to them it really was hands-on man issues like how can I be a man? Nearly all of them came from backgrounds where they didn't have fathers who taught them how to relate to women well. None seem to have a clue on how to live in this world with a good genuine biblical witness in the midst of this culture. So there was a lot of thought about how do I help the

> men think about doctrine and manhood. A lot of the other pastors I met were big on Reformed theology. The problem is that they were always dealing in terms of theory, but they didn't provide any type of application in terms of how to live as a decent man. And there was a lot of that Bill Cosby mindset in me that thought they needed to grow up, find a job, and take care of their responsibilities. How do you think through theology in such a way that it enables you to live as a decent person who really lives out the things that you're learning about? And again, I worked with every type of guy: unchurched, unsaved, and reformed also.

Pastor Franklin is concerned to make sure that he addresses the concerns of young African American males without coming across to them as "an old man trying to be cool." He explains:

> I don't want to sound like some cornball who's heard the phrase "drop it like it's hot" and says it like an old fogey, without really understanding what they're saying. If I use an idiom like that, it needs to actually be relevant and not just an old man trying to be cool. So I do things like watch 106 and Park, I read Source magazine and the different hip-hop magazines and listen to Jay-Z. I do all of that because I seek to answer biblically and intelligently what they are all going after. I believe at the end of the day they're all after the same thing, but all those things leave them empty. So we seek to attack their emptiness with what Christ can do in fullness, because I do think that a lot of these goofballs are on a quest for wholeness. They just don't know that Jesus is the only way.

Because he ministers in an urban setting where there is more of a mixture of young African American males who are college educated and those who are not, Pastor Edwards also has to be mindful of the needs of those men who need more intellectual challenge. He has to take the wide educational range of his listeners into account in his preparation.

> One of the bells that people have heard me toll over and over again probably has been the need for reading and improving the life of the mind. I try to emphasize that reading and growing and thinking has been important in Christian history. And I try to challenge them to think on the issues of the day beyond what they might get on typical sitcoms or from a typical African American radio personality like the Steve Harveys or the Tom Joyners. I want to get them to think in another way, to think in the way that Scripture thinks. I try to give them a vision for what their family can be, if they will be diligent in working and thinking and in trusting the Lord and living for Him. I work hard at utilizing pop culture that slips into their lives but not speaking about it so much that they think that "He must be

> comfortable embracing pop culture the same way we're doing." It's a hard thing because I don't know what's out there in terms of secular rap and secular singing. I just offer the alternative, the Christian and the reformed rap, things like that.

Pastor Bryant is also mindful of the specific concerns of young black males who are drawn to the Nation of Islam. One thing that he has observed is that "the best way I see to engage Muslims from the Nation of Islam is to talk about community life, because the church is seen as having nothing to do with the community at all." He related a particular conversation he had with a Muslim about the work of a church in an urban community.

> I like to talk about community and the needs of the community, about what needs to be done in the community. It really helps when you're actually doing something. So we were on our way to a house dedication. It was great to be able to say that we work with Habitat for Humanity to rehab houses in the community. It helps the people, it helps the neighborhood. The way I engage them is to talk about what's already going on, what the church is already doing. I don't think the conversation would have jumped off if we'd started off talking about Jesus and Reformed theology.

Sermon Preparation

The pastors' reflections on their sermon preparation revealed a process that is both simple and complex. There are many things they take into consideration, in addition to the standard preparation any preacher would do. Pastor Daniels provided some insights into his preparation:

> I think my preparation process is simple and complex, it looks different every time. Of course I'm reading the text. I immediately open up to the languages, look at background, and I spend a lot of time, I do all 3 of my outlines at the same time in my mind. I do exegetical, theological, and homiletical outlines at the same time while I'm doing my study, so that by the time I'm finished doing my exegetical work I already have an outline.

Daniels incorporates teaching from Haddon Robinson into his regular preparation process. He connects Robinson's instruction with what African American preachers do by nature.

> This is how preaching is, especially in African American preaching: it's a natural exercise of how you apply Haddon Robinson's developmental questions. I use his developmental questions, which I think are the meat and potatoes of his book; I'm not using the style and all that. But one of the best things I think Haddon Robinson says on biblical preaching really are his developmental questions: (1) What is true? Answering people's questions that come up in their minds as to whether what you're saying is true; (2) What does it look like in my life?, and (3) How do I need to hear it? In other words, there is the author's intent with the original audience, the Christological interpretation, and then canonical interpretation. Beyond that, where are my people at in relation in their ability to hear what the word of God is saying in this particular area? And so this is where in the preaching you have to be careful of "eisegesis." That's why most preaching among this generation is done eisegetically. It's because I don't believe people trust that the text is able to minister to people's core concerns without compromising the text in some way.

While all of the preachers interviewed speak to young African American males on a regular basis, four of the six pastors also regularly preach in worship settings which are very diverse both ethnically and in terms of educational background. Pastor Cox explained how he is sensitive to this reality in his sermon preparation, particularly in how he thinks about the need for illustrations and practical applications:

> Most of my illustrations, most of my applications, are very concrete. The danger of course, is to make a concrete application without making it a moralism. For example, God doesn't want you to steal. That's true, but if all I'm doing is giving people the law it doesn't help them. They have to have the gospel, they have to have grace. So as the church has grown, I preach to a population of young people who have not finished school, who have dropped out, who are illiterate, and to people who have PhDs. So I run the gamut in my preaching.

Cox further explained how he preaches in a way that impacts young black males while speaking to a diverse congregation.

> I preach in a way that is populist. I can't allow it to be too academic. I can't allow it to be theoretical. But the educated people in my church, they like erudition.

> When I quote authors, when I note what other theologians have said, they revel in that. But the common people in the congregation don't care about any of that. And I must admit that often when educated people come, they are frustrated because they think that these sermons aren't deep enough; but what they find out—at least this is what I hope—that I preach the Scriptures. And I preach them with the understanding of grace. I believe that my sermons are Reformed, and I preach the whole counsel of God. I do not try to preach abstractly, I do not try to preach in a way that people are living except in their brains.

Pastor Cox does not want to merely entertain or distribute information in his sermons. He wants his messages to speak to the hearts of his people. He uses his illustrations toward that end.

> I use a lot of personal illustrations. I will talk about events that are happening, common events. I don't just preach in one little story after another, but stories are very important, anecdotes are very important, but everybody who hears me preach knows that I stick to the text, and I try to make the text live in the common experience of peoples' lives. And it is my hope that after you've heard my sermons, that you feel stabbed in the heart. That's maybe a common phrase that we use, but I want people thinking, "You've got me." I think in a populist kind of way, so that young men who come in off the street are going to get something. At least they're showing up; obviously they're not bored. As to what work of grace God is doing in their lives, that's up to God.

Pastor Daniels and other members of his staff are in the process of writing a book on preaching. Daniels explained that the idea for the book came from the preaching preparation process he has developed.

> I don't write down illustrations. I'll probably do 15-20 pages a week of writing for each sermon but I don't manuscript. They're more like triggers, and I mostly use quotes. As for format, I've created 5 S's of preaching for me. And I just realized that this is what we end up doing. Supplicating, studying, soaking, sizzling, and speaking. That's my process: Supplicating, Studying, Soaking, Sizzling, Speaking. The sizzling is the Holy Ghost fire! That comes from soaking. Matter of fact, we're writing a book on my S's for preaching.

But Daniels feels his preaching book will have a different focus than many of the preaching books that are written today.

> It's more about the nuts and bolts, the process. I think too many preaching books today are too technical. And guys don't trust the Holy Spirit. The guys don't pray,

> they don't load themselves up with prayer, and then get up and talk. That's what you need to do, man. And I think that nowadays most preaching books are written by mainline Western white Americans who talk more about structure and not the other elements. I think structure is a very narrow part of what the preaching process involves. And so I think one of the things we want to talk about is, what does it look like "to soak," because that's when you find your preaching voice, when you're soaking. Because when you get up and trust God, the Holy Spirit just throws stuff from your soul. I mean, you know that, I know you know that just from experience. But the Holy Spirit can't bring nothing out of you that ain't in you. And so I think that needs to be resurrected in the preaching process.

Sermon Delivery

Pastor Franklin characterizes his sermon delivery as very basic. He describes it this way:

> I'm normally a three-point guy, with explanation, implication, and application. And I consider application obedience, a call to obedience. And I believe in telling the story. So I think we've got to continue to tell the story because it is a grand narrative; it's a narrative, and we tell the story.

Pastor Edwards preaches in a predominately black congregation, located in an area where there are a large number of traditional predominately black churches. He is sometimes chided for "not being black enough" by people who've come to his church from other black churches. He describes his sermon delivery this way:

> I'm not musically inclined, nor do I have tons of James Baldwin or Langston Hughes poetry memorized. So I am not always drawing from African American literature or music, not too much from pop culture. Nor is my style really traditional. It probably sounds more like a very exciting lecture. But I do bring my own personal excitement for the text and the Lord to it. But if people are expecting some sort of climax that's always going to make them feel immediately happy in the sermon that doesn't happen, I don't have that.

Pastor Cox also wrestles with the tension between their academic training and the culture of their congregation. He trains African American pastors who often come from Reformed seminaries and finds that he has to tell them, "You're not preaching black

enough." He is concerned to make sure that the seminary-educated men he is training don't lose their ability to speak to African American audiences.

> One of my concerns for African Americans in the Reformed community who go to a white seminary is that when they come to us we want to help them remember that they're black. Usually I have a relationship with the guys, so I can just say it. When I've had guys come out of Reformed seminaries, I find sometimes that they're trying to be whiter than white guys. They're very careful, they don't want to be emotional or fall into emotionalism, they fail to tell stories, they fail to tell anecdotes. And that is a great disaster. We don't need academic. If you're going to be academic, be a professor. But if you're going to preach, then preach to the heart. You gotta move me when you preach. I'm a very critical person when I listen to preaching. The best sermons are, when in a few minutes, I'm saying "Oh, ouch. Hallelujah! Thank you Jesus."

Pastor Cox's concerns about the preaching of his interns reflect his desires for the impact of his own preaching. He explained:

> I pray for an anointing when I preach. I pray for the Holy Spirit to use me. I know he uses his word, but emotion and mood in worship are very important. And the Scriptures are very aware of how worship can affect mood. We want the Lord to affect the hearts of people. I want people to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" I want them to be like the people at Pentecost, when they heard Peter preach—they were cut to the heart. They said "What do we do?" And I want to see young men have that desire. I don't want them to just approach preaching as an intellectual exercise: I've got my introduction, my three points, my conclusion, and my propositional statement. That's all well and good, but if the people aren't going out knowing what God wants of them, you've failed.

Pastor Franklin, the youngest preacher of the six interviewed, works hard to present difficult and complex subjects to his listeners in ways that they can grasp. He doesn't avoid the difficult subjects, but neither does he preach about them in a manner that is over the heads of young African American males. He made the point that men in the inner city are intelligent and therefore messages directed to them shouldn't be "dumbed down." He explained his sermon delivery this way:

> I call my preaching intellectual connectivity at a grassroots level. That's what I think reaches the hood because people in the hood think intellectually, and we can lie and act like they don't. We say they don't have a high-school diploma, but

> they have a laptop and a Facebook account. They've got iPads and iPhones that are electronically required for intellectualism. So we can play those games all we want, but if you ask them about charges in court, they can walk through law books to explain how that's a misdemeanor and not a felony. The Muslims are teaching our kids with a 9th-grade education how to read Arabic and yet we go to the church and we want to preach, "Ain't he alright?!" and "God is good all the time!" That ain't even in the Bible, so shut up! So intellectual connectivity at a grassroots level, that's my idea of preaching in the inner city context and the urban context.

Contextualization in Preaching to Young African American Males

The fourth research question sought to understand what principles and methods of contextualization pastors utilize in preaching to young African American males. The answers pastors gave are organized in the following categories: contextualization principles, contextualization methods, learning from others on contextualization, contextualization in preaching style, and the importance of relationships outside the pulpit for contextualization.

Contextualization Principles

One contextualization principle that three of the pastors mentioned was "realness" or "authenticity." Pastor Anthony says of his preaching, "A big piece is keeping it real. Realness is important to everybody, but we're talking about young black men. Realness, transparency, and authentic lifestyle make communication stick." Pastor Daniels also spoke the importance of authenticity and shared an illustration of its impact in the urban community:

> I think authenticity is important, being clearly informed, not being sold something though. They don't like you selling them anything. Word-of-mouth is the best marketing for them. Because the word-of-mouth means that somebody actually believes in something. People market and do a lot of different things, but you have to get the spirit of word-of-mouth to the pulpit, which is a very difficult thing to do. The spirit of the word-of-mouth is authenticity that comes from experience. And so it's just like a new soul food restaurant in the community. They can put out all the flyers they want to, but who has been there and how does

> the food taste? That's what it is at the end of the day. So their next question is I know the restaurant serves a lot of things, but what should I get? And then you tell them what to get, and they get that same exact thing. And if that experience continues to domino then guess what continues to increase? Word-of-mouth. So word-of-mouth also needs to be a part of engaging the hip-hop generation in terms of what they will value in preaching.

Pastor Edwards speaks of his intentionality in connecting on a real level with his listeners.

> I'm working hard to find the illustrations and examples so as to make it more "real." That has been a real challenge. I've enjoyed the reading, the research, the teaching, the theology, but then to say this is how it affects my love for my wife, this is how it affects my job, then I know what the blank stares (from the congregation) are about. Then to say that some things are not for you to put in your coffee cup for Monday morning. This is just straightening your overall walk with the Lord, and learning to think rightly about him. Communicating that idea has been a real challenge.

Related to the principle of authenticity or realness is the need to be transparent. Three of the pastors reported that members of their congregation, including young African American males, appreciated when pastors shared about their own personal struggles. Pastor Edwards noted that his congregation has "appreciated that I've shared about where I am with my own walk with the Lord from time to time. I've been honest about a struggle as a parent or something of that nature." Pastor Franklin has received similar feedback.

> I'm halfway crazy, and so I tell stories and jokes on myself about my failures and my sin, including some crazy stories of my barbershop years and my dog-breeding years. But I tie in my own life issues and place myself in the narrative as one of the examples rather than always talking about somebody else. They say "Pastor Doug, you're connecting with your heart, your sin, and your passion in the sermon, which really makes me walk away remembering how I place myself in the narrative." That's what important for me.

Another principle of contextualization that was mentioned as important is preaching with clarity, so that the message can be clearly understood in its meaning and

application. Pastor Edwards related that his people have appreciated "a clear explanation of the text that is in front of them." Also in regards to clarity, Pastor Daniels has noticed the importance of clearly demonstrating biblically why things young people already care about, such as social justice, are consistent with God's word. Daniels explained:

> People here really want the social justice piece. I think that the preaching of the Word of God gives social justice and social ministries credibility. Beyond simple motivation, preaching gives the reasoning and depth of what the obedience to the gospel means and shows what it looks like when we engage the city with the gospel. So it's very important.

Pastor Anthony spoke about the importance of creating an inviting atmosphere for listeners. He especially is mindful of the unbelievers in his audience. He said, "when I think about preparing a message, first of all, they don't want to hear the Bible at all. They don't want to hear about how wrong they are and how they need to get their lives right before God. So I gotta create an atmosphere that is welcoming."

Contextualization Methods

Three of the pastors gave examples of how they contextualize their messages for young African American males. Pastor Anthony spoke in particular about his use of stories from biblical texts to relate to his audience. He also mentioned the importance of the preacher doing the hard work to contextualize. He explained:

> I take a biblical text, a story often times, because stories transfer values and morals and ethics tby helping people put themselves in the storyline. "So say you're one of two guys who want to build a crib and your boy wants to build a crib, too. You got a solid foundation and your boy over here ain't do no soil test or nothing but y'all are both talking about building a crib. You go to your boy's house, take a gift, and you're jealous because his house is hot." So now we dialogue about these two houses a little bit, but sometimes something like that takes a lot more work. You've got to be willing to put that work into being able to communicate as lively and as real as possible, because the Bible is alive. If we're going to take it from its hermeneutic "then and there" to "here and now," with a grasp of the culture, and a grasp of the community we're seeking to minister and

> speak into, we've got to talk about the injustices. You can't tiptoe around that because otherwise they'll think you ain't really real.

Pastor Daniels gave an example of how he contextualized a sermon series for his audience on the book of Ephesians:

> We're going through Ephesians right now, and Ephesians has no issues going on there that caused Paul to write it, in terms of some major problem, but one of the things he talks about real, real strong is identity. And so we called it "Who am I?" From a contextual standpoint, in every section of the book I'm working through, I'm working through a particular identity issue that our people are dealing with. For instance the last week we covered I called "The Sticky Church" because of the flightiness of our culture today in wanting autonomy; there's a real need for more connectivity and unity. And so that's what the exegetical part of the passage was saying. But I just named it "sticky" because they understand "sticky."

Pastor Franklin said that some of the positive feedback he has received on his preaching has to do with how he "connects them to a modern idea of an ancient text." Franklin explained that for some of his examples, he connects the biblical passage directly with today. For example, he might "explain Matthew 5 with an example of today that makes them land in Matthew 5 but yet see themselves being held accountable to it in 2010. That's one of the examples where people are always able to connect."

Franklin went on to explain the reasoning behind his views on contextualization:

> I think that the gospel is timeless and Jesus has a relevant reign, a redemptive relevant reign of all time. So for me as I walk through Genesis to Revelation I see a consistent message dealing with the issues of the day. Abraham, his understanding and explanation of the culture in which he dwelt was similar but different than Isaiah's. And I see how they took the things of that day and engaged them all the way to Paul. I think Acts 17 is a great backdrop to understand cultural relevance. And cultural relevance is so overrated, the black preacher has been doing cultural relevance forever, and we never called it cultural relevance; we called it preaching. And the black preacher's been doing mercy ministry forever but he never called it mercy ministry, he called it church. And so I think it's similar for us as are preaching to a modern world from an ancient text. I think the devil has an agenda that has gone on for years and it fleshes out and manifests in different things in different times. So we need to just continue to see Satan at work seeking to hinder the unstoppable gospel, and show that unstoppable gospel in relevant ways. I see Paul in Acts 17 express the gospel

> through culture, through the things of that time, how this unknown God is really the one true God. And he quotes their own books that says "in him we live and move and have our being." And I see that contexualization throughout the text. It is apparent in how John the Baptist described Jesus as the "Lamb of God," in the way Paul described him as the unknown God. All of these ideas pull out of the reality of a culture and speak to it, in a relevant way, the same message with different methods.

Franklin sees a vital connection between contextualization and psychology:

> I don't think that the best preacher has a theological degree; I think he has a sociological degree and a psychology degree. That's why I think Dr. Eric Mason is so good, because that was his major in college, psychology, and Paul Tripp as well. Those guys get to the heart. And so I think to be effective preachers with an ancient text, it's really a sociological and psychological study that makes all of us forever students of the context and never masters of the context. And so when we remain students of the context, we'll always naturally deal with relevance without it being some secret weapon.

Finally, Franklin encourages preachers to continually engage the culture relationally in order to remain effective at contextualization. "I think the way to keep it modern is when the preacher stays actively engaging the culture comprehensively and not only creating a camp or a Christian ghetto, and calling it a church while being so out of touch with reality." He called for pastors to have a "mobile pulpit."

> A few things I do just as an example, is I always invite unbelievers to my house. I spend less time in the office and more time on the block. And on the block normally I don't lead with a bunch of imperatives but some indicatives. I ask a lot of questions and listen to a lot of stories. Here's a practical application of all that mess I just said to you: I had to preach Acts 14 where it talks about Paul getting beat down at the edge of the city. What I did was, I grabbed my computer and I just walked around the block and began to express that to people, that's what I'm preaching on and what do they think. Do they think that guy is crazy? And people began to tell me, "Yo! Yeah he's stupid. If they would have beaten me I would have left those jokers for dead." And they didn't use the word "jokers." As you listen to the people and their thoughts and ideas about what it looks like, you'll understand what relevance looks like. So when they told me all of that, I went back, soaked in that, and I wrote a sermon. And when I preached, I used most of that stuff those ten or so people that I engaged on the block told me. And all the while, I was sharing the gospel with them, through asking them questions about their story and this story. So I walked in and preached that sermon and went with a lot of their examples. That's how I apply my idea of always being a student. I'm

> never the professor of the block; I'm always the student in their classroom. So when I'm preaching on a Sunday, I've spent two or three days on the block just asking the people about this text.

Learning from Others

Each of the six pastors mentioned that there were people they learned from in helping them with their own contextualization. While a number of the people mentioned were other preachers, there were also some sociologists and entertainment personalities, people who are adept at exegeting the culture of young African American males.

Pastor Anthony mentioned several social commentators as people he learned from in trying to speak to the core concerns of young African American males. When asked to name a few of them Anthony replied, "I think Mike Dyson and Cornell West, cats who can extrapolate on situations both from a street level and academic piece. I think Jawanza Kunjufu also; none of these guys have preaching books, but they shed light through their understanding of the culture and times."

Pastor Bryant and Pastor Franklin both mentioned Carl Ellis as someone who has impacted their ability to contextualize. Franklin commented:

> I think Carl Ellis contributed to my being ok with being an intellectual. He was one of the contributors. I think Carl Ellis is one of the most intellectual, most brilliant dudes that I know, yet he still eats cheesesteak with mustard and knows how to joke like a dude off the block. When I listen to his intellectualism I can take it without him being an egghead because I can connect with his life and his practicality. So Carl Ellis makes me feel ok as a black man to be an intellectual.

The pastors named preaching mentors who varied widely with regard to race, denomination, and theological vantage point. Pastor Anthony listed a great diversity of preachers he had learned from:

> I like Gardner C. Taylor. I listen to John Ortberg. I like the way he juggles humor and thought and yet he has good segways into things. I think Charles Booth in Dayton, Ohio, is a phenomenal orator. Emanuel Cleveland from Kansas City is

> another guy who taught me how to preach. His style, he takes you way over here, but by the end of the sermon he'll have you shouting. Vashti MacKenzie, she has a unique style. She is the first African American female bishop. Father Flager from St. Savani in Chicago, is like a black preacher who wants to come out of a white guy. Harvey Carey is another preacher from today that I've learned from.

Pastor Bryant has learned from several different mentors, even though most of them do not minister primarily to young African American males. He said "I listen to Kevin Smith, I listen to Mark Dever, I listen to D.A. Carson. I'm a heady guy, so I listen to those guys. I used to listen to Phil Ryken. But, they don't speak to my church's demographic." Bryant takes the teaching he learns from these preachers and contextualizes it for his own audience.

Pastor Daniels listens to a number of different preachers who are all African Americans, but who are from very different theological and homiletical traditions.

> One of my greatest models, one of the first men to show me that it was ok to be a thinker was Dr. Tony Evans. He is one of my fathers in the ministry. E.K. Bailey, with his ability, was one of the first artistic preachers that I heard. One of his most famous theories is his whole deal on Hosea, where he preaches it in the first person. Another is E.V. Hill. He is probably the best preacher I've ever heard. Ever. From a showmanship standpoint, I like Jasper Williams. He's in Atlanta. He's like the whooping genius. He's incredible as a communicator. Those are my major guys. And A. Lewis Patterson. His ability to do exegesis inductively is just incredible.

Pastor Edwards has an ethnically diverse group of preaching mentors he learns from to minister to young African American males.

> When it comes to preaching to young African American males, there is a local preacher here that is peer to me, his name is Keith Battle. He pastors Zion Church in Largo, MD. He has a unique way of understanding the young African American male context, and his church is full of young African American men. Now he's probably the African American equivalent of something more seeker-oriented and so I have some theological differences with him. But in terms of knowing what is going on in the mind of African Americans, he's good. My other model is an African American who's been the pastor of his church for 25 years. His name is Terry Streeter and he pastors Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. He has a more traditional message, but he's good at

> explaining the text. But probably my earliest models for preaching that still carry over would be John McArthur and David Jeremiah, because to me they clearly go after the text. I've listened to scores of their sermons, I mean years upon years upon years, and I know that has colored who I am and what I do. But I've had many local examples of how to put that into the African American context, with Battle and Streeter proving the most helpful for that focus.

Pastor Franklin spent a year of his study focused on exclusively on preaching. His concern was to listen to preachers who had great theological depth "without losing the preachers of the inner city."

> In these latter years Haddon Robinson has been a big influence on me, from a systematic preaching, not a systematic theology, standpoint. And G.E. Patterson, I call my style G.E. Patterson mixed with Bryan Chapell. So some of those dynamics have blended, and then Eric Mason really helped me tie the bow towards the end. To be able to engage both a deep love for theology (Bavinck being my favorite theologian, next to Francis Grimke), and really understanding the gospel in its sovereignty through the Reformed faith is major. However, I did not want to lose the preachers of the inner city. So I sought to blend those two, and for about a year I did a study of preaching from multiple aspects. I studied (Tom) Skinner, Evans, Grimke, Haddon Robinson and Bryan Chapell. I spent some time with Phil Ryken and Manny Ortiz. I took time to understand Montgomery Boice's preaching and talked to Mary Clark. I spent time with a multiplicity of people trying to understand preaching and what it meant. I listened to a lot of podcasts and really tried to grasp that intellectualism with really relevant connectivity.

Franklin also credits Bill Krispin of Philadelphia with having a major influence on his preaching. "He was a great mentor to me in preaching as he's a hybrid dude. He's an OPC minister preaching at Deliverance Pentecostal Church in Philadelphia; that's amazing to me," said Franklin.

Preaching Style

Each of the preachers interviewed has a style that is more of a "hybrid" nature than classical African American. They tend to combine elements of traditional African American preaching with more of a conversational style, along with solid theological teaching. They have all been influenced by both African American preachers and

Reformed theological teachers. Their styles have been developed "on the job" in their pulpits, through trial and error.

Pastor Cox considers his style a blend of traditional expository preaching with elements of the African American preaching style. He explained what he has learned about black preaching:

> I divide preaching up culturally, into black preaching and white preaching. White preaching is often times very academic and intellectual. White people worship oftentimes in their heads. If you would say that white preaching is more science, then you would say African American preaching is more art. It's not that black preachers don't have science in their preaching, and it's not that some white preachers don't have art in their preaching. Some white preachers are great storytellers, some of them have a real great sense of timing, and some of them are humorous, but I didn't really learn the drama of preaching until I heard black preaching. Tom Skinner really had an impact on my life. When I heard him preach, it almost made the hair stand up on the back of my head. But his preaching was also totally untraditional in terms of the traditional black church, because he preached the Bible applied to social issues. Some social type black churches will preach social issues without a lot of Bible. Some will give a lot of bible-cliché, or religious clichés, like "God will make a way out of no way." Tom would take a text and apply it to issues like poverty or racism and let it fly. And so I learned social application from him as well as drama. E.V. Hill was a black preacher that I learned a lot from. I first heard him when I went to his church in California in 1969. So over the years, I have tried to really study black preaching. I joined the Clergy Koinonia group in my city; it used to be called the black preachers' union. We met very Tuesday, and somebody preached and talked about preaching. I learned so much from them about preaching.

This preaching was different than what Pastor Cox had been taught in seminary. He reported:

> I learned the expository method of preaching when I was in seminary at Covenant from Dr. Rayburn, who was a wonderful homiletics professor. But it was white preaching. But I'm so glad I learned expository preaching because I try really hard to get my major and minor points from the text. My general pattern of preaching has never been to look at a social issue and say, I need to preach on that. I generally preach through books of the Bible and that protects me from getting into ruts. One of my great fears as a preacher is that I would get angry about something. I've heard preachers who think the biggest sin in the world is about sex and so every Sunday they work something about sexual activity into the sermon. I don't want to do that. I don't want to make every sermon an

> evangelistic sermon. I want the gospel in every sermon. But I don't want to close every sermon saying the only reason I'm preaching today is to see who's going to walk forward. Now I do believe that people are being saved in my church, even through sermons that I never thought would be evangelistic. And sometimes I do give altar calls; I believe in altar calls. But I want to be true to the context of Scripture and the message it's trying to talk about. I believe Scripture is relevant to every aspect of our lives.

Pastor Cox incorporates things he's learned from the African American preaching tradition into his preaching style. He also works to help his cross-cultural congregation learn how to respond in more of an African American church fashion.

> I try to use some of the great techniques of black preaching, like the "hook." You have one phrase that you come back to. And rhythm. You've got to be able to preach with a good sense of timing; you don't talk too fast, you never slow down. How is your cadence? Without a dramatic pause, you don't encourage feedback from the congregation —and I love feedback from the congregation. My church is majority white, but I've found that white people can be trained to respond appropriately. A lot of them would like to, but in their tradition, they're never taught it.

Pastor Daniels, though African American and preaching to a predominately African American audience, only incorporates traditional African American preaching as a small part of his preaching style. He explained his reasons:

> I go in and out of the traditional African American style about a third of the time, because the older tradition of African American preaching is viewed by this generation as inauthentic. Because it is a form which they don't necessarily know, to them it doesn't have an artistic believability component. So when you say, "Aaaaaaahhhhh," they say you're just contriving that, that's not who you actually are if I'm just talking to you. This generation, especially the hip-hop generation, values authenticity. And so I do bring in elements of spontaneity from black church preaching because I think that reeks of authenticity. I think traditional black preaching is the best connective preaching style available; however I think it's also conversational and intellectual. So there are several elements I try to bring into preaching here.

When asked what his congregation has said they appreciate about his preaching, Pastor Daniels replied, "that I don't skip over stuff. I think people like that about my

preaching. I think they like the hybrid nature of it, being intellectual, streetwise, and practical." He also added:

> I've heard stories of black men saying they gave up on the black church. They didn't really give up on the black church, but on black pastors. And I had guys saying that they view black preaching as preaching that inspires you but doesn't develop you. I think that is a lie. But they'll come here and say, "Man, I've having both my mind and my heart engaged." And so that's the main story I hear from black men. And that God has used it to transform their lives.

Pastor Franklin has refined his style from the church experience he grew up with and began ministry in to being in a reformed theological setting now.

> I grew up in preaching and I'm learning to get rid of some bad habits. I've grown in areas that changed a lot of who I am. When I was saved in 1996, I had owned a barbershop for 10 years in Laurinburg, New Jersey. And people would say that "Franklin has a barbershop apologetic, and that's where he gets his preaching from because he's always debating with people in the barbershop and he knows how to use these examples to make his point or argument." And so in preaching I was always the king of making illustrations to explain the gospel. Now I don't know how good I did with the text so much, but when you got finished you understood what I said even if it didn't have anything to do with the text.

Pastor Franklin had the unique opportunity to simultaneously serve as an intern at an affluent, highly-educated predominately white church and at a young, urban predominately African American church. That experience greatly helped him become more adept at contextualization. He related one example:

> I found myself preaching one way at one church and preaching another way at the other, and I decided I wanted to blend those. In my computer I had a sermon called "Keep On Moving, Don't Stop" from Acts 14 and in parenthesis I had "urban." And in the other sermon on Acts 14 I had in parenthesis "suburban." And the suburban one wasn't called "Keep on Moving, Don't Stop," — it was called "Keep Persevering in Christ." So what came out of that was, again, intellectual connectivity at a grass roots level.

Relationships Outside the Pulpit

Three of the pastors highlighted the importance of building relationships with young African American men outside the pulpit. This was vital not only for learning

more about how to speak to their culture, but also for building credibility with the men so that they will want to listen to the sermons. Pastor Daniels makes a priority of taking young men under his wing and training them for ministry because he believes "this generation values relationships with indoctrination."

Pastor Anthony spoke to the importance of relationships outside the pulpit to positively impact how young men receive him as a pastor.

> I think that a part of it is having a real relationship with people from the jump street every single day. That way when you're preparing a message and thinking through a text, you're looking at this kid who's in front of me right now, and wondering how would he perceive that? Having a daily relationship with those people is key, not because you're studying them to preach every time but because you want a tangible person in mind for whom you're trying to flesh out a message.

Pastor Anthony has seen the value in his own ministry of being relationally connected with the people he ministers to.

> I think the main event should be the everyday impact. That's slower, it takes longer, it takes a different kind of shift. But if that happens it creates a longterm impact. Guys are like, "Okay, you're out here every day." There are some cats whose preaching is just ok. But because the young men know that pastor is going to be there on Tuesday at the gym and at the school, they think, "I can deal with that guy." If they see me in a positive light, both through the oral tradition and the actual practical real-life stuff that's going on, that may cause them to want to stick around.

Pastor Cox, like Pastor Daniels, began his ministry through spending lots of time building relationships with young men. In his early years, he recalls "there were two kinds of communication: one was in a worship service setting. But most of my conversations with young men happened in Bible studies, through extemporaneous speaking in the groups, or one-on-one."

In reflecting on his ministry at the church some 30 years later, Pastor Cox remarked:

> I think almost all success stories for young men are relational. Almost all of the young men that come into the church and stay and grow and want to serve God, it's happened because there was some significant relationship of discipleship. And preaching was not necessarily the primary means. I think if the preaching is boring, they won't stay. But the thing that really holds people and develops people, at least initially, is a relationship.

Regarding the important connection between preaching and relational connection outside of the pulpit, Pastor Cox added:

> I'm enough of a biblicist to believe that through the foolishness of preaching, God saves people. But I'm also enough of a biblicist to know that if Andrew doesn't bring you, you don't get to hear the preaching. So it's a both-and.

Summary

The first research question addressed what the pastors perceived to be "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context. The pastors identified the following areas as core concerns: manhood, identity, direction, survival, navigating pain, community, and dealing with authority.

The second research question explored what avenues young African American males have turned to in order to address their core concerns. The primary avenues the pastors identified were "street life," hip-hop culture, the Nation of Islam, immorality and idolatry, and entertainment.

The third research question explored how pastors prepared and delivered Christ-centered sermons that were mindful of the core concerns of young African American males in urban contexts. The answers the pastors gave were divided into three categories: being mindful of the needs of young African American males, sermon preparation, and sermon delivery.

The fourth research question sought to understand what principles and methods of contextualization pastors utilized in preaching to young African American males. Their

answers were organized in the following categories: contextualization principles, contextualization methods, learning about contextualization from others, contextualization in preaching style, and the importance of relationships outside the pulpit for contextualization.

The next chapter will bring together the findings of the literature review and interview with the pastors. The chapter will also include the author's recommendations for application gleaned from those sources. Suggestions for practice and further research on this topic will also be offered.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that address the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context. The assumption of this study was that a significant need and opportunity exists for the church in ministering to the young African American male demographic. A common theme among pastors in the African American context is the challenge of reaching and engaging young black males with the message of the gospel. Statistics show that churches ministering in African American communities tend to include far more adult females, children, and older generations than young adult males. The need to effectively minister to young African American males in urban contexts is acute.

One reason for this problem is that there seems to be a disconnect between the ministry of the church and the felt needs of young African American males, especially those residing in urban contexts. Thankfully, there is some valuable research available on the nature of the "core concerns" that young African American males identify as important. There are also some effective urban ministries and churches that are addressing these "core concerns" with faithful contextualization of the gospel. What role has preaching—historically a vital tool in reaching and inspiring African Americans—played in ministering effectively to young African American males? Preaching methods

successfully employed to reach this demographic need to be identified and shared with a broader audience so that more young African American males will be touched by the gospel, and so the church can grow and mature.

The study focused on six pastors who are working with a significant number of young African American males in urban contexts, and who have had some measure of fruitfulness in reaching and retaining these men in their congregations. In order to discover and explore their best practices, particularly with regard to their preaching and ministering to young African American males in an urban context, the following research questions were used:

1. What are the "core concerns" of young African American males in an urban context?

2. What are some avenues young African American males in an urban context have sought to address their "core concerns"?

3. How do pastors prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that are mindful of the needs of young African American males?

4. What principles and methods of contextualization do pastors utilize in preaching to the young African American male demographic?

This study also examined relevant literature related to the subjects of young African American males, preaching, and contextualization. The literature review is arranged under three general headings: a) "core concerns" of young African-American males in an urban context, b) Christ-centered preaching, and c) contextualization.

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study. After a brief summary of the findings from the literature review and interviews with pastors, I will discuss those findings and offer recommendations for implementing the wisdom gleaned into other contexts.

Summary of Findings

The literature review and interviews with pastors explored the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context. The pastors identified the following areas as core concerns: manhood, identity, direction, survival, navigating pain, community, and dealing with authority. The core concerns revealed from the literature review were dignity, significance, identity and empowerment.

The literature review and interviews also examined what avenues young African American men turned to in order to have their core concerns addressed. The primary avenues the pastors identified were "street life," hip-hop culture, the Nation of Islam, immorality and idolatry, and entertainment. The literature review listed secularism, the Nation of Islam, the Five Percenter sect, hip-hop culture, and nihilism as avenues men turn to.

The pastors were asked how they prepare and deliver Christ-centered sermons that are mindful of the core concerns of young African American males in urban contexts. The answers the pastors gave were divided into three categories: being mindful of the needs of young African American males, sermon preparation, and sermon delivery. The literature review examined biblical and theological material on Christ-centered preaching, and the meaning, necessity, method and mandate of Christ-centered preaching.

The pastors were also asked what principles and methods of contextualization they utilized in preaching to young African American males. Their answers were organized in the following categories: contextualization principles, contextualization methods, learning from others on contextualization, contextualization in preaching style, and the importance of relationships outside the pulpit for contextualization. The literature

review section began with a biblical and theological review and then examined the meaning and necessity of contextualization, contextualization in postmodern culture, contextualization among young African American males, and the importance of contextualization outside the pulpit.

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on an analysis of the literature and the interview data, I offer four recommendations for preparing and delivering Christ-centered sermons that address the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context. My recommendations are: (1) Recognize the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context, (2) Recognize the primary avenues young African American men turn to and why, in order to address their core concerns, (3) Preach Christ-centered sermons that address the core concerns of young African American males, and (4) Do the hard work of contextualization in preparing sermons for young African American males. I will discuss each of these recommendations in turn.

Recognize the Core Concerns of Young African American Males in an Urban Context

The term "core concerns" is taken from the work of Carl Ellis and his study of African American culture. He defines core concerns as "life concerns which tend to be life-controlling and life-defining in people's lives.[398]" Ellis categorizes these concerns as personal, social, and cultural. Ellis writes, "Cultural core concerns are those which are directly related to particular situations. This last category of core concerns tends to be unique to each people group,"[399] such as young African American males.

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[398] Carl F. Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: An Analysis of Today's African-American Cultural Crisis," (Chattanooga, TN: Accord Publications, 2007), 1.
[399] Ibid., 2.

Ellis identifies four primary core concerns for young African American males: dignity, identity, significance, and empowerment. He references these issues in several of his writings. In a *Christianity Today* article from 2000 on the influence of Islam on Black America, Ellis says regarding what he terms "Black Nationalist-type Muslims," that "all these groups have a theology based on the historical core cultural issues of African Americans—dignity, identity, significance, empowerment—along with various doctrines that claim God is black and the white man is the devil."[400]

In my interviews with six urban pastors who regularly preach to the young African American male demographic, they identified the following areas as core concerns: manhood, identity, direction, survival, navigating pain, community, and dealing with authority. I have taken those categories and grouped them into Ellis' four core concerns.

The first core concern is dignity. This concern seeks to answer these questions: What gives my life meaning? What gives my life value? What does it mean to be a man? Four of the six pastors interviewed identified manhood as a core concern. Pastor Bryant was mindful of this concern in his preparation for preaching:

> When I thought about preaching to them it really was hands-on on man issues: "How do I be a man?" Nearly all of them came from backgrounds where they didn't have fathers who taught them how to relate to women well, they didn't really seem to have a clue on how to live in this world with a good genuine biblical witness while living in this culture. So there was a lot of thought about how do I help the men think about doctrine and manhood.

The second core concern is identity. The questions this concern addresses are: Who am I? What is my heritage? Why am I here? Pastor Anthony, an urban pastor in the Midwest, spoke of questions he has heard young people around him asking, including:

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[400] Edward Gilbreath, "How Islam Is Winning Black America," *Christianity Today* 44, no. 4 (2000): 53.

"How do I make sense of and define myself in the midst of all these forces seeking to define me?" Included in this concern were aspects such as acceptance and fatherlessness. Anthony has also sensed young men he works with asking the question, How do I find meaning in my pain? That question comes from young men looking at the pain and trauma they have experienced in their lives and wondering what to make of what they've been through and how their trials have shaped who they are.

The third core concern for young African American males in urban contexts is significance. The idea of significance is concerned with the questions, what is my place here? What am I to contribute? Does anyone care that I'm here? Pastor Daniels saw this core concern being fleshed out in men seeking community with other men, whether it is through positive or negative means. He believes that men of every social status will seek community in some fashion. For those in poor neighborhoods, belonging to gangs can provide the male community men seek to be a part of. For men who come from more highly educated backgrounds, Daniels observed them seeking community in different ways:

> I was in a fraternity back in my college days. So my core concerns, the reasons I became a part of a fraternity, were the big three things—fatherhood, manhood, and acceptance. And I saw the fraternity as a way of developing community, relationship, and that type of thing with men where I was accepted and where I knew that I was held in high regard. I think every man in his heart wants that.

The final core concern is empowerment. This concern deals with questions like, how may I have the opportunity to use what I've been given? How can I make a living for myself and my family? Pastor Bryant spoke to this concern when he remarked, "When you are the bottom of the economic food chain, and as a black man you're still on the bottom pretty much, survival is an issue."

In an article in *The Voice Magazine* on the pervasive influence of Islam on young African American males, Ellis cited the Muslims' engagement with this core concern of empowerment as a reason for their success in attracting young African American males. "Anybody in a subdominant culture will always want to level the playing field," he says. "Empowerment is a core cultural issue among African-Americans."[401]

Ellis highlights the need for the present-day church to recognize these core concerns. He says that, "traditionally, if American Christianity deals with core concerns at all, it tends to focus only on the personal dimension. The American church has yet to wake up to the need to address cultural core concerns. This is especially true for sub-dominant cultures like African American culture."[402] What Ellis means by "the personal dimension" is that evangelical Christianity has tended to focus primarily on things like personal salvation and individual piety. These things should not be thrown out or diminished, but there is more to be added. The redemption that Christ brings is comprehensive, meaning that it impacts not only peoples' individual spiritual lives, but every aspect of our lives: relationships, work, education, living situation, engagement in issues of social justice and concern for the poor.

Former *Washington Post* reporter John W. Fountain wrote first-hand of his own struggles with the church in a 2005 article entitled "No Place for Me." In addition to being a reporter, Fountain is also a licensed minister and veteran of the church. He lamented his lack of involvement in the church:

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[401] Elizabeth Sanchez, "Rescuing Black America from the Grip of Islam," The Voice Magazine.com, http://www.thevoicemagazine.com/culture/society/rescueing-black-america-from-the-grip-of-islam.html (accessed April 19, 2011).

[402] Carl F. Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: From 'I Have a Dream' to 'Sagging Pants'— an Analysis of the Current African American Cultural Crisis" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford Graduate School, 2010), 5.

> Somewhere along the way, for us, for me, the church—the collective of black churches of the Christian faith, regardless of denomination—lost its meaning, its relevance. It seems to have no discernible message for what ails the 21st century black male soul.[403]

To be effective in ministry to young African American males in the urban context, pastors must recognize and take into account their concerns. This is true with regard to every aspect of ministry, but particularly to the ministry of preaching.

Recognize the Primary Avenues Young African American Men Have Turned to and Why

My second recommendation is for pastors to recognize the primary avenues young African American men turn to have their core concerns addressed. I also encourage preachers to give thought to why the particular avenues are appealing so that they can understand those choices and speak into them with the truth of the gospel.

Daniel White Hodge lists as one of six missionary essentials in reaching the hip-hop generation the need to "adequately accept and deal with the true nature of the 'hood." This does not mean that the church and preacher turn a blind eye to the sins of the streets but it means that the preacher will seek to understand what lies behind and beneath the outward negative events."[404]

The Apostle Paul's ministry in Athens, recorded in Acts 17, is instructive on this point. The first thing Luke tells us about Paul's time in Athens is that "he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols."[405] What we find later in the passage is that Paul didn't angrily dismiss the avenues the Athenians had turned to in expressing

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[403] John W. Fountain, "No Place for Me—I Still Love God, but I've Lost Faith in the Black Church," *Washington Post*, July 17, 2005.
[404] Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 222.
[405] Acts 17:16.

their idolatry, but he examined them and spoke into what was at the heart of them. Luke tells us:

> Paul then stood up in the middle of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.[406]

Like Paul, modern preachers must examine the objects of worship of our day, particularly for young African American males for the purposes of our study. There were several avenues noted in the literature review that these men turned to in order to address their core concerns: secularism, the Nation of Islam, the Five Percenter sect, hip-hop culture, and nihilism. The pastors interviewed listed "street life," hip-hop culture, the Nation of Islam, immorality and idolatry, and entertainment. I have combined the information gleaned from the literature review and pastor interviews into four primary avenues: the Nation of Islam, hip-hop culture, nihilism, and entertainment. I included some of the elements of secularism and "street life" into the nihilism category and the Five Percenter sect into the Nation of Islam section since they are closely related.

The first avenue to be considered is the Nation of Islam. Our country has seen rapid growth in the number of young African American males turning to the Nation. A *Christianity Today* article on the influence of Islam on the black community notes that "Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in America, and the massive number of African American converts—in prisons, colleges, and inner cities—is a key factor."[407]

Josh Llano provides growth statistics on the influence of Islam on the African American community:

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[406] Acts 17:22-23.
[407] Gilbreath, 52.

> Islam is gaining most of its converts in America in prisons and on university campuses. The majority of American converts to Islam—eighty-five to ninety percent—are black. Of the estimated six million Muslims in America, two point six million are black. One out of every fifteen blacks identifies himself or herself as Muslims.[408]

In trying to understand this avenue, it is important to distinguish between the beliefs of traditional Islam and the Nation of Islam. While traditional Islam teaches the equality of all races and that a person of any race may convert to Islam, the Nation of Islam (NOI) "teaches that the Black man is the original man, and from him came all brown, yellow, and white people. The Nation of Islam does not believe that whites are worthy to be evangelized, and thus does not accept them into the NOI.""[409] The Nation of Islam further teaches that "the original black race of man is superior, especially to the white man, a race of 'blue-eyed devils' created by the black man."[410]

In his ministry seeking to evangelize Muslims, Ellis discovered that Islam "appeals to God seekers because it answers their questions. He reports as many as 75 percent of American Muslims his team reaches converted from Christianity because the church 'did not deal with their issues.'"[411]

David Murrow quotes an African American male convert to Islam on why he left the Baptist church he grew up in and turned to Islam as an adult: "In Islam I found a stronger ideal of brotherhood and moral discipline—and of manhood."[412] His explanation speaks to each of the core concerns of dignity, identity, significance, and empowerment.

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[408] Josh Lee Llano, *Reaching African-American Muslims for Christ* (n.p.: Xulon Press, 2005), xi.
[409] Abraham Sarker, *Understand My Muslim People* (Newberg, Oregon: Barclay Press, 2004), 90.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Elizabeth Sanchez, "Rescuing Black America from the Grip of Islam," The Voice Magazine.com, http://www.thevoicemagazine.com/culture/society/rescueing-black-america-from-the-grip-of-islam.html (accessed April 19, 2011).
[412] David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), 48.

Adam Edgerly and Carl Ellis note that "men were also drawn to the Nation of Islam because of the emphasis placed on male leadership. African American churches tend to be dominated by women, with one central male figure, the pastor in the pulpit. As a result, many men do not feel affirmed in the church environment."[413] This emphasis addresses the core concern of empowerment.

One of the pastors, Pastor Anthony, seeks to learn how to speak to those core concerns from the Nation of Islam, except that he does so from a Christian perspective. He explained, "I think you can learn from everybody. You look at black Muslims, they deal with humanity, they deal with human issues."

Pastor Bryant believes that another reason for the Nation of Islam's increasing influence among young black males is that it appeals to men who may be of a more nationalistic mindset. He's heard on a number of occasions that "Islam is the black man's religion" while Christianity is "the white man's religion." He adds, "And so guys would say 'Even if I don't don the uniform I'm going to live the principles of Islam, even if I don't even know the principles of Islam.'" What Bryant is getting at is that the men believe that there core concerns are better addressed by Islam than by Christianity.

Bryant further expounded on some of the perceived contrasts between Christianity (particularly the prosperity gospel version that is prevalent now), and the Nation of Islam, and the effect this has on young men:

> Most if not all of them grew up with the influence of Christianity. They do want some substance in their lives. A lot of them don't want to go with the hedonistic notion of let's live for pleasure for the sake of living for pleasure because that's all there is. They want structure, they want order, they want to see something that is effective at helping them deal with all the issues they have and they just don't see it in the church. So the next option is to be a Muslim. I think it is structure and

[413] Adam Edgerly, and Carl Ellis, "Emergence of Islam in the African-American Community," *Reach Out,* 1994, 11.

> the order that are appealing. There is a sense that now you are somebody, and we're going to do something about these things. We present ourselves as strong people who are moving out together, as opposed to the cowardly, timid, selfish Christians.

The second avenue young African American men often turn to is hip-hop. Regarding the increased prominence of hip-hop culture, Ralph Watkins observes that, "Where the church was once that place of family and gathering, hip-hop is fast becoming today's alternative. Hip-hop culture brings young people together."[414] Bakari Kitwana notes that "Today, more and more Black youth are turning to rap music, music videos, designer clothing, popular Black films, and television programs for values and identity."[415] These comments speak to how young African American males may turn to hip-hop culture to address core concerns of identity and significance.

Hip-hop culture is difficult to define. Hodge does so in the following manner:

> Hip-hop is an urban subculture that seeks to express a lifestyle, attitude, or theology. Rejecting the dominant culture, it seeks to increase social consciousness, cultural awareness and racial pride. Rap music functions as the vehicle by which the cultural messages of hip-hop are sent, and the industry by which hip-hop culture is funded and propagated.[416]

A surprising aspect of hip-hop is that it describes more than just the music. Hip-hop is a culture unto itself. Regarding this concept of hip hop as a culture, Hodge writes:

> Hip-hop, in the words of KRS-One, is "something that is being lived." Hip-hop is larger than the radio, larger than commercialized artists, larger than record industry branding. It is a culture, a people, a movement, a growing community of people that live, breathe, eat, love, hate and work just as anyone else does. Hip-hop cannot be easily understood or defined.[417]

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[414] Ralph C. Watkins, and Jason A. Barr, *The Gospel Remix : Reaching the Hip Hop Generation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 26.
[415] Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002), 9.
[416] Hodge, 38.
[417] Ibid., 20.

Hodge argues that "black gospel music set a liberating tone for not only Blacks but anyone in an oppressed context; hip-hop is its postmodern, urban equivalent, articulating liberation, authenticity and freedom from the shackles of modernity."[418] This quote indicates that for many, hip-hop culture addresses the core concern of empowerment.

While hip-hop culture appeals to youth of all ethnicities and social classes, there is a particular identification with African American males in urban contexts. Hodge points out:

> The Black male image and Black youth are the foundational piece to hip-hop culture when it emerged within the inner city. Hip-hop has embraced many different ethnicities, but overall, the Black image, particularly the Black male persona, is still referred to when hip-hop culture is discussed.[419]

Pastor Daniels has noticed an increased desire of young men to not only listen to hip-hop music, but to become professional hip-hop artists themselves. This also seems to be an attempt to address the core concern of empowerment also. Daniels commented:

> Another big avenue is the arts. Right now everybody, I mean twenty years ago I don't think most of these cats would have been thinking of becoming a rapper, but now everybody wants to be a rapper. I can't believe how many people want to be emcees or artists. I mean half of our congregation of men either are, or want to be some type of artist. And every young church planter I know that has people under the age of thirty-five is dealing with the same issue. It's not just rap and dance that attracts them, but it's also the entrepreneurial aspect of it. Even guys that start businesses use the arts as a major marketing piece to start their business.

Pastor Bryant was surprised to learn of the seriousness with which young African American males he came in contact with approached hip-hop. In addition to being an avenue to address empowerment, hip-hop also seemed to be touching on the identity and significance concerns as well. Bryant said:

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[418] Ibid., 25.
[419] Ibid., 59.

> But with the hip-hop generation I've seen this attitude more and more: "I'm doing hip-hop and this is what I'm going to do." I found out that hip-hop is a whole culture, and outside of getting saved, hip-hop is what they wanted to do. And now they say "I'm saved and I'm going to make a record and blow up {become famous}." I was taken aback by that. I knew enough through church that there was a focus on getting a job and still serving the Lord. So that was the one thing that stood out to me about the hip-hop generation.

Pastor Anthony sees hip-hop as a way young men try to address the core concern of identity, in particular.

> Sometimes cats rhyming, you know, hip-hop and things like that. You find guys trying to redefine themselves through the music. And so having an album, an EP, or something out saying, "This is who I am, this is who I really am, and this is who I want to be" is an expression of identity. The art of hip-hop gives them a context to express themselves. I think the reality of what education has not done to help young African American men causes those kinds of responses.

Hip-hop culture is a prominent avenue young African American males turn to in order to have their core concerns of dignity, identity, significance, and empowerment addressed. While there are certainly destructive elements of hip-hop culture, it is not necessarily mutually exclusive with Christianity. In much the same way that Paul used the poets of the day as a medium for sharing the gospel with the Athenians in Acts 17, so hip-hop culture can be an effective evangelism tool today. There are a number of young Christian hip-hop artists such as shai linne, Timothy Brindle, The Cross Movement, Da TRUTH, Lecrae, and Trip Lee who are increasingly popular among all youth, whether Christian or non-Christian. These artists come from cities such as Philadelphia, Washington D.C., St. Louis, Atlanta, and Dallas, and many of them have Reformed theological views.

The third avenue young men turn to in addressing their core concerns is nihilism. Ellis defines the nihilistic worldview as "a total rejection of established laws and

traditions. It is a belief that all existence is senseless and that there is no possibility of an objective basis for truth. It also is a denial that anything is valuable."[420]

Hodge writes that Princeton professor Cornell West "sees a powerful current of nihilism among youth in the inner city. Some young people have already dismissed life as of no value; consequently, death is welcomed as better than what is in front of them."[421]

I have included the category of "street life," highlighted in the pastors' interviews, as part of the nihilism avenue. The term refers to a number of related activities many of the pastors saw young African American males turning to in order to have their core concerns addressed. Pastor Anthony included in this term things such as "gangs, acts of violence, and drugs." Pastor Cox has witnessed what he calls "a propensity of violence, which could break out at any moment." Pastor Daniels referred to this "street life" idea as "thuggism," and has seen this more prevalently in lower-income areas. Pastor Franklin associates street life with "drugs, drug-use, drug-sales, violence, and robbery." These things are what he calls "the loud sins of the inner city."

Ellis calls the nihilism that is present in the urban African American context as "ghetto nihilism" or "thug spirituality." He writes, "Thug spirituality is a manifestation of nihilism that became a major cultural influence in the mid-1980s. The 'thug' has become the ideal for many Black youth. It represents for many a way of living ("thug life") and even a social vision."[422]

What are some distinctive elements of the ghetto nihilism worldview? Ellis writes that "ghetto nihilism itself is a strong and toxic culture that intimidates residents of the

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[420] Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: An Analysis of Today's African-American Cultural Crisis," 50.
[421] Hodge, 91.
[422] Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: An Analysis of Today's African-American Cultural Crisis,". 56.

'hood'—a culture of non-achieverism, victimology, dysfunctionality, dependence, helplessness, hopelessness, and death."[423]

Ellis says that rapper Tupac Shakur "was for the hip-hop generation what Malcolm X was for the baby-boomers. While Malcolm articulated cultural core concerns related to empowerment, Tupac articulated cultural and personal core concerns related to dysfunctionality."[424] Ironically, many young men turn to nihilism to have their core concerns addressed only to find that it leaves them less empowered and more insecure about their dignity, identity, and significance.

The final category is entertainment. The pastors interviewed included such things as sports, gambling, television, and video games in this area. Pastor Edwards has seen this focus particularly in the large northeastern city where he ministers, where there are seemingly unlimited options for entertainment. He expressed what stands out to him about the young men he's in contact with:

> ... just their love for entertainment. And that's not just in terms of entertainment in church, I mean entertainment in general like sitting around watching TV and participating in things that provide temporary, earthly enjoyment. That's not a judgment against those things, but that's just what life consists of for them: video, etc. I'm very concerned about what that kind of focus produces in somebody at say ages twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, and forty.

Pastor Franklin sees people in the entertainment industry as the "pastors" of our youth. He believes that, "Jay-Z is pastoring our kids, Eminem is pastoring our kids, and they're giving them the gospel according to Jay-Z, the gospel according to Eminem. The NFL is pastoring our kids; the NBA is pastoring our kids." I believe what Franklin means

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[423] Carl Ellis, "Thug Spirituality: From 'I Have a Dream' to 'Sagging Pants'— an Analysis of the Current African American Cultural Crisis" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford Graduate School, 2010), 69.
[424] Ibid., 55.

is that entertainers, whether from the music world or the sports world, offer a way for young men to seek to find their identity, dignity, significance, and empowerment.

Each of the avenues reviewed for addressing the core concerns of young African American males in urban contexts makes promises they cannot deliver on. They promise life, but in and of themselves cannot provide it. They cannot bear the weight of a young man's identity, dignity, significance, and empowerment.

Preach Christ-Centered Sermons That Address the Core Concerns of Young African American Males

My third recommendation is for pastors to preach Christ-centered sermons that speak directly to the core concerns of young African American males. This recommendation stems from the belief that only Christ can bear the weight of our identities, dignity, significance, and empowerment. I will first discuss essential elements of Christ-centered preaching and then offer suggestions on how Christ speaks to the core concerns of young black men.

To say that preaching is "Christ-centered" means that Jesus Christ is the content of preaching. This idea does not refer exclusively to preaching sermons on the Gospel texts. The proper text for preaching Christ is the whole Bible. Bryan Chapell instructs that "Christ-centered preaching, rightly understood, does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ."[425]

Christ-centered preaching means not only that Jesus serves as the content of this preaching, but that He also must provide the enablement for it. Paul writes of his preaching ministry in Corinth, "my message and my preaching were not with wise and

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[425] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 279.

persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."[426] The same must be true for preachers of our day.

On the importance of Christ enabling the preacher, Ed Clowney writes that "gospel preaching presents Jesus Christ. Preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit is preaching in the presence of Jesus."[427]

Pastor Daniels is in the process of writing a book on preaching. One of the things he discusses in the book is his belief that today's preaching has gotten away from relying on Christ for the enablement to preach. Regarding the upcoming book, Daniels shared in his interview:

> It's more about the nuts and bolts, the process. I think too many preaching books today are too technical. And guys don't trust the Holy Spirit. The guys don't pray, they don't load themselves up with prayer, and then get up and talk. That's what you need to do, man. And I think that nowadays most preaching books are written by mainline Western white Americans who talk more about structure and not the other elements. I think structure is a very narrow part of what the preaching process involves. And so I think one of the things we want to talk about is, what does it look like "to soak," because that's when you find your preaching voice, when you're soaking. Because when you get up and trust God, the Holy Spirit just throws stuff from your soul. I mean, you know that, I know you know that just from experience. But the Holy Spirit can't bring nothing out of you that ain't in you. And so I think that needs to be resurrected in the preaching process.

Pastor Daniels shared with me a simple outline of his preaching preparation process, which includes dependence upon the Holy Spirit. He explained:

> I don't write down illustrations. I'll probably do fifteen to twenty pages a week of writing for each sermon but I don't manuscript. They're more like triggers, and I mostly use quotes. As for format, I've created five S's of preaching for me. And I just realized that this is what we end up doing. Supplicating, studying, soaking, sizzling, and speaking. That's my process: Supplicating, Studying, Soaking, Sizzling, Speaking. The sizzling is the Holy Ghost fire! That comes from soaking. Matter of fact, we're writing a book on my S's for preaching.

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[426] 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.
[427] Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 45.

Supplication is the time spent in prayer throughout the process, both for the audience and over the text. Studying is the actual exegetical work on the passage being preached. Soaking is spending time letting the text work on you, meditating on the passage and on the message. Sizzling is the power of the Holy Spirit, at work in us not only in the pulpit but also during the whole preparation process. And Speaking is the act of standing up to deliver the message.

While it may be tempting to water down the message somewhat in trying to make it more accessible for young African American males, the preacher must resist the temptation and continue to preach Christ. On the necessity of preaching Christ, Chapell asserts that "preaching that is not Christ-centered ultimately promotes a faith that is not of Christ, even if it thinks of itself as Christian."[428]

Michael Horton explains:

> It is easy to become distracted form Christ as the only hope for sinners. Where everything is measured by our happiness rather than by God's holiness, the sense of our being sinners becomes secondary, if not offensive. If we are good people who have lost our way but with the proper instructions and motivation can become a better person, we need only a life coach, not a redeemer. We can still give our assent to a high view of Christ and the centrality of his person and work, but in actual practice we are being distracted from "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).[429]

The preferred method of Christ-centered preaching is expository. Longtime preacher and teacher of preachers, Haddon Robinson proposes the following as a definition of expository preaching:

> Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage

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[428] Bryan Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," *Presbyterion* 30, no. 2 (2004): 79.
[429] Michael Scott Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2008),15-16.

> in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.[430]

In making a case for the use of expository preaching, Chapell points out that "the ethic of expository preaching is plain: because we believe that the power of spiritual transformation resides in the Word of God, the goal of the preacher is to say what God says."[431]

The mandate of Christ-centered preaching is that it be applied to the lives of the hearers. It is not preaching for entertainment or manipulative purposes. Chapell explains that "the goal of preaching is not merely to impart information but to provide the means of transformation ordained by a sovereign God that will affect the lives and destinies of eternal souls committed to a preacher's spiritual care."[432]

Many of the young men who do come to hear the preaching of God's Word do not return because they feel they are beaten up with the Word of God or that they could never be good enough to apply it. Pastor Cox is keenly aware in his preaching of making concrete applications, but doing so in a way that is Christ-centered, meaning relying of the grace of God and looking to God to supply the power He requires to obey the Word. Cox said:

> Most of my illustrations, most of my applications, are very concrete. The danger of course, is to make a concrete application without making it a moralism. For example, God doesn't want you to steal. That's true, but if all I'm doing is giving people the law it doesn't help them. They have to have the gospel, they have to have grace.

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[430] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 20.
[431] Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," 65.
[432] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 25.

Pastor Cox does not want to merely entertain or distribute information in his sermons. He wants his messages to speak to the hearts of his people. He uses his applications and illustrations toward that end.

> I use a lot of personal illustrations. I will talk about events that are happening, common events. I don't just preach in one little story after another, but stories are very important, anecdotes are very important, but everybody who hears me preach knows that I stick to the text, and I try to make the text live in the common experience of peoples' lives. And it is my hope that after you've heard my sermons, that you feel stabbed in the heart. That's maybe a common phrase that we use, but I want people thinking, "You've got me." I think in a populist kind of way, so that young men who come in off the street are going to get something. At least they're showing up; obviously they're not bored. As to what work of grace God is doing in their lives, that's up to God.

Chapell advocates seeking to tie the sermon applications directly with what he terms "the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF)" of each text. He defines the FCF as "the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glory and enjoy him."[433]

Pastor Daniels also has a helpful preparation process in helping him aim his words directly to the heart of his audience:

> One of the best things I think Haddon Robinson recommends for biblical preaching really are his developmental questions: (1) What is true? Answering people's questions that come up in their minds as to whether what you're saying is true; (2) What does it look like in my life?, and (3) How do I need to hear it? In other words, there is the author's intent with the original audience, the Christological interpretation, and then canonical interpretation. Beyond that, where are my people at in relation in their ability to hear what the word of God is saying in this particular area? And so this is where in the preaching you have to be careful of "eisegesis." That's why most preaching among this generation is done eisegetically. It's because I don't believe people trust that the text is able to minister to people's core concerns without compromising the text in some way.

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[433] Ibid., 50.

Pastor Anthony revealed his mindset when preparing for a message: "I'm seeing students and young men in my head and I'm asking, What is this person's issue? and What is that person's issue?"" In other words, Anthony is thinking about the core concerns of his audience.

How does one preach Christ in a way that addresses the core concerns of young African American males in an urban context? How does one speak into the issues of dignity, identity, significance, and empowerment from a Christological perspective? Quoting Bryan Chapell, Eswine writes, "the best preaching takes truth to struggle." Eswine adds, "When truth meets struggle, the result is substantial healing, and the substantial healing of reality is the business of preaching."[434] Preachers must bring truth to the struggle of young African American males in urban contexts. But how?

There are a few key theological concepts that help answer the questions posed by the core concerns of young black males. These concepts include the four-part gospel story, the kingdom of God, the image of God, the Trinity, the sovereignty of God, and the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The four-part gospel story is composed of the following elements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation. This paradigm helps to answer questions directly related to dignity, identity, significance, and empowerment. At the very least it presents answers to the following questions:

1. Who am I?
2. How did I get here?
3. Why am I here?
4. What's wrong with the world?
5. Is there any hope of things getting better?

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[434] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 25.

6. Is there a basis for working for justice in our world?
7. Where are things headed?

More conservative theologies tend to reduce the "four-part story" to two parts—Fall and Redemption—which leads to limiting the gospel to a message about personal salvation that does not really addressing social or cultural core concerns. Conversely, more liberal theological views tend to reduce the message to Creation and New Creation, eliminating the need to be redeemed from sin and the provision of sin that Christ provides.

Naturally following the four-part gospel story paradigm is an emphasis on the kingdom of God, which also helps to guard against reducing the gospel message to personal spiritual change. The kingdom of God emphasis does not eliminate or even de-emphasize the need to personally respond to the provision of God's grace in Jesus Christ through the cross. But the kingdom paradigm reminds God's people of Christ's lordship over every realm, including the social and cultural. The implication is that God's reign extends over every area of our lives and the world, including issues of social justice, racial unity, and political engagement.

The image of God is an important doctrine for speaking to the core concerns of dignity, identity, empowerment and significance. Dignity is found in the fact that people of every race and background are "fearfully and wonderfully made," with their ultimate value recognized by God Himself. Each person's identity and significance is rooted in being an image-bearer of God. The basis for true empowerment is found in the creation mandate that God has given all people to "be fruitful and multiply" and "rule and subdue" the earth as God's stewards over his creation.

An important aspect of being made in the image of God is being made for community. The Trinity provides the basis for community. Young African American males have a hunger to be in community with other men, and will seek that in places such as sports teams, fraternities, and even gangs. The doctrine of the Trinity means that God Himself is a community, in the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is relational in His very essence. Therefore, being made in the image of God, men will naturally desire to be in community as well. God not only identifies with young men's need to be in community but He provides the proper understanding and application of what it means to be in meaningful community.

The sovereignty of God is an important concept for people who have experienced suffering in their background. Narrative stories in Scripture, such as the accounts of the lives of Joseph, Job, and Israel in Egypt, have long been looked to by African Americans to provide hope that God can not only save His people from their suffering, but can save them through their suffering.

The person and work of Christ are vital on a number of levels. The uniqueness of Christ as both fully human and divine is important to emphasize. John 1:1 and 14 are helpful in this regard. This elevates Jesus above being considered merely a good prophet or teacher, and it also speaks to the idea that no one else (e.g. Nation of Islam's W.D. Fard) can truthfully make the claim to God in human form. Also, Muslims believe that Christ is a prophet, and that no prophet can lie; a verse to point them to would be John 14:6, "no one comes to the Father except through me." If Jesus cannot lie then his statement must be true. The perfect righteousness of Christ is another key truth. It must be pointed out that righteousness can only come by faith in Jesus and not by good works.

An important aspect of the humanity of Christ is his suffering. A concern for young African American males is finding leaders who can relate to where they've been. Christ's being a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering, demonstrates not only his identification with present suffering but his choosing to enter into it on behalf of others. Philip's witness to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 is a good example of applying this idea.

Preachers Must Do the Hard Work of Contextualization

Pastor Anthony challenged the importance of the preacher doing the hard work to contextualize.

> So now we dialogue about these two houses (from Matthew 7:24-27) a little bit, but sometimes something like that takes a lot more work. You've got to be willing to put that work into being able to communicate as lively and as real as possible, because the Bible is alive. If we're going to take it from its hermeneutic "then and there" to "here and now," with a grasp of the culture, and a grasp of the community we're seeking to minister and speak into, we've got to talk about the injustices. You can't tiptoe around that because otherwise they'll think you ain't really real.

What does it mean to contextualize? Lesslie Newbigin asks, "How can the gospel 'come alive' in all these different cultural contexts, and still be the same authentic gospel? That is the problem of contextualization."[435]

Dean Flemming describes the concept of contextualization this way:

> I take contextualization, then, to refer to the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation. This happens in such a way that the gospel both comes to authentic expression in the local context and at the same time prophetically transforms the context.[436]

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[435] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: 1989), 142.

[436] Dean E. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19.

Examining and comparing Paul's sermons in Acts 13 and 17 will help every preacher to do the work of contextualization. The sermon in Acts 13 was delivered at a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch to a primarily Jewish audience. By contrast, Paul preached the sermon in Acts 17 in a marketplace in Athens to an "unchurched" Gentile audience.

Regarding Paul's message in Acts 13, Flemming notes that:

> Paul's missionary sermon in Acts 13 is a masterpiece of contextualization for a synagogue gathering. When preaching to Jews, Paul incorporates his audience's history, its expectations, its Scriptures and its culturally accepted methods of interpretation in order to persuasively proclaim the good news.[437]

Flemming describes Paul's sermon in Acts 17:16-34 as "perhaps the outstanding example of intercultural evangelistic witness in the New Testament."[438]

Extolling Paul's work of contextualization in Acts 17, Flemming explains that "the genius of Paul's context-sensitive preaching in Acts 17 is that he intentionally uses the philosophical language of his audience, not simply to stake out common ground, but in order to transform their worldview."[439]

Flemming summarizes Paul's preaching in Acts 13 and 17 in this way:

> Luke probably intends Paul's evangelistic speeches in Acts to provide a model for how the gospel approaches various groups of people, which his readers can appropriate in their own witness to the world. These speeches model for us a magnificent balance between, on the one hand, an *identificational* approach that proclaims the gospel in ways the audience can understand and, on the other, a *transformational* approach that resists compromising the gospel's integrity in a pluralistic world.[440] (italics in original)

Commenting on the necessity of contextualization in preaching among the African American community, Anthony Bradley explains:

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[437] Ibid., 65.
[438] Ibid., 72.
[439] Ibid., 79.
[440] Ibid., 85-86.

> Proper uses of contextualization and application can provide a platform for applying the biblical story to the unique particularities of the black experience without jettisoning orthodox understandings of the absolute authority of Scripture and the inerrant, inspired, self-attesting, condescended revelation of the triune God to his people.[441]

Given that young African American males in urban contexts are also a segment of today's postmodern culture, helpful suggestions from people like Tim Keller can be applied from preaching to postmoderns, in general, to preaching to young black males. Here are Keller's points on preaching to what he calls "post-everythings":

> First, remember that post-everything people like narrative and story. If you know how to do Christ-centered preaching, then you turn every single sermon into a kind of story. Second, remember that post-everything's are experientially oriented. They do not just want intellectual propositions. For them life's meaning is grounded in what they experience. Third, remember that post-everything's are very much against moralism and self-righteousness. Fourth, take note of post-everything's concern for social justice. They innately sense that the church is not credible without care for mercy and justice. Fifth, recognize that post-everything's love art because they love the material world. Finally, remember that post-everything's are not strongly swayed by evidence and proofs.[442]

A key characteristic of contextualized preaching for young African American males is authenticity. Commenting on preaching to the hip-hop generation, Watkins advises:

> Hip hoppers want leaders who are transparent, honest, and willing to share their struggles and how they overcame. This translates into preaching that is authentic, honest, revealing—rooted in story that is practical and relevant. It works not just on Sunday but also on Monday through Saturday. Preachers who are going to be successful with the hip-hop generation will be preachers who reclaim the telling of the story—the old, old story and your story—as it relates to the hip-hop generation's story, in their language. In summary, effective preaching to the hip-hop generation is about truth, translation, and honesty.[443]

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[441] Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 144.
[442] Timothy J. Keller, "Ministering to Post-Everythings," (Address given at the *National Conversation on Renewal and Outreach*,Nashville, TN, April, 2003).
[443] Watkins and Barr, 17-18.

Zack Eswine also gives counsel on the importance of being authentic in preaching to today's postmodern generation. He challenges preachers to ask themselves the question, "Can I now reach who I once was? Anything good we ever preach has been made possible by a prior testimony of God's mercy. I am convinced that biblical preaching will meet the challenge of reaching people with the gospel in today's world only when a generation of preachers remembers where they have been."[444]

One of Hodge's missiological elements in reaching the hip-hop generation is to be able to identify with sinners. This calls for both transparency in the preacher regarding his own struggles and also a willingness to enter into the comfort zones of young African American males who may be considered as outcasts.[445]

Finally, regarding the need for preachers who wish to reach the hip-hop generation to contextualize, Watkins emphasizes:

> Hip hoppers want leaders who are transparent, honest, and willing to share their struggles and how they overcame. They inspect at first sight and have a wait-and-see attitude when it comes to those with whom they choose to share leadership. They want their leaders to speak from the heart and from experience.[446]

Watkins adds, "Probably the most important thing preachers can do to reach my peers is to live a life of spiritual authenticity."[447]

Three of the six pastors interviewed mentioned "realness" or "authenticity" as a vital principle of contextualization. Pastor Anthony says of his preaching, "A big piece is keeping it real. Realness is important to everybody, but we're talking about young black men. Realness, transparency, and authentic lifestyle make communication stick." Pastor

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[444] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 11.
[445] Hodge, 220.
[50] Watkins and Barr, 17.
[447] Benjamin Stephens and Ralph C. Watkins, *From Jay-Z to Jesus: Reaching & Teaching Young Adults in the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), 84.

Edwards remarked that his people have "appreciated that in some of my examples I've shared about where I am with my own walk with the Lord from time to time. I've been honest about a struggle as a parent or something of that nature."

While preaching is a vital aspect of ministry, to have an impact of young African American males in the urban context, the work of ministry must also go on outside of the pulpit. In their book *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne argue that "Sunday sermons are necessary but not sufficient. Sermons are needed, yes, but they are not all that is needed."[448]

Developing relationships with young African American men goes hand-in-hand with having an effective preaching ministry among them. "In the Black preaching enterprise," Henry Mitchell writes, "the preacher's preparation starts with close identity with the congregation."[449] He adds that

> the Black preacher must be ear deep in the condition of the people, and out of this comes the easy dialogue between the preacher and the people, whose lives are intimately close together... this intimacy leads people to feel literally that they are being addressed personally.[450]

Pastor Franklin echoed this need to have relational connection with men outside the pulpit. He said, "I think the way to keep it modern is when the preacher stays actively engaging the culture comprehensively and not only creating a camp, not only creating the Christian ghetto and calling it a church and being so out of touch with reality." He called for pastors to have a "mobile pulpit."

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[448] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, N.S.W.: Matthias Media, 2009), 102.
[449] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 106.
[450] Ibid., 106.

Pastor Anthony has also seen his preaching ministry bear fruit because of his building relationships with young men outside the pulpit. Building relationship helps with contextualization by giving the preacher a better understanding of what the men are going through. Anthony remarked:

> Having a daily relationship with those people is key, not because you're studying them to preach every time, but because you want a tangible person in mind that you're trying to flesh out a message to.

Pastor Cox offered a very practical observation regarding the vital link between preaching and relational connection outside of the pulpit:

> I'm enough of a biblicist to believe that through the foolishness of preaching, God saves people. But I'm also enough of a biblicist to know that if Andrew (a church leader) doesn't bring you, you don't get to hear the preaching. So it's a both-and.

Each of the pastors interviewed found it helpful to learn about preaching but also about the core concerns of young African American men from others. When asked to name people who have been influential in teaching them about contextualization among young African American males in an urban context, the pastors gave many different names, including some who are not pastors at all.

The non-pastors who were recognized as being helpful to the pastors in their contextualization were Michael Eric Dyson, Cornell West, Carl Ellis, Jawanza Kunjufu, and Eric Baysdon. Dyson, West, and Kunjufu are primarily prominent social commentators on today's African American culture. Ellis is a former pastor and a current theologian who teaches primarily on ministry within African American culture. Baysdon is a radio personality who provides a forum for today's social and political commentators to engage the public.

There were a number of renowned African American preachers listed as helping preachers with contextualization. Among those mentioned were Gardner C. Taylor, Charles Booth, Emanuel Cleveland, Vashti MacKenzie, Father Flager from St. Savani in Chicago, Harvey Carey, Dr. Tony Evans, E.K. Bailey, E.V. Hill, Jasper Williams, A. Lewis Patterson, and Tom Skinner.

The pastors also listed preachers who don't preach to African American audiences, but who provide theological depth that encourages the soul. The preachers interviewed then take what they learn and contextualize it. Pastor Franklin described himself as taking some of Dr. James Boice's sermons and adding "collard green juice to it." What he was doing was simply contextualizing—taking the truths of Boice's messages and reframing them in ways that are accessible to a more urban audience. Other preachers mentioned as helpful teachers of preachers included Kevin Smith, John Ortberg, Mark Dever, D.A. Carson, Paul Tripp, Phil Ryken, Bill Krispin, Haddon Robinson, Bryan Chapell, and Manny Ortiz.

Preaching style was not something necessarily uniform for the pastors interviewed. Some felt the need to "preach black" more than others. For example, Pastor Cox said of his preaching and training of preachers:

> I try to use some of the great techniques of black preaching, like the "hook." You have one phrase that you come back to. And rhythm. You've got to be able to preach with a good sense of timing; you don't talk too fast, you never slow down. How is your cadence? Without a dramatic pause, you don't encourage feedback from the congregation —and I love feedback from the congregation.

Though he is an African American preaching to a predominately African American audience, Pastor Daniels only incorporates traditional African American preaching as a small part of his preaching style. He explains his reasons for this:

> I go in and out of the traditional African American style about a third of the time, because the older tradition of African American preaching is viewed by this generation as inauthentic. Because it is a form which they don't necessarily know, to them it doesn't have an artistic believability component. So when you say, "Aaaaaaahhhhh," they say you're just contriving that, that's not who you actually are if I'm just talking to you. This generation, especially the hip-hop generation, values authenticity. And so I do bring in elements of spontaneity from black church preaching because I think that reeks of authenticity. I think traditional black preaching is the best connective preaching style available; however I think it's also conversational and intellectual. So there are several elements I try to bring into preaching here.

My recommendation for contextualization in terms of preaching style is to develop a "hybrid" style, as Pastor Daniels discussed. Preaching to young African American males cannot be done in a monotone or erudite type of fashion. There must be appropriate emotion and excitement, bringing in the celebratory aspect of traditional African American preaching. However, the affective element should only be one element of the message, not the entire content of the message. There must be strong, meaningful teaching of the Word of God, with direct, concrete application to the lives of the hearers. It also helps to use illustrations and stories, both from contemporary events and the preacher's own life, to engage the hearers. And, given that authenticity is such a high value among the young African American male demographic, the preacher must still be himself, even while bringing in aspects of preaching that are learned from others.

Recommendations for Further Study

Due to time constraints, there were areas related to this study that could not be pursued, but would be worthy of further investigation. First of all, in my research I came across a number of young African American males who are engaged in the holy hip-hop movement. Since my interview focus was pastors, I was not able to sit and talk with these laymen directly. Research should be done on their backgrounds, including their formative

experiences and challenges, and also their testimonies of being drawn to Christ and how God used preachers and preaching to minister to them.

A second recurring theme that came out of the pastors' interviews was that of a culture clash between the traditional black church and the hip-hop generation. I'm referring specifically to Christian hip-hoppers. One of the pastors told me that he assumed the older church members would welcome in their younger counterparts, but was shocked to see that the older members were appalled by the hip-hopper's presence. There were cultural barriers of dress, language, music, and worldview that could not be overcome in his setting—he ended up losing both groups.

Of all the pastors I interviewed, none of them ministers in what would be considered a traditional black church. I wonder if this phenomenon is true across-the-board? Do young hip-hoppers not belong to traditional black churches, period, or was this just a coincidence in my research? That would be a valuable study. Perhaps the traditional church is more of an "old wineskin" when it comes to reaching the hip-hop generation, and only "new wineskins" will serve to hold them.

A final area of further research would be to discover what training and teaching is already being offered nationwide to preach to young African American males in urban contexts. In my research I came across a seminary program in Chicago called the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE). One class they offered was "The Art of Prophetic Preaching in the Urban Context," taught by Otis Moss III, a preacher from Chicago who contributed to one of my readings, *The Gospel Remix*. I attempted to get some information on the class and materials, but could not do so without taking the class. I was not able to participate in the class because of time constraints. The

existence of that class leads me to wonder if there are more classes like this being offered that I am unaware of.

In closing, my hope and prayer is that this study would not be an ending point, but a beginning in discovering ways to be more effective in reaching and discipling young African American men in urban contexts. Personally, I am challenged to learn more and try to become a better preacher and pastor to the young men around me. May God use this work to move others to the same.

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