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# **Field Sermons**

A Study In Extemporaneous Preaching  
Effected Without The Regular Tools Of Preparation And Delivery

By  
Robert Nicholas Burns, Jr.

A Dissertation Submitted to  
The Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

Saint Louis Missouri  
2013



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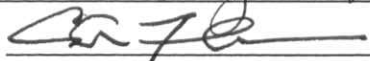
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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore how military chaplains preach sermons to personnel within the field environment, with a particular focus on overcoming the challenges faced without the regular tools of preparation and delivery. A literature review was conducted that centered on the methods of preparation and delivery of sermons that would be beneficial to chaplains in the field. The study followed a qualitative research method, utilizing semi-structured interviews with six chaplains, analyzed in a constant comparative method. The research found that chaplains delivered their sermons extemporaneously, often without notes, and utilized oral methods of preparation grounded upon their own personal devotions and prayer. This study concludes that chaplains need to avail themselves of the techniques and practices of extemporaneous preaching without notes, to include an oral method of preparation in order to preach effectively in the field.

To my wife, who not only was patient with me  
through the trying years of seminary,  
but bore the loneliness of three deployments...  
and then I threw this Doctor of Ministry project at her.

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I would also like to thank the six chaplains who graciously gave me the opportunity to interview them. Their insights into the world of field preaching have encouraged me to rely more on the foundations of my own personal spiritual life in the production of my messages. Their ministry to the combat arms of our military and sea services is a calling full of personal sacrifice and is worthy of the greatest honor.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Preaching in the open air has been a tradition of Christianity from its inception. John the Baptist's preaching in the Judean wilderness is a clear example.<sup>1</sup> Although Jesus often preached in synagogues, the large crowds that were drawn to his message often pushed him to preach in the open air, such as when he gave his "Sermon On The Mount,"<sup>2</sup> when he later preached beside the Sea of Galilee,<sup>3</sup> and again when he preached from a boat on the bank of Lake Gennesaret.<sup>4</sup> The apostles continued to preach in the open, often to large crowds, with little of the preparation and none of the aids so commonly associated with preaching in modern church settings.<sup>5</sup>

During the Great Awakening, Methodist preachers like John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield traveled about England and America on horseback, going from town to town successfully delivering their sermons outdoors. George Whitefield, with his unique voice and expressive style, was able to address thousands at one time and was so effective in his delivery that he was able to move

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:1.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 15:9.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 5:1.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:14, Acts 3:11 and Acts 9.

even men as irreligious as Benjamin Franklin.<sup>6</sup> By means of open air preaching, the Wesleys and Whitfield brought thousands to faith in Christ, encouraged the Great Awakening, and became household names in England and America, as well as inspiring many to follow their example of preaching to large audiences outdoors.<sup>7</sup> The apparent success of these great men at such a difficult task and under such harsh conditions compels one to consider what today's preachers can learn from them. How were they so successful? What methods and practices did they utilize that could benefit preachers' ministries today? How well are today's ministers prepared to preach in similar situations? What can they learn from these outdoor preachers?

A contemporary version of the open air preaching of the past is found in the work of military chaplains, such as the chaplains that have served our military forces during the many overseas conflicts of our nation. Can preachers today relearn the lost art of George Whitfield's field preaching by examining the work of these chaplains? What challenges do military chaplains face when they preach in the open air, and how do they overcome those challenges? How do those who preach in such rudimentary circumstances prepare and deliver their sermons?

### **Military Chaplains Preach in the Field**

#### *Chaplains of the Civil War*

The military chaplains who served with the Union and the Confederacy during the American Civil War engaged in open air preaching while they ministered

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 2 (1975 repr., Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1999), 959.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

to their troops, often in very challenging conditions.<sup>8</sup> When they had the opportunity, they preached in chapels<sup>9</sup> or in tents;<sup>10</sup> however, the majority of their ministry was with the soldiers in the field and along the roads as they traveled to and from the conflict. For the purposes of this study, the term “field preaching” will refer to this practice of open air preaching by military chaplains. The reminiscences of Reverend E. F. Williams describe an excellent example of this type of preaching:

Coming round rather late one morning, I found a regiment drawn up in marching order. Approaching the officer in command, I inquired – “How long since these men have had the gospel preached to them?” “Some three months,” was the reply. “Can I preach to them now?” “Yes, if you can do it in five minutes.” Instantly I stated the case to the men, taking my text from Proverbs ix. 12, - “If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.” My subject was “Individual Responsibility.” It would have done any Christian good to see how the men drank in the only sermon they had heard for three months. But the five minutes were quickly gone; a hasty benediction pronounced, my audience moved down the street to the music of fife and drum.<sup>11</sup>

Often these sermons were delivered in rapid succession and sometimes even from horseback. Traveling about, the preachers would come across various units in the field and their arrival presented the soldiers an opportunity to worship. The Reverend Amos H. Coolidge recorded a narrative of one Sunday’s work:

[The Regiment] was drawn up in line; leave was given any to retire from the ranks and the sermon if they wished; only two left. On my return, at a little picket-station, the men begged for a service; so again the Word was preached. At another picket-station on the way, another service was held.

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<sup>8</sup> Alex L. Wiatt, *Confederate Chaplain William Edward Wiatt: An Annotated Diary* (Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1994), 12f.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 16f.

<sup>11</sup> Edward P. Smith, *Incidents of the U.S. Christian Commission* (1869; facsimile repr., Concord, VA: RJMC Publication, 2003), 381.

Without dismounting this time, hymns and prayer and the proclamation of the blessed gospel succeeded each other, for the fourth time.<sup>12</sup>

Coolidge continued on his way and preached another sermon before arriving back at his post, bringing the total for the day to five services. Preaching multiple sermons in a day was not uncommon. In fact, most anecdotal recollections of chaplains at this time record their preaching daily and often at numerous services and locations each day.<sup>13</sup> For a soldier during the Civil War, Sunday was no longer the first day of the week but the day the chaplain arrived at your camp. This form of preaching—done impromptu in a field environment—is unique, presenting many difficulties that pastors in church settings do not regularly experience.

#### *The Difficulty of Field Preaching During the Civil War*

Preaching in the field often brings with it many challenges, some of which include the remoteness of the venue, the lack of suitable furnishings to aid the service, and even the effect of the weather. The Reverend J. William Jones records an instance when he preached to a congregation outside as it snowed, with the men to whom he was preaching, fourteen of whom were barefoot, standing in snow several inches deep.<sup>14</sup> He describes another instance when he went to a military unit to hold services, expecting due to the steady rain only to deliver a small prayer meeting in a tent but upon arriving was overcome by the dedication and determination of the men in the face of such harsh conditions:

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>13</sup> J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp* (1904; facsimile repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 248.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 249.

To my surprise, as I rode up, I heard a volume of sacred song ascending from the usual place of worship, and found a large congregation assembled on the rude logs... I preached forty minutes in a constant rain to as attentive a congregation as I ever addressed. The men used to say: "We go on picket; we march and fight, and we do all other military duty in any weather that comes, and we cannot see why we allow the weather to interrupt our religious services."<sup>15</sup>

Weather certainly does have a major impact on field preaching, but it is not the only significant challenge encountered. The demands of marching<sup>16</sup> and combat<sup>17</sup> often steal significant amounts of time from chaplains and hamper their ability to provide services for their soldiers. The Reverend Chas. P. Lyford relays an interesting account of this occurring once when he was seeking to preach in the "wilderness." He had made an appointment to preach the day before but upon arrival at the brigade location, the men had already taken to the road due to their orders to advance. The colonel of the regiment told him, "Young man, you won't keep your appointment tonight." Overcome with compassion for these men who were always on the go, and determined to share the gospel with them, he did not abandon his call.

They were a noble body of men, marching so gaily and gladly to the grave. My heart went out after them in silent resolve to preach to them, if it were possible, that night. I mounted a horse and quietly followed them. After night, as they approached Culpepper, they halted and prepared to bivouac. Supper over, I rode up to the Colonel... and reported myself ready to fill my appointment. With his whole heart he entered into the minutiae of preparation. "I believe you fellows would come with us to the cannon's mouth to preach the gospel," said he.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Wiatt, 235.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, 244.



By far, the greatest challenge to field preaching must be after a battle is fought, when the chaplain ministers the gospel to the dying. Chaplain Eastman, the son of Reverend Dr. Eastman of the American Tract Society, recalls a time after a battle, when having had his horse shot from under him, he lay on the ground unable to move due to an injured leg. He heard a man cry out, "O, my God," and begin to pray. As he could not walk, he rolled over to the man, passing the dead along the way, and preached Christ to the suffering soldier and prayed for him in his last moments.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Challenges for Chaplains in Vietnam*

The chaplains who served our military forces in the fields of Vietnam fared no differently. Often they had to live "like pigs, bathing out of helmets, eating c-rations three times a day, and a few other things not worth mentioning."<sup>20</sup> They preached everywhere their soldiers and Marines were: in fields, in the jungle, and even on the steps of a Buddhist pagoda.<sup>21</sup> Many were very creative in accommodating the service and the sermon: for example, fashioning bamboo pews,<sup>22</sup> using a jeep as an altar,<sup>23</sup> and using the wood from ammo crates as seats for

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>20</sup> John W. Schumacher, *A Soldier of God Remembers* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 2000), 32.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Elden H. Luffman, *Bringing God to War: Glimpses of a Chaplain's Ministry with U.S. Marines in Vietnam* (Williamstown, NJ: Phillips Publications, 2006), 71.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 74.

the men.<sup>24</sup> One chaplain, Colonel John W. Schumacher gives this description of how he overcame the difficulties of preaching in the field:

I had a chaplain's kit consisting of various items I could use to fashion an altar, if I could find anything that could be used as an altar. Ammunition boxes worked; so did a medic stretcher. I would place an altar cloth, candles, an open Bible (usually open to the text I would use that evening) and a small cross on the altar. I always carried with me the elements for Holy Communion and offered it at the end of each service... I knew that this could possibly be the last time a soldier would take communion.<sup>25</sup>

Colonel Schumacher's recollection reemphasizes the main purpose of the chaplain's ministry in the field: to bring the gospel to the hurting and those about to die. As in the Civil War, the chaplains in Vietnam brought the gospel to the sick and wounded on the battlefield<sup>26</sup> and often found themselves wounded in combat.<sup>27</sup> One chaplain, Lieutenant Commander Elden H. Luffman, USN, reminds us why preaching the gospel and administering the sacrament remains relevant to our troops in the field and in combat: "I had a brief meditation and then served them communion. The altar was a stack of C-Ration cases. They seemed hungry for communion. It's more meaningful to them out here."<sup>28</sup> He later solidifies this point with a clear example of the impact on a particular officer:

I walked up to a young Lieutenant whose head was bandaged. When he saw me, he perked up and said, "Chaplain, I was in your service this morning." He seemed relaxed and comforted by my presence. I wrote home telling about this incident and commented: "This is one reason church services mean so

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>25</sup> Schumacher, 62.

<sup>26</sup> Marion F. Sturkey, *Bonnie-Sue: A Marine Corps Helicopter Squadron in Vietnam* (Plum Branch, SC: Heritage Press International, 1999), 178.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>28</sup> Luffman, 65.

much to these guys. They never know when they might get hit. They want to be ready.”<sup>29</sup>

As chaplains bring comfort with their presence and prepare many with the gospel and sacrament for possible loss of life, they also bring comfort as a symbol of the presence of God. Chaplain Richard Hutcheson describes the comfort that the presence of a chaplain can communicate:

The religiously-minded welcome him as a symbol of the presence of God in a seemingly God-forsaken place. Those who can do so take advantage of the opportunities he offers for worship and sacrament. The lonely and troubled welcome him as a counselor and a link with the values and standards of home, too often neglected by troops at war.<sup>30</sup>

Hutcheson later recollects his experience in field ministry and notes the challenges that a chaplain can face when the unit the chaplain serves is distributed over many positions in the battle space. Describing his experience in the field, he states: “The only alternative was to take the services to them. So, what with fourteen scheduled services at fourteen different places each week, plus assorted unscheduled visits to the forward observers and to batteries taking appreciable amounts of incoming and sustaining casualties, I had little free time.”<sup>31</sup>

The anecdotal evidence of the chaplains who served in the field during Vietnam and the Civil War illustrates the significant challenges involved in military field preaching and ministry—challenges brought on by weather, distance, combat, personnel movement, and most importantly, time and resource limitations. How

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>30</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson, *Chaplain at Sea: Holding on to Values in Changing Times* (Arlington, VA: The Navy Chaplain Foundation, 1999), 133.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 134.

were these chaplains able to preach despite such overwhelming challenges? How can chaplains today be successful at preaching in the field with similar challenges? What methods and practices did chaplains of the past use to overcome these challenges to their preaching? Specifically, given that the conditions in the field frequently prohibit some of the routines that most preachers consider essential – such as access to commentaries or the ability to produce or utilize sermon notes – how can today’s chaplains properly prepare to conduct their preaching ministry?

### **Problem & Purpose Statements**

**Problem Statement:** How do military chaplains effectively preach sermons to personnel in the field? What are the toughest challenges to preaching in the field? How do they minimize some of these challenges?

**Purpose Statement:** The purpose of this study is to explore how military chaplains preach sermons to personnel within the field environment, given its particular challenges.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions served as a guide for this study:

1. What methods do chaplains use while they prepare sermons to preach in the field?
2. What delivery techniques/practices do chaplains use while preaching in the field?
3. How do chaplains evaluate the effectiveness of their field preaching?
4. What lessons have experienced chaplains learned from their field preaching experience that may be beneficial to other chaplains in the field, and even to preachers in more traditional settings?

### **Significance of the Study**

The techniques and practices that military chaplains have utilized to overcome the challenges of preaching in a field environment remain significant to both continued chaplain ministry and to the greater church. Opportunities abound to address congregations in the open without the technical aids and comfort associated with a formal church setting. Pastors and chaplains alike need to have the confidence, in the moment, to proclaim the gospel when the opportunity presents itself and not shy away from an uncomfortable environment.

The lessons one can learn from chaplains preaching in the field and in combat environments should be identified and passed down to future generations of chaplains, in order to enable continued effective ministry as well as ensure that hard won lessons will be remembered. This need has become even more apparent as denominational diversity within the chaplain corps increases and, with it, a diversity of pastoral training and experience. With the absence of uniform professional standards, it is important to pass on to the increasing numbers of less experienced pastoral applicants the techniques and practices of seasoned veterans.

Additionally, this study is significant to the greater church. As pastors struggle in the preparation and delivery of their weekly sermons, the lessons learned in this study will persuade them to alter the ways they prepare and deliver their weekly messages to their congregations. Hopefully, this study will encourage pastors to become confident to preach outside of comfortable settings; to preach anytime, anywhere; and ultimately to review and, where needed, revise their philosophies of preaching.

Furthermore, church ministries that bear a resemblance to field conditions will also benefit from this study. For example, the findings of this study could enhance the ministries of missionaries who preach in remote areas with none of the conveniences of a regular church setting, as well as the ministries of pastors involved with sports teams or other similar outdoor gatherings or events.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Extemporaneous Preaching:** Wayne V. McDill writes in his book, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*:

A well-prepared sermon delivered with few notes or none at all is “extemporaneous.” The word literally means “out of the time” and emphasizes the spontaneity and freedom of the extemporaneous method. Though extensive study may be done, even a manuscript written, the speaker does not memorize the words of his sermon. He rather gets his subject and its treatment in view and trusts the word choice to the moment of delivery.<sup>32</sup>

**Field:** A military term referring to the “scene or area of active military operations; a battleground.”<sup>33</sup> For this study, “in the field” or “the field environment” may refer to various locations such as distributed outposts in remote places or fixed operating bases in urban areas of combat. The unifying factor is the clear lack of any of the regular conveniences associated with daily life.

**Field Ministry:** The ministry associated with chaplains who are operating in a field environment. This definition includes all types of ministry, from holding worship services to caring for the grieving, wounded, and dead.

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<sup>32</sup> Wayne V. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 136.

<sup>33</sup> *The Random House College Dictionary* (1982), s.v. “field.”

**Field Preaching:** The act of delivering a sermon during a worship service held in a field environment.

**Impromptu Sermon:** A sermon delivered on the spur of the moment, without preparation or notes, as in an impromptu speech.<sup>34</sup>

**Manuscript Sermon:** A sermon prepared completely beforehand and then read (though not necessarily verbatim) at the time of delivery.<sup>35</sup>

**Memorized or Recitation Sermon:** A sermon prepared completely beforehand, then memorized and recited word for word at the time of delivery.<sup>36</sup>

**Open Air Preaching:** The act of preaching publicly, taking place outside, without any of the conveniences of a church building; as in the sermons delivered during the Great Awakening “in the open air.”<sup>37</sup>

**Preaching from the Heart:** Preaching in such a way that the delivery is a “spontaneous product of the speaker’s particular personality, as acted on by the subject which now fills his mind and heart,”<sup>38</sup> for the purpose of cooperating with

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<sup>34</sup> McDill, 132.

<sup>35</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Vernon L. Stanfield, 4th ed., revised by Vernon L. Stanfield, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1979), 265. This study makes use of two editions of Broadus, a work that was extensively expanded and revised since its original publication in 1870. While the overall thought remained that of Broadus, some of the content of later editions reflects the judgment of other authors. Nonetheless, this study will cite the work simply as Broadus.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>37</sup> Latourette, 959.

<sup>38</sup> Broadus, 264.

the Holy Spirit as he works by and with the “Word of God in our hearts,”<sup>39</sup> i.e., the hearts of the audience.

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<sup>39</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, ed. S. W. Carruthers, 1995 ed. (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994; reprint, 1995), 1.5, 22.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this study is to explore how military chaplains might effectively preach sermons to personnel in the field environment. Chapter 1 included anecdotal evidence from military chaplains who served in Vietnam and the Civil War. These stories identified several significant challenges to military field preaching and field ministry: challenges brought on by weather, distance, combat, personnel movement, and most importantly, limitations of time and other resources. This study considers three probing questions concerning ministry conducted within the field environment: How can chaplains today preach successfully in the field, while facing such significant challenges? What methods and practices have chaplains of the past used to overcome these challenges? How can today's chaplains properly prepare, with limited time and resources, with no commentaries, and with limited ability to produce or utilize sermon notes in the field?

### **One Chaplain's Answer**

A systematic review of the extant literature on preaching in the field environment yielded only limited answers to the research questions. In fact, only one, non-academic article addressed these questions specifically and identified at least one practice that chaplains should utilize in preparing and delivering their field

sermons. Chaplain David Smartt, in his article, "The Field Preaching Experience,"<sup>40</sup> shares some pertinent reflections on how properly to prepare and deliver a field sermon. Smartt first confirms that it is significantly difficult to prepare in the field and that, if possible, it is preferable to prepare prior to any field exercise.<sup>41</sup> However, he acknowledges that for long periods of deployment, a certain amount of preparation must be done in the field; he further confirms two significant challenges that chaplains must overcome in the preparation of field sermons: limited time and limited resources.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Limited Time and Resources*

Chaplain Smartt emphasizes that time is a very important element in the preparation of field sermons. He explains that chaplains in the field are constantly active and are consistently being pulled away from the preparation process to conduct visitation or other duties; they must therefore schedule preparation time carefully. "While time may be scarce, time spent in the preparation of the sermon is as important as time spent in visitation. If I cheat the sermon of preparation, then I have cheated the troops of my best to offer."<sup>43</sup>

Yet limited time is not the most significant challenge to field preaching that Smartt addresses. He also notes that during his time in the field he was "hampered by limited resources. It is impractical—if not impossible—to designate a set of

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<sup>40</sup> David W. Smartt, "The Field Preaching Experience," *Military Chaplains' Review* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1986).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

commentaries to be included in the load plan... I am forced to rely on previous knowledge of the text.”<sup>44</sup> While most pastors may feel they could not do without sermon preparation tools, such as commentaries and Greek lexicons, Smartt somehow sees beyond this challenge to recognize its benefits:

While these limited resources may be thought of as a drawback, they may also be seen to have paradoxical and positive benefits. As I am forced to dig into my own inner resources, the door is opened for freshness and spontaneity... This often leads to a surprising immediacy and current meaning to the message of the preacher in the field.<sup>45</sup>

Although Chaplain Smartt adequately presents the challenges of preparing field sermons, in his discussion of the topic, he does not seem to introduce any method or practice for overcoming these challenges.

#### *Private Devotions Critical*

While he does not suggest particular methods that can help people prepare their sermons in the field, Smartt does explain that, for him, one of the most significant elements to the preparation process was his own private devotion. He asserts,

I believe strongly that the field preaching experience requires the seasoning of fresh and vibrant moments of personal reflection and prayer. As I take the time to gather my thoughts and my spirit—to focus my prayers—to provide time for reflection and insight, I am better able to preach a current and inspiring message to meet the needs of the soldier in the field.<sup>46</sup>

Later, he testifies that his prayer and devotions do more than just aid him in preaching, but are actually the very moments in which he prepares: “I have

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 17.

discovered that while in the field, it is necessary for me to schedule a block of time to be alone for prayer and personal reflection each day... It is in those short moments each day that my field sermon is formulated.”<sup>47</sup>

Although this technique of prayer and reflection seems crucial for building an effective sermon, it is not yet a clear method of sermon development. Smartt does not leave his reader there, however. He offers three guidelines, by which he develops his own field sermons. He explains that when preparing a sermon, he first examines the current situation that the troops in the field are facing. He asks what challenges they have to overcome. Second, he examines his own feelings about the very same challenges as he encounters them himself. Lastly, he asks the question: “How does my relationship with God help me deal with the realities of the current situation?”<sup>48</sup> Once he has considered these three primary guidelines, he begins to develop his message, applying three additional principles, which he holds as essential to the preparation of a good field sermon. The foremost of these is the principle of simplicity. He notes that the greatest sermon in scripture, the Sermon on the Mount, was in fact a field sermon, which should suggest to us that such sermons “should be simple, profound, and easy to remember.”<sup>49</sup> His next two claims are that a sermon should be “full of fresh, down to earth, illustrative language” and should contain an appropriate amount of humor.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Smartt's three guidelines appear more geared for the development of a sermon topic than for overcoming the challenges of sermon preparation in the field. His focus on the challenges that the troops are facing in the field seems promising, but his emphasis on one's existential relationship with God does not provide a specific method for the preparation of sermons. Instead, this guidance raises a number of questions. How does one choose the biblical text that best answers the identified need? Is a chaplain's relationship with God a true basis for a redemptive message? These questions will indeed need to be answered, but Smartt's work does not itself provide those answers. His three additional principles of sermon preparation are worthy of further consideration; however, they focus more on sermon content than on sermon preparation and delivery.

In his article, Smartt never outlines how he delivered his sermons, but he does give his reader a clue about the way in which he believed the sermon ought to be delivered. He explains, "The manner of delivery of the sermon is significant to the effectiveness of the preaching event. In every sermon it is important to speak with authority and warmth. In the field it is paramount. As I am able to preach the message that I feel in my heart, I am more effective in reaching the hearts of the soldiers."<sup>51</sup> This heartfelt approach is necessary in every sermon, but its importance in the field may provide a clue to the method that preachers in the field should use in preparing and delivering their sermons.

In reviewing the source materials, the researcher was able to identify a number of circumstances that pose clear challenges to the field preaching

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 21.

experience. However, thus far, Smartt has yet to offer any method or practice for the field preparation process that can help preachers overcome these challenges.

Although Smartt's writings reveal critical elements of the preparation process, they do not present a comprehensive method for preparing and delivering a field sermon. The researcher must therefore expand the scope of study beyond the topic of field preaching to focus instead on the general topics of sermon preparation and delivery in order to discover universal principles of preparation and delivery that can help other ministers overcome the challenges of field preaching.

### **Concerning Field Preparation**

John A. Broadus, in his seminal work *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, presents a comprehensive discussion on a number of techniques of sermon development that have significance to this study. This work is uniquely significant, not only for its historical contributions to the study of preaching, but for the fact that prior to his work as a homiletics professor, John A. Broadus himself was a military chaplain who served with the 23<sup>rd</sup> South Carolina Regiment<sup>52</sup> during the American Civil War. He first makes a distinction between two types of sermon preparation: the first he calls "general," and the second, "special" or "immediate." "Special" or "immediate" (terms Broadus uses interchangeably) preparation is the preparation one does for each individual sermon.<sup>53</sup> In his discussion of "general" preparation, Broadus calls preachers to involve themselves in constant study, because the best sermons rest on prior knowledge and personal experience. He explains, "The

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<sup>52</sup> John Wesley Brinsfield, *The Spirit Divided, Memoirs of Civil War Chaplains* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 257.

<sup>53</sup> Broadus, 241.

sermons that require the least time in immediate preparation are frequently better than sermons laboriously created through long hours of intense study. This is true because they have used materials accumulated in the mind through months and years and now remembered in favorable circumstances.”<sup>54</sup> In this assertion, Broadus clearly agrees with Smartt, who, responding to the lack of commentaries in the field, subsequently had to rely on his “own inner resources.” These personal resources, Smartt notes, “often lead to a surprising immediacy and current meaning to the message of the preacher in the field.”<sup>55</sup> However, while supporting the use of this second type of preparation, Broadus also cautions,

No person can keep fresh who does not put fresh material in every sermon—something which particularly belongs to that sermon and occasion and fits no others so well. It is imperative, therefore, that the preacher should also give his very careful thought not only to his general stock but also to what could be called his “materials provided at the time.”<sup>56</sup>

Of course, this idea forces the question of what materials can be used for immediate preparation in the field. Broadus does not address this specific application of his discussion, but he does give his readers some clues regarding where to look.

Broadus outlines four different preachers’ individual practices for preparation. The discussion is enlightening. However, three of the preachers’ methods depend greatly on the study of commentaries and other forms of literature.<sup>57</sup> One seven step method that Broadus attributes to Dr. Henry Sloan

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>55</sup> Smartt, 18.

<sup>56</sup> Broadus, 241.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 242.

Coffin<sup>58</sup> looks remarkably like the method that Chaplain Smartt espouses, and it answers the questions that Smartt's method leaves unresolved. Broadus recounts this seven-step method:

1. Decide upon a pressing need of the congregation.
2. Select the aspect of the gospel that meets that need.
3. Look for a text that embodies the message.
4. Study the text for its full meaning.
5. Make an outline with a few notes regarding illustrations.
6. Write it out, whether it is to be read or delivered extemporaneously.
7. Correct and polish it.

Dr. Coffin's method marks encouraging progress for the current discussion. It answers the questions that arose during the review of Smartt's method and particularly addresses the need for reliance on the biblical text. However, the researcher suspects that Dr. Coffin's sixth step would be difficult to achieve during field preparation. The functionality of this step would be entirely dependent on the availability of paper and the cleanliness of the field environment.

In his discussion, Broadus presents his own eight-step method. The first three steps have to do with choosing and examining the selected text. He then emphasizes the examination of literature on the subject, which should include commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and related books. Clearly one can only complete this process prior to going into the field; it must therefore be part of one's general

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Dr. Henry Sloan Coffin was actually quoted by Broadus' fourth edition's reviser, Vernon L. Stanfield who cites as his source: H. A. Prichard, *The Minister, the Method, and the Message* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).



preparation. Broadus's last four steps involve outlining the sermon, speaking it openly, refining the outline, and writing it completely out. He says, "Ideally, every sermon should be written in full... The minimum writing for each sermon would be to write the introduction in full, to write a detailed outline of the body of the sermon, and write the conclusion in full."<sup>59</sup> Interestingly enough, in earlier editions, Broadus actually comments on the disadvantages of writing out sermons, and he notes a disadvantage that is key to this study: "Akin to this last [disadvantage] is the disadvantage of consuming so much time in the merely mechanical effort of writing, time which might often be more profitably spent upon the thoughts of the discourse or upon the preacher's general improvement."<sup>60</sup> It is clear from this statement that Broadus did not hold the act of writing out a sermon as absolutely necessary, but rather valued the goal of creating a clear rendition of the sermon in the preacher's mind. One can certainly conduct this creative process mentally if no paper is available, or through the use of an outline if the person is able to attain a small notepad.

### **Concerning Field Delivery of Sermons**

In addition to his work on sermon preparation, John A. Broadus offers some valuable insights regarding sermon delivery, which have bearing on this study. Broadus rejects both reading and recitation as viable means of delivering a sermon. He states that reading has a power of its own if done well; however, it is a different form of communication than speaking and is far less effective due to its "coldness of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>60</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Jesse B. Weatherspoon, 3rd. ed. (Louisville, KY: Citizens Fidelity Bank & Trust Co., 1944), 301.

manner.”<sup>61</sup> Broadus rejects recitation or repeating verbatim from memory a previously written sermon, not only because of the enormous amount of work involved in the memorization, but also because “the power of verbal memorizing is really less valuable than the ability to retain ideas and to share them with words that come in the act of delivery.”<sup>62</sup> The ability to retain ideas rather than words, and the ability to communicate those ideas, is a form of extemporaneous speaking that Broadus calls “free speaking.”<sup>63</sup> He states, in the 1944 edition of his book,

When one makes no effort to remember the words and recalls them at all only by their association with the ideas he is seeking to express, the process lacks the essential character of recitation. What then is it? The answer must be that free speaking from written preparation is only one of the varieties of what we call extemporaneous speaking.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, Broadus proposes a more extemporaneous means of delivery than the more rigid forms of reading and recitation. This idea helps those interested in the present study, since it steers preachers away from the more paper-based, time-consuming methods of preparation. In fact, the extemporaneous method that Broadus espouses is the one that aids a preacher who is pressed for time and resources.

When notes are made as a help to preparation, when the plan of the discourse is drawn out on paper and all the principle points are stated or suggested, it is called extemporaneous speaking because all this is regarded only as a means of arranging and recalling the thoughts and the language is extemporized. Extemporaneous preaching is best understood as preaching after limited preparation.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 266.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>64</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1944, 325.

<sup>65</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 269.

After making his point that extemporaneous preaching is superior to reading and recitation, he continues to drive this point home by identifying eight advantages to the method. All eight are significant; however, three have immediate impact on this discussion. First, Broadus states that an extemporaneous method saves time for general study and other pastoral work. Saving time is extremely significant for a chaplain in field ministry, who is constantly moving about, consistently meeting with people, and rarely able to dedicate much time to preparation.<sup>66</sup> Another advantage to this method is that extempore speaking is usually more natural, heartfelt, and spontaneous.<sup>67</sup> This idea harmonizes with Chaplain David Smartt's emphasis on the importance of speaking with warmth and from the heart.<sup>68</sup> Broadus's method of delivery also has the advantage of encouraging one's development of the ability to speak without immediate preparation.<sup>69</sup> Anecdotal evidence from Civil War and Vietnam chaplains demonstrates the need for so speaking from the heart. Broadus also recognizes this need, stating, "The preacher who cannot do this upon occasion misses many opportunities of usefulness and loses influence with the people by an incapacity which they consider a reproach."<sup>70</sup> Broadus goes on to explain what he considers the most important advantage of extemporaneous preaching: that people "like the minister to look at them and to

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>68</sup> Smartt, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 271.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 271.

share directly with them,”<sup>71</sup> not reading from a paper or distracted by notes, but rather maintaining eye contact. Clearly, people have not changed. People in the pew, and in the field, want someone who speaks directly to them, who speak to their heart and not from some artificial, scripted performance.

From Broadus’s summation, it is clear that he supports an extemporaneous means of delivery. However, he defines his preferred method as not only extemporaneous but also note-free. This method he calls “free delivery” and further assigns three elements to it: careful preparation, which includes anything from a deep meditation on scripture to the production of a full manuscript; preaching accomplished without any notes at the time of delivery; and preaching accomplished with no conscious effort to memorize the sermon.<sup>72</sup> These three characteristics are well suited to the uniquely challenging context of preparing sermons in the field. Additionally, Broadus claims that his method of free delivery has all the advantages of other methods without any of their disadvantages.<sup>73</sup> He claims that free delivery has the advantages of recitation and reading—preserving the preacher’s work and developing the memory—while retaining all the benefits of extemporaneous speaking.<sup>74</sup> He also asserts that free delivery best suits the minister’s calling to proclaim the gospel, particularly as it does not allow for the use of notes during delivery. He concludes,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 274.

One cannot imagine Simon Peter and the apostles dragging out their notes before they preached Jesus. In fact, the use of manuscripts and the reading of sermons came later in Christian history when preaching was in a period of decline. It seems fitting that one called to proclaim a message should do it without written support in the pulpit.<sup>75</sup>

This statement also reinforces the chaplains' anecdotal evidence (listed earlier in this study) and indicates that free delivery is most likely the method chaplains use to deliver their sermons in the field. Furthermore, Broadus offers a technique for learning free delivery, which is also fitting for the field preaching experience. He says that the preacher must concentrate on immediate preparation but remember to keep it simple and logical for oral delivery. Additionally, the preacher must rehearse the sermon orally and train himself to depend on his memory rather than his notes.<sup>76</sup> This advice can easily be effected in the field or even when traveling from one troop location to another. Broadus's last two techniques seem to come right out of a chaplain's memoirs: physical fitness and prayer.<sup>77</sup> Physical fitness, he states, promotes well-being and acuteness. One can imagine Broadus being forced to this conclusion by the rigors of life on the battlefield during the Civil War. Prayer, he says, is the most important step of faith in delivering a sermon without notes.<sup>78</sup> This assertion, interestingly enough, is Chaplain Smartt's position as well: "I have discovered that while in the field, it is necessary for me to schedule a block of time to be alone for prayer and personal reflection each day... It is in those short

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 276f.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 278f.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 279.

moments each day that my field sermon is formulated.”<sup>79</sup> It seems that Broadus’s technique also fits with the chaplains’ experiences described earlier in this study.

John A. Broadus’s extemporaneous method of delivery, which he calls free delivery, seems a viable technique for a chaplain to use in the field, and one worthy of further study. Throughout the following pages, this study will therefore center on the topic of extemporaneous preaching without notes and, specifically, the four techniques of free delivery that Broadus espouses: oral preparation and rehearsal, simplicity, prayer and physical fitness.

### **Toward a Truly Oral Technique**

Although Broadus acknowledged that a sermon could be in fact developed without first being written, he insisted with the other men he cites, that the sermon should be written out in full.<sup>80</sup> It seems that Broadus’s concern is for the preacher to affect the adequate amount of preparation prior to entering the pulpit. He writes: “Let the sermon be written. If not written on paper, it must be written just as scrupulously on the tablet of the mind.”<sup>81</sup> The question whether writing is necessary for an extemporaneous sermon is not a new one. Thomas H. Skinner agrees with Broadus in his 1864 article, published in *The American Presbyterian & Theological Review*:

Is composition essential to the best preparation? In the absolute sense, no; but yes, -yes, with emphasis relative to general proficiency. In some instances we may prepare better without than with writing; we sometimes preach

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<sup>79</sup> Smartt, 21.

<sup>80</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 245.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 242.

better when we have no manuscript, not even a brief; but on the whole, the highest success in preparing requires the use of a pen.<sup>82</sup>

He goes on to conclude that it would be “perilous to the credit and honor of preaching to forbear writing as a means of preparing for the pulpit.”<sup>83</sup> And in the minds of some homileticians, this opinion has not lessened over time. Hugh Litchfield, in his work, *Visualizing the Sermon*, purports a method of producing a manuscript orally. He uses a technique of pictures and imagery to develop a mental road map for the sermon that then is written down as an oral manuscript. He states, “Even though there are tremendous advantages to preparing an oral manuscript, I am still one who believes that the sermon needs to be written down.”<sup>84</sup> Litchfield continues to develop his argument on a number of points, including theological benefits of the written manuscript, avoidance of unnecessary talking in the pulpit, increased opportunity to rethink and absorb the sermon, and ultimately, availability of the sermon for future use.<sup>85</sup> These are all valid concerns; however, they do not address or overcome the challenges of field preaching. William Shepherd agrees with Litchfield that the sermon should first be written out in full, then rehearsed and revised to ingrain it within the preacher’s memory.<sup>86</sup> Wilbur Ellsworth also

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas H. Skinner, “The Theory of Preparation of Preaching,” *The American Presbyterian & Theological Review* II, (January 1864): 94.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>84</sup> Hugh Litchfield, *Visualizing the Sermon: A Guide to Preaching without Notes* (Sioux Falls, SD: Hugh Litchfield, 1996), 105.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 106f.

<sup>86</sup> William H. Shepherd, *Without a Net: Preaching in the Paperless Pulpit* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, 2004), 129.

follows Hugh Litchfield's model of an oral manuscript<sup>87</sup> and stresses the need to make the sermon memorable through the use of simplicity and clarity. Charles W. Koller makes a good point on the subject of writing out a sermon: in his work, *How to Preach Without Notes*, he writes,

One way of preaching without notes is to write out and memorize the full manuscript. This has been the method of some of our great preachers. But to memorize a ten-page manuscript for every service calls for prodigious feats of memory... The time element alone would be generally prohibitive.<sup>88</sup>

Koller goes on to state that for the majority of preachers, the best preparation for the pulpit is a carefully prepared outline and that its use in the pulpit might be needed for delivery.<sup>89</sup> It is unclear which "great preachers" he was referring to; however, Clarence E. Macartney records an interesting anecdote concerning Charles Spurgeon's method of preparation:

When Theodore Cuyler visited Spurgeon late one Saturday afternoon... [he] told him that he had not yet selected a text for the next day's sermon, but that presently he would go down into the garden, choose a text for the morning and evening, and then outline the morning sermon. Sunday afternoon he would make an outline of the evening sermon. Spurgeon never composed a sentence in advance, and spent little time laying out the plan of the sermon.<sup>90</sup>

Now that is the type of preparation that is needed in the field! Spurgeon would appear to be a great source for field preaching methodology. However, there seems to be a lot of myth built up around his methods. Lewis Drummond, in his book, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, argues, quoting Craig Skinner, that many half-truths

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<sup>87</sup> Wilbur Ellsworth, *The Power of Speaking God's Word* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 106.

<sup>88</sup> Charles W. Koller, *How to Preach without Notes*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 90.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 91f.

<sup>90</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, *Preaching without Notes*, (1946; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 162.



appear in almost every biography about Charles Spurgeon, particularly about his methods.<sup>91</sup> He further advises, quoting W. M. Fullerton, that “Mr. Spurgeon’s method of preparing his sermons is not to be recommended to others who are without his gifts.”<sup>92</sup>

Clarence Macartney later testifies that Whitfield’s least effective sermons were those that he wrote in his early ministry. Later, his method was to find a quiet place with his favorite commentaries and a concordance and “meditate for a season.”<sup>93</sup> It is a shame that these great preachers did not write a detailed account of how they prepared for their extemporaneous sermons. But today’s preachers are not at a complete loss. One individual wrote a very effective method that a number of later authors have promoted; Clyde E. Fant’s oral manuscript.<sup>94</sup>

*An Answer: The Oral Manuscript*

Clyde Fant begins the description of his oral manuscript method by stating that the sermon is an oral product that should be produced orally.<sup>95</sup> He quotes Fred Craddock: “‘Much of the awkwardness and discontinuity created by writing and then oralizing a text can be relieved by preparing orally from the outset,’ and he recommends that the preacher ‘mentally talk through the message.’”<sup>96</sup> Establishing

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<sup>91</sup> Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 1992), 306.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>93</sup> Macartney, 164.

<sup>94</sup> Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today*, revised ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 165. Note: Both Hugh Litchfield and Wilbur Ellsworth review and cite Clyde Fant’s work.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

that as his foundation, he continues the description by stating that an oral preparation method should begin exactly like a manuscript method, with careful study, to include meditative study of the text. While studying the text and meditating upon it, he suggests that one also take notes as ideas present themselves. This is done for the purpose of establishing a tentative plan for the sermon. Joe Webb agrees with this suggestion, for he recommends the same thing: “Notes must be taken so that the ideas, however fleeting, are not lost. Often they are not easy to call back.”<sup>97</sup> This suggestion is a good one and does not invalidate the usefulness of this method for the readers of this study, since one could easily accommodate it in the field, using various hand writing devices.

As the preacher’s study progresses, the sermon evolves from a matter of thought to a matter of speech, in that the direction of the sermon “that thought has suggested should be made definite through speaking.”<sup>98</sup> From this process, a rough oral draft emerges. Fant then recommends preaching the ideas aloud as they present themselves, using free association—pausing only to take notes as key sentences emerge. These key sentences he calls *thought blocks*, akin to the topic sentences of the paragraphs in a manuscript; they bring to mind the relevant points intended for oral discussion. This rough oral draft stage “corresponds exactly with the writing of the rough draft of the manuscript—except that it is being done in the medium that will eventually be used.”<sup>99</sup> Fant encourages the preacher to experiment

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<sup>97</sup> Joseph M. Webb, *Preaching without Notes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 39.

<sup>98</sup> Fant, 166.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

with the order of the thought blocks to arrange them into a format most conducive to an oral delivery. At this stage, the preacher adds illustrations and makes specific applications. Once the basic content of the sermon is set, Fant tells his readers to decide how to begin and end the sermon. This last step, in effect, creates the sermon's introduction and conclusion.

At this point, the preacher has a minimalist oral outline, consisting of thought blocks, which include introductory thoughts and concluding statements. Fant then suggests a process of rehearsal and refinement in order to bring the oral outline to its final form, which he calls a "sermon brief."<sup>100</sup> This sermon brief takes the form of a written outline of "basic directional sentences, each of which introduces a thought block of oral discussion."<sup>101</sup> The preacher should commit the sermon to memory during the refinement process but can retain it with minimal notes, as represented by the sermon brief.

#### *The Process of Internalization and a Note of Caution*

The process of internalizing the oral message should occur innately during the process of building the oral manuscript. The preacher should not attempt to internalize the message via an independent action of memorization, as Joseph Webb<sup>102</sup> and William Shepherd<sup>103</sup> agree. By quoting Webb, Fred R. Lybrand makes an interesting point about this in his book, *Preaching on Your Feet*: "While it is

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Webb, 77f.

<sup>103</sup> Shepherd, 129f.

clearly the task of the preacher without notes to stay close to the well-prepared and memorized outline, one will discover very quickly that there are clearly times when unexpected insights occur to one while one is actually preaching.”<sup>104</sup> He then makes his point: “Preaching on your feet is not about memorizing an outline or having a full set of notes in your head. Those devices are simply illusions to make it appear to the audience that you are not note free. If, however, your notes are memorized, or if your notes are before you on paper, you’re still using notes instead of ‘actually preaching.’”<sup>105</sup>

Lybrand emphasizes that one should avoid memorization while preaching without notes or manuscript, but he does so at the expense of Webb, who originally intended to encourage preachers to be receptive to unexpected insights while preaching.<sup>106</sup> Putting this error aside, Lybrand’s overall point is clear; he is trying to get preachers to connect the audience with God in the moment of sermon delivery. He encourages the preacher to speak from the heart and not from a memorized sermon or a memorized outline. He quotes Charles Koller, stating that when people preach, they must speak “from heart to heart and from eye to eye.”<sup>107</sup> The only way to successfully do this is to avoid the memorized manuscript or memorized outline. In order to effectively do that, the preacher must ensure that the sermon is not

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<sup>104</sup> Fred R. Lybrand, *Preaching on Your Feet: Connecting God and the Audience in the Preachable Moment* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 20.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Webb, 115.

<sup>107</sup> Lybrand, 2.

complicated and that it is easy to remember—which leads to the second element of Broadus’s free delivery: simplicity.

### **Work Toward Simplicity**

Richard Storrs, in his lectures to Union Theological Seminary in 1875, stated that his first attempt to preach without notes was nearly a dead failure, due to his having engaged in too much preparation of detail. He stated that he “had written out heads, sub-divisions, even some passages or paragraphs in full,” and as a result, was looking backward trying to remember pre-arranged trains of thought instead of trusting to “the impulse of the subject.”<sup>108</sup> He thus advised that preachers must “Be careful that the plan of your sermon is simple, natural, progressive, easily mastered, and is thoroughly imbedded in your mind.”<sup>109</sup> He also adds that this simplicity must “speak for a purpose; and the purpose must propel and govern the sermon.” Haddon W. Robinson agrees with Storrs, arguing for the importance of centering on a single idea: “Students of public speaking and preaching have argued for centuries that effective communication demands a single theme.”<sup>110</sup> Robinson calls this ‘the big idea’ and dedicates a whole chapter to the concept. This emphasis is no different for contemporary extemporaneous preachers, as one can see in the following quote from Hugh Litchfield: “I then emphasize that sermons should only have one point. That point may be developed in two or three or four ways, but one point is all that a

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<sup>108</sup> Richard Salter Storrs, *Preaching without Notes: A Series of Lectures (1875)* (1875; facsimile repr., LaVergne, TN: Kessinger Publishing, 2011), 23f.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>110</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 35.

sermon seeks to communicate. Finding that one idea is often the hardest work in preparing to preach. But limiting it to one idea may be just as hard.”<sup>111</sup>

The question then follows, How does a preacher, or particularly a chaplain in the field with little or no commentary assistance, come to this one, ‘big idea’? Hugh Litchfield’s quote highlights the fact that finding that idea will be difficult. Should one use the basic exegetical focus of the text and risk being irrelevant to the preaching audience? And how can preacher ensure that what they preach will in fact impact their listeners? As a partial answer to these questions, Wilbur Ellsworth states that a sermon must be memorable:

Memory may be thought of as the “eye of the needle” in preaching. Everything that the preacher cannot remember to say gets excluded and does not reach the congregation. Everything that the congregation cannot remember becomes extraneous and does not enter into the life of the hearer beyond the moment of delivery... Memory is the foundational way in which sermons live beyond the moment.<sup>112</sup>

Preachers must therefore make the main idea clear and memorable, not only so that they can recall it in the moment of preaching, but also in order to truly impact their listeners. But what practice can one use to arrive at a clear, memorable idea that is impactful to the preaching audience?

Joseph Webb agrees that every text lends itself to a wide variety of topics and that only one topic should drive the formation of the sermon. He even goes farther and argues for the formation of a controlling metaphor, a metaphorical idea that corresponds to the central statement of the sermon.<sup>113</sup> This of course makes the

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<sup>111</sup> Litchfield, 17.

<sup>112</sup> Ellsworth, 102.

<sup>113</sup> Webb, 48.

sermon more memorable, or at least makes the metaphor the thing that the hearers remember. But should a metaphor be the controlling idea for a sermon? William Shepherd does not think so. He feels that a metaphor “might obscure the preacher’s thinking enough to make the whole sermon fuzzy.”<sup>114</sup> And if the preacher’s thinking is “fuzzy,” the listeners should not be expected to develop a clear understanding of the big idea either. Instead of supporting the use of a controlling metaphor, William Shepherd holds to the idea that a brief, theme statement is more in order. But how does one arrive at this theme statement, from the many possibilities that scripture offers us? What practice can one use in a field environment that will enable a chaplain to produce a clear, single idea that will serve in the creation of a memorable sermon, one that will impact the soldiers, sailors, and marines in the chaplain’s care? Brian Chapell offers one answer to this question.<sup>115</sup>

*The Fallen Condition Focus (FCF)*

Bryan Chapell, in his work, *Christ Centered Preaching*, explains that listeners need unity in a sermon in order to grasp the many thoughts that the sermon provides. He states that “unity organizes a message for a single thrust rather than a shower of disconnected thoughts.”<sup>116</sup> The purpose of this unity, particularly for the expository sermon, is for the clear communication of biblical truth. This biblical truth is rooted in the foundational purpose of all scripture. Chapell quotes 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,

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<sup>114</sup> Shepherd, 91.

<sup>115</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 47.

correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”<sup>117</sup> This foundational and overarching purpose of all scripture is what pastors should seek in the scripture passages that they study for their sermons. Chapell fleshes out this concept:

The corrupted state of our world and our beings cries for God’s aid. He responds with the truths of scripture and gives us hope by focusing his grace on a facet of our fallen condition in every portion of his Word. No text was written merely for those in the past; God intends for each passage to give us the “endurance and encouragement” that we need today (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13). Preaching that is true to these purposes (1) focuses on the fallen condition that necessitated the writing of the passage and (2) uses the text’s features to explain how the Holy Spirit addresses that concern then and now. The Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) is 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.<sup>118</sup>

This overarching purpose of preaching, according to Chapell, must therefore be to deal with the fallen human nature. Focusing on humanity’s fallen condition does not need to entail addressing a specific list of sins but may simply mean addressing anything that arises out of the painful condition of our lives. Chapell states, “Grief, illness, longing for the Lord’s return, the need to know how to share the gospel, and the desire to be a better parent are not sins, but they are needs that our fallen condition imposes and that Scripture addresses.”<sup>119</sup> An FCF therefore does not need to be a sin of which the hearers are guilty but may be simply an aspect of the human

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 51.



condition that requires the admonition, instruction, and comfort that scripture provides.<sup>120</sup>

One may question whether, with Chapell's approach, a person can remain faithful to the original meaning of a text and not impose a particular meaning onto the text that was not originally intended. This is an especially important consideration, since the FCF can vary greatly from text to text and from one sermon to another even when the sermons are built upon a single text. Bryan Chapell gives a solution to this potential problem, providing three questions for pastors to answer during the formation of an FCF:

1. What does the text say?
2. What spiritual concern(s) did the text address (in its context)?
3. What spiritual concerns do listeners share in common with those to (or about) whom the text was written?<sup>121</sup>

Bryan Chapell encourages his readers not only to focus the sermon to one singular point, but he encourages them to make that point relevant and memorable for their listeners. Yet, a message is still incomplete until the preacher can organize its ideas and the FCF into a clear application that challenges the listener and brings the lesson home. Chapell states that a preacher who cannot answer "so what?" in a sermon will be preaching to a group who says "who cares?"<sup>122</sup> The preacher must make each sermon's singular focus clear and applicable to the audience. A well thought out sermon, organized in light of a text and applied to a single, major FCF, will accomplish this and will provide an avenue for application—application that

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 56.

elucidates the solution to human fallenness: the redemption that is available through Christ.

### *A Redemptive Approach*

Bryan Chapell's FCF provides not only a central focus for the sermon; it also directs the preacher to a relevant, redemptive application that the sermon text supports.<sup>123</sup> Chapell's presupposition, based on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, is that all scripture has an underlying purpose to teach and correct our fallen condition and is an instrument of God's redeeming work. Humanity, made up of fallen creatures in a fallen world, needs this redemptive work not only for salvation, but also for its continuing sanctification and hope.<sup>124</sup> Chapell refers to Romans 15:4, which states, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (NIV), and then concludes, "Preaching that remains true to this God-glorifying purpose specifies an FCF indicated by the text and addresses this aspect of our fallenness with the grace revealed by the text."<sup>125</sup> In this way, Chapell calls preachers to not only incorporate an FCF, but also to identify the redemptive elements of the text, in order to apply those redemptive elements to the passage's particular case of human fallenness.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 273.

This redemptive approach to preaching therefore seeks to bring the listeners from their fallen condition to the divine provision of grace, as it is manifested within each text.<sup>127</sup> In that way, it is a method of preaching that seeks not only the application of grace for salvation but also of grace for daily living. Chapell explains that in order to accomplish this effectively, the preacher must ask two questions of the text. Firstly, “What does this text reflect of human nature that requires redemption?” And secondly, “What does this text reveal of God’s nature that provides redemption?”<sup>128</sup> By answering these questions, preachers can ensure that their sermons will retain a redemptive focus because each sermon will clearly identify how its text functions within the redemptive plan of God.<sup>129</sup>

Chapell states that one of the tests of a sermon’s redemptive character is how it motivates the parishioners to be holy. He notes that one must avoid preaching sermons that call people to be good, or to be disciplined, or to meet a particular standard, without also presenting a clear provision of God to meet that standard.<sup>130</sup> He adds that “successful (i.e. biblical) Christ-centered preaching bears the marks of grace-motivated obedience—insisting on the contemporary application of biblical mandates while grounding the source of Christian behavior in appreciation of God’s glory and provision.”<sup>131</sup> Ephesians 6:10 exemplifies this pattern, calling believers to

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 289f.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 313.

be strong, but also showing that the means of that strength rest firmly in God's mighty power.

### **On the Importance of Prayer and the Holy Spirit**

In his lecture series, Richard Storrs attests to the fact that whenever a person is preaching the Word of God, one should always “carry with you into the pulpit a personal presence of the Master.”<sup>132</sup> Bryan Chapell agrees with Broadus and Storrs about the presence of the Holy Spirit and the importance of prayer. Chapell states that the Holy Spirit uses the preachers' own words to do his work in the lives of their listeners. “When we proclaim the Word, we bring the work of the Holy Spirit to bear on others' lives... When we present the light of God's Word, his Spirit performs his purposes of warming, melting and conforming hearts to his will.”<sup>133</sup> This truth challenges all ministers to approach their work with not only a deep personal presence of the Master, but also a deep sense of dependence upon him. Chapell concludes with Broadus: “Public ministry true to God's purposes requires devoted private prayer.”<sup>134</sup>

With the importance that Broadus, Chapell, and Storrs place on the practice of prayer in the formation and delivery of extemporaneous sermons, one would expect that the many books written on extemporaneous preaching would include in them a mention of the necessity of prayer as a part of the process. But this is not the case. Most texts delve into the technical aspects of the process and the methods of

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<sup>132</sup> Storrs, 182.

<sup>133</sup> Chapell, 33.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

preparation, memorization, and delivery but not into the more personal aspects that one must practice in order to preach without notes effectively. This is particularly true of the seminal works of Clarence Macartney and Charles Koller. The researcher does not therefore wish to neglect the subject, which according to Chapell, “signals serious deficiencies in a ministry even if other signs of success have not diminished.”<sup>135</sup>

The first source to consider is the earliest. Thomas Skinner testifies that preachers must include prayer in their preparation, since the preparation of sermons must involve the cooperation of the Holy Spirit. He states that “The nature of preaching [is] spiritual work—work not to be done without the co-operation of the Spirit.”<sup>136</sup> He concludes that the nature of this prayer should be that God would assist the pastor both in the work of preparation and in the delivery of the sermon.<sup>137</sup> Wilbur Ellsworth similarly places a major emphasis on prayer, particularly on how it relates to the speaking of God’s Word and on how to communicate that meaning to the congregation:

I believe it is not too much to say that prayer finds its full place in the theology of preaching when we consider orality as the essence of preaching. Jacques Ellul puts it succinctly: “God speaks. We must answer Him.” If, in fact, we regard the Scripture as the very Word of God given to us, then we must not only give ourselves to a deep hearing of his word, but we must honor his initiative in speaking to us by responding and speaking to him in prayer. I suggest that one of the key aspects of the orality of preaching is that the preacher conveys to the congregation not only the accurate transmission of the text’s meaning but also reflects the deep hearing and responding to the

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Skinner, 93.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

text that brings personal insight, new vision from the Lord's message and submissive response.<sup>138</sup>

Ellsworth therefore insists that in order to truly communicate the meaning of scripture, this meaning must have first impacted the preacher's heart in a way that brings new personal insight—something only accomplished through prayer.

The most helpful source on this subject of prayer and how it relates to extemporaneous preaching comes from a dissertation by Andrew Vander Maas, entitled *Speaking of Delivery*.<sup>139</sup> In this work, Vander Maas shares a three-stage process of sermon preparation that has a central theme of prayer throughout. He calls this three-stage process Conception, Gestation, and Delivery.<sup>140</sup> The first step, conception, is founded on prayer. Vander Maas states,

As with every sermon, whether oral or written, the conception phase should begin with prayer. This seems obvious since the preacher is attempting to understand, explain, and apply the mysteries and wonders of the Word of God... Since it is that Spirit that knows the heart of God, the preacher must seek the guidance of that Spirit in approaching the passage. This step cannot be undermined or neglected.<sup>141</sup>

But Vander Maas does not leave prayer for only the beginning of the process. He describes the gestation phase as a time to allow the message to grow in the heart of the preacher. He refers to this time as “praying hot,” borrowing a term from one of his research subjects, insisting that “prayer must remain constant throughout this

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<sup>138</sup> Ellsworth, 50.

<sup>139</sup> Andrew Scott Vander Maas, “Speaking of Delivery: An Examination of the Processes Leading through Sermon Delivery” (D.Min. diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 2009).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

phase.”<sup>142</sup> Items to be discussed as illustrations and applications will come to the preacher during times of prayer and worship and through other day to day experiences “that will help make the message not only drive at the head but also reach the heart.”<sup>143</sup> The final stage of delivery is no different: it is also to be rooted in prayer. Vander Maas notes that he presupposes the presence of prayer throughout the process of preparation. But here, in this final step of delivery, the importance of prayer should be made once again explicit. Preachers cannot deliver their messages under their own power but must seek God before even entering the pulpit.<sup>144</sup>

At this point, most people would end their discussion concerning the practice of prayer in the context of preaching, but Vander Maas does not. He states that preachers also, through prayer, need to follow through with their sermons:

Regardless of whether one is committed to a method that employs orality or literacy, prayer is something that should occur after the delivery of the sermon. The parable of the sower correctly points out that it is after the seed is sown that it is susceptible to being snatched away, getting choked out, or dying for lack of root. It seems therefore prudent to spend some time (both the preacher and a prayer team) praying that the word would find good soil in the hearts of the listeners.<sup>145</sup>

Vander Maas shows, therefore, the importance of prayer for the entirety of the preaching process: from preparation to delivery and even afterward.

After prayer, John Broadus lists a final practice that will aid preachers in mastering the extemporaneous technique that he calls free delivery.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 91.

### On Physical Fitness

John Broadus attests that physical well-being contributes greatly to the mental acuteness necessary to preach without notes. He states that rest and relaxation are needed in order for one to think clearly and that many sermons are rendered ineffective not because of poor preparation, but because the preacher was not physically or mentally able.<sup>146</sup> However, physical well-being is not limited to receiving sufficient rest; it may also remind one of the practice of Henry Ward Beecher, “a man with a rugged physique,”<sup>147</sup> who devoted his Saturdays to recreation so that he could preach better on Sundays. Broadus even claims that rest is required before one preaches, in order to alleviate the nervous exhaustion that many suffer after preaching.<sup>148</sup> Good physical condition is an aid to sound preaching, according to Richard Storrs, who states that “we must maintain, as far as we can, full health of the body, if we would discourse to men on the themes of the Gospel, without help from a manuscript, with any success.”<sup>149</sup> Storrs writes that one’s physical well-being affects the person’s judgment, will, creative imagination, and ability to rapidly organize thoughts.<sup>150</sup> Clarence Macartney agrees, humorously stating, “It is well said that if the preacher does not sleep over his sermon Saturday night, the congregation will sleep over it on Sunday morning.”<sup>151</sup> Joseph Webb refers

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<sup>146</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 278.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Storrs, 85.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>151</sup> Macartney, 156.



to recent research that, he claims, shows a relationship “between good physical and mental health and the keenness of short term memory.”<sup>152</sup> There may very well be an obvious element to this type of information. However, it echoes not only the writings of Chaplain Smartt and John Broadus, but it also helpfully addresses the culture of the military within which many chaplains minister.

### **On the Particulars of Delivery**

So far, this literature review has addressed how military chaplains might effectively preach sermons to personnel in the field environment, by exploring several components of field sermon preparation: content, redemptive approaches, oral techniques, prayer, and even the impact of physical fitness on one’s preaching ability. However, this discussion has not yet addressed ways to ensure the effective delivery of a field sermon. Charles Koller states, “A good delivery can make a poor sermon reasonably effective; a bad delivery may make the best of sermons ineffective.”<sup>153</sup> It is imperative, therefore, to explore the elements of delivery that may ensure success at the moment of preaching. The first element that is important to this discussion is how preachers present themselves to their audiences.

#### *A Natural Style*

In *Christ Centered Preaching*, Bryan Chapell warns against the rigid philosophy of the elocution movement, taught over a century ago. Today, the preachers that are most respected “are those most able to sound like themselves

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<sup>152</sup> Webb, 80.

<sup>153</sup> Koller, 110.

when they are deeply interested in a subject.”<sup>154</sup> Chapell asserts that a preacher must preach in a manner consistent with his personality and with the import of the message. Fred Lybrand agrees with this statement and adds that delivery, “if it is to be anything needs to be personal and natural,”<sup>155</sup> and even quotes John Broadus, who insists that a sermon be a “spontaneous product of the speaker’s particular personality, as acted on by the subject which now fills his mind and heart.”<sup>156</sup> Such comments call for a style and philosophy that is entirely natural and not put on, but rather, earnest and heartfelt. Bryan Chapell insists that a speaking style that is true to the personality of the preacher contains the most effective delivery tools.<sup>157</sup> When preachers speak to others in the way that is most natural to them, with the voice and gestures they use during conversation, what they say becomes more important than the way they deliver it.<sup>158</sup> “When delivery techniques (skilled or unskilled) dominate a sermon’s impressions, listeners tend to reject the message.”<sup>159</sup> Preachers therefore communicate best when their delivery is transparent and does not draw attention to itself. Further, Lybrand asserts that effective delivery not only includes a natural style that reflects one’s personality; it is also passionate. He states that the key to delivery is not technique but heart.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Chapell, 329.

<sup>155</sup> Lybrand, 117.

<sup>156</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 264.

<sup>157</sup> Chapell, 330.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>160</sup> Lybrand, 125.

### *Pathos*

Bryan Chapell writes, “Showing genuine enthusiasm for what you deeply believe is the only unbreakable rule of great delivery.”<sup>161</sup> This bringing of emotion into the argument is crucial for an effectively delivered sermon. This emotion not only keeps the attention and sympathies of the listeners, but is also in fact the means of truly identifying the issues and relaying them to the people. Jerry Vines, in his book, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, communicates this succinctly: “Sermons are actually born in the heart. Though the preacher gets his sermon from the Bible, he must bring it to life in his heart.”<sup>162</sup> Vines calls his readers to preach like Jesus and like Paul, who did not use words crafted purely of logic but words drawn out of the furnace of the soul.<sup>163</sup> Vines laments that many preachers have lost their capacity to be emotive in their delivery<sup>164</sup> and attests that when sermons are preached from the heart, when preachers put everything they have into their sermons, they become genuinely effective. Lybrand agrees that many preachers suppress their pathos in preaching, stating: “Feelings that arise in the act of preaching when there’s no room in the sermon for them to be expressed are simply fought against and avoided although they are often the most powerful piece because

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<sup>161</sup> Chapell, 338.

<sup>162</sup> Jerry Vines, *A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 150.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 149.

human beings hear another human being speak from his heart.”<sup>165</sup> An effective preacher does not so much deliver a sermon as he delivers himself.<sup>166</sup>

*Preaching in the Spirit*

Jerry Vines mentions another element that is involved in the effectiveness of sermon delivery: the Holy Spirit. He refers to several scriptural passages that address effective communication. In Matthew 10:19-20, Jesus encourages his disciples not to worry what to say, for the Holy Spirit will speak on their behalf. Vines also quotes Acts 14:3, where Paul speaks boldly in the Lord, and 1 Corinthians 12:3, which refers to speaking by the Spirit of God.<sup>167</sup> He continues to make his point:

Paul makes it emphatically clear that the success of preaching and effective sermon delivery does not depend upon the skill of the preacher. This is not to say that we cannot yield gifts of speech to be used by the Lord. But preaching, to be genuinely effective, must be in the demonstration of the Spirit's power. Such preaching produces a spiritual power with results that are unassailable.<sup>168</sup>

He thus concludes that the Christian preacher has a power of communication that other speakers do not possess. For the Holy Spirit not only changes the preacher but has the ability to take hold of the listener and change him, too, forever.<sup>169</sup> This

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<sup>165</sup> Lybrand, 23.

<sup>166</sup> Vines, 152.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 157f.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 159.

“anointed preaching,” as he calls it, “is the ultimate source of Preaching power and the true secret of effective sermon delivery.”<sup>170</sup>

### *Voice*

If the Holy Spirit is the number one secret of effective sermon delivery, having a clear and audible voice should be the second most important element, especially when one is preaching in the field environment. It does not take much imagination to realize that preaching outside to a large audience without the aid of a microphone will require unique talents of vocalization. Poor vocal production can not only make the sermon hard to hear but may tire the listener and lose the audience’s attention. A thorough review of literature on the problems of vocalization suggested that this is not only a challenge to field preaching but is a problem even in churches.

William Shepherd writes, “A foremost concern for many congregations is the problem of volume. ‘We need a microphone,’ is a cry heard in churches throughout the land, even though in many cases, volume is not really the problem. Poor vocal production can make speech hard to hear, and amplifying it will only make the problem worse.”<sup>171</sup> Bryan Chapell agrees that full vocal production is necessary even with a microphone. He states that “If you use a microphone, do not depend on electronics to carry your voice. Pulpit microphones work best (carrying the full dynamics of your voice) if you project over them rather than speak into them.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>171</sup> Shepherd, 138.

<sup>172</sup> Chapell, 332.

Further, he says that most students of homiletics have to be reminded to keep the volume at a sufficient level when they are learning to preach. And the most natural way of determining the proper volume is to speak in such a way that even the most distant person from you can easily hear.<sup>173</sup> Many aspects of professional vocal delivery go beyond the scope of this study, but Chapell claims that there is one key point for preachers to practice: “Fill the room, but speak to individuals.”<sup>174</sup> If any readers of this study wish to deepen their understanding of the subject of full vocal production, Al Fasol’s book, *A Complete Guide to Sermon Delivery*,<sup>175</sup> is an excellent guide. In this book, Fasol not only discusses the proper vocalization process, diaphragmatic breathing, and full vocal production; he also gives exercises to improve vocal quality and volume.

#### *A Return to Broadus*

Appropriate to this discussion of voice is an examination of what John A. Broadus, the Civil War chaplain, teaches on the subject. Developed from many experiences with preaching in a field environment, his opinion carries a lot of weight. He begins his discussion by establishing the importance of the voice, using a quote from Cicero’s *De Oratore*: “For effectiveness and distinction in delivery the greatest share undoubtedly belongs to the voice.”<sup>176</sup> And, as one may expect from a preacher who never used electronic sound amplification, the primary element of

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Al Fasol, *A Complete Guide to Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 7.

<sup>176</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 281.

voice on which Broadus focuses is volume. He states, “Ample volume, properly regulated, will make the voice audible to a greater distance, and will make it more commanding.”<sup>177</sup> He continues by making the point that a preacher need not have an extensive knowledge of anatomy or an understanding of the functions of the organs in order to preach well.<sup>178</sup> Instead, he suggests practices for developing the voice.

Concerning the production of volume, Broadus states that the speaker improves primarily by “habitual good posture and physical exercise that expands and strengthens the lungs.”<sup>179</sup> He suggests activities like running, swimming, and gymnastics to gain strength of speech. He adds that the habit of talking with the mouth fully opened, as well as occasional loud singing, although not on a high pitch, has the effect of increasing the volume of a speaker’s voice in youth.<sup>180</sup> Broadus even makes the suggestion that “Young ministers and those preparing for the ministry should learn to sing.”<sup>181</sup> Preachers need to practice projecting the voice in order to achieve what he calls “penetrating power.”<sup>182</sup> One may achieve “penetrating” vocal power by maintaining purity of tone, particularly of vowel sounds; vocal power is also “greatly assisted by the distinct articulation of consonants.”<sup>183</sup> In the context of preaching in the open air, Broadus testifies, “He who wishes to be heard at a great

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

distance must speak rather slowly. There is thus a clear interval between the sound waves, and even when they have come a long way and are growing faint, they will still be distinct.”<sup>184</sup>

Broadus concludes his discussion on the voice with a list of five simple hints designed to aid the preacher in the management of the voice while preaching. He suggests not beginning on too high a key, particularly in the open air, because if one does so, “when impassioned passages come in which the voice must rise, it will rise to a scream!”<sup>185</sup> Similarly, he recommends not letting the voice drop at the end of a sentence, for it will render the last word inaudible. And since the volume of the voice is produced primarily by the breath, he suggests keeping the lungs well filled with air, never letting them empty. His next suggestion is to “look frequently at the remotest hearers, and see to it that they hear you. If particular persons anywhere in the room have grown inattentive, they can often be aroused by unobtrusively aiming the voice at them for a moment.”<sup>186</sup> His last suggestion is to maintain variety in the speech; monotony utterly destroys eloquence. Broadus claims that one’s speech should include a variety in pitch, force, speed, and even emotion, and that one’s words should be delivered in a spontaneous and natural manner.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.



## Conclusion

This chapter represents a survey of the available literature bearing upon the subject of how chaplains might effectively prepare and deliver sermons in the field. The examination has proved to be enlightening, revealing a number of possible methods to overcome the challenges encountered in this unique preaching environment. The study revealed the importance of prior knowledge—knowledge one gains from study before entering the field environment—which Broadus calls *General Preparation*. Due to the lack of available resources in the field, meditation and daily devotions are also crucial to the preparation process. Chaplain Smartt confirms both of these points, testifying that when he was “forced to dig into my own inner resources the door is opened to freshness and spontaneity leading to a surprising immediacy and current meaning,”<sup>188</sup> and that his private devotions were the most significant element in his preparation process; that he was “better able to preach a current and inspiring message.”<sup>189</sup>

This study also revealed the need for an exegetical method that provides simplicity and clarity to the topic preached, and one that includes a redemptive approach. One method that appeared in the literature fulfills this requirement, Bryan Chapell’s *Christ Centered Preaching* and the use of his “Fallen Condition Focus.” The study continued to examine preparation within the field context and concluded that immediate preparation must also involve a process that organizes the points of the sermon and that can be developed orally, or with a minimal

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<sup>188</sup> Smartt, 18.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 17.

amount of writing. Finally, the chapter contained an examination of both oral methods of preparation and processes for internalizing the message.

The scope of this study is not limited to field preparation but includes an examination of numerous methods of delivery that could prove beneficial for use in a field environment. The method of delivery must speak to the hearts of the Marines and soldiers in the field with a natural style that keeps their attention through eye contact. It must also require only minimal written preparation or perhaps none at all. For this study, the focal method of delivery was one that is extemporaneous and deliverable without notes—a method John Broadus refers to as *Free Delivery*. The aspects of delivery necessary for the field include voice, pathos, and physical fitness, so that the speaker can be effective in while facing the rigors of the field environment.<sup>190</sup>

The above elements are helpful, but are they enough for the modern military context? Does the contemporary chaplain need something more in order to overcome the specific challenges to field preparation and delivery? Do chaplains utilize the methods above, or do they have other, more effective techniques? To what extent do chaplains evaluate these methods as effective for preaching in a field environment? What lessons have chaplains learned from their field preaching experience that may be beneficial to other chaplains in the field? In order to answer these questions and validate the findings of the literature review, this research

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<sup>190</sup> Physical fitness not only provides the chaplain the ability to preach under the rigors of the field environment, but it also may be very significant to another issue not covered in this study, the ethos of the chaplain in the field. A chaplain that is not able to overcome the challenges of the field environment may also be unable to maintain the confidence of his troops. This loss of perceived character from the perspective of the men may render the chaplain's field ministry ineffective.

presentation moves next to a qualitative study of chaplains who have had recent field experience.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore how military chaplains might effectively preach sermons to personnel in the field environment. In considering the challenge of preaching effective field sermons, a number of questions arose. What problems do chaplains face? What are the toughest challenges to preaching in the field? How do they minimize some of these challenges? To examine these issues, this study relied on the following research questions:

1. What methods do chaplains use while they prepare sermons to preach in the field?
2. What delivery techniques/practices do chaplains use while preaching in the field? (To what extent do chaplains use notes in the delivery of sermons in the field?)
3. How do chaplains evaluate the effectiveness of their field preaching?
4. What lessons have chaplains learned from their preaching experience that may be beneficial to other chaplains in the field?

Chapter one reviewed anecdotal evidence of military chaplains who served in Vietnam and the Civil War. This evidence revealed several significant challenges to military field preaching and ministry, including challenges brought on by weather, distance, combat, personnel movement, and most importantly, time and resource limitations. Chapter one further presented several probing questions

concerning ministry within the field environment: How can chaplains today be successful at preaching in the field with similar challenges? What methods and practices did chaplains of the past use to overcome these challenges to their preaching? How can today's chaplains properly prepare with limited time and resources, with no commentaries, and with limited ability to produce or utilize sermon notes in the field?

The available literature relevant to the study of field preaching revealed a number of considerations regarding the preparation and delivery of field sermons. Some of these include the importance of knowledge gained from study prior to entering the field environment; the importance of private devotions for the preparation process, including prayer and scripture meditation; the need for an exegetical method that provides simplicity or clarity of the sermon topic; and the usefulness of oral preparation and extemporaneous delivery. All these elements are helpful, but are they enough for the modern military context? Does the contemporary chaplain need something more? The need to identify specific answers to these questions led to the development of a qualitative study that examines the practices of a group of current chaplains who have recently had the opportunity to preach in a field environment.

### **A Qualitative Approach**

This study's research design followed a basic qualitative approach. In her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Sharan B. Merriam defines a basic qualitative study as an interpretive study focusing on how

“individuals construct reality within their social worlds.”<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, she describes qualitative studies as those interested in “how meaning is constructed [and] how people make sense of their lives and their worlds”; she asserts that their purpose is to “uncover and interpret these meanings.”<sup>192</sup> She also explains that a qualitative study is descriptive and heuristic because it richly describes and illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study.<sup>193</sup> In addition, R. K. Yin specifically suggests that a qualitative study has a distinct advantage over other research designs in answering “how” and “why” questions.<sup>194</sup>

The basic qualitative research method therefore guided this study since qualitative research focuses on analyzing a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. Specifically, the qualitative approach was an effective tool for answering the “how” and “why” questions regarding military chaplains’ practices in preparing and delivering sermons in the field. The qualitative research method aided the researcher in discovering and evaluating the specific practices of various military chaplains for the purpose of passing on the lessons that this isolated examination revealed to other chaplains less experienced within the context of field ministry.

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<sup>191</sup> Sharran B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 22.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>194</sup> R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 13. (Quoted by Merriam, p. 45).

### **Design Tools**

The researcher gathered data using semi-structured interviews of six Army and Navy chaplains. The researcher sought to generate questions that the interviewee would readily understand and that would elicit responses detailing the interviewees' descriptions of their experiences with preparing and delivering sermons in the field. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The researcher conducted the interviews in person, recorded them, and finally transcribed them for further analysis.

### *Participant Criteria*

The chaplains who participated in the study needed to have had sufficient time in a field environment in order to develop means to overcome the challenges of that unique preaching experience. The researcher therefore restricted the study to chaplains who had completed at least one deployment over six months, preferably to a combat environment, and were assigned to units that allowed them to preach to service members in the field. Additionally, these chaplains needed to come from a denominational background that performs exegetical sermons founded upon scripture. The researcher therefore selected participants from a group of thirty-seven chaplains attending the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC) annual training seminar during the 2012 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, held in Louisville, Kentucky.

A six-question pre-interview helped to identify suitable candidates. The researcher designed the six yes/no questions to identify candidates who understood

the unique challenges to field ministry, particularly in the preparation and delivery of field sermons. The pre-interview questions were as follows:

1. Have you completed at least one deployment to field conditions for at least six months?
2. Did you have the opportunity to preach sermons in this field environment?
3. Did you conceive of, plan, prepare and complete any of these sermons entirely within this field environment?
4. Did you ever find it necessary, due to field conditions, to preach a sermon without any notes?
5. Has this experience changed the way you have preached during regular circumstances?
6. Would you be willing to participate in a qualitative interview?

Of the thirty-seven chaplains who responded to the questionnaire, only six were able to respond positively to all six questions. The researcher then interviewed these six respondents individually during the 2012 annual training seminar.

#### *Interview Questions*

A pilot test of the proposed interview protocol helped to evaluate the usefulness and effectiveness of each question for eliciting relevant data.

Subsequently, the following questions guided the individual interviews.

1. Please describe a recent or memorable field preaching experience.
2. What challenges and hindrances did you experience while preaching in the field, and how did you overcome them?
3. What methods/techniques have you used that were helpful and why?



4. What methods/techniques failed and why?
5. Have you ever preached an extemporaneous sermon?
6. Have you ever had to preach without the aid of any written notes?
7. What method have you successfully used in preparing field sermons?
8. What resources were you able to use in the field?
9. How has the field environment affected how you have preached?
10. What benefits did you experience while preaching in the field?
11. How did you develop a focus for the sermon?
12. How important is physical fitness to preaching in the field?
13. How did your prayer life affect your preparation of field sermons?
14. How did your devotional life play into your preparation of field sermons?
15. How important is your voice in the delivery of field sermons?
16. What evaluative reflections do you have regarding your experience with preaching in the field?

### **Limitations of the Study**

The six military chaplains who participated in this study were U.S. Army and Navy Chaplains of a single endorsing agency, the PRCC, who had served with deployed combat units. Due to both the legal requirements governing the composition of deployed combat units, restricting this role to only male personnel, and the parallel denominational restriction on ordained ministers, the interviewees consisted exclusively of male clergy. These limitations prevent this study from being an exhaustive examination of all chaplains' experiences or all field preaching situations. All six chaplains maintained a specific theological and ecclesiastical

stance, as well as a particular method of providing religious services in the field. They all maintained a clear presupposition of the need to preach biblically based expository sermons even in a field environment. Chaplains from other denominations will have their own unique challenges to overcome while conducting religious services in the field.

Finally, the conclusions of this study will be limited to the experiences of the interviewees, along with the information gleaned from the selected readings. The interview analysis and its resultant conclusions are not universally applicable to other unique situations. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of this study's conclusions may gather inferences for another context. However, those inferences should be tested within that environment. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their own circumstances.

### **Researcher Position**

This researcher is a male U.S. Navy Chaplain and has had multiple deployments to combat areas, including a seven-month deployment to Iraq with Regimental Combat Team 1, 2d Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines from October 2007 till May 2008. During this seven-month deployment, this researcher conducted over 235 field services for deployed Marines and is therefore personally familiar with the challenges of the research topic as well as the methods to overcome those challenges. As such, this researcher has a bias towards the methods he personally used and the methods particular to his denominational background, that being the Presbyterian Church in America with its strong commitment to reformed, Christ-

centered expository preaching. Additionally, this researcher desires to utilize this study to encourage evangelical chaplains to promote effective Christ-centered expository sermons for their personnel in the field.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore how military chaplains preach sermons to personnel within the field environment. To that end, this chapter draws on the interviews of six military chaplains who have had field experience. The interviews took place during the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC)'s 2012 training conference, which was held during the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America in Louisville, Kentucky. During the chaplains' individual interviews, each participant responded to sixteen questions concerning the problems and challenges unique to preaching in the field environment, as well as methods for overcoming or minimizing these unique challenges to preaching.

The researcher selected the six participants from a group of thirty-seven chaplains whom the PRCC had endorsed, utilizing a six question, pre-interview survey that included a question gauging each person's willingness to participate. All six chaplains were experienced in preaching in combat environments, such as Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti, Jordan, and Haiti. Three of these chaplains served with the United States Army, and three were United States Navy chaplains who had served with the United States Marines. To maintain participant anonymity, in place of the chaplains' actual names, this report employs the following pseudonyms: Adam, Brad, Chuck, Dan, Ed, and Frank.

### **Introductory Questions**

The initial questions were general in nature and focused on examining each chaplain's experience in the field, his recollections of field preaching, and the challenges he encountered along the way. All six chaplains were quickly able to recall recent or memorable field preaching experiences that exemplify the unique challenges of this preaching ministry, such as the personal challenges of exhaustion and lack of sleep. Many also noted environmental challenges, such as poor lighting (or even complete darkness), rain, extreme heat, dust storms, lack of preparation time, lack of resources, and even lack of paper or access to a printer. The chaplains also described the challenges of preaching to a diverse audience made up of many individuals from various faith backgrounds, who were hungry and tired, unable to stay awake, dirty and lacking good hygiene, and easily distracted by their physical setting (e.g., the noise of combat, constantly running generators, and communication radios that demanded their attention).

Adam had a very interesting recollection of a field preaching experience that radically changed the way he preached in the field and even spurred him to change one particular sermon's content at the last minute. He had planned to preach a typical, three-point sermon with illustrations and applications; however, he then realized he had to change all of that to minister to the needs of his men.

Before the day started I had some points, some applications, but after spending the day with them and listening to their own personal experiences, my applications had changed. And that was done after that time, after having short conversations with some folks about things like marriage. So I started with one sort of content and application, but they were not the same when I actually did the worship service... [T]hey had actually helped me understand them and helped make my message more relevant... to where they were.

Adam noted a significant challenge to field preaching: the need to minister within the context and situation in which the men live. He said that he accomplished this not by bringing them a formalized sermon but a message uniquely crafted to their current spiritual need. He described a field preaching experience in which he learned this lesson. As he spent the day with a group of men, he became aware of a deeper need that many of them had. And although he had prepared a sermon for them, at the last minute he decided to adjust his sermon to fit this perceived need. He knew he had to change what he had prepared because of what the men of his unit had expressed to him earlier in the day. Furthermore, from that time on, Adam abandoned the three-point sermon for something brief and to the point, something that he could tailor to the immediate needs of the men.

Brad expressed having had a similar experience, in which he had to adapt to the environment and the needs of his soldiers. During his interview, he stated that if a chaplain in the field can count on anything, it is that the soldiers will always be hungry and tired. “And so the challenge for a chaplain is to deliver the goods in a short amount of time. So I try to keep it as short as I possibly can. As short and effective and as deep impacting as I can keep it... clear, concise... [Y]ou say one thing... that’s it.” For Brad that one thing was the gospel and its redemptive message and application to the soldier’s situation. He explained:

Seems like everything significant happens on deployment, surrounding the gospel. You know, when people are suffering, that tends to be the soil faith grows in. So we were taking casualties pretty regularly from IDF<sup>195</sup> and

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<sup>195</sup> IDF: Indirect Fire as in mortar fire or artillery. In this case Brad was referring to mortar fire with which insurgents harassed US forces during the Iraq war.

IEDs,<sup>196</sup> but to be able to hold a field service, which I did on a regular basis, out in the dirt...cold, dirty, hungry, stinking...but to then talk about how the gospel offers you security that the threats of the enemy cannot steal from you.

For Brad, the challenges to field preaching appear to be an opportunity for clarity and a way to promote the gospel, as well as an opportunity to apply the gospel redemptively to the situations in which his men are suffering.

Chuck also noted what was most important to field preaching in light of all its challenges. He reflected on a time when he showed up planning to pray for a unit that was about to embark on a dangerous mission, and instead, the unit commander had him stand up and said that he was going to deliver a message of encouragement and inspiration. So with only a prayer in mind, Chuck had to provide an unplanned message—a significant challenge for any preacher to overcome. In this context, with little immediate preparation, Chuck was able to deliver a redemptive message from the truth of Christ's gospel:

And from a biblical perspective obviously the most important thing they need to know is their safety, whether that's physical safety or eternal safety, is something that you can only have through faith in Christ, and you want to say that in such a way that if they haven't heard that before, they would have an opportunity to hear that.

As Chuck relayed his experience of giving that unplanned message, it became clear that he had not delivered a completely impromptu message, without any preparation. Rather, he had delivered a homily that was well thought out and prepared specifically for such an occasion. He relayed his method for constructing these unplanned messages:

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<sup>196</sup> IED: Improvised Explosive Device, the homemade bombs made by insurgents that were so effective in injuring and killing US forces.

Well first thing I did was I have, what I've always called over the past ten years, a very standardized hip pocket sermon which has five points, and I can just tell you what those five points are off the top of my head. I can quote the Bible verses that I associate with each one of those five points, and I can use any portion of that outline, whether that's anywhere from one point to five points as I address a group, and if there are personal examples either of my own or of other people that I know that fit any point of that sermon that would illustrate and in a sense make a connection with a particular audience.

Chuck was not the only chaplain to mention utilizing this simple method. Two other chaplains also alluded to the practice, although not to the level of Chuck's five-point sermon. Having an adaptable, previously memorized sermon was an important field ministry tool for half of the chaplains who participated in this study. Chuck's version, which he could deliver as five homilies or one, large, five-point sermon, appears to be very useful, particularly in an unplanned ministry opportunity. Although the five-point "hip-pocket" sermon may not be effective over sustained deployments or with individuals who have heard it before, it appears that it is effective within the context where Chuck used it: speaking to a new audience when there has been absolutely no time to prepare a sermon for the occasion.

Frank similarly relied on what he called "pocket sermons" that contained key and essential biblical topics, dealing with issues in which his audience was interested. He stated that he had these sermons "ready to go" and that he was "prepared in and out of season... [S]ometimes your worship service may not be on a typical Sabbath day," but may be given at any time in the week. Dan recalled a similar situation in which this technique would have been useful:

Well the first service I did in the field was a day or two after the huge sandstorm passed by so there was still a lot of dust in the air. So in the midst of that, and because we were on a convoy that didn't stop for many days, I wasn't prepared at all, but I knew they hadn't had a chance to worship so it was almost hip pocket. I just had to flip through pages of the Bible and say, "I



need to talk about this today,” and then just off the cuff preach to a bunch of guys that were willing to come together.

When describing how he overcame his lack of preparation, Dan explained that he relied on “past experience, past sermons that I’ve done that I could recall to the best of my knowledge.” Although Dan’s method was not as developed a technique as the one Chuck had devised, it was still pastorally attuned to the needs of the men in the field. By delivering a previously prepared, simple gospel message, Dan was able to remind his men of the divine in the midst of their extremely stressful environment.

Ed’s response to unplanned ministry opportunities was similar to Dan’s response. He stated that in difficult situations it was best that he “defer back to passages that I am most familiar with.” In fact he went on to explain that he preferred to preach from passages that were familiar to his audience as well.

So I defer to passages that I think are kind of high water marks in the scripture. I don’t spend a lot of time in prophetic literature, things that are going to be unfamiliar. I preach through the gospels, and actually I’m preaching through the gospel of Mark now. So I think one of the ways of doing that is thinking about your audience, knowing that they don’t know a whole lot about minute details of scripture. You stick with passages that are familiar to you and likely going to be more familiar to them.

Focusing on texts that are familiar was a theme throughout the interviews in overcoming the challenges to preaching in a field environment. It is an approach similar to Chuck’s prepared five-point sermon, as both techniques rest on material that the preacher has previously studied and applied. However, this technique may be more able, due to its intuitive and extemporaneous nature, to address any given immediate situation and audience.

Frank also expressed, in the initial portion of his interview, how he overcame the many challenges to preaching that he encountered in the field. Along with Adam,

he rejected a typical three-point sermon for one that not only dealt with the immediate situation of the audience, but also was more interactive, accommodating dialogue. He states: “My sermons were more interactive, more dialogue than your typical three-point sermon. Although I had an idea of what I wanted to talk about, I allowed some of those interactions and questions to guide them... but then stringing it back in to the hope of the gospel.” In this way, although he relied on long-term preparation, Frank maintained the ability to adapt his sermons to his audience and their immediate experience. Referring to Aristotle’s discussion on the *Logos*, *Ethos*, and *Pathos* of public speaking, he clarifies his point about rooting the sermon in the audience’s recent experiences:

Bryan Chapell wrote a bit about that in his book *Christ Centered Preaching* that one of the things about being an effective communicator is that you need the *logos*, the content of what you’re saying is true; the *pathos*, the way how you communicate it; but then also the *ethos*, the ethic. Do your soldiers know you; do you know your soldiers and the things that they’re going through at that time? That particular section is going through a particular event and being able to identify with that event, whether it’s the loss of a soldier member, whatever it is.

Frank states that the chaplain must be immediately involved in the experiences of the audience and must address those experiences in the sermon. This theme of immediacy was apparent in all six interviews.

From Adam’s need to change his sermon’s focus at the last minute based on interactions with his men, to Brad’s need to take into account the exhaustion of his soldiers, to Chuck’s necessity to address the request for an unplanned message when his men were heading off to war, the chaplains described several significant challenges to their field preaching that they needed to overcome. In order to be effective in their preaching, chaplains need to be flexible, able to identify with the

audience's particular situation and immediate needs, and ready to bring a redemptive message directly into the moment. For these men, their field experiences led them to develop methods for producing and delivering sermons that were adaptable, brief and to the point, and focused on an immediate need of their audience.

Once the chaplains had responded to the introductory interview questions, further questioning focused their comments more specifically on the methods and practices that chaplains use for preparing sermons in the field.

### **Concerning Field Preparation**

The limited availability of source material for sermon preparation also presented a challenge to field preaching. When describing the preparation resources that they could use in the field, all six chaplains emphatically reported that their primary resource was their Bible. Consequently, a few relayed that they made sure that they brought along with them a good reference Bible; Dan said that his only reference material was his study Bible. Frank encouraged chaplains, if a laptop were available, to bring with them a digital library into the field. Brad claimed that he brought with him, for his own personal reflection and devotion, a few of his favorite books that had impacted his life, such books by Francis Schaeffer, C.S. Lewis, and Tim Keller. Brad also relayed that he used his own life and the lives of his men as resources for writing his sermons.

Adam noted that for sermon preparation he relied heavily upon his long-term study of texts, especially since he felt it helped him to preach more extemporaneously, which he felt made his field preaching more effective. He stated:

“So, it helped me a lot, if I had to preach extemporaneously, if I knew the passage very well... To preach extemporaneously you have to know the passage in and out; context, history, relationship to other passages.” Chuck relied heavily on his Bible as well and reflected upon it within the context of his soldiers’ situation. He stated: “Some of the questions that you are asking are really questions that are common to anyone who is proclaiming biblical truths. You are always thinking, ‘Who is the audience? What are the circumstances that that audience is facing? What is the truth that we have in scripture that communicates to that need?’”

As Chuck reiterated his method for overcoming the difficulties of preaching in the field, he also reflected that the Holy Spirit is always a present resource for a chaplain, especially when one must recall prior biblical material and present it in the context of the current situation. Reliance on the Holy Spirit to bring a message out of the scripture that addresses the particular need of the soldiers was one of Chuck’s goals while preaching in the field. He stated: “You connect God’s Word to whatever the challenges are that people are facing. And obviously soldiers who are getting ready to go face combat are dealing with a whole host, but some very specific needs in their own mind, and you want to do the best that you can to bring scripture to that.” He then explained that he achieved this reliance on the Holy Spirit through prayer and through reflecting upon the passage of scripture.

#### *On Prayer and Devotions*

During the interviews, the participants’ next task was to explain more about the methods they used to overcome the challenges of preparing sermons in the field. Their answers were surprising. Rather than describing a particular method, a list of

steps, or even a philosophy of sermon preparation, all the chaplains responded that their primary method of preparation was prayer, followed by personal devotions and meditation upon the scripture. One chaplain said that he had “no particular method” but that he rather preferred to pray about the scripture, read through it often, and then pray some more. Another said that the chaplain must constantly be in prayer, reading the focal passage and meditating upon it, especially when in a situation where the chaplain had not been anticipating the delivery of a message. Dan introduced his reliance on prayer early in the interview, when listing things that he had used to overcome the difficulties he experienced in the field. Dan replied, “Prayer, lots of prayer. Because I was physically struggling... in the environment, and mentally and emotionally drained, because it was the first time I’d ever been in a combat situation.” He later reiterated in the interview and that “the most important thing for me was especially when I felt ill prepared and lacking, prayer definitely helped.” Brad was the most effective in communicating his reliance on prayer and personal devotions within the preparation process. Describing how he prepared his field sermons, he said,

Well I constantly try to stay in God’s word, not just for the preparation of a sermon, but feeding on it myself. God’s word and prayer... You want to constantly avail yourself to what God is saying. And God is always talking in his book. And so as you expose yourself to him devotionally, as you commune with him like John Owen would talk about, as you commune with the Trinity, you can’t walk away the same.

Brad therefore relied heavily on prayer and the reading of the Word, especially in a devotional sense, communing with God until that experience changed him and strengthened him. And this process of experiencing and communing with God in a transformational way ultimately became the source for the focus for his message.

This was also true for Chuck, whose reliance on reading and reflecting upon scripture was a major element in the preparation of his messages:

...the whole issue of reading scripture, reflecting on your own life, asking common everyday questions as you read scripture that have to do with understanding and applying it to your own life and the world at large. Another aspect of reflection on scripture would be meditation, where you find a piece of scripture that in some particular way catches your attention... and so you spend some time thinking about that maybe throughout the day or maybe for an entire week... meditating on that biblical truth.

Continuing to reflect on his preparations for preaching in the field, Chuck stated that he had relied on his prior preparation and study and his immediate reflection on the circumstances within the field environment, and then tied those two elements together with what he called evangelical, biblical prayer:

I find myself praying, and praying fervently, “God, what kind of word do people need to hear today in our given circumstances?”... So there’s prior preparation, current reflection, taking in of scripture on an ongoing basis, but then there’s what you might term evangelical, biblical prayer, where you are asking for God’s help on an immediate basis. So those are three things that God uses for me. I’m not sure there’s any magical formula, as it were, other than being Christ-centered, being deeply biblically centered. And prayerfully, devotionally, and I think it’s not technically grace of the Holy Spirit, but you really do need to have a heart for the fact that people need to hear the good news.

Therefore, for Chuck, three practices are important for sermon preparation: prior preparation and study; current or immediate reflection; and the most significant, prayer.

These three elements also emerged as important themes during other participants’ interviews. Adam discussed the elements of prior preparation and personal devotional life while recounting a number of instances that had required him to adjust his plan to the immediate circumstances of his audience. He achieved

the needed shift by reflecting on his own devotional life and the personal effect that the study of scripture had had on him:

So I had something prepared to deliver, but I didn't feel that it would be called to that moment, and I actually used my devotions and what I understood of my devotional reading and the Holy Spirit working that truth in my life, and it actually became my sermon... And because it was personal I did not need notes. I did not need to look at a paper. I could look at my Marines all the time. And I knew what to say because it was personally available to me. And then to them too... So devotional life is very important. It can feed your extemporaneous preaching. It can feed and energize and inform and make you a better preacher.

Adam's need to shift his prior work to reflect the immediate situation, and his use of his own personal devotional experience to do so, allowed him to exercise another element that positively impacted the effectiveness of his field preaching: being able to preach in the moment, to preach extemporaneously. The shift to extemporaneous preaching allowed Adam to focus on his audience, to communicate to them directly, and to present his own experiences to them clearly. It is significant to note that though extemporaneous preaching was a focal topic of certain interview questions, in this instance, Adam brought up the topic without prompting and included it within the context of his own personal devotions and study.

Like Adam, Dan also relied heavily on his daily devotions for developing sermon material; however, he also mentioned a unique source for his sermon material, letters from his father:

Because I was so at a loss of where to start and then it definitely caused me to... just do daily devotions and just let God speak to me through that. But the other additional thing that really helped me out was my father, also a retired pastor, a missionary, wrote me letters every day. Literally, handwrote and sent them every day. Some of them came in piles of five or six letters, but he dated it so I was able to read it and every letter had a scripture that he wanted me to reflect upon. Those were little things, many of which were very timely for what I was going through, helped me through.

Dan's testimony, along with those of the other study participants, provides a clear illustration that not only is prior preparation important for a chaplain preaching in the field, but daily devotions, meditation on the scripture within the context of the immediate situation, and especially prayer are all major contributors to how chaplains can overcome the difficulties of their environment and maintain their effectiveness. But what are the precise methods that these chaplains used? The chaplains' answers to additional, more specific interview questions revealed the techniques these men employed in preparing to preach effectively.

#### *On Preparation Techniques*

Ed admitted that he had no intentional preparation technique but then quickly began to make some very good reflective comments. He stated, "You have to have some structure. If it's just a running monologue, people will get lost. They'll give up. So you have to know where you're going. You want to be true to the text, have your own agenda as to the areas that you want to highlight and then apply it effectively." He went on later and admitted that he struggled with application and had even studied Dan Doriani's writings on application techniques. But in the end, he explained, he realized that he had to focus on one simple point that was present in the text and make that the focus of his sermon. Adam also shared about realizing that there was a need for a singular message when preaching in the field:

The span of service...my first year I was coming from seminary with the idea a worship service had to have three points, you know, it had to be an hour and twenty-five minutes long at least, but my first year taught me otherwise. I could not water down the gospel and the message, but I had to accommodate myself to the working pace of the Marines. There was only so much that they could hear and understand. But I had to come to terms with... I had to shorten the span of the worship service, what helped me to be



effective was that I had to do some study on the text, but that really helped me to be more concise. Another thing that helped me was that, “Hey, I’m spending two years and a half with these men. I’ll have plenty of time with them. So I don’t have to have three points.”

Adam realized early on that the regular hour and a half church service did not accommodate well the situation of his Marines, nor did a regular three-point sermon; he had to come to terms with a significantly shorter service and with an equally concise message.

Brad concurred with this view when he said that a preacher had to make the sermon about one thing or risk losing the audience. In fact, five of the six chaplains stated in some way that they limited the focus of their sermon to one point. Chuck expressed the concept of a single focus very cogently:

Well again, adjust the requirement of focus to focus or to neck-down to the most salient expression of a point as possible... To be simple is not to be simplistic. Preaching in the field makes you seek to be as straightforward and as simple as possible... There’s a set of items called universal standards, universal intellectual standards, and simplicity is one, clarity is another, and those two things go together. Preaching in the field forces you, or at least it should force you, to do those things.

Chuck’s testimony here, and the testimony of the other chaplains, is clear: preaching in the field forced them to adopt a singular focus, a focus that promoted simplicity and clarity, and these elements were important components of preaching effectively in the field. Further, Chuck described a method for finding a singular focus for his sermon and based it on his reflection upon scripture: “Well I think a method and technique as it were would be constant reflection on biblical themes; constant reflection on biblical truths. Scripture needs to be the foundation... So if we really hold to the high view of scripture that we claim we do, then we’ll spend time examining scripture and reflecting on it.”

Then Chuck went on to describe what that reflection entailed, asking some probing questions about his situation: “Some of the questions that you are asking are really questions that are common to anyone who is proclaiming biblical truths. You are always thinking, ‘Who is the audience? What are the circumstances that that audience is facing? What is the truth that we have in scripture that communicates to that need?’” Brad mirrored this answer, claiming: “So I exegete the passage, I exegete them, and I exegete my circumstances. And usually after that...man if you don’t have anything to say, if you don’t have any way to say this is how the gospel brings light and life to you, then you probably haven’t really encountered the gospel yourself.” Ed agreed with Brad and related these three exegetical questions for effectively communicating with the audience:

But I don't think the goal is just to fill up the air, I think you want to connect with people. And to do that effectively you have to think about who they are, what the passage is saying, and what God wants you to say to them. So, to do those things requires an act of God. It's not me; it's not just talent; it's really dependency on the Holy Spirit to do something through you in that moment.

So there is consistency among Ed’s, Brad’s, and Chuck’s responses regarding their methods of determining a singular focus for each sermon. Yet their use of reflective questions does not represent a fully developed technique. On the other hand, three chaplains did admit to using a more formal technique—a technique Bryan Chapell describes in *Christ Centered Preaching*,<sup>197</sup> which includes the use of the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF).

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<sup>197</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

*The Use of the FCF in the Field*

Three of the six participating chaplains indicated that they had utilized the methods that Bryan Chapell teaches in his work, *Christ Centered Preaching*. Adam stated that he abandoned the traditional three-point sermon for a simplified, single-point message and that it became very important for him to have a singular, Christ centered focus to his sermons. He stated in his process of sermon preparation that Bryan Chapell's Christ Centered Preaching technique kept him grounded, and gave him a framework that allowed him to be consistent over a long deployment period. For him it was a "guiding principle" that was very profitable for preparing and delivering his sermons. He spoke about how he preached from the scriptures:

I would explain and talk about the context of the passage, the main characters, the situation. With any passage, I wanted to talk about the character of God. Who is God? What is it that the passage is telling us about who God is and who we are? You know, the human condition there. And then see how the gospel was resolving any tension that there may be. And I always try to preach Jesus from the passage. Knowing of course what type of passage that was. I come from a background where all scripture is ultimately to lead you to Jesus. So I didn't just want to give just information. I wanted them to have a sense of who Jesus is from the whole scriptures. I wanted to talk about who God is and then about our fallen condition and then see in the passage, Where is redemption, and where is redemption coming from?

Adam's reliance on the Christ Centered Preaching technique allowed him to identify a clear redemptive focus for his message, which in turn enabled him to mentally prepare and deliver a message that he stated was extemporaneously delivered.

Dan, as a chaplain on his first deployment, found Christ Centered Preaching to be an effective tool for field preaching. He particularly stated that the process Chapell outlines could be utilized to prepare sermons via a process of mental exercise. He states:

In terms of method, being a recent grad from seminary and everything, the only method I knew was basically Bryan Chapell's Christ Centered Preaching, so, I didn't bring the book with me, but I did my best to recall how I was trained. And obviously no one keeps everything to the letter exactly how we were taught, but that basic foundation helped me just craft it in my mind.

Reflecting on the particular ways in which Christ Centered Preaching was helpful within the field environment, Dan said that it overcame his lack of preparation time and helped him focus his message:

At a minimum, you know, I don't have time to write out the whole sermon manuscripts, but what I did have time for was to read through a portion of scripture that I think I want to preach on and then put that in outline format and just looking at the outline and preaching from that. So the basic skeletal structure of how to prepare a sermon helped me greatly.

Frank also expressed that he utilized Bryan Chapell's Christ Centered Preaching method, particularly the Fallen Condition Focus, to produce a sermon focus; however, he also expressed the need to present a clear and relevant application for his audience. He wanted not only to be truthful to the text, to teach the "major point" of the scripture, but also to connect with his audience in a significant way. He stated:

I would say, "What does this scripture teach? What is the major point?" And then I go and I ask myself, "Out of this message that's here, what current event can somebody relate to as a point of contact?" ... So, looking for that point of contact and then going ahead and, now, "What is the message in [the scripture] for today that God does speak to us?"

Although Chuck did not mention that he utilized Bryan Chapell's method of Christ Centered Preaching by name, he did make it clear that in the field environment there was a very high need to ensure that the scripture communicated with the audience to whom you were delivering it. He stated, "You needed to be constantly engaged in conversation with the people among whom you do ministry...

[You] have to become a greater master of the culture that they find themselves operating in... And the degree you do that along that spectrum may determine how effectively you communicate with people.”

Brad also discussed the need for his sermons to be filled with relevant application for his immediate audience. He said that this was such a significant thing in the field, that in a way his sermons may at times become unbalanced: “I probably err on getting to application too quickly. Instead of doing more deep [exegesis]...instead of really building the case historically and grammatically that you might have time to do on a thirty minute sermon, I do that but not nearly as deep as I would, and I get to application.” He then explained his concern for transitioning too quickly to application in his field sermons:

I think it’s very important that people be able to walk away from your sermon, open the Bible, and see it themselves. “Oh yeah, here’s why. This is what it teaches. Here’s that application right here.” And if you don’t necessarily build that, people walk away and they open up John 15 two weeks later and they are like, “I don’t know where he got that from here because I don’t see it.” I think there’s some value in building some historical, grammatical understanding of the text before you say “So what...? This is why this matters today.” As a chaplain you have to be very... you know I forsake some of that in order to set the hooks in order to keep people drawn into the message. And now even when I preach in a church and I take twenty-five minutes, it’s still heavy on, why is this applicable for today... for the now, and probably less on the grammatical historical survey of the passage.

In order to truly appreciate the magnitude of Brad’s point about the importance of application for field preaching, one must consider in context his lament that he had to forsake the grammatical historical exegesis of the text. Brad was the chaplain who brought his Greek and Hebrew Bibles into the field and spent his devotional time in the original languages. For a minister whose life is dedicated to the original languages to that degree, who is dedicated to the proper exegesis of the scripture, it

is not a simple thing to abandon or forsake something that important in order to accommodate an environmental change like preaching in the field. Brad felt that the importance of application and the connection with the audience—“to set the hooks” in order to keep the people drawn to the message—was paramount for effective preaching in the field.

*In Preparation For Delivery*

Concerning which methods and techniques were the most helpful for preparing sermons in the field, three of the six chaplains reiterated their use of the Fallen Condition Focus to identify a main point and application, two identified Chapell’s Christ Centered Preaching for its outline development, and two noted again their use of pocket sermons and previously prepared material, adjusted for relevance. However, the practices that the chaplains most reported as effective for the preparation of field sermons was the chaplain’s devotional life, his prayer, and the reading of God’s Word. This was specifically the case for Adam, Brad, and Dan, who claimed that one’s personal devotional life was critical for the preparation of sermons.

This reliance on prayer and devotional material reflected an oral preparation technique, in which the preacher completely internalized the message by making it part of his own spiritual life. Specific interview questions that explored this connection would have been profitable to this study; however, one may still infer from the chaplains’ responses to other questions that relying on prayer and devotional material for sermon preparation enabled the chaplains to prepare their sermons orally. Chuck noted the necessity of internalizing his message when he said

that it was important to practice and refine each sermon, while being self-reflective on its content. Frank stated that he liked to go over his sermons in his head while he was running and added that doing so helped him to refine the outline in his mind.

Ed said that preachers need to internalize their message, simplify it, and then just be themselves in its delivery. He warned that a field preacher needs a good outline in his head in order to be effective, especially when preparing to preach without notes. “If it’s just a running monologue, people will get lost. They’ll give up. So you have to know where you’re going. You want to be true to the text, have your own agenda as to the areas that you want to highlight, and then apply it effectively.”

Adam Brad, and Dan, the three chaplains who relied so heavily on their devotions, all stated that a sermon must be internalized completely in order to be engaging with the audience. When stating this point, Brad tied the internalization of the message to repentance and joy within the speaker’s own heart:

Probably the greatest homiletic technique was to absolutely have stone cold memorized and down pat what you want to say. Completely internalized. No notes, you just know what you want to say because it has so preached and inflicted you with repentance but also joy, so when you stand up, you can say it. It’s there. It flows. It is very conversational.

Although Brad used the term “stone cold memorized,” his full explanation made it clear that he was not memorizing a manuscript but that he had a message that was so personal, so viscerally part of him, that he was able to bring it forth without any notes. Adam as well came to the understanding that he had to prepare his message and have it completely internalized, particularly due to his extemporaneous delivery technique: “I had to make sure that I had some type of outline in my mind... So, it helped me a lot if I had to preach extemporaneously if I knew the passage very

well... To preach extemporaneously you have to know the passage in and out; context, history, relationship to other passages.” As their comments revealed, the chaplains who participated in this study thought it very important for preaching effectively in a field environment to internalize the sermon, make the material personal in such a way that it also became part of them, and utilize an oral preparation method.

The preparation of field sermons is a unique task, especially due to the field environment and the limited availability of resources there. Relying on scripture, devotions, and prayer; allowing each scriptural passage to impact one’s own heart; and internalizing the message were important elements of sermon preparation that all six participating chaplains discussed. The need for simplicity and the use of Bryan Chapell’s Fallen Condition Focus to attain that simplicity, as well as the use of Christ Centered Preaching methods to develop a unified theme and outline, were all clearly represented within the interviews, too. These methods were necessary not only because of the environment of preparation but also because of the method of delivery these chaplains favored: an extemporaneous, noteless delivery.

### **From Preparation to Delivery**

The six chaplains also commented on techniques that had failed in the field. Although their answers varied, a singular theme emerged that reflected the method of delivery they all preferred: preaching without notes. Three chaplains responded that the use of notes during delivery failed them, due to the environment in which they preached. Often this was due to poor lighting or inclement weather, but it became apparent that there was also a cultural need held by the soldiers to preach



without notes. Frank stated specifically that the practice of reading manuscripts was doomed to fail due to the need to be more conversational with the audience: "I think reading sermons verbatim failed. I think that particularly in a sermon type of setting that soldiers like the interaction, the dialogue." Frank explained that his sermon style was more conversational, that it included dialogue with the audience, and that the soldiers not only responded well to this but that they expected it. Chuck similarly noted the need to be conversational; he claimed that not identifying closely with the audience was also a point of failure. Ed agreed, saying that too much formality would distance the preacher from the men. He insisted that one must "preach from the heart" and look at the listeners' faces in order to be effective.

Adam and Brad both stated that a sermon with too many points, one that could not be adapted to the situation, or one that lasted longer than ten to fifteen minutes would fail when delivered in the field. According to the chaplains, the style of preaching that was most effective was relaxed, conversational, and delivered clearly within the moment. When the interviewer asked if they ever preached sermons extemporaneously, five of the six chaplains immediately responded with a yes, while the sixth tried to clarify that he preached "in the moment" but with a lot of preparation. This chaplain wanted to clarify that he did not preach impromptu but utilized a lot of prior preparation and then preached without notes, which for this study is the definition of extemporaneous preaching. To the question of whether they preached extemporaneously without notes, four of the chaplains responded with a resounding yes, while two clarified that they used an outline, either in a small notebook or on a 3x5 card. These responses naturally lead to the question, "Why

was extemporaneous preaching utilized so uniformly by all six chaplains?" An examination of the chaplains' views on effective preaching reveals the answer.

### **Effective Field Delivery**

Adam expressed a need to preach extemporaneously when reflecting on how his personal devotional life empowered his sermon content and delivery. He stated:

And because it was personal I did not need notes. I did not need to look at a paper. I could look at my Marines all the time. And I knew what to say because it was personally available to me. And then to them too... So devotional life is very important. It can feed your extemporaneous preaching. It can feed and energize and inform and make you a better preacher.

Note that Adam thought that in order to be an effective preacher he had to look at his audience all the time, and that a better preacher was informed, energized, and extempore. For Adam, utilizing notes in delivery distracted him from that goal and reduced his effectiveness in preaching in the field.

Frank expressed that a noteless delivery technique was necessary in order to communicate to his audience, but he also evaluated the reason that it was necessary. Frank explained that when he abandoned his written notes for an oral, memorized outline, he was able to preach more effectively, and in his words "from the heart":

I think that it is healthy not to preach from notes. Some preachers get up there and it's almost verbatim, they're reading from a manuscript. I think it has helped me to come up with an outline in my head, and I think that has helped to preach from the heart. And people begin to see it, you can look them in the eye and you kind of go ahead with your story. And it kind of allows for the Holy Spirit to impart something at the last minute during the service and all. Obviously you do have your outline in front of you just in case you do get lost but it has helped me to be able to connect, to be real, relevant, and relational in preaching.

For Frank, this "preaching from the heart" allowed him to be passionate and to connect with his audience, therefore becoming a more relevant and effective

speaker. Dan also spoke of connecting to his audience by abandoning his notes and “speaking from the heart.” He said: “There were times when I actually came prepared with notes and started off, but because the crowd was responding vocally to it I just shut down the notes and preached right out of the heart and it was well received.” Dan then admitted that when he went back to using notes “the depth of content came out, but the heart may have been missing sometimes.” Heartfelt delivery clearly improved the effectiveness of field preaching for the chaplains and was directly related to their preaching without notes.

Brad explained and contextualized well the importance of extemporaneous preaching without notes, the need for a heartfelt pathos in delivery, and the cultural need to keep eye contact with the soldiers in a field environment. He stated:

Well I think that it's because the soldiers are tired and their minds are thinking about a thousand other things. You're most effective when you are most engaging, when you are most conversational. When the guy feels like “Chaplain [Brad's] up there talking to me. It's just me and the chaplain sitting here,” when it's not, he's sitting there with twenty other dudes. So I think that is the effect, it engages them. It keeps them hooked at least for a few minutes.

Brad in effect testified that it is the very challenges of the field environment that make a no notes delivery necessary. The challenges of exhaustion and the distractions of the field conditions make it necessary to remain engaged with the audience. There is also an implied military cultural need for the individuals in the audience to be spoken to directly in order for the speaker to maintain their attention.

Frank, who earlier referred to Aristotle's *Logos, Pathos & Ethos* of public speaking in the context of maintaining a connection with the audience, tied the need

to be interactive (in order to be effective in today's culture) to the requirement to preach without notes. Frank said:

I think reading sermons verbatim failed. I think that particularly in a sermon type of setting that soldiers like the interaction, the dialogue. While you still are the authority, the scripture really is the Word of God, but just that interactive type of sermon and asking questions. Is it more like a study? Yeah it could be. But I think that soldier or serviceman really enjoys that type of interaction for the most part.

Although Frank's interactive style and use of dialogue was unique among the chaplains, it did reflect a method to address the audience's apparent cultural expectation.

Chuck concurred that the men held a cultural expectation to be spoken to directly and noted that preachers needed to accommodate this expectation in order to keep soldiers engaged. However, he did not limit this expectation only to the culture of the military, but rather claimed that it is the standard means of delivery that people expect today:

So that's the standard of delivery that people expect, which is, "Hey. Talk directly to me. There's no room for notes here. If you really have something important to say you don't need notes." And that's the type of communication that people expect. So if you are preaching in a field setting, especially in a situation that would be considered highly charged and significant, then people want you to look into their eyes and speak to them directly. Even if there are hundreds of people there, that's the kind of communication they are looking for. So you can't use notes and you better have something internalized. Or I should say you can't use a manuscript. You may be able to use a very simple outline jotted in your hand or jotted in the margin on the page of a Bible if you're using a field Bible, but people are expecting something more direct and down to earth in the form of a more personal conversation than somebody who's going to be reading from a manuscript. My experience would be that doesn't work in the military in a field setting.

For Chuck, this cultural need to speak directly to the people mandates a note-less delivery. People want you to look at them, to talk directly to them. People expect a

direct, down to earth approach that is personal and conversational. In this “Talk directly to me” culture, there is no room for notes.

The interviews revealed that the delivery of a field sermon needs to be relaxed, conversational, in the moment, and passionate. The study participants uniformly utilized a no notes or minimal notes extemporaneous delivery style that enabled them to speak directly to the audience. This extemporaneous style was not only a military cultural concern but was born out of the very challenges and hindrances that were prevalent in the field environment. It maximized flexibility and gave the chaplains the ability to rapidly adapt to the changing circumstances present in a field environment. Adam lamented that when preaching extemporaneously, he was not always able to remember all of his points, but that at times, “I came with a passage and the outline but the situation required something totally different. So, I just chose another passage and gave an impromptu sermon.” According to the study participants, the challenges and conflicts prevalent in the field environment demanded this ability to be flexible, which in turn made them more effective preachers of the gospel.

### *Effective Use of Voice*

The next questions reflected elements that came out of the literature review, particularly the importance of voice and physical fitness—elements of concern for the nineteenth century authors, particularly Broadus. Four of the six chaplains who participated in this study said that voice was an important element of effective preaching in the field. Three said that volume and projection were crucial elements of preaching effectively, particularly when no microphone was available or when

significant distractions were present. Frank stated that the need for voice projection is just as important today as it was in the past, even with the advent of amplifying technology: “being able to project your voice, there’s going to be times you don’t have electronics, you *won’t* have electronics out there, so being able to project your voice in a way that you can do it over a long period of time, but also where people can make sense out of what you’re saying.” The point is well made that without a microphone it becomes very important not only to be loud enough to be heard but to articulate in such a way that the audience can understand the speaker.

Additionally, Frank made an important point that the speaker should achieve this volume of delivery in such a way that it does not lead to fatigue. Responding to the interview question on voice, Chuck underscored the significance of volume, projection, and clarity:

Well it’s obvious. I mean, historically you have to speak loudly enough for people to hear and yet at the same time you have to speak in such a way that people understand that you’re not yelling at them. You have to have enough volume and projection. There are physical aspects, and prior to the twentieth century people had to overcome those obstacles physically, whether it was an issue of voice projection or diaphragm support, you have to do that.

It is interesting to note that Chuck went back to the nineteenth century preachers and even made some of the same points that Broadus did in his work on preaching. Chuck’s experience in the field convinced him of the importance of volume, projection, and clarity and confirms that Broadus’ teaching is still relevant for today.

Dan also held that the voice was an important element of delivery in the field and yet did not speak of volume and projection, but rather noted using variations in the voice in order to lead the listeners to hear more attentively. He spoke of his use of emphasis by raising and lowering his voice or making changes in tone or even

pounding his fists. He stated that the expression of passion communicated well to his audience. Brad said that attention to one's voice is crucial for preaching effectively in the field. He agreed with Dan that "the harmonics, the ebb and flow of the voice" helped to hold the attention of the men in the field.

Chuck also expressed this view and added another element: the need to connect with the culture and to understand the way in which the soldier communicates. He said: "And really in a military setting I think most people would acknowledge that you can't speak in a way that would be regarded as timid." He went on to say that being too timid was a fault that was not acceptable to soldiers in the field who were accustomed to decisive leadership delivered with a commanding voice. Brad also affirmed this cultural need to speak with authority:

You know it's soldiers that are confronting our country's enemies on the field of battle that respect manliness. And when they see a chaplain that talks to them like they are men and acts like a man, they respond to that. Who is authoritative, who speaks with authority. Like they said about Jesus, "This guy, he's not like our scribes and Pharisees. This dude speaks with authority," you know? So I think it's very important to have a command voice and a command presence. Because soldiers respond to that; they are trained to respond to that.

From the testimony of these chaplains, it is evident that the effective use of one's voice is critical to the effective delivery of sermons in the field. The field creates a situational need for preachers to project the voice, to speak loudly and clearly enough to be heard and understood by all, to use a voice that changes for emphasis and keeps the attention of the audience, and to meet the cultural requirement to not be timid but rather speak with confidence and authority—to have, as Brad put it, "a command voice and a command presence." And yet the chaplain must accomplish all this in a way that does not fatigue the preacher and

thus compromise the delivery. This final point, avoiding fatigue, introduces the next interview question, which concerned the need for physical fitness and its effect on preaching in the field.

### *Physical Fitness and Delivery*

The literature review revealed a need for chaplains to be physically fit in the field, indicating that physical fitness has a major impact on the ability of the chaplain to preach effectively in the field. Additionally the literature revealed that good physical and mental health is related to the keenness of short term memory, which is extremely important when preaching without a manuscript or without notes. Adam expressed in the beginning of his interview the difficulty he had when he was in the field, exhausted from a long day and then having to preach without lighting. Unable to use notes, he relied only on the outline he had in his head. He emphasized the physical challenge of preaching in the ever-changing conditions of a field environment.

Responding to the question, “How important is physical fitness to preaching in the field?” Brad replied that it is very important since in that environment you “can’t have fallen out,”<sup>198</sup> or rather have made yourself unavailable due to the lack of physical capability and lack of presence. He said:

That’s a great, great question. I think it’s very important. One – if you want to preach to your boys, you’ve got to keep up with them. When the chips fall and their lives are falling apart, you’ve got to be there. You can’t have fallen out. You’ve got to be there in that time when that opportunity presents itself. So

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<sup>198</sup> *Fall out*: a command used by the military to dismiss troops from a drill formation. To *have fallen out* indicates that an individual has left a drill formation or with-unit physical activity, due to inability or exhaustion. In this case, the term is utilized to indicate an individual who was unable to keep up with the physical demands of being deployed to a field setting.



you've got to work on your physical fitness. If you want to preach to them you've got to keep up with them.

For Brad, a chaplain's ministry in the field is one of presence; the chaplain must be present and available not only for pastoral care, conducting worship and preaching sermons, but also for suffering the very same challenges and experiencing the same stresses as the people to whom he is ministering. The chaplain must literally have the ability, when the time is right, when the opportunity presents itself, to connect with the men through the same difficulties and burdens they are enduring. And as the chaplain endures the same sufferings as his men do, he must be able to keep up and not allow the physical challenges to stop him. If chaplains want to preach in the field, they must be physically fit enough to keep up with the rigors of that environment and must have the same endurance as the soldiers to whom they are ministering.

Brad related the goal of not falling out to the biblical concept of being "all things to all men,"<sup>199</sup> the cross-cultural mandate of missionaries. He explained that one has to be physically fit in order to minister to a physically fit culture; the missionary needs to speak the target language. For Brad, that target language is physical fitness. He explains:

Secondly, missionaries were chaplains. And when a missionary goes into a culture, he has to learn the language that his culture speaks. His target culture, the target language. He has to move into that culture and move in and out of their language. Well one of the languages a soldier speaks is physical fitness. It's a very physically fit culture, and so that is one of the languages I think chaplains need to be able to speak. It's physical fitness.

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<sup>199</sup> See 1 Corinthians 9:22.

Brad was not the only chaplain that saw physical fitness as a tool to connect culturally with his military audience. When Chuck responded to the same question regarding whether chaplains needed to be physically fit in order to preach in the field, he immediately reiterated what Brad had expressed, that there was a cultural mandate in the military for physical fitness, and that physical fitness was necessary in order for a chaplain to communicate effectively to that culture. He said:

Well you have to be physically fit to be there in the first place. I mean that's part of military culture. You have to have at least a modicum of fitness to be accepted by your audience. Because it's expected of them that they are physically fit, and so you can't not be physically fit, at least in a field setting, it just can't be because you're not permitted to be there if you're not physically fit. So there's a certain minimal amount of physical fitness that you have to have.

Chuck also agreed that a chaplain had to be physically fit in order to preach effectively in the field. In fact, he came remarkably close to echoing John Broadus' attestation that physical wellbeing contributes greatly to the mental acuteness necessary for preaching effectively. Chuck relayed,

Then there's just the generic reality in a military setting that you need to be physically fit to sustain the physical environment of the field. You may not be able to preach if the physical environment of the field, and especially a deployment environment, if you're so beat down physically that you are not able to stand and preach. And that happens. I've had that happen in the sense that I've been in settings where I wasn't preaching at the time but because of the extreme physical conditions I found myself coming close to passing out or just having a hard time functioning physically. You need to be physically fit. And certainly, as with everyday life in general, physical fitness contributes to a higher mental alertness and overall ability to do anything.

Chuck's last statement that physical fitness contributes to a higher mental alertness and overall ability clearly agrees with the point that Richard Storrs made, attesting that good physical condition aids the ability to rapidly organize thoughts and

promotes sound preaching, particularly when one preaches without notes or the help of a manuscript.

Ed came close to expressing the same assertion when he answered the physical fitness question from the perspective of being energetic and having the stamina to stand on one's feet while preaching:

Well, you need energy. You definitely need energy to preach anytime. In the best of circumstances I always come away from a sermon completely worn out. So I think, yeah, I don't think I've ever connected the dots here, but staying in shape will give you and allow you the stamina to stay on your feet. I think there's [sic] maybe some cases where I've preached sitting down, but more often than not I'm going to be standing and walking. So yeah, staying in shape is critical.

For Ed, physical fitness gave him the energy and stamina he needed in order to preach effectively; Adam agreed that physical fitness is necessary for combating the exhaustion one encounters in the field. For Chuck and Brad, physical fitness enabled them to endure the field environment and to connect culturally with the military audience. In short, four of the chaplains held that physical fitness was very important to preaching effectively in the field. Two chaplains, however, held an alternate view: both relied on spiritual strength to overcome the physical challenges of the field.

#### *An Alternate View*

Frank did not consider physical fitness an element of effective field preaching and stated that he never noticed a connection between the two. Yet he did acknowledge that he meets all the military's physical fitness standards. Although he said that he "never goes running," he later noted that he does not utilize headphones

when running because he instead goes over his sermons when he runs. In Frank's words:

I never thought about it ... I'm physically fit, I pass all my PT tests, I meet all my weight, I don't get taped<sup>200</sup> and all like that, so I never really thought about that. I never go running. I know that PT is not physical fitness; it's prayer time. I don't run with headphones, I don't like running with cadence, because I do spend time with the Lord. I do go over sermons when I run and all. But, I don't know really. I never noticed.

Frank's statements concerning the connection between physical fitness and preaching are inconclusive. He admits only to never noticing a connection and never having thought about it. At best, one may surmise that Frank holds that prayer is more important to a field preaching experience than physical fitness, which fits squarely within his earlier statements about his field preaching practices.

Additionally, Frank reported being very fit and admitted to achieving the high physical fitness standards set by his military organization, therefore keeping himself relevant to the military culture in which he ministers. Frank's statement therefore does not speak against the need for physical fitness in preaching in a field environment, but it rather speaks to the importance that prayer plays in his preaching philosophy. Dan, however, made an interesting point, noting that he was more effective when he was weak and relied on God than when he was strong and did not trust in God for his preaching. Yet he stated that he did not see a direct connection between being physically fit and preaching effective sermons in the field:

For me anyway I don't think it impacted me so much. Because when I was physically weak for whatever reason but was strengthened spiritually from,

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<sup>200</sup> *Taped*: a term referring to having your waist measured with a tape as part of a physical fitness test. Individuals who weigh less than the accepted standard for fitness do not have to be measured. Those above the standard but below the maximum acceptable weight limit must have their waist tape measured in order to determine their body fat index.

like, letters from my dad, that actually gave me more to be able to talk about. When I was much more physically well off, I think I tended to be a little more lazy [sic] in terms of trusting in God, relying on God. Even though I was physically weak for whatever reason, those are the times that I was strong spiritually to come up with something that was appropriate.

Dan stated clearly that he sees weakness as an opportunity to rely more on God. In this reliance on God, he said, he was able to produce sermons that were spiritually appropriate for his audience.

As Chuck attested, physical fitness is an organizational requirement for working in the field, so Dan's approach does not deny the need for physical fitness. Yet Dan's strong point is that being spiritually fit to preach in the field is just as important as being physically fit. He went on to explain this within the context of prayer, "So I realized then that there is just as much importance not just in physically and mentally preparing but really praying and asking for God's guidance, because when my delivery sucked God still used that effectively not for my own personal ego but for their personal current need."

For Dan, the effective delivery of field sermons depended more on prayer and trusting in God for his guidance, especially in times of weakness, than it did on being physically fit. Frank did not see a connection between the two at all. Yet neither Dan's nor Frank's views actively denied the need for physical fitness in the preparation and delivery of field sermons. The other four chaplains attested to the need for physical fitness in order to overcome the exhaustion they encountered in the field, to be able to keep up with the physical demands that soldiers and marines experience there, and to meet the cultural need to be respectable leaders within a group of people who place a high degree of value on physical fitness.

### **Final Reflections on Field Preaching**

The final interview questions had a more self-evaluative theme to help the researcher explore how chaplains evaluate the effectiveness of their field preaching. Each chaplain responded to three specific questions. The first question dealt with how the field preaching experience had affected the participant's subsequent preaching. Responses to this question varied, but generally the chaplains spoke of how they now focus more on application and produce shorter, clearer sermons; they noted that the experience helped them to realize what is truly important in a sermon's message. A number stated that they work harder now to focus the message of their sermons on what they want to say, while using more illustrative language to do so.

Adam said that he now understands the importance of knowing his people and being involved in their lives. He spoke of the credibility that he gained from living with the same challenges and being exposed to the same discomforts that his men had endured. He recalled that it brought him credibility with his military audience, but also changed the way he thought about preaching in a church setting:

It opened my eyes to the fact that I am speaking into real lives. Because [in the field] they needed to hear something that would tell them who God is, what they should do. They were already in their work environment. They were not in church. It was very important for them to hear right then. So it made my preaching very... it had immediate significance. So I didn't have to wonder if it was important or not... it is important. So I took that to the pulpit. I needed to be more inquisitive about people's lives.

Adam added that his experience in the field had played a redemptive role in his own life. He admitted to in the past having becoming cynical about the church, something that he stated was common for pastors who experience alienation or conflict with

their congregations. He explained that the field services showed him that people do come to church to hear God's word and be fed by him:

So that helped me to confirm that some people go to church because they actually want to hear God's word. Because sometimes we become cynical when we are preaching from the church pulpit. You know, everyone looks nice. And because of bad experiences we become cynical about the church. So in the field it brought me back. We had people that were there because they wanted to hear God's word.

Adam's preaching experience with his dirty, exhausted Marines, allowed him to see once again a true desire to worship God. The Marines looked forward to his services, his messages, not just despite their bad conditions, but because of them. The stresses and challenges of the field helped Adam to see once again true faith and a desire for God in his people that had appeared to be lacking in the church, and this comforted him.

Brad stated that the field preaching experienced changed the content of his sermons, making them heavier on application rather than the exegetical work so commonly expected in a traditional church setting. He also relayed that he now gets to the application more quickly and usually limits the length of his sermons to twenty-five minutes:

I probably err on getting to application too quickly. Instead of going more deep [sic]... instead of really building the case historically and grammatically that you might have time to do on a 30 minute sermon, I do that but not nearly as deep as I would, and I get to application... And now even when I preach in a church and I take twenty-five minutes, it's still heavy on, "Why is this applicable for today, for the now?" and probably less on the grammatical, historical survey of the passage.

Chuck agreed with Brad that he now arrives at his main points more quickly and is more direct and to the point. He stated that he now uses fewer words than he did before his field preaching experience. It is interesting to note in the below quote

how he links preaching less with working harder. However, Chuck does not find that focusing his preaching on what he wants to say and thus limiting the sermon's duration is an easy thing to do. For Chuck, clarity is his goal and it is the lesson he gleaned from his field preaching experience:

Well certainly you preach more directly. You probably use less [sic] words. You're not likely to preach as long as you may preach if you preach in a civilian pulpit ministry on a regular basis. Preaching in a field environment causes you to work harder to focus more specifically on what you are trying to say. So that's how it has influenced me.

Ed also concurred with Brad and Chuck that his field preaching experience allowed him to focus on what is really important within the text; in his view it was application and engagement with his audience:

I think you realize [in the field] what's really important, because the things you want to cover in the field environment are the application points of the text. So I would have to think that preaching in the field environment has given me the ability, when I'm not in that environment, to focus on what's really important in the engagement pieces... Which, I think, to me, that's the hardest part to preaching.

For Frank what was important was understanding how to apply the scriptural focus of a text through the lens of today, making the application relevant to the audience, to today's culture. Additionally, Frank shared how ministering in the field forced him to abandon his manuscript and taught him to preach from the heart. As he learned that he needed to preach from an outline in his head, he was able to connect to the audience: "it has helped me to be able to connect, to be real, relevant, and relational in preaching."

Dan spoke more about how the broader experience of being in the field affected him, rather than how the field preaching experience affected him. Dan's experience of the harshness of the field and the effects of being on deployment gave



him the insight he needed to understand and illustrate more vividly the content of his message:

I would say just the mere experience of being out in the field, where I am experiencing the same hardship and difficulties that the Marines and sailors were experiencing, I bring that whole experience into Garrison, into chapel or into a church setting, and it enhances my content for illustrations and explanations of key passages of scripture when I am able to prepare more fully for chapel settings. So I would say it helps me in terms of sermon illustrations, for one, because of the graphic nature of the combat zone. The graphic nature brings out the point better for me to be able to explain to people who may not necessarily have experienced all that.

Dan's experience in field preaching and his subsequent use of illustrations that arose out of combat may have a very strong impact on his preaching, particularly when he refers to the emotive experiences of loss and of sacrifice.

However, Chuck warned chaplains not to neglect the transition from the field back into the pulpit. He explained that there is a rawness to combat and an earthy nature allowed in field preaching that may not be appropriate elsewhere:

Now certainly there are some aspects of military culture that don't translate well into a civilian-preaching context. You can't be quite as down to earth in a civilian setting as you can be in a military setting. There are some forms of expression that would be considered not necessarily profane but they would be considered vulgar or maybe offensive to some people. So you need to be careful.

Chuck's call to be careful and not neglect the transition back to a civilian pulpit is well founded and confirms that not all one's experiences, however relevant, are suitable fodder for a sermon.

### *The Benefits Gained from Field Preaching*

During the interviews, another reflective question presented the six participants with the opportunity to consider the benefits that they experienced while preaching in the field. Although some of their answers simply echoed the

chaplains' answers to the initial self-reflection question, this latter question provided an opportunity to explore their answers more fully. Some spoke again of developing a new appreciation for clarity and simplicity but tied that concept to the passion and intensity gained in the face of the darkness of combat. Others spoke of gaining an authority to speak to the lives of the men because of the time they spent with them, as well as an increased credibility even with the families back home. Ed mentioned again that he was able to overcome his struggle with sermon applications, while Frank reiterated how the use of the mental outline had helped him preach from the heart.

Chuck returned to his earlier point that learning to maintain the simplicity of the message was the primary benefit that he obtained in field. He said:

Well again, adjust the requirement of focus, to focus or to neck-down to the most salient expression of a point as possible. People in the military don't like multiplied words, they don't like for instance what might be considered academic language. A more common or colloquial way of expressing that would be they don't like a \$5 word when a \$1 word will do the job. To be simple is not to be simplistic. Preaching in the field makes you seek to be as straightforward and as simple as possible.

This clarity of communication that Chuck espoused is very important to his style of field preaching, and his reiteration of this point while discussing the benefits he gained from his time in the field shows that it has continuing implications for him outside of the field preaching experience.

Adam expressed that his field preaching experience gave him more authority with the men, particularly due to the time that they had spent together; he felt that they heard him better because he had shared their pain:

I didn't feel just that I was a preacher, but it also made me... in one sense I know that we as pastors have authority by God given by his Word, but I got a

sense that I had more authority to speak in their lives because I shared my life with them. So I felt their ears were more open to my preaching... They were more receptive. And I felt that experience of pain and suffering actually built us into a family. I was not just a pastor. I was also speaking sometimes like an elder brother. Sometimes like a father. But it gave me more knowledge; it gave me more hearing in their sight.

Although the use of the phrase “hearing in their sight” is a bit out of the ordinary, note that Adam is not originally an English speaker. It was apparent from his interview that the men in his unit listened to him more because of the rapport built between them during their shared experience.

Dan’s experience was similar to Adam’s; he spoke of his increased credibility with the men for having deployed and conducted the ministry in the field. He even added that this credibility extended to the families in the base chapel:

Being there gave me credibility with the men and even with the families back in the chapel... The fact that I was out there, sometimes with their husbands or wives, gave the spouses and children who haven’t been out there some appreciation for what their own family members have done, and because of that connection they leaned their ears a lot more to be more attentive to what I have to say.

Chaplains have a significant role in the field, and although the field environment presents significant limitations particularly for the preparation of sermons, for effective preaching, as Dan’s perspective shows, chaplains must be careful not to neglect or diminish the time they spend with their men.

Brad by far had the most enlightening response to the question concerning the benefits gained from preaching in the field. He shared passionately that he now experiences what he calls “increased gospel intensity.” He stated that once a person has deployed to a combat area, the way that person preaches will necessarily change. One must viscerally understand the gospel and have the faith and

confidence to proclaim it in the face of one's own fears. Brad spoke of having that gospel message seared into his own heart:

You're no longer studying the passage in the comfort of your study, but you're out, you're dirty, you're hungry, you're hot, people are dying, guys are getting blown up. And you stand up in front of these men and you say that in the midst of this darkness, in the midst of this hopelessness, that there is hope to be had. And that takes courage. That takes faith, you know, "Is this really true? Do I have anything to say in the midst of this ugliness?" And that kind of sears it [the gospel] into your own heart.

And once that gospel message had set into his heart, it brought forth an increased intensity and passion that stemmed from facing death every day with his soldiers. It is that intensity and the depth of the gospel message that affected his own heart that he brings home as a benefit from the field:

I have an unbelievable intensity and passion... We listen to sermons in the comfort of AC in our pews versus listening to a sermon or a field service and the smell of death is all around you. And guys, you don't know who's sitting there, who's going to get blown up on patrol. You just do not know. And so when you come back and you stand in a pulpit here and you look at people... combat has changed you. You preach differently because you've been in ugliness. You preach differently because you've seen hardened grunts cling to Christ in tears, and yet pick up their weapon and confront the enemies of our country on the field of battle. That's an unbelievable, transformative affect that it has on a minister.

This gospel clarity and increased intensity has a very personal motivation for Brad. It was not just the friends he made in his own unit or the loss of life he experienced with them that transformed him, but the reality that each of these men represented because of the personal loss of his own brother in Iraq:

You know, I have some baggage too. My brother, my only brother, was KIA<sup>201</sup> in Iraq. When I stand up in front of these men and I look at them, every one of them is... if I was my brother's chaplain, what would I have wanted my brother's chaplain to be saying right now? And that just brings so much clarity.

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<sup>201</sup> KIA: Killed In Action.

Brad's loss of his brother gave him clarity for the gospel and made every soldier he came into contact with someone's son, brother, husband. His own time in combat gave him the urgency and passion to proclaim the gospel with the intensity of the situation. This was a gift that he had with him after leaving the hell of Iraq; he left the field filled with the intensity and passion of the gospel in a way that was unique to his situation.

### *Evaluative Reflections*

The final question the six chaplains considered was "What evaluative reflections do you have regarding your experience with preaching in the field?" Two of the chaplains continued along the same theme that they established in their answers to the other two reflective questions, while three answered honestly how difficult it was to evaluate the effectiveness of their own field sermons. One chaplain answered by describing a method he had utilized that was more related to understanding a particular unit's morale, than to reflecting on the effectiveness of his field preaching experience.

Adam and Brad both responded with answers that were similar to their previous two answers. Adam spoke of the need to be clear and concise in the field, as well as to present a message that applied the scriptures clearly and relevantly to the lives of the Marines with whom he served:

I learned that you have to be clear, because people's minds are tired most of the time. You need to be clear. You need to be concise. You need to go beyond just giving them information. They are looking for transformation. They are looking to see if what you are speaking is according to what they read and if it is relevant to their lives. They are not there to hear you. They really want to hear God, at one of the most difficult times in their lives.

Effective preaching in the field, according to Adam, is clear and concise. It contains biblical exposition that is relevant to the lives of his men, reaching them where they are, and is supported by the chaplain's genuine presence in their midst.

It did change the way I preach, because they would pay attention if you act on what you preach, because you are spending 24/7 with them. You cannot just go leave and go home. You have to believe and act what you preach for your field preaching to have continuous credibility. You cannot go preach thinking that they will not see if you yourself believe it or not. So that gave me a pause in my preaching. I'm not able to hide. They will see you.

Adam was not the only chaplain who expressed that his presence had a major impact on the effectiveness of his field preaching. Brad as well held that effective field preaching was based on a solid understanding of the application of the gospel, with the chaplain earning the right to speak by sharing in the misery that the soldiers faced. Here he speaks as if he were giving advice to another chaplain about to deploy into a combat zone:

I would say first and foremost, brother, do not forsake the gospel. The gospel is the answer. I don't care what you're about to see, what you're about to feel... the gospel is the answer to everything you're about to see and everything you're about to feel. What you have to think through is "how is it the answer?" Because it is! But how? And how do you show those who [sic] God has given you that it is the answer? And secondly, you have to earn the right to speak into their lives. You cannot expect it; you cannot demand it. The only way you earn the right as a chaplain to speak into their [sic] lives of soldiers is to be there. It's to suffer with them, be cold, wet, and hungry with them, cry with them, bleed with them... and that will give you access into their lives.

Brad here testifies that effective field preaching entails applying the scriptures and the gospel in a way that is relevant to the lives of the men, while one's life presents the gospel through shared experience—earning the right to speak by suffering the same trials that bind the men together. Here one sees the *esprit de corps* of combat used as a vehicle for the gospel.

Chuck, Dan, and Ed spoke of the need for feedback to measure the effectiveness of field preaching. The soldiers or Marines could offer this feedback, or the chaplain could ask for it; however, chaplains generally do not receive a lot of evaluative feedback. In the end, the chaplains who participated in this study relied on people coming up to them after services or perhaps a significant amount of time later, and gauging these responses over their time in the field. Chuck explained:

Well, that's a tough question that everybody who preaches faces, not just people who preach in the field, but everybody. One of the standards of measurement I have is do people reflect on what I've said later? Not just twenty minutes later, but are they still thinking about it or does the Holy Spirit bring it to their mind four days later? Or are they remembering any of it a week later? Will they be thinking about it possibly for a long time on and off? That's a standard of evaluation that I have, and on occasion you get that feedback if you cross paths with somebody where you've preached [and] they may come to you at a later point in time, and every pastor has this happen.

For Chuck, the best metric for gauging the effectiveness of field preaching is if those who heard his message are still thinking about it later:

To me the most robust evaluation is if somebody continues to think about, meditate on, and dwell on what has been said through the ministry of the word while it has been engaged. But other than that, I am not sure whether I've really had any effective evaluation, although I have had people come back to me months and even years later and tell me that they remember a particular thing that I shared or preached.

Dan also experienced feedback concerning his sermons and came to an interesting realization that he was often more effective when he was the least prepared:

I would say how [my preaching] was effective: many times I find out with people actually coming to me. Sometimes I had a service member both in garrison and as well as in the field saying, "You just preached on an issue that was very near and dear to my heart. I needed to hear that." So I've had people come to me reflecting upon what I said. More often than not when people came and told me how that day or that last week really spoke to their hearts was the one time that I felt I wasn't able to prepare. So I realized then that there is just as much importance not just in physically and mentally

preparing but really praying and asking for God's guidance, because when my delivery sucked, God still used that effectively not for my own personal ego but for their personal current need.

Dan realized the importance of not just physically and mentally preparing but also of praying and asking God's guidance for the effectiveness of the sermon. Similarly, Ed, who also spoke of asking people for feedback, quickly made the point that the real metric of effectiveness was seeing growth and impact in the faith of the men. He pointed out that the effectiveness of the sermon was not about the number of people who heard it, but rather about the impact and growth one sees in individual's lives.

Well, the one evaluative thing that comes to mind might not have anything to do with the question, but to me, something I've learned from the new deployment is that numbers don't mean a lot. It doesn't really matter how many people come to the service. It's nice if there's a good group, but you realize God tends to be working through a smaller group through which he uses that smaller group for them to reach out into their communities; to the people that they are most comfortable and familiar with. I think we all tend to get down on the fact that there's such a small number that attend worship services in the field.... [We should be] content to work with the few that the Lord brings you.

Frank answered the question, "What evaluative reflections do you have with your experience with preaching in the field?" from a military organizational approach. He immediately mentioned the *Measures of Performance* and *Measures of Effectiveness*, two elements of military organizational staff work. Although these measurements have great bearing on how the military makes decisions and addresses issues that arise within its ranks, it is not necessarily applicable to the discussion of effective field preaching.

Frank additionally addressed the measures of effectiveness from the perspective of advising the commander on morale. He replied to the question:



That's a great question. And I'm all for...there's this thing within the military, as you probably know, Measures of Performance and Measures of Effectiveness... and I'm a firm believer in applying those to what chaplains do. I came up with basically fifteen categories of how we advise the commander of our morale. And it's basically from discipline issues, UCMJ issues, to weapons revocation, PT, standards, counseling issues, financial issues, and you get that report and you get it back and you say, "Now where did it all start, what units did it start with?" and now I can identify certain issues that I can address to that unit. Then my preaching addresses those issues that they're struggling with. So I am evaluating, and that is getting back to your idea of quantitative versus qualitative. I am using quantitative information to provide a qualitative response to fix a situation. Now the situation may be one person or it may be organizational so then my preaching is then geared towards that so then I can see the effect as those numbers begin to get better.

Although Frank's fifteen categories that measure morale may be a useful tool in advising the commander on the morale of his men and may very well inform the topics of a sermon, they do not necessarily correlate to the effectiveness of those sermons in the field. Further study on the relationship between unit morale and sermon delivery would be necessary in order to validate or dispute this claim.

### **Summary of Findings**

In this study, six military chaplains with field experience answered sixteen interview questions. Their responses to these questions shed light on the problems and challenges unique to preaching in the field environment and the methods the chaplains utilized for overcoming those challenges. All six chaplains were quickly able to recall field-preaching experiences that were impactful to them, and all six readily discussed the various challenges they had faced. They delineated the preparation techniques they had used, including oral preparation and methods of identifying and refining exegetical topics. The chaplains' interview responses revealed that the most impactful practice for preparing their sermons had been

their own devotions, which included prayer and meditation. The participants further described how that practice influenced their sermon delivery. They consistently held to an extemporaneous delivery style that in only one case included the use of notes. They affirmed the importance of voice in the field environment, as well as the need to maintain physical fitness. Their evaluative reflections acknowledged the same challenges that other pastors face in determining the effectiveness of their preaching, while adding a unique element— the importance of the shared experience between the chaplain and his men and the powerful effect that this presence of the chaplain in the field had on the soldiers and Marines to whom the chaplain was ministering.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Open air preaching has been a tradition of Christianity since the earliest accounts of preaching recorded in the Gospels and Acts. From the Apostles to the great Methodist preachers of the Great Awakening, the tradition continued. A contemporary version of the practice of open air preaching can be found in the work of military chaplains who have served our armed forces during the recent overseas conflicts of our nation. The anecdotal evidence presented in chapter one indicates that there are significant challenges involved in a military field preaching ministry—challenges brought on by weather, distance, combat, personnel movement, and most importantly, limitations of time and other resources.

These accounts raise a number of questions. How were these chaplains able to be successful in their ministries despite these overwhelming conditions? What particular challenges did these military chaplains face when they preached in the open air, and how did they overcome those challenges? How can chaplains today learn from prior experiences and become adept at preaching in the field with similar challenges? How do those who preach in such rudimentary circumstances prepare and deliver their sermons? Can preachers and missionaries today also learn and benefit from the valuable lost art of open air preaching by examining the work of these chaplains?

As a military chaplain who personally experienced the challenges of field ministry, my purpose for this study was to explore how military chaplains might effectively preach sermons to personnel in the field environment. During this study I considered four probing questions about conducting ministry in that environment:

1. What methods do chaplains use while they prepare sermons to preach in the field? 2. What delivery techniques/practices do chaplains use while preaching in the field? For example: To what extent do chaplains use notes in the delivery of sermons in the field? 3. How do chaplains evaluate the effectiveness of their field preaching? 4. What lessons have chaplains learned from their field preaching experience that may be beneficial to other chaplains in the field? I also conducted a literature review and a qualitative examination of six interviews of chaplains with field experience to answer these questions.

### **Summary of the Study**

In chapter one, I opened this study with anecdotal evidence from military chaplains who served in Vietnam and the Civil War. These stories identified several significant challenges to military field preaching and field ministry: challenges brought on by weather, distance, combat, personnel movement, and most importantly, limitations of time and other resources.

Chapter two represents a survey of the available literature bearing upon the subject of how chaplains might effectively prepare and deliver sermons in the field. My examination proved to be enlightening by revealing a number of practices that will aid a chaplain in overcoming the challenges encountered in this unique preaching environment. The first was the importance of prior knowledge—

knowledge one gains from study before entering the field environment—which John Broadus, in his book *On The Preparation And Delivery Of Sermons*, calls “general preparation.” A second practice noted in the literature review was meditation and daily devotions, which became critical in the preparation process due to the lack of available resources in the field. My study also revealed the need for an exegetical method that provides simplicity and clarity to the topic preached and an exegetical method that includes a redemptive approach. The method that appeared in the literature that fulfills this requirement was Bryan Chapell’s *Christ Centered Preaching*, including the use of a “Fallen Condition Focus.” I continued the study to examine how preparation may be accomplished within the field context, revealing that immediate preparation must also involve a process for organizing the points of the sermon in a way that can be developed orally or with a minimal amount of writing.

Additionally during the literature review I studied oral methods of preparation to include processes for internalizing the message and examined methods of delivery that could prove beneficial for use in a field environment. Due to the limitations of time and resources encountered in a field environment, I focused on delivery methods that required only minimal written preparation, or none at all, and settled on the practice of extemporaneous preaching and delivery without notes. Lastly, I researched the aspects of delivery necessary for speakers to be effective while facing the rigors of the field environment, to include voice, pathos, and physical fitness.

In chapter four, I presented my qualitative study results. For the study, six military chaplains with field experience had responded to sixteen interview questions. I designed the questions to elicit responses concerning the problems and challenges unique to preaching in the field environment, so that I could examine the methods and practices that chaplains utilize for overcoming these unique challenges. All six chaplains were quickly able to recall field-preaching experiences that had impacted them, and all six discussed various challenges that they faced in preparing and delivering field sermons. They discussed the preparation techniques they had utilized, including oral preparation and various methods for identifying and refining exegetical topics. They revealed that the most impactful practice for preparing their sermons was their own devotions, to include prayer and meditation, and specifically described how their personal devotions impacted their sermon delivery. The participating chaplains consistently held to an extemporaneous delivery style that in only one case included the use of notes. They affirmed the importance of voice in the field environment as well as the need to maintain physical fitness. Their evaluative reflections acknowledged the same challenges that pastors experience in determining the effectiveness of their preaching, and yet acknowledged a unique element, that being the importance of the shared experience the chaplain had with his men and how their presence in the field had a powerful effect upon the soldiers and Marines to whom they were ministering.

## Discussion of Findings

### *Preparation Methods Used*

The first question I sought to answer through this study was “What methods do chaplains use while they prepare sermons to preach in the field?” John A. Broadus, in his work *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, discusses the importance of what he calls “general preparation” and challenges all preachers to involve themselves in constant study because the best sermons rely on the accumulated past personal experiences of the pastor. He explains, “The sermons that require the least time in immediate preparation are frequently better than sermons laboriously created through long hours of intense study. This is true because they have used materials accumulated in the mind through months and years and now remembered in favorable circumstances.”<sup>202</sup> In a field preaching experience, general preparation is even more important, due to the lack of time and resources necessary for immediate study.

The anecdotal evidence and the testimony of the six chaplains confirmed the challenges to preparation that preachers face in field conditions, as well as the need of these preachers to rely on prior knowledge. This prior knowledge included previously prepared sermon material, as Chuck’s five point “hip pocket sermon” and Frank’s “ready to go” “pocket sermons” demonstrated. Dan attested to his reliance on “past experience, past sermons that I have done” that could be brought to memory and applied to the immediate context. Ed as well noted that he frequently deferred back to passages with which he was most familiar, adding that he tended to

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<sup>202</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 238.

use texts that his audience would also know well. In fact, focusing on texts that were familiar to the preacher was a theme throughout the interviews regarding overcoming the challenges to preaching that one faces in a field environment. This demonstrates the importance of Broadus' general preparation and underscores that a previously prepared, simple gospel message can significantly impact a field ministry by reminding personnel in the field of the divine in the midst of an extremely stressful environment.

Yet Broadus also cautions us concerning the need to remain relevant to the immediate context. He states, "No person can keep fresh who does not put fresh material in every sermon."<sup>203</sup> A chaplain in the field must therefore seek to put fresh material into the sermons in order to make the message relevant to the audience. This shows that there is still a need for immediate preparation.

Similar recollections of field ministry from all six chaplains revealed that spending time with the men among whom the chaplain ministers is another form of immediate preparation. All six expressed that time spent with their men affected the messages they delivered. This time with the men was necessary to not only build rapport and gain confidence with the troops, but also to endure their same suffering and by doing so gain insight into their specific needs. In his interview, Frank spoke of his reliance on long-term preparation but admitted needing to adapt his messages to the immediate context of the audience. He said that he achieved this by being involved in the experiences of the soldiers and by, in his sermons, addressing the challenges they were encountering. Adam recalled spending a long day with his

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 241.



Marines and at the last minute deciding to change the point of his message to address an immediate need of his men. Frank spoke about how he had realized that his sermons needed to be brief and to the point, but at the same time they needed to be adaptive and tailored to the immediate needs of his audience. In order to achieve this adaptability, he utilized dialogue in his sermons. Dialoguing with the men helped to draw them out and lead them toward an application of the gospel that fit within their circumstances. The theme of spending time with one's men as a form of immediate preparation was apparent in all six interviews and reinforced the need for a chaplain to be flexible and to identify with the audience's particular situation, their immediate need, for the express purpose of bringing a redemptive message directly into the moment. Although spending time spent with one's men was a consistent theme, it was not the primary means of immediate preparation that the study participants reported. The principal means of immediate preparation was their reliance upon devotions, time spent in prayer, and reflection upon scripture.

Therefore, chaplains in the field do not rely solely on their prior or general preparation, but they also utilize immediate preparation in the form of time with their men and, ultimately, reliance on prayer, devotions, and scripture meditation. This ultimate reliance on personal devotions was also apparent in the literature review; David W. Smartt reported that private devotions were critical for his process of preparing sermons in the field:

I believe strongly that the field preaching experience requires the seasoning of fresh and vibrant moments of personal reflection and prayer. As I take the time to gather my thoughts and my spirit—to focus my prayers—to provide time for

reflection and insight, I am better able to preach a current and inspiring message to meet the needs of the soldier in the field.<sup>204</sup>

All six chaplains who participated in this study confirmed Smartt's belief when they noted their heavy reliance on prayer and devotions for preparing sermons in the field. They attested that a chaplain must constantly avail himself of what God is saying in his word: the very act of coming to God, experiencing him in the midst of the field environment, in a personally transformational way, ultimately became the source for their messages. If a chaplain does not allow scripture and the Holy Spirit to transform his heart in the midst of his own circumstances, it would stand to reason that the chaplain's message would not transform the hearts of his men, who are facing the same environmental challenges. In preparing to preach in the field, chaplains must rely on their prior preparation and study and their immediate reflection on the circumstances within the field environment, but then they must also bind these two things together with heartfelt prayer and meditation upon the scriptures. Through all these examples from both the literature and the interviews, this study confirms the practice of private devotions, including prayer and meditation, as critical to the immediate preparation of sermons in the field.

Meditating on scripture and applying it to the sermon are also critical for internalizing one's message. Broadus speaks about creating a clear rendition of the sermon in the preacher's mind as an effective means to prepare for extemporaneous delivery.<sup>205</sup> The chaplain's reliance on prayer and devotional material reflects a

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<sup>204</sup> Smartt, 17.

<sup>205</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 273.

means to achieve this by making the message part of the chaplain's own spiritual life and therefore completely internalizing it. The six chaplains addressed the necessity of internalizing their messages by going over the sermons in their heads, practicing and refining their outlines by process of mental exercise. Three of the chaplains who relied heavily on their devotions stated that preachers must completely internalize their sermons in order to engage their audience. Brad reported that he would completely internalize his messages and preach with no notes. He said that he did not need notes, but rather, "you just know what you want to say because it has so preached and inflicted you with repentance but also joy, so when you stand up, you can say it."

From the interviews, it was evident that the chaplains thought it very important to internalize their sermons, to make the material personal in such a way that it became part of them. This meditative, devotional practice of internalizing the material represents an oral preparation method similar to Clyde Fant's method. Fant rejected the use of written techniques of preparation over the use of constructing the sermon orally, or, in his words, "in the medium that will eventually be used."<sup>206</sup> He proposed producing an oral manuscript (rather than a written outline), consisting of a string of *thought blocks* that are similar to the rough draft of a written manuscript. The arrangement of these thought blocks and their connecting material, once the preacher practiced and refined it orally, would result in the sermon being etched into the preacher's mind. The method of composing a sermon via oral rehearsal is itself a process of internalization that could be easily adopted

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<sup>206</sup> Fant, 167.

for use in the field and would fit within the chaplain's reliance on devotional prayer and reflection on the scriptures. However, this study did not inquire whether the six chaplains in their sermon preparations had utilized similar oral practices.

The idea of simplicity and clarity was another theme that emerged during this study. In his writings, Haddon Robinson emphasizes the importance of public speaking being centered on a single idea or single theme.<sup>207</sup> Hugh Litchfield agrees and asserts that sermons should also only have one point.<sup>208</sup> Richard Storrs advises us similarly: "Be careful that the plan of your sermon is simple, natural, progressive, easily mastered, and is thoroughly imbedded in your mind."<sup>209</sup> The sermon being imbedded in one's mind is very important for chaplains in the field who are unable to use any notes or other memory aids. It is also crucial for the audience, for if the preacher is unable to remember a point, it will be impossible for the people to remember it. As Wilbur Ellsworth reminds us, "Memory is the foundational way in which sermons live beyond the moment."<sup>210</sup> However, passages of scripture often lend themselves to a wide variety of topics. Preachers therefore need a method for focusing the sermon during its formation into a singular, memorable theme.

Chaplains need a method that they can utilize in the field that will enable them to produce a clear, single idea that will serve in the creation of a memorable sermon and will impact the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines with a clear

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<sup>207</sup> Robinson, 35.

<sup>208</sup> Litchfield, 17.

<sup>209</sup> Storrs, 108.

<sup>210</sup> Ellsworth, 102.

redemptive message. Bryan Chapell's *Christ Centered Preaching* offers a solution to this need, particularly with the use of the "Fallen Condition Focus."<sup>211</sup> Although Ed, Brad, and Chuck did not report using this technique in the field, they did agree about the need for a singular focus. Even Ed, who stated that he had no intentional technique, admitted that one must have an agenda, some structure that dictates where the sermon will go, or the people will get lost. Both Brad and Chuck described a redemptive, exegetical technique that they utilized, which involved examining the passage, the audience, and the circumstances that the men were experiencing. But the remaining half of the chaplains mentioned using Chapell's technique, stating that it helped them to become more effective and more concise in their sermons. Adam's reliance on the techniques of Christ Centered Preaching allowed him to identify a clear redemptive focus for his message, which in turn enabled him to prepare the message mentally and deliver it extemporaneously. Frank and Dan both expressed that they found Christ Centered Preaching to be an effective tool for field preaching that one could easily use to prepare sermons via a process of mental exercise. They also attested to its ability to overcome the lack of preparation time that chaplains experience in the field and said that it helped them to focus and apply a sermon's message concisely.

This study has provided an answer to my initial question, "What methods do chaplains use while the prepare sermons to preach in the field?" Due to the challenges of limited time and resources in the field, chaplains rely heavily on their prior knowledge and experience, or what John Broadus calls general preparation.

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<sup>211</sup> Chapell, 118.

Yet chaplains do not rest solely on this but endeavor to spend time with their men, gaining immediate relevance within the context of their situation. Through prayer, devotions, and meditation on the scripture, chaplains produce sermons with minimal written material. They focus the topic of the sermon on a single, salient point that provides clarity for delivery and is memorable for the audience. Chaplains utilize techniques like Bryan Chapell's Christ Centered Preaching in order to determine a salient focus and build a redemptive, exegetical sermon that provides a vehicle for the gospel in the midst of great challenges. They prepare for delivery with oral methods and mental rehearsal, which allows them to deliver their sermons under variable conditions and without the aid of notes.

#### *Delivery Techniques & Practices*

The second question that I intended this study to answer was "What delivery techniques/practices do chaplains use while preaching in the field?" More specifically, "To what extent do chaplains use notes in the delivery of sermons in the field?" This compound question can be quickly answered. All six of the participating chaplains confirmed that they had employed an extemporaneous method of delivery, and only two acknowledged the use of notes, though even in these cases, the use of notes was minimal, including for example an outline on a 3x5 card. The chaplains' use of an extemporaneous approach was not surprising, since the challenges present during field delivery are not conducive to the use of notes. In fact, three of the chaplains responded that their use of notes in the field during delivery failed them, due to the environment in which they preached. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that the very challenges of the field environment make

a noteless delivery necessary. Additionally, Adam and Brad both spoke of a need to address their soldiers and Marines directly in order to keep them engaged, despite their exhaustion after a long day in the field. This study also uncovered a cultural need among the soldiers for their chaplains to preach without notes.

The challenges of exhaustion and the distractions of the field conditions make it essential for chaplains to remain engaged with their audience. Frank and Chuck both talked about the necessity to connect with the audience in a personal, relaxed, and conversational way. Uniquely, Frank even describing utilizing interactive dialogue to accomplish this and tied the need to be interactive to a need to preach without notes. Brad acknowledged the need to keep the attention of the audience; however, he articulated as a cultural expectation the men's desire to feel like they were being spoken to directly. Chuck concurred that the men held a cultural expectation to be spoken to directly and said that he had to accommodate this expectation in order to keep his soldiers engaged. However, he did not describe this expectation as unique to the culture of the military, but rather claimed that it is the standard means of delivery that people expect today. The cultural requirement of speaking directly to one's audience members mandates a noteless delivery. People want you to look at them, to talk directly to them. People expect a direct, down to earth approach that is personal and conversational. In this "talk directly to me" culture, there is no room for notes. Chaplains in the field must preach extemporaneously and without notes, and utilize what John Broadus calls "Free Delivery."<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 271.

John Broadus confirms the cultural need for preachers to speak directly to the people. He states that the most important advantage of extemporaneous preaching is that people “like a minister to look at them and to share directly with them.”<sup>213</sup> It stands to reason therefore that if even back in the later nineteenth century people had a cultural need for speakers to speak directly and genuinely to them, this need may very well have been present throughout America’s history. This need remarkably resembles Aristotle’s *ethos* of public speaking, which addresses how the audience perceives and accepts the authenticity of the speaker.

Another element of public speaking that is significant within the discussion of extemporaneous delivery is the pathos of the speaker. David Smartt writes that in order to preach effectively to his soldiers in the field, he had to speak to their hearts. For Smartt, speaking to their hearts entailed speaking with authority and warmth. For when he was “able to preach the message I feel in my heart – [I was] more effective in preaching to the hearts of my solders.”<sup>214</sup> Fred R. Lybrand also states that the purpose of an extemporaneous delivery style is to get preachers to connect with the audience in the moment of sermon delivery. He encourages people to speak from the heart and not from a memorized sermon.<sup>215</sup> Further, Lybrand asserts that effective delivery not only includes a natural style but is also passionate and reflects one’s personality. For Lybrand, the key to effective delivery is not technique but

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Smartt, 21.

<sup>215</sup> Lybrand, 20.



heart,<sup>216</sup> and this heartfelt preaching is accomplished when a preacher abandons his notes and preaches from his passion.

The chaplains in this study confirmed that the soldiers and Marines in the field were better able to connect with their messages if they were personally engaging and passionate. Frank explained that when he abandoned his written notes, he was able to preach from the heart. This “preaching from the heart” enabled him to express passion and to connect with his audience, thereby making him a more relevant and effective speaker. Dan also spoke of connecting to his audience by abandoning his notes and “speaking from the heart.” He said: “There were times when I actually came prepared with notes and started off, but because the crowd was responding vocally to it I just shut down the notes and preached right out of the heart and it was well received.” Dan then admitted that whenever he consulted his notes, “the depth of content came out, but the heart may have been missing sometimes.” It is clear that a heartfelt delivery significantly improved the effectiveness of field preaching for the chaplains and was directly related to their preaching without notes.

Broadus identified four techniques of “Free Delivery,” preaching extemporaneously without notes.<sup>217</sup> I have already addressed three of these techniques in detail: oral preparation and rehearsal, simplicity, and prayer. The chaplains’ interview responses firmly established how these three techniques contribute to the effectiveness of preaching in the field. The fourth technique,

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<sup>216</sup> Lybrand, 125.

<sup>217</sup> Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 1979, 245.

physical fitness, was also found to be a contributing factor for effective sermon delivery in the field. Broadus speaks of a relationship between good physical and mental health and the keenness of short-term memory, which he claims is extremely important when preaching without any written notes. Richard Storrs also attests to the phenomenon that good physical condition aids in the ability to organize thoughts rapidly and promotes sound preaching, particularly when the preaching is noteless.<sup>218</sup> The relationship between one's physical health and preaching ability is more pronounced in the field, considering the physical demands of a field environment and the inevitable exhaustion one encounters there. Four of the six chaplains who participated in this study indicated that they had had to endure significant physical challenges while maintaining the ability to preach. Chuck even made an assertion remarkably close to John Broadus', claiming that physical fitness contributes to a higher mental alertness. Brad, however, made an even more significant observation when he likened physical fitness to being all things to all men. The chaplain's role is often one of a cross cultural missionary, and Brad insisted that one must be physically fit in order to minister to a physically fit culture. He likened staying fit to speaking his men's language. Three other chaplains shared this view, acknowledging the need for stamina in order to work effectively in the field but also addressing the cultural need to communicate well to those within the physically fit culture of the military.

The literature review also addressed the importance of voice, particularly the importance of volume, projection, and clarity. Although the literature centered on

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<sup>218</sup> Storrs, 151.

information and techniques that speakers used during the nineteenth century, before that advent of microphones, the findings are still relevant today. Four of the six chaplains said that voice was an important element of effective field preaching. Three said that volume and projection were crucial for preaching effectively, particularly when no microphone was available or when significant distractions were present. The chaplains' testimonies confirm that without a microphone, one must not only be loud enough to be heard but must articulate in such a way that the audience can easily understand the speaker's words. Additionally, the speaker must achieve this volume of delivery in a manner that it does not lead to voice fatigue. The experiences of our chaplains in the field confirm the continued importance of volume, projection, and clarity, and that John Broadus' teaching is still relevant for today. Two of our chaplains also attested to a cultural need to not be regarded as timid. They confirmed that a chaplain who serves with the military needs to speak with authority, or as Brad stated, "have a command voice and a command presence." Chaplains who preach in the field must renew their study of voice projection, volume, and clarity and come to the field confident of their message, speaking it boldly.

### *Evaluative Reflection of Field Preaching*

The third research question dealt with how chaplains evaluate the effectiveness of their field preaching. Chaplains struggled to evaluate the effectiveness of their field sermons in the same way pastors struggle to evaluate the sermons they preach to regular congregations. Three chaplains shared that they experienced difficulty evaluating the effectiveness of their own field sermons. One

chaplain described an evaluative method that he utilized, consisting of fifteen metrics. However, these metrics were more helpful for understanding a particular unit's morale, rather than the effectiveness of one's field preaching. Chuck, Dan, and Ed spoke of the need for feedback to measure the effectiveness of their field preaching. They suggested that the soldiers or Marines might offer such feedback, or the chaplain himself could request it. They acknowledged, however, that these options did not provide them with dependable, evaluative feedback. In the end, these three chaplains relied on people approaching them after a service, or even a significant amount of time later, and they gauged such responses over time. For Chuck, the best metric for gauging the effectiveness of field preaching was if the soldiers were still thinking about the sermon later. Ed admitted to asking people for feedback but quickly made the point that a real metric of effectiveness was seeing growth and impact in the faith of the men. He made a good point that effectiveness was not about the numbers one had in attendance, but rather the impact and growth one could observe in individual's lives.

For Adam, effective preaching in the field was more about attaining a standard than experiencing positive feedback from the audience. His standard was to preach clearly and concisely sermons containing biblical exposition that was relevant to the lives of his men, "reaching them where they are at," and to back up his sermons by living out a genuine presence in their midst. Adam was not the only chaplain who expressed that his presence had a major impact on the effectiveness of his field preaching. Brad as well held that effective field preaching was based on a solid understanding of the application of the gospel to the men's current

circumstances, the presence of the chaplain through shared misery earning him the right to speak. For Brad and Adam, effective field preaching entails the application of scripture and the gospel in a way that is relevant to the lives of their men, while their own lives present the gospel during collective field experiences—the chaplains earning the right to speak by suffering the same trials that bind their men together. Here Adam and Brad present to us how the *esprit de corps* of combat can be used as a vehicle of the gospel.

Although chaplains experience the same challenges as pastors in determining the effectiveness of their preaching, they also have a unique opportunity to increase their effectiveness through the shared experience they have with the men. A chaplain's presence in the field can powerfully affect the soldiers and Marines to whom the chaplain is ministering. However, this study did not uncover any reliable means for determining the effectiveness of preaching in the field. And due to the general lack of skilled churchmen present during field ministry, it may be necessary to solicit other chaplains to evaluate one's sermon delivery in the field.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### *Lessons Learned*

The last research question that I set out to answer through this study was “What lessons have chaplains learned from their field preaching experience that may be beneficial to other chaplains in the field?” This question serves as an overarching question that the literature review and the six chaplains' interviews were able to answer successfully. Therefore, this question serves as an excellent platform from which to address, in summary, the findings of this study.

Significant hurdles present a challenge to effective field ministry and, in particular, to preaching in the field. These hurdles may be related to the environment, such as bad weather or poor lighting, or they may be more personal in nature, such as exhaustion, limited preparation time, or resource shortages. The audience in a field environment may also face challenges that can affect the preaching event—challenges such as exhaustion, hunger, and the distractions of combat. All these challenges work together to make the practice of preaching in the field a difficult skill to master. These challenges require that chaplains rely on some very important fundamentals of sermon preparation and delivery. While pastors may depend on many tools available to them for the preparation of their sermons, tools like commentaries, computers, and the Internet, chaplains need to come to the field prepared with material that has already become viscerally part of their personal life and preaching experience. John Broadus calls this type of material general preparation, material that stems from a long-term study in the life of the preacher. We saw clear evidence of this practice among our six chaplains, who carried with them certain “pocket sermons,” upon which they relied whenever they needed to provide a seemingly impromptu message. Yet, as Broadus and our chaplains suggest, each sermon must also be fresh and relevant, incorporating immediate material. This is especially true during longer deployments, in which one must present new material daily.

Both the literature review and the testimony of our chaplains illustrate the need for chaplains in the field to focus their immediate preparation on a liberal amount of prayer, as well as personal devotions and meditations particularly on the

scripture passage they plan to use in the sermon. The preparation process should seek to make the message come alive in the heart of the preacher and therefore enable him to communicate directly with the audience through passion and conviction. Immediate preparation should also include a method of oral preparation and rehearsal. Broadus includes oral preparation among his techniques for extemporaneous delivery without notes, and a number of our chaplains employed this type of technique when preparing their sermons. One strength of oral preparation and rehearsal is that one can easily accomplish it during a time of meditation, while on a march, or while exercising. The chaplain should develop the habit of engaging every opportunity to reflect on the message of his sermon, allowing his current circumstances to help mold it and refine it.

Further, a chaplain deployed to a field setting should not neglect spending time with his troops. The immediate experience with the men in the field is extremely important to preaching in that environment. The chaplain should view spending time with his men as a means of immediate preparation and as a way to connect with the people under his care. Adam spoke of the credibility that he gained from living with the same challenges and being exposed to the same discomfort that his men endured. He recalled that it brought him credibility with his audience and changed the way he thought about preaching in a church setting; he realized the need to build a rapport with a congregation. As the time Adam spent with his Marines gave his preaching immediate significance, the men listened to him more because of the rapport that had grown between them and because of their shared experience. Adam realized that when he returned to the chapel or congregation, he

needed to build the same confidence with those to whom he would be ministering. Although circumstances often pull chaplains away from the creative process of preparing sermons, the chaplains who participated in this study underscored that it is equally important to effective preaching for chaplains to spend time with their men.

From the anecdotal evidence and testimony of our chaplains, we learn that in the context of field preaching, with all its inherent challenges, a chaplain must be ready at all times to bring a relevant message to the men in the field, and to accomplish this without the aid of notes. Adam recalled how he had to preach after dark without lights to an audience that was tired from a long day in the field. Although he came prepared to preach with notes in hand, he had to abandon his manuscript when darkness fell and he was unable to use lighting. Frank shared how ministry in the field had forced him to abandon his manuscript and taught him to preach from the heart. As he learned that he needed to preach from an outline in his head, he was able to connect to the audience: “It has helped me to be able to connect, to be real, relevant, and relational in preaching.” Dan spoke of how when he abandoned his notes, his preaching became more powerful. But when he returned to his notes, the content was there but the passion was gone. Additionally, the chaplains spoke of the need to keep the attention of the men and to speak to them directly. They attested to a cultural need to connect with the audience and insisted that a noteless approach was necessary to accomplish this. This testimony echoes the teaching of John Broadus, who notes the same cultural need and insists that effective preaching must be extemporaneous and done without notes.



Another lesson of field preaching is the need for flexibility. The chaplains must be able either to deliver a sermon without any immediate preparation or to tailor the sermon at the last minute to some immediate need. Adam spoke of a preaching experience where he came to the field prepared to deliver a particular message, but after spending the day with his men, it was apparent that they needed to hear something else. He had to change the message of his sermon at the last minute. Broadus teaches that an extemporaneous method of delivery has the advantage of encouraging the development of speaking without immediate preparation. Adam's example not only confirms the need to develop the ability to speak extemporaneously, but also encourages chaplains to remain flexible, ensuring that they are using the time they spend with their men to good effect. Chaplains have to be able to tailor their sermons at the last minute so that their messages can be comforting to their immediate audience.

Simplicity and clarity are elements that emerged from the literature review and that the chaplains confirmed in their interviews. An extemporaneous method of delivery requires the preacher to work hard and simplify his message to be clear and memorable. Likewise, in the field, chaplains need to make their sermon's point clear to the soldiers and Marines to whom they are preaching. The chaplains in this study expressed that a chaplain needs to be direct and to the point in order to keep the attention of the audience. Chuck relayed "the requirement of focus, to focus or to neck-down to the most salient expression of a point as possible. People in the military don't like multiplied words, they don't like for instance what might be considered academic language." This study has shown how preaching in the field

drives chaplains to seek to be as straightforward and simple as possible and causes them to work harder to focus on what is really important for the people of God to hear from the given text. The literature review suggested that this simplicity and clarity could be achieved utilizing Bryan Chapell's Christ Centered Preaching technique and the "Fallen Condition Focus." Three of the six chaplains stated that they used this method in the preparation of field sermons to great effect. They relayed how it brought clarity to their sermons and allowed them to provide a redemptive message that they could easily apply to the situation of their audience. The chaplains also described how application played into their field sermons. Brad spoke of how the field preaching experience changed the content of his sermons, making them heavier on application rather than the exegetical work so commonly expected in a traditional church setting. Preaching in a field environment causes one to work harder to focus on what one wants to say, to focus more on what is really important for the people of God to hear from the particular text. The message should be a Christ centered, gospel sermon that is clear and passionately delivered, spoken directly to the people in a way that can be heard and received by the men.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The techniques and practices that military chaplains have utilized to overcome the challenges of preaching in a field environment remain significant to both continued chaplain ministry and to the greater church. Opportunities abound to address congregations in the open air without the technical aids and comfort associated with a formal church setting. Pastors and chaplains alike need to have the confidence, in the moment, to proclaim the gospel when the opportunity presents

itself and not shy away from an uncomfortable environment or a lack of immediate preparation.

### *Recommendations for Chaplains*

Chaplains should involve themselves in continuous study and avail themselves of preaching opportunities to develop confidence and sermon material for future use in the field. They should practice the art of extemporaneous preaching with the goal of being comfortable to preach without notes and to preach at any time the moment presents itself. Chaplains should not neglect their own personal devotions, particularly the disciplines of prayer and meditation on scripture. During this meditative process, they should practice the formulation of sermon material while allowing the experience to minister to their own hearts and feed their passions. Chaplains should acquire methods that will aid them in developing a clear focus for their sermons. They may utilize Bryan Chapell's *Christ Centered Preaching* and the "Fallen Condition Focus," which I recommend based on the findings of this study, to provide a clear redemptive emphasis for their message and a suitable application for their audience. If they do not have a voice that can be heard without amplification, they should study the techniques of full vocal production<sup>219</sup> to improve their vocal quality and volume. If chaplains have not already developed a high level of athleticism, they should strive to adopt a lifestyle of physical fitness commensurate with the requirements of military service.

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<sup>219</sup> Fasol, 7.

*Recommendations for Pastors*

Additionally, the findings of this study are significant to the greater church. As pastors struggle with limited time for the preparation of their weekly sermons, the lessons learned in this study will challenge them in the ways they prepare and deliver their weekly messages to their congregations. This study encourages pastors to become confident to preach outside of comfortable settings—to preach anytime, anywhere and ultimately to review and, where needed, revise their philosophies of sermon preparation and delivery.

For the pastors who spend a lot of time in preparation reading numerous commentaries and conducting academic research, this study challenges them to not neglect time in heartfelt prayer and meditation on scripture. It is easy to work as if the effectiveness of the sermon depends on oneself, either out of a sense of obligation or pride in the quality of one's work. But one must not pursue these efforts at the expense of allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our own hearts and our preaching. The necessity of field preaching to rely on foundational practices like prayer and devotions should be a sober reminder that preachers may be tempted to rely on their own skills and education to produce their messages every week rather than on the spiritual encouragement of the Holy Spirit.

A number of the reasons that the study participants listed for delivering field sermons extemporaneously were rooted in the expectations of military culture. These cultural expectations may stem more from a generally held American belief than purely a military convention. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that

pastors should recognize their audiences' expectations regarding delivery and adopt a suitable delivery style that is acceptable to their listeners.

The demands on pastors are very high. As the week progresses, tension builds between the demands of spending time in preparation of the sermon and spending time with parishioners. This study identified a significant link between the time one spends with members of the congregation and the effectiveness of the preaching moment. As chaplains should not neglect to spend time with their troops, pastors of churches should be immediately involved in the experiences of their congregants and allow these experiences to guide the content and delivery of their sermons. In this context, pastors need to remain flexible with their messages, able to change them at the last minute to address a concern of those to whom they are ministering. Pastors must be flexible enough to tailor their sermon at the last minute so that it is comforting for their listeners. If a particular pastor has spent numerous hours in his study producing an outstanding sermon on the sovereignty of God and a child's death occurs on Sunday morning, he cannot proceed with the intended sermon without immediate revision, even if he must do this revision at the moment of delivery. Whatever the sermon was going to be, it must become a message about the comforting sovereignty of God in this child's life, the comforting sovereignty of God in the family's life, and the comforting sovereignty of God in the church's life. The pastor must spend time with the people and remain flexible even from the pulpit.

Furthermore, church ministries that bear a resemblance to the field conditions of a military deployment will also benefit from this study. For example,

the methods of preparation and delivery of field sermons utilized by chaplains could enhance the ministries of missionaries who preach in remote areas without the conveniences of a regular church setting. This may include sermons that ministers deliver to tribal people far from conventional settlements, where the same challenges of field preaching prevail, and where the need for strong volume production is necessary due to the absence of electronic amplification. Pastors who have the opportunity to deliver messages to sports teams may also benefit from this study when challenged in keeping the attention of their audience and overcoming the distractions prevalent in such surroundings. Graveside funeral services and outdoor weddings are also homiletic events that could utilize the practice of field preaching, or any situation where pastors do not regularly utilize extensive notes or the aid of sound systems and often have a need to overcome the challenges of their environment.

The techniques and practices that military chaplains have utilized to overcome the challenges of preaching in a field environment remain significant to both continued chaplain ministry and to the greater church. Chaplains need to avail themselves of these techniques and practices and not shy away from opportunities to preach in difficult field conditions. Particularly, chaplains should practice an oral means of preparation and delivery and avoid dependence upon notes. During preparation, they should not discount the importance of their own devotions and prayer life or neglect the time they spend with their men. For the church, opportunities abound to address congregations in the open air without the technical aids and comfort associated with a formal church setting. Pastors need to develop

their own extemporaneous style and the ability to speak with passion directly to the people, as well as the ability to provide a message with confidence when the moment arises, even without immediate preparation or notes. Pastors and chaplains alike need to build confidence to proclaim the gospel even in an uncomfortable or unfamiliar environment, as missionaries over the centuries have done so effectively.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

In my literature review I restricted my study to extemporaneous methods of preaching, with a particular focus of preaching without notes. It might be helpful in the future for a study to be conducted that examines other disciplines and fields of literature for more insight related to field preaching—such as literature covering public speaking for military leaders other than chaplains, lawyers or politicians speaking at open air events, or coaches in their work with athletes.

My study of physical fitness as it relates to a chaplain's ministry in the field revealed that it was significant to not only providing the chaplain the ability to preach under the rigors of the field environment, but may be very significant to another issue not covered in this study, the ethos of the chaplain in the field. A chaplain that is not able to overcome the physical challenges of the field environment may be unable to maintain the confidence of his troops. The resulting loss of character from the perspective of the men may result in the chaplain's field ministry being rendered ineffective. The data suggests that further study is needed to establish the relationship ethos, or the perceived character of the chaplain has with the effectiveness of field preaching. A question that might be considered is

“How might practices of preparation and delivery in field preaching undermine or strengthen soldiers’ confidence in a chaplain’s character?”

In this study, I was not able to delve deeply into the study of orality, or rather, oral methods of preparation such as Clyde Fant espouses. The data suggested that a significant link exists between the chaplain’s practice of devotions and the process of internalizing the message in preparation for delivery. However, I did not ask subsequent questions during the interviews to determine the role that oral methods of preparation and rehearsal played in this process of preparation prior to delivery. Oral methods of preparation may prove to be very suitable for chaplains in the field, and they deserve further investigation. Orality may also play a role in preparation for preaching in the church, particularly for those who practice an extemporaneous method of delivery.

The role that prayer and the devotional life of the chaplain played in the preparation of sermons impressed me as the most significant finding of this study. Further investigation could potentially establish the role of prayer and personal devotions in the sermon preparation and delivery of ministers for their church congregations. A question to consider could be “How does the quality of a minister’s devotional life translate to effective sermon delivery?”

This study revealed a lack of reliable metrics to gauge the effectiveness of field sermons. The chaplains who participated in the study were only able to gauge the effectiveness of their sermons based on the condition of their overall ministry and on direct feedback from their men. Further study could help to develop reliable metrics of sermon effectiveness. Such tools would prove helpful not only for



chaplains in the field, but also for ministers who serve in positions without elders to provide honest and well informed feedback.

For the purposes of this study, I viewed field ministry as centering on an expository sermon that the chaplain delivers in the midst of worship. Chaplains of other faiths may have different focuses in their provision of divine services during field ministry; therefore, they may have other means to overcome the challenges one encounters there. For example, further study may be required in order to identify the challenges and corresponding ministry methods of liturgical chaplains in the field.

#### *Closing Remarks*

The history of the church is full of examples of preachers delivering sermons in the difficult environment of the open air without the aid of notes or other supportive means of preparation or delivery. As I write this study, our nation has struggled through the challenges of sustained combat for over twelve years. A significant number of military chaplains have deployed to regions far from home and far from the conveniences of a regular church setting, and yet have provided sermons for their troops. Over numerous deployments and years of trial, these chaplains have developed techniques and practices that aid them in overcoming the challenges of field conditions. With this study, I sought to answer a number of questions regarding how particular chaplains prepare and deliver sermons in the military field environment in order to record their techniques and practices and encourage current and prospective chaplains to retain this knowledge for future use.

The study showed that chaplains utilize an extemporaneous, note-free delivery that they passionately direct to their men and develop through a number of oral and cognitive means. Their preparation centers on personal devotions, prayer, and scripture meditation. Furthermore, the study revealed that although the lack of time is a critical challenge for chaplains seeking to prepare their sermons, the time the chaplains spend with their men is just as critical to effective sermon development. Chaplains who are preparing to deploy with their unit into field conditions I would highly encourage to take note of these lessons and utilize them in their ministry. In particular I would urge chaplains to develop their ability to preach at a moments notice, as the chaplains in the Civil War were able to get off their horses and preach whenever they encountered a group of soldiers who had not heard a sermon in weeks. Every pastor as well needs to have done enough general preparation that he is ready to preach on a moment's notice when needed. Additionally, programs that train and equip military chaplains or missionaries who plan to serve in environments similar to the field should also consider incorporating extemporaneous techniques in their curricula and encourage their students to become effective as open air preachers. A simple exercise for students could be to send them outside with a previously unknown bible passage, to sit under a tree for forty-five minutes with only a bible and no paper, and to return to class with a fifteen-minute message prepared solely from their meditations. Lastly every pastor needs to understand the culture of his congregation well enough to know what use of written notes is effective in preaching to his people. How many pastors are doing what they think works best, without any real reflection on the culture at large or the

culture of their specific congregation? I challenge pastors to examine the cultural expectations of their congregations, to experiment with different delivery styles, including an extemporaneous notes-free delivery, and solicit feedback from a broad range of ages and backgrounds. I am convinced that the results will challenge their assumptions.

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