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PREPARE, DELIVER, SHEPHERD:
USING EVALUATION TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF
ETHOS IN PREACHING

By

WILLIAM H. WADE, JR.

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

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ABSTRACT

Preaching literature deals with the rhetorical categories of logos and pathos by thoroughly treating sermon preparation and delivery, but it largely ignores the impact of ethos in preaching. The purpose of this study was to explore how preachers use evaluation for understanding how pastoral relationships influence preaching. The study followed a qualitative research method, utilizing semi-structured interviews with six pastors, analyzed in a constant comparative method. The research explored perceptions of the pastoral relationship, evaluation, emotional intelligence, and ongoing sermon preparation. This study concluded that preachers improve receptivity of their sermons when they invest in shepherding relationships with their congregations through sermon feedback.

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CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARIES

Introduction to the Study

"Good sermon this morning, Pastor."

"Thank you, Marty."

Thus ends the evaluation of last week's sermon. For the most part, a preacher moves on to next week's sermon without expending much energy on evaluating the previous sermon. Last week's study, prayer, and writing culminate in the act of the sermon preached. Once the sermon has left the mouth of the preacher, the work of the sermon is finished. Or is it?

Preaching is a form of communication, and communication assumes a relationship between a speaker and a listener. The speaker has not communicated simply by speaking a message. That message must be received and interpreted by a listener. The speaker can only discern the effectiveness of the message transmission by receiving and analyzing feedback from the listener. Tim Muehlhoff and Todd Lewis illustrate this basic process as follows:

> When I speak with another person, I convey my thoughts through symbols that must be interpreted. The listener works to understand what my symbols stand for or represent. In turn, I seek to discern how my symbols are being interpreted. In short, communication is a reciprocal process of meaning making.[1]

Likewise, preachers must consider the reception and the response of their congregants as part of the reciprocal process of communicating their sermons.

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[1] Tim Muehlhoff and Todd V. Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 43.

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Many authors utilize Aristotle's classic categories of rhetoric in describing the communicative components of preaching. Logos, according to Bryan Chapell, describes the "verbal content of the message," pathos, "the emotive features of the message," and ethos, "the perceived character of the speaker."[2] Preachers largely address the logos of a sermon through sermon preparation – the exegetical and hermeneutical analysis and explanation of the scripture passage. The pathos of a sermon comes across through homiletics and the delivery of the sermon. Ethos, however, is much more difficult to define in practice. Ethos, as Muehlhoff and Lewis observe, "relies on the rather amorphous concept of source credibility and trustworthiness."[3] In the context of preaching, ethos represents the condition of the relationship that connects the preacher and the congregation.

Preachers of God's word must recognize the importance of the role of relationship in their preaching. Muehlhoff and Lewis note that "Aristotle deemed ethos as the most powerful mode of persuasion…."[4] A congregant's receptivity to a sermon is based more on the perceived relationship with the preacher than on the technical precision or eloquence of the sermon itself. John McClure, et. al., explain:

> Most congregational cultures contain a sense of the place of the preacher and the sermon in that community (both in the service of worship and in the wider life of the parish). The congregation tends to be open to the sermon when the people perceive that the preacher and the message are in continuity with congregational culture… The congregation tends to authorize a preacher and a message when the preacher speaks or acts (in the service of worship or beyond) in ways that are consistent with the expectations of the congregational culture.[5]

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[2] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 34.

[3] Muehlhoff and Lewis, 95.

[4] Ibid. See also Chapell, 34.

[5] John S. McClure and others, *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 129.

People define the role of the pastor in relationship to the church with different terms and emphases. When congregants feel that their expectations are being met concerning how the pastor should relate with them, they tend to receive the pastor's sermons with more contentment. However, when this perceived relationship becomes broken by conflict, or when the pastor relates in a way that does not match the congregants' expectations, then the communication process often breaks down.

This ethos component of communication is often overlooked in preaching literature. Chapell, for example, admits, "Although this book of homiletical method necessarily focuses on the elements of logos and pathos in preaching, the Bible's own emphases remind us that pastoral character remains the foundation of ministry."[6] If the relationship between the preacher and the congregation plays such a strong role in the effective communication of sermons, then why does most of the literature on preaching deal mostly with preparation and delivery?

The ultimate goal of this study is to explore how pastoral relationships influence the preaching process. Because relationships can be complex, there must be an entry point into understanding the nature of this relationship. How do preachers come to understand the ways their relationships with congregants impact the communication of their sermons? One must return to the aforementioned concept of evaluation.

Preachers often receive various forms of feedback on their sermons. This feedback can be negative or positive. "How many pastors," asks Francis Schaeffer, "have been smashed because their people have expected them to live up to an impossible ideal? And how many congregations have been injured by pastors who forgot that the people in

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[6] Ibid., 35.

their churches could not be expected to be perfect?"[7] Broken relationships can discourage the preacher and hinder the receptivity of the congregants. Positive feedback, if not received with humility, also can produce a relational hindrance in preaching. Chapell observes, "Congregational accolades for pulpit excellence may tempt one to put too much confidence in personal gifts, acquired skills, or a particular method of preaching."[8] Thus, positive feedback can bring too much focus on the pastor as a person rather than on the message from God's word. Evaluation will not solve relational crises, but it will begin to describe what is going on in the preacher-congregant relationship that might be enhancing or hindering communication of the gospel message. Preachers must have a way of evaluating their preaching that includes how their congregants perceive the status of this pastoral relationship.

Literature Review

This study addresses the intersection of two holes in preaching literature. As previously mentioned, preaching literature leans heavily on the rhetorical categories of logos and pathos in preaching (or preparation and delivery), but it remains largely silent on the ethos of preaching. Also, much of the preaching literature fails to address the use of evaluation in preaching. Teaching literature deals with a three-step process that may be described as plan-conduct-evaluate. However, preaching literature usually leaves out this third, analytical component: preparation-delivery-[missing evaluative component].[9] This study will explore how evaluation may be used as a tool for understanding the ethos

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[7] Francis A. Schaeffer, "The Weakness of God's Servants," in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 30.

[8] Chapell, 33.

[9] Donald Guthrie, interviewed by author, St. Louis, MO, February 9, 2011. Guthrie discusses this educational process in Donald C. Guthrie, "Christ-Centered Educational Ministry: An Overview of Frameworks and Practices," in *All for Jesus: A Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Covenant Theological Seminary*, ed. Robert A. Peterson and Sean Michael Lucas (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 209.

component of preaching. The literature review will begin by exploring the biblical and theological foundations on the preacher-congregation relationship. It will then survey current literature concerning three areas of scholarship: 1) evaluation, 2) emotional intelligence, and 3) sermon preparation and delivery.

Biblical and Theological Foundations on the Preacher-Congregation Relationship

The Bible itself is an act of communication between God the creator and his creation. God relates to humanity through his word, both written and incarnate: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."[10] Sidney Greidanus describes the importance of this relationship in the message of scripture: "...the canon intends to tell us about God - not God in the abstract, but God in relationship to his creation and his people, God's actions in the world, God's coming kingdom."[11] If one wants to understand the relationship that exists between a preacher of God's word and God's people, then one must start with scripture.

This study will build on three foundational principles from scripture. First, scripture confirms that the preacher of God's word stands in relationship with the congregation of God's people. Paul writes to Timothy, "I charge you in the presence of God… preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people…."[12] Paul's instructions to Timothy on the practice and the content of preaching is given in the

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[10] John 1:14. Unless otherwise specified, Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[11] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 112.

[12] 2 Tim. 4:1-5.

context of relationship with people. Preachers must view themselves standing in relationship between the word of God and the people of God.

Second, the Bible describes the relationship between the preacher and the congregation, but it does not necessarily define it. Jonathan Edwards, for example, takes 2 Corinthians 11:2 ("For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ,")[13] and applies the analogy of marriage to the relationship between preachers and their congregations. He explains, "The preaching of the gospel by faithful ministers, is the principal means that God uses for exhibiting Christ, his love and benefits to his elect people, and the chief means of their being sanctified, and so fitted to enjoy their spiritual bridegroom."[14] The scriptures do not limit the definition of this pastoral relationship to one particular image, but the pictures themselves inform one's understanding of the relationship.

The third principle is that the relationship between the preacher and the congregation influences the preaching itself. Concerning Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 11:3, Zack Eswine considers, "What was the issue that led Paul's Corinthian hearers into this potential for deception? The issue was preaching."[15] Conflict in the Corinthian church surrounded the peoples' evaluations of preaching. However, the competing evaluations of preaching in the Corinthian church were also symptoms of a deeper problem. Jouette Bassler concludes:

> Not only then was the effectiveness of Paul's ongoing leadership of the community being undermined, his very understanding and presentation of the gospel were being challenged. Clarity on both of these issues -

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[13] 2 Cor. 11:2.

[14] Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon 2: The Church's Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 23.

[15] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 241.

leadership and gospel - was essential if Paul was effectively to redress the ethical issues that were rocking the Corinthian church.[16]

In other words, in order to increase the effectiveness of his proclamation of the gospel, Paul addressed the nature of the relationship he experienced with the congregation.

Evaluation

The literature on evaluation, both in business and in educational settings, provides helpful guidance for preachers who wish to improve their communication of the gospel to their congregations. Robert Burns writes, "Learning in practice refers to the construction of knowledge that takes place as professionals grow through experience and reflection on that experience."[17] Preachers "learn in practice," in part, by receiving and analyzing feedback on their sermons.

This evaluation process can consist of both formal and informal methods. Few preachers utilize structured forms of evaluation with their congregations, but rely instead on informal evaluation. In her guidebook for evaluation practices, Rosemary Caffarella argues for valuing informal methods, "Although systematic or strategically planned evaluations are important, so are the more informal and unplanned evaluation activities."[18] However, she also points out that the nature of the preaching relationship itself makes the evaluative process more difficult. "For example, education and training programs whose major objectives are to foster changes in personal, organizational, and/or societal values and beliefs are especially difficult to evaluate."[19] Preachers particularly seek life change based on the message of the gospel. Thus, evaluative methods should

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[16] Jouette M. Bassler, "1 Corinthians 4:1-5," *Interpretation* 44, no. 2 (1990): 180.
[17] Robert W. Burns, "How Pastors Learn the Politics of Ministry Practice," *Religious Education* 97, no. 4 (2002): 309.
[18] Rosemary S. Caffarella, *Planning Programs for Adult Learners: A Practical Guide for Educators, Trainers, and Staff Developers*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 225.
[19] Ibid., 235.

provide insight for preachers to understand how their congregants are receiving and reacting to the preached word.

Emotional Intelligence

The second area of literature considered in this study deals with the emotional component of the preacher as a person, or as it is often termed in the literature, emotional intelligence. Goleman, et al., define this simply as "how leaders handle themselves and their relationships."[20] As Peter Scazzero writes, "The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader's internal life than with the leader's expertise, gifts, or experience."[21] This study will consider both the personal and the corporate aspects of emotional intelligence in the preacher.

Bare evaluation without healthy emotional intelligence can produce stress for the pastor on a personal level. "Emphasis on the power of ethos," writes Chapell, "without dependence on God's mercy has the potential to drive preachers either to arrogance or to despair."[22] Positive feedback can result in an over-dependence on the preacher's gifts and talents, while negative feedback can induce a spiral of despair. Unfortunately, preachers can become undone by emotional stress precisely in the context of relational evaluation from the congregation. "The numerous role expectations from self and others in the context of strongly held values and beliefs make clergy particularly susceptible to role conflict."[23] "Left unaddressed," David Gortner explains, "these issues become Achilles'

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[20] Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 6.

[21] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 20.

[22] Chapell, 39.

[23] Edward R. Kemery, "Clergy Role Stress and Satisfaction: Role Ambiguity Isn't Always Bad," *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 6 (2006): 562. Here Kemery cites S. W. Blizzard, *The Protestant Parish Minister: A*

heels for leaders: anxiety binds effective assertiveness and decision-leadership, patterns get repeated in continuous cycles of frustration, and subtle lack of interest leaves people questioning leaders' involvement."[24] Thus preachers must learn to differentiate themselves personally from the feedback received in the evaluation process.

Furthermore, the way preachers handle their emotional response to both positive and negative sermon evaluation affects the emotional state of the whole congregation. From a leadership perspective, "in any human group the leader has maximal power to sway everyone's emotions."[25] Much has been written about leading through emotional stress in the context of systems. The emotional state of every member of an organizational system impacts the functionality of the whole system. "Asking an entire community to change its ways… is dangerous. If leadership were about giving people good news, the job would be easy," assert Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky in their landmark work on systems leadership.[26]

Ironically, pastoral leadership consists precisely in giving people "good news" through the gospel message; however, leadership in the church is anything but easy. Why is this? In a way, people still perceive the message of the good news of the gospel of Christ in the context of loss because the gospel requires giving up false hopes and behaviors in exchange for Christ-centered hopes and behaviors. "People do not resist change, per se," Heifetz and Linsky explain, "People resist loss."[27] Evaluation can help preachers identify where congregants are experiencing this perception of loss and

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Behavioral Science Interpretation, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Monograph Series, no. 5 (Storrs, CT: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1985).

[24] David T. Gortner, "Retraining Ourselves in Thought and Action: A Thematic Exploration of Leadership Literature," *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (2010): 209.

[25] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 5.

[26] Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 11.

[27] Ibid.

discomfort. "As both a social outsider and a central figure in the work of the church, it is the pastor who possesses the potential for change and adaptation… It is precisely this gap between similarity and difference, an appropriate gap, that allows the minister to lead others on the road towards change."[28]

Sermon Preparation and Delivery

The third category of literature concerns the process of sermon preparation and delivery. This study purposefully places consideration of sermon crafting at the end of the process because it is designed to analyze how the processes of evaluation and the concept of emotional intelligence inform preaching. Specifically, the study will focus on the priorities of understanding and addressing the congregation in preaching. "In ministry," explains Michael Emlet, "we are reading two 'texts' simultaneously, the story of Scripture and the story of the person we serve… Reading the Bible without reading the person is a recipe for irrelevance in ministry."[29] Christ-centered preaching in particular seeks to communicate the pervasive message of grace in Christ throughout all scripture to the people of the church. If the preacher's mission, as Chapell defines it, is "to explain to God's people what the Bible means,"[30] then the preacher must find out whether the message is getting through to the people. Roger van Harn further explains that this process of listening to their listeners must happen "before, during, and after they speak."[31] In other words, preachers must use evaluation to understand how their preaching is getting through (or not) to their congregations.

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[28] Rein Nauta, ""People Make the Place: Religious Leadership and the Identity of the Local Congregation"," *Pastoral Psychology* 56, no. 1 (2007): 48.

[29] Michael R. Emlet, *Crosstalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 25.

[30] Chapell, 30.

[31] Roger E. van Harn, *Preacher Can You Hear Us Listening?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 2005), xi.

Preachers then use this information they process from sermon evaluation to inform their future preaching. They must not only know the nature of what their congregations are hearing, they must also speak to it. As Roy Clements puts it, "An expository sermon must have a 'prophetic' dimension. It is a living word for a particular time and place, targeted onto the life situation of the audience."[32] The more preachers understand the nature of the pastor-congregation relationship, the better they can address the people according to their perceived needs. Van Harns summarizes, "The pastor-congregation relationship provides opportunities for the preacher to say and show that he or she has heard them. But preaching itself gives opportunity for the preacher to say and show that he or she has heard them."[33]

Problem and Purpose Statements

Preaching is a relational activity. Many books acknowledge the importance of ethos in preaching, but they do not go into great depth describing the nature of the relationship between the preacher and the congregation. Pastors are trained extensively on how to exegete a passage of scripture and how to write and deliver a sermon based on that scripture, but they are not prepared to understand how the relationship with their congregations can influence communication in their preaching. Congregants who are scandalized by conflicting expectations with their preachers can become closed to hearing anything from their sermons at all. Preachers who receive negative feedback on their sermons may try to change the content or the delivery of their sermons and find that they still receive the same negative feedback from the same people. Preachers need a means for understanding how relationships affect the communication of their sermons.

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[32] Roy Clements, "Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23:2, no. (1999): 179.
[33] van Harn, xii.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how preachers use evaluation as a means for understanding how relationships with their congregation impact their preaching.

Primary Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do pastors understand their role as a preacher in relationship with their congregation?

2. How do pastors conduct evaluation of their preaching?

3. How do pastors respond emotionally to this evaluation?

4. How do pastors use this evaluation in their ongoing sermon preparation and delivery?

Significance of the Study

Pastors often single out preaching as one of the most essential duties in their calling. On a theoretical level, this study will contribute to two gaps in preaching literature: an understanding of the role of ethos in preaching and the utilization of evaluation in preaching. Pastors may recognize intuitively that preaching happens in the context of relationships, but they do not have many resources that help them to understand how their particular congregational relationships are enhancing or hindering their own preaching. This study seeks to apply the fields of emotional intelligence and evaluation methods to the process of preaching. Both preachers and congregations should benefit by the addition of reflection and evaluation to the process of preaching.

This study will also benefit churches in at least three practical ways. First, it can help pastors deal with the reality of how relationships affect the preaching of sermons. This study will alert pastors to the importance of asking the relational questions in

evaluation of how the Christ-centered message of their preaching is being received.

Whether pastors feel ineffective or successful in their preaching, they need helpful

evaluation tools to understand how this relational process affects the way they preach.

Second, it will help pastors to improve communication in their sermons. This study will

seek to identify best practices for conducting and analyzing such evaluation. Finally, this

research will also give church officers the ability to understand and to encourage pastors

who are under relational stress.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethos - For the purposes of this study, ethos will refer to "the listener's perception of the

character, personality, and trustworthiness of the preacher in the event of preaching."[34]

Broadly, ethos will be utilized in reference to the relational aspect of communication.

Evaluation - In the corporate world, "Program evaluation is most often defined as a

process used to determine whether the design and delivery of a program were effective

and whether the proposed outcomes were met."[35] This study will focus on evaluation

(sometimes referred to as assessment) as a process of determining how the Christ-

centered message of preaching is being received by the congregation. Feedback will refer

more specifically to the data received in the sermon evaluation process.

Systems - According to James Lamkin, the "systems thinking" approach "asks the

observer to pay attention to the processes between the relationships and the sum total of

those processes."[36] Evaluating relationships necessarily involves the understanding that

interpersonal organizations, including churches, operate in mutually influential ways.

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[34] McClure and others, 7.

[35] Caffarella, 225.

[36] James E. Lamkin, "Systems Theory and Congregational Leadership: Leaves from an Alchemist's Journal," *Review and Expositor* 102, no. 3 (2005): 467.

The emotional state of each member affects the emotional state of the organization as a whole.[37] In a church setting, the preacher does not stand alone but belongs relationally to the organism, or system, of the church. This study will investigate the nature of this relationship, particularly how preachers can understand and manage their relationship within the system of the church.

Emotional Intelligence - Goleman, et al., define this simply as "how leaders handle themselves and their relationships."[38] This study recognizes that the emotional state of preachers makes a difference in the effectiveness of their preaching. Emotional intelligence refers to the individual's ability to assess and to manage one's own emotional responses and also those of others in a helpful manner. As Jim Herrington puts it, "Effective leadership comes from someone with enough emotional maturity to call a congregation to discern and pursue a shared vision, to remain connected with those who differ with the leader or the majority, and to remain a calm presence when the anxiety rises."[39]

Differentiation - "Differentiation is the ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet not have our reactions and behavior determined by them."[40] In this context, differentiation is the process by which pastors separate evaluation of their preaching from the true evaluation of their character or self-worth, or as Heifetz and Linsky put it, "distinguishing yourself from your role."[41]

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[37] Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 8. In the authors' words, "...we influence and are influenced by the interaction of the complex systems in which we live."

[38] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 6.

[39] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 46.

[40] Ibid., 18.

[41] Heifetz and Linsky, 190.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preachers stand in a unique relationship between God's word and God's people. Much like Jesus' picture of his followers being "in the world" but not "of the world,"[42] a preacher lives and works with the tension of being "in the congregation" but not "of the congregation." Following Jesus' model of not only speaking the word of God but also incarnating it, the preacher speaks God's word in the context of relationship with the congregation of God's people. This study seeks to understand the nature of this relationship and how preachers might improve the preaching of the gospel of Christ through evaluation of the relationships with their own congregations.

This chapter explores a cross-section of literature in an attempt to bring works on evaluation and relational theory into the context of preaching. In his PhD thesis entitled "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice," Robert Burns concludes that pastors desire to communicate a particular content in their preaching, but "persons entering the ministry need to understand relational and political dynamics in order to communicate their content." Although Burns focuses primarily on the political aspect of pastoral work, he suggests that "reflection about relational and political issues should have an important place in the development of continuing pastoral education."[43] Building on the relational side of his conclusion, this chapter considers literature on evaluation, emotional intelligence, and sermon preparation and delivery.

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[42] John 17:15-18.

[43] Robert W. Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice" (PhD thesis, The University of Georgia, 2001), 234.

Biblical and Theological Foundations on the Preacher-Congregation Relationship

Preachers who affirm the divine inspiration of scripture and the central message of the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus must also develop an understanding of their roles as preachers. A preacher in the kingdom of Christ is, foundationally, the servant of a book. As Sidney Greidanus explains, "Since the Bible is the normative source of revelation for contemporary preachers, they must bind themselves to the Scriptures if they would preach the word of God. In other words, they must preach biblically."[44] Thus, questions concerning the role of the preacher in relationship to the congregation must be defined by that book - the Bible. As Haddon Robinson observes, many pastors "feel caught in the tension between the text and their audience."[45] How does the Bible itself provide guidance for understanding the preacher's role in relationship between the word and the people?

The Reality of the Relationship

The scriptures affirm that pastoral ministry is defined by and carried out in the context of relationship. The emphasis on relationship begins with God himself. The repeated refrains of the Old Testament testify that God will be "with" his people, and "I will be your God, and you shall be my people."[46] Greidanus concludes that "the canon intends to tell us about God - not God in the abstract, but God in relationship to his creation and his people, God's actions in the world, God's coming kingdom."[47] Jesus brings the kingdom near to his people through incarnation: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the

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[44] Greidanus, 9.
[45] Haddon Robinson, "The Relevance of Expository Preaching," in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 80.
[46] See, e.g., Gen. 26:24; 48:21; Exod. 3:12; 6:7; Isa. 41:10; Jer. 7:23; Ezek. 36:28.
[47] Greidanus, 112.

Father, full of grace and truth."[48] Even his earthly ministry takes on a relational character.

Andy Crouch suggests that Jesus' discipleship method teaches "that every cultural

innovation, no matter how far-reaching its consequences, is based on personal

relationships and personal commitment."[49] God, in scripture, speaks to his people in the

context of relationship.

Throughout scripture, God also sets apart certain people to stand in a special

relationship between himself and his people. In the Old Testament, God's representatives

were largely categorized into three offices: prophets, priests, and kings. The letter to the

Hebrews defines in general terms the role of a prophet as speaking God's word to the

people and the role of a priest as representing the people to God.[50] The king serves as

God's anointed leader for the people.[51] In the New Testament, Jesus fulfills all three

offices together.[52]

The New Testament also introduces the role of pastors to the church.[53] John Stott

points out that the English Reformers of the sixteenth century understood the essence of

ordained ministry "to be not priestly, but pastoral. It was and is a ministry of the Word.

For the chief responsibility of the pastor who 'tends' his sheep is to 'feed' them."[54] It lies

beyond the scope of this work to discuss the office of elder and shepherd (pastor);

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[48] John 1:14.

[49] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 243.

[50] "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets…" (Hebrews 1:1). "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Hebrews 5:1).

[51] "The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed" (1 Samuel 2:10).

[52] E.g., Acts 3:18-26; Heb. 4:14-15; John 18:36-37.

[53] E.g., Acts 20:17ff; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 13:7.

[54] John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 118.

however, the New Testament does indicate that the preaching and pastoral functions are inseparable in church ministry. William Willimon explains:

> Preaching derives part of its power because it is done by *pastors*…. The lonely, detached preacher, cloistered away in the pastoral study for much of the week, is not the most fruitful image for faithful preaching. It is the pastor who stands at that fateful intersection between the biblical text and the congregational context, the one who rises each week in service to the congregation's, "Is there any word from the Lord?…"[55]

As Paul writes to Timothy, the pastor is to preach the word for the purpose of equipping the people for good work.[56] Stott explains, "…preaching is not exposition only but communication, not just the exegesis of a text but the conveying of a God-given message to living people who need to hear it…"[57] Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."[58] Preachers speak the word of God to God's church, and this message is communicated, in part, through the relationship they have with the church.

Biblical Pictures of the Relationship

The New Testament does not give a fully-developed, modern-day job description of the role of the pastor in relationship to the church. What the scriptures give instead is a series of word pictures. This study does not intend to establish one single paradigm that fully encompasses the relationship between the pastor and the congregation, but rather to take a quick glimpse into the variety of the Bible's pictures of the relationship.

Most biblical word pictures consist of simple words. Many scholars begin with the word "herald" (*kēryx*). David Dunn-Wilson points out that *kēryx* is used in the New

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[55] William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 67.
[56] 2 Tim. 3:16 - 4:2.
[57] Stott, 137.
[58] 2 Cor. 4:5.

Testament over sixty times.[59] Stott explains, "The commonest [image] is that of the

herald or town crier (*kēryx*), who has been given a message of good news and been told

to proclaim it."[60] He also identifies other biblical word pictures for the pastor, such as:

"sower" (*speirōn*), "ambassador" (*presbus*), "steward or housekeeper" (*oikonomos*),

"pastor or shepherd" (*poimēn*), and "one approved, a workman who has no need to be

ashamed.[61]" Dunn-Wilson adds, "A preacher is an εὐαγγελιστής [*euangelistes*]- a

messenger of the good news… also a διδάσκαλος [*didaskalos*] because he is a teacher of

eternal truths. Preachers are μάρτυρες [*martures*] - witnesses to the saving facts of the

gospel, often with undertones of suffering for their ministry."[62] Willimon lists verbal

word pictures in addition to proclaiming (*keryssein*): "the announcement of good news

(*euangelizesthai*), conversing (*homilein*), witnessing (*martyrein*), teaching (*didaskein*),

prophesying (*propheteuein*), and exhorting (*parakalein*)."[63]

      With all of these various word pictures from scripture, pastors and their

congregations may struggle with differing expectations on pastoral identity. Ronald

Osborn, in his book *Creative Disarray: Models of Ministry in a Changing America*,

theorizes, "our problem in ministry in America today is the problem of great expectations

joined to hopeless confusion over basic definition."[64] He poses the question, "How can

you and I agree as to my effectiveness in my ministry when we measure it by different

standards based on different conceptions of what a minister is?"[65] Osborn then takes a

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[59] David Dunn-Wilson, *A Mirror for the Church: Preaching in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2005), 2.
[60] Stott, 135.
[61] Ibid., 135-136.
[62] Dunn-Wilson, 2.
[63] Willimon, 145.
[64] Ronald E. Osborn, *Creative Disarray: Models of Ministry in a Changing America* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1991), 5.
[65] Ibid.

historical approach in defining categories which have been used to describe the perceived relationship between the pastor and the congregation.

Osborn follows the general perceptions of this pastor-congregation relationship through recent centuries of American history, defined in cultural terms rather than with strict biblical terminology. He characterizes the eighteenth-century minister as saint, priest, master, and awakener. During the nineteenth-century, American culture changed through pluralism, privatism, and subjectivism.[66] He notes,

> In popular understanding American subjectivism in religion has undercut the teaching authority of the ministerial office. People pick and choose among religious doctrines on the basis of what *appeals* to them. "Prophetic" preaching, even the quiet discussion of social issues, is discouraged - not necessarily out of opposition to the minister's views but from the fear that someone might take offense.[67]

Because of the widening gap between the church and society, Osborn delineates the nineteenth-century minister as pulpiteer, revivalist, builder, and missionary.

When Osborn reaches his analysis of the twentieth-century, he observes, "Our sense of ministry's declining significance in society has its roots in the breakdown of community."[68] Describing the growing proliferation of suburban churches, Osborn says, "The nice people who come to church want help with their families and guidance for their personal problems, but the church no longer stands at the center of the common life, for the common life itself has largely dissipated."[69] The twentieth-century has brought a view of ministers that leans on the concept of professionalism.[70] Within this

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[66] Ibid., 61-67.
[67] Ibid., 67.
[68] Ibid., 121.
[69] Ibid., 123.
[70] Ibid., 135.

professionalism paradigm, Osborn describes the twentieth-century minister as manager, counselor, impresario, and teacher.

Osborn concludes his culturally-defined description of the pastoral role with one final test for validity: "We need to match up any model we consider against the biblical paradigms of ministry for the essential elements they contain."[71] Whether the pastor is seen as a spiritual leader within a closed community, as an evangelist leader faced outward toward the world, or as a professional leader of a singular organizational choice among many options, any paradigm for pastoral identity must ultimately relate to the biblical word pictures, such as servant, prophet, shepherd, teacher, and soldier. Osborn concludes that no one paradigm of ministry can possibly suffice for a particular minister; therefore the individual should chose a best fit: "It falls to each of us in ministry to think through as best we are able the model of ministry that, given our particular abilities and inclinations, will enable us to make our largest contribution."[72] Rather than despair over the disparity of views, Osborn elects to see diversity as a gift. Each pastor should choose a paradigm that works.

Robert Reid takes a similar approach, using the biblical word pictures of pastoral identity as a jumping-off point for an even wider array of paradigm options. His book *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity* is an anthology of essays offering various images (or "tropes") for the preacher, such as "Messenger of Hope… Lover… God's Mystery Steward… Ridiculous Person… Fisher… Host and Guest… One 'Out of Your Mind…' One Entrusted." The basic questions that the essays address are: "How is preaching both the work of God and yet

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[71] Ibid., 194.
[72] Ibid., 198.

also a function of the individual's own person and identity? What is the role of human agency in the divine-human dance called preaching?"[73] Reid theorizes that the diversity of possible paradigms actually frees preachers to discover their own individual identities and opens the door for more effective communication with the congregation.[74]

The paradigms given in the essays in Reid's book do emanate from scripture. In her essay "Preacher as Lover," Lucy Lind Hogan points out that recent biblical scholarship has encouraged this move toward studying the relationship factor in preaching. "Rather than focusing on the attribute/action model that pictured God as the immutable sovereign controlling the world, there has been a radical shift toward understanding the love of God as one of relationality."[75] The relational paradigm of God's dealing with mankind serves as a foundation for the necessity of a relational paradigm for pastoral identity.

In his essay "Preacher as God's Mystery Steward: Preaching Healing in an Apocalyptic Frame," André Resner argues that a preacher must retain a "gospel orientation" as the only permissible hermeneutical strategy.[76] Resner provides a working definition of the gospel as "not a temporal description of some one act of God, but… rather hermeneutical: *the gospel is something that God does that human beings cannot do for themselves, that concretely changes a situation from… to…*"[77] He deflects attention from human agency in preaching the gospel. Although Christ's work is not mentioned in

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[73] Robert Stephen Reid, ed. *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 9.

[74] Ibid., 11.

[75] Lucy Lind Hogan, "Preacher as Lover," in *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity*, ed. Robert Stephen Reid (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 41.

[76] André Resner, Jr., "Preacher as God's Mystery Steward: Preaching Healing in an Apocalyptic Frame," in *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity*, ed. Robert Stephen Reid (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 60.

[77] Ibid., 63. At this point, Resner is not attempting to define the details of what the gospel changes; he is merely highlighting the process of change.

the definition, Resner continues by drawing attention to Paul's imagery of the preacher as "God's mystery steward." In this paradigm, Resner highlights the subservient role of the preacher to God, noting that the preacher is accountable to God rather than to the audience of the church (as was the case with the Corinthian culture and classical rhetoric). The mystery (*mysterion*) "is closely related to the word of the cross, Christ crucified proclaimed (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:1, 7)."[78]

Jonathan Edwards offers one more biblical word picture on pastoral identity from an ordination sermon entitled, "The Church's Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God."[79] The sermon is based on the marriage motif, describing God's relationship with his people. Edwards begins with a prophecy in which God promises delightful intimacy with his people in Zion:

> You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.[80]

Edwards identifies the "sons" of Isaiah's prophecy in today's context as the pastors who are "married" to the church. He places the pastors in the unique role of representing God himself in the way they are united with their congregations:

> Not that we are to understand that the church has many husbands, or that Christ is one husband, and ministers are other husbands strictly speaking… But ministers espouse the church entirely as Christ's ambassadors, as representing him and standing in his stead, being sent forth by him to be married to her in his name, that by this means she may be married to him.[81]

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[78] Ibid., 68-70.
[79] Edwards, 17-26.
[80] Isa. 62:4-5.
[81] Edwards, 18.

This marriage-relationship serves not as the end in itself but as a means to an end - the uniting of the church to her true groom, Christ.

Edwards emphasizes a dual-emphasis for pastors in this word-picture. First, pastors unite themselves to their congregations as a husband would unite with his bride.

> And every one [*sic*] that takes on him this office as he ought to do, espouses the church of Christ, as he espouses the interest of the church in a manner that is peculiar. He is under obligations, as a minster of the christian [*sic*] church, beyond other men, to love the church, as Christ her true bridegroom hath loved her, and to prefer Jerusalem above his chief joy, and to imitate Christ, the great shepherd and bishop of souls and husband of the church, in his care and tender concern for her welfare, and earnest and constant labours to promote it, as he has opportunity.[82]

Thus the marriage picture relates directly to the pastor and the church. At the same time, Edwards draws attention to the representative nature of this union. As Paul writes in the second letter to the Corinthians, "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ."[83] The pastor's "marriage" is intended to prepare the church for her true marriage: "…a faithful minister espouses a christian [*sic*] people, not in his own name, but as Christ's ambassador: he espouses them, that therein they may be espoused to Christ."[84]

This dual imagery – the pastor as husband and as ambassador for betrothal – elevates both the dignity and the humility of pastoral identity. The pastor stands both as an ambassador for the groom and as a member of the bride. "They shall have a greater and more immediate participation with the bride in her joy; for they shall not only be ministers to the church as the angels are, but parts of the church, principal members of the

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[82] Ibid., 19.
[83] 2 Cor. 11:2.
[84] Edwards, 23.

bride."[85] The pastor relates and matures with Christ just like every other member of the church, but the pastor also stands before the church as a representative charged with the task of preparing the church for marriage with the Son of God.

Impact of the Relationship on Preaching

This brief survey of biblical pictures of pastoral identity does not simplify the preacher-congregation relationship; rather, it highlights the complexity of this relationship. Preachers stand in unique relationship between the word of God and the people of God - not only as priest or prophet, but more as ambassadors preparing the church for marriage with Christ. The New Testament demonstrates further that the relationship itself affects the communication of the biblical message in preaching.

In his letters, Paul addresses the nature of his own relationship with the people to whom he had delivered the gospel message. Bryan Chapell cites 1 Thessalonians 1:5 as "giving scriptural credence to the notion that *ethos* is a powerful force in the ordinary process of spiritual persuasion."[86] He points out how all three of Aristotle's rhetorical categories are found in this one verse: "because our gospel came to you not only in word [logos], but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction [pathos]. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake [ethos]."[87] The relationship Paul had enjoyed with the people of the church of Thessalonica demonstrated and enlivened the gospel message.

Even Paul's shortcomings could be used to embody the gospel message. In the opening of his first letter to Timothy, Paul is conscious of the fact that he did not deserve, by his past behaviors, to be a servant of God. He also knew that the grace he received

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[85] Ibid., 26.
[86] Chapell, 35.
[87] 1 Thess. 1:5

made him an example of God's grace to make him, the "foremost" of sinners, a well-qualified person to be a preacher of the gospel. "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."[88]

Even though a preacher's failings can serve to highlight and enhance God's grace, negative perceptions of a preacher's ethos can also hinder the message. Paul is persuaded that sinful behavior particularly hinders the gospel communication of preachers. Chapell points out, "The apostle Paul taught of the inherent efficacy of the Word, but he also related his personal resolve to put no stumbling block to the gospel in anyone's path (2 Cor. 6:3)."[89] Paul also instructs Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching."[90] Paul warns the preacher to pay attention to both aspects of his ministry: personal character and faithful instruction. Commenting on 1 Timothy 4:11-16, John Bohannon concludes, "Timothy's authority, effectiveness, and persuasiveness in the pulpit rested heavily upon his life testimony as a man of godly character not necessarily from his knowledge or implementation of first-century rhetorical skills."[91]

Observations from Paul's Letters to the Corinthian Church

In his letters to the Corinthian church, Paul consciously addresses the way his own relationship with the church affected the communication of the gospel message. Several authors have explored the role of Paul's relationship with the church in these letters. Eugene Hensell points out broadly, "These letters give us a rich introduction into what an early Christian community was really like. They also show us St. Paul in his

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[88] 1 Tim. 1:15-16.
[89] Chapell, 34.
[90] 1 Tim. 4:16.
[91] John S. Bohannon, "Persuasive Preaching: The Role of Ethos," *Faith and Mission* 24, no. 1 (2006): 48.

primary role as pastor of a new, enthusiastic, but sometimes misguided church."[92] Paul

states explicitly that an underlying purpose for the first letter is that he is being

"examined" by people in the church - he is defending himself and his gospel message.[93]

As Ray Pickett suggests, the overarching theme that binds all the letter's smaller issues

together is Paul's response to "the attitudes and practices of believers who not only

diverged from and disagreed with his teaching on occasion, but who also questioned his

credibility…."[94] Speaking of 2 Corinthians 11:3, Zack Eswine ponders, "What was the

issue that led Paul's Corinthian hearers into this potential for deception? The issue was

preaching."[95]

Their criticism of his preaching, however, extended beyond hermeneutical

preferences. The Corinthians were directly undermining Paul's character and authority.

Ultimately, the Corinthian church had become "increasingly disenchanted with Paul

because he did not exhibit the marks of a powerful apostle, with eloquence, wisdom,

revelations, and other wonders…."[96] Bassler agrees that Paul's "very understanding and

presentation of the gospel were being challenged. Clarity on both of these issues -

leadership and gospel - was essential if Paul was effectively to redress the ethical issues

that were rocking the Corinthian church."[97] In order to address the difficulties of conflict,

division and moral failings, Paul defends both the gospel preached and the preacher of

the gospel.

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[92] Eugene Hensell, "St. Paul's Corinthian Correspondence," *Review for Religious* 67, no. 3 (2008): 318.
[93] 1 Cor. 9:3.
[94] Ray Pickett, "Conflicts at Corinth," in *Christian Origins*, A People's History of Christianity, ed. Richard A. Horsley, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 114.
[95] Eswine, 241.
[96] Pickett, 133.
[97] Bassler: 180.

In his work *Paul's Use of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in 2 Corinthians 10-13*, Mario DiCicco applies a rhetorical critical analysis of Paul's response to the Corinthian criticism in 2 Corinthians 10-13, revealing a purposeful defense of Paul's person in relation to his message. In 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul specifically calls attention to his relationship with the congregation - being perceived as meek in person, but bold when writing. DiCicco argues that Paul purposefully utilizes an ethos argument "to establish his legitimacy as a true apostle, to regain the confidence of the Corinthians in himself, and to secure their adherence to his interpretation of the Gospel."[98] In defining the importance of ethos in persuasion, DiCicco explains, "An audience listens more carefully and believes more readily when it perceives the speaker to be a person of superior moral integrity."[99] Paul's opponents pointedly attacked him in his person - in his "good sense and practical wisdom in guiding the Corinthians (10:10-11), his virtue and integrity as an apostle (11:12), and his goodwill and sincerity toward the best interests of the Corinthians (12:14-17)."[100] Paul recounts his credentials and his sufferings, but rather than deny his weaknesses because of his credentials, he accepts the reproach of his adversaries.

Thomas Stegman argues that DiCicco misses Paul's purpose in the letter by basing his interpretation too much on the perspective of Paul's opponents. He laments DiCicco's "failure to consider another possibility, namely, that Paul draws upon the *ethos* of a third party… how Paul draws upon and aligns himself with the character of Jesus."[101] He agrees with DiCicco's assertion that Paul uses his own ethos in his argumentation,

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[98] Mario M. DiCicco, *Paul's Use of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in 2 Corinthians 10-13* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 77.
[99] Ibid., 36.
[100] Ibid., 82.
[101] Thomas Stegman, *The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin to Paul's Argument in 2 Corinthians* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 66.

however Stegman concludes that, "it is the *ethos* of Jesus, the *ethos* the apostle himself claims to embody, that he wishes the Corinthians to incarnate."[102] DiCicco does, however, conclude that Paul's ultimate goal is the proclamation of Christ. Paul does not seem concerned merely with defending his perceived reputation, but he is concerned with how his reputation enhances the communication of the gospel of Christ.[103]

André Resner sees a similar rhetorical approach to Paul's argumentation in the first four chapters of the first letter to the Corinthians. Resner argues that the Corinthian church is not receiving Paul's instructions precisely because of the breakdown in their relationship with Paul:

> Underlying all the problems in Corinth, Paul is a problem himself because of a fundamental disagreement between Paul and some in Corinth over the kind of person that God's messenger of the gospel ought to be. These differing points of view as to the nature of the preacher are due to differing criteria that are being exerted for evaluating the preacher. Some at Corinth are attempting to erode Paul's apostolic authority by applying criteria for his credibility derived from the sociocultural expectations for orators as described in the classical rhetorical tradition.[104]

Paul responds to these charges by shifting the terms of the debate away from the criteria of classical rhetoric and toward a greater emphasis on the gospel message itself.[105] "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."[106] The message is king; the messenger, although present, is subservient to the message. Resner labels Paul's method a "reverse" or "ironic" ethos:[107]

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[102] Ibid., 68.
[103] DiCicco, 85.
[104] André Resner, Jr., *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 98.
[105] Ibid., 99.
[106] 1 Cor. 2:1–2.
[107] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 4.

For Paul goes so far as to "reverse" rhetoric in his gospel communication, and in his description of preaching, thus using rhetoric for the purpose of rhetoric's own humiliation. In like manner, God uses preachers in an event which, culturally defined, functions to elevate orators competitively, thereby creating rivalry among them and their adherents. But because of what the gospel accomplishes the cross-event-proclaimed actually humiliates preachers and hearers alike by demolishing the arena and occasion of competition and the resultant party rivalry. God uses preachers to humble preachers.[108]

Rather than using rhetoric to draw attention to himself as a skilled and worthy orator, Paul utilizes classical rhetoric to de-emphasize himself and instead to draw attention to the message.

The route to the gospel message, however, cannot bypass altogether the vehicle of the preacher. "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."[109] Ideally, the church should evaluate the message of the preacher on its own merit apart from the eloquence of the preacher, but Paul also recognizes that the manner in which the congregation relates to him as a preacher affects the transmission of the message of the cross. "Paul's response to the Corinthian Christians' confusion over ministerial identity took the route of redirecting their consciousness via the cross-event-proclaimed. For Paul, this was the foundation for ecclesial reflection on ministerial identity."[110] Far from minimizing the relevance of relationship, Paul emphasizes the importance of that relationship "so that his hearers' experience of that witness depends upon God, points to God's all-sufficiency to save, and leads to the praise of God's glory, not any human's oratorical ability."[111] Paul's famous relational ideal: "I have become all

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[108] Ibid., 116.
[109] 1 Cor. 4:1.
[110] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 7.
[111] Ibid., 120.

things to all people," is offered with a gospel-centered purpose: "that by all means I might save some."[112]

Resner further identifies Paul's strategy for preaching in order to draw attention away from himself and toward Christ. Paul seeks to bring the people of the church from a knowledge that functions in a merely sensory manor - "*kata sarka* ('according to the flesh')" - to a perspective that is "*kata pneuma* ('according to the spirit')."[113] In order to draw his listeners to this way of thinking and living, he must preach to them "*kata stauron* ('according to the cross').[114] "All aspects of the rhetorical situation of the proclamation of the gospel are seen through the cruciform lens of the gospel message. This is one way in which Paul's fundamental *modus operandi* differed from those of classical rhetoric, which operate in a typical hearer-driven manner."[115]

In this way, Paul avoids two problems: an overemphasis on the preacher, so that the cross fades into irrelevancy (and the church divides over personalities), and an underemphasis on the preacher, so that the congregation does not respect the preaching of the cross. "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."[116] In essence, Stegman draws a similar conclusion from Paul's second letter. He writes, "I argue that Paul offers a unique form of self-commendation, one based on his sharing the *ethos* of Jesus. The apostle can commend himself to the Corinthians precisely because he embodies the pattern of loving,

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[112] 1 Cor. 9:22.
[113] E.g., 1 Cor. 2:14 - 3:3. Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 114.
[114] Ibid., 115.
[115] Ibid., 112.
[116] 2 Cor. 4:5.

self-giving existence manifested by Jesus."[117] Because of Paul's union with Christ, both message and messenger are essential to the communication of the gospel of the cross.

The apostle Paul expresses a desire for a biblically-defined and mutually-held understanding of the relationship between pastor and congregation for the effective preaching of the gospel. "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."[118] As Eugene Hensell points out, "Paul is absolutely committed to the gospel of Christ Jesus, and his primary service to the Corinthian church is showing how that gospel applies to that community at that time. This is the challenge facing pastoral ministry in the church today."[119] The one thing Paul wants the Corinthian people to "get" from his preaching is the gospel of Christ, in which they stand and in which they are being saved.

Evaluation

If the relationship between the preacher and the congregation is an integral part of the gospel message, then preachers need a mechanism for evaluating this relationship. In his classic book on preaching, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*, John Stott asserts, "In nearly every church closer and more cordial relations between pastors and people, preachers and listeners, would be beneficial. There is need for more cooperation between them in the preparing of sermons, and more candour in evaluating them."[120] Even with this stated desire, Stott suggests no practical methods in the book for pursuing evaluation or for using such evaluation for the preparation of future sermons. In

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[117] Stegman, 213.
[118] 1 Cor. 15:1–2.
[119] Hensell: 319.
[120] Stott, 11.

order to move closer to understanding the usefulness of evaluation in preaching, this study looks at evaluation (or assessment) in the context of business and education literature and how this literature begins to address the field of preaching.

Benefits of Evaluation

What is evaluation? Joseph Wholey, Harry Hatry, and Kathryn Newcomer, in their book on program evaluation, define it as "a valuable learning strategy to enhance knowledge about the logic of the underlying programs, as well as the practical results of programs."[121] Evaluation can be used for any type of organization or activity with measurable goals in order to improve on the attainment of those goals. Program leaders use evaluation to learn "how their programs are performing so that they can improve them and learn from the information they gather."[122]

Both preaching and teaching are exercises in communication, which involve both speakers and listeners. The speaker desires to communicate a message in such a way that it is received. In broad terms, Muelhoff and Lewis explain:

> When I speak with another person, I convey my thoughts through symbols
> that must be interpreted. The listener works to understand what my
> symbols stand for or represent. In turn, I seek to discern how my symbols
> are being interpreted. In short, communication is a reciprocal process of
> meaning making.[123]

Evaluation gives the teacher/preacher a "reciprocal process" for discovering how the message is being received by the student/congregant. Without evaluation, the speaker

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[121] Joseph S. Wholey, Harry P. Hatry, and Kathryn E. Newcomer, eds. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, Second ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), xxxiv.
[122] Ibid., xxxiii.
[123] Muehlhoff and Lewis, 43.

only sees the transmission of the message, not the reception of it. Or, as Angelo and Cross put it, "Teaching without learning is just talking."[124]

Recent educational literature has focused on the value of formal evaluation in the classroom. Thomas Angelo and Patricia Cross provide a handbook for classroom assessment at the college level. They observe in the 1980's and 1990's a positive trend of educators pursuing assessment for "improving effectiveness at system, campus, or program levels,"[125] but they decry the lack of direct involvement of the teachers in the assessment process.[126] Angelo and Cross assert the necessity of classroom assessment that is learner-centered and teacher-directed.[127] They explain, "By collaborating with colleagues and actively involving students and classroom assessment efforts, faculty (and students) enhance learning and personal satisfaction."[128] Formal assessment gives both teacher and student the opportunity to reflect on the teaching and learning process. Students expressed an appreciation for being able to give feedback "as evidence that faculty are aware of their learning levels and progress and care about their opinions and ideas."[129]

Some modern literature in Christian education is rooted in Norman DeJong's work *Education in the Truth*. DeJong put forth a philosophical system of education that he pictured as a ladder (see figure 1). While it lies outside the scope of this work to discuss the full philosophical implications of this structure, DeJong proposed that education cannot conclude without an evaluative component.

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[124] Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 3.
[125] Ibid., 7.
[126] Ibid., xiii.
[127] Ibid., 4.
[128] Ibid., 11.
[129] Ibid., 374-375.

Evaluation
↑
Implementation
↑
Structural Organization
↑
Objectives or goals
↑
Nature of man
↑
Basis or Authority
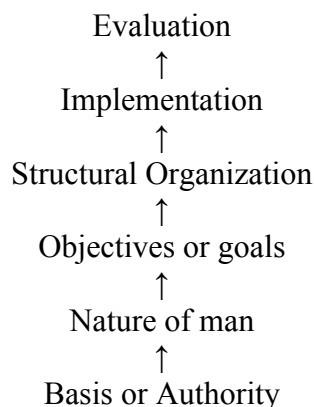
Figure 1: DeJong's Philosophical Ladder of Education[130]

Evaluation in education, according to DeJong, serves as a means to judge how

well a school system is reaching its stated objectives. "In order to use this principle

comprehensively, it becomes apparent that the objectives of a teacher or school or nation

must first be clearly articulated. Then, with objectives vividly in mind, one can determine

quality by measuring the degree to which the objectives have been met."[131] DeJong notes

that in Christian education, these objectives distinctively involve "the increased honor

and praise of God through the lives of the students (as well as the teachers) being

educated."[132] Since these objectives are not as easily measured as knowledge in math or

science, Christian educators must evaluate the quality of education "by its proximity to

Christ and the Bible."[133]

Recent literature in Christian education, such as Michael Anthony's anthology

Introducing Christian Education, builds upon the foundation of DeJong's work. Warren

Benson specifically sets out DeJong's philosophical ladder as the foundation for modern

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[130] Norman DeJong, *Education in the Truth* (N. p.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969), 63.
[131] Ibid., 182.
[132] Ibid., 183.
[133] Ibid.

Christian education.[134] William "Rick" Yount traces the development of education

psychology through three distinct phases: behavioral (doing), cognitive (thinking), and

humanistic (feeling).[135] Yount concludes that "the effective teaching-learning process

intersects and transforms the lives of learners" and must include all three elements –

doing, thinking, and feeling – for the learning process to be complete.[136] Ted Ward, in his

essay "The Teaching-Learning Process" confirms the need for teachers to pursue

evaluation in the context of the teacher - student relationship:

> Any teaching, even teaching through mediated means such as television or
> computer programs, involves a human relationship of some sort. The
> relationship between teacher and learner is both intellectual and emotional.
> Perhaps it would be better to say that teaching is more dependent on
> human relationships within the learning context than upon the intellectual
> or informational components of the knowledge being taught.[137]

Ward concludes that even though classroom evaluation might be time-consuming, "A

competent teacher will…devote plenty of time and attention to gathering and using data

for evaluating learners' progress."[138] The time needed for evaluation is well worth the

effort.

Methods of Evaluation

Literature on classroom evaluation is filled with specific tools and methods

available to the teacher. While this project cannot go into great detail on specific tools for

evaluation, it will glean principles of methodology from the offerings. Donald Guthrie

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[134] Warren S. Benson, "Philosophical Foundations of Christian Education," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 26.

[135] William "Rick" Yount, "Learning Theory for Christian Teachers," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 101.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ted Ward, "The Teaching-Learning Process," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 118.

[138] Ibid., 123.

offers a simple, overarching framework for the teaching process: "plan, conduct, and

evaluate."[139] Evaluation serves to solicit "participants' interests…through multiple

feedback systems" which can then inform future planning.[140] These feedback systems are

often categorized as Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs):

> CATs provide immediate feedback for the teacher and reflection-on-
> learning for the learner. Following a lecture or discussion, learners
> articulate major themes and remaining questions. Teachers are then able to
> capitalize on learner response to fine-tune delivery, and learners benefit
> from increased attention to reflection-on-learning - which has been
> demonstrated to increase learning depth significantly."[141]

CAT's are conducted in the classroom in close proximity to the teaching event, and they

provide a mutual benefit to both teacher and listener.

Angelo and Cross label this three-part teaching assessment process as planning,

implementing, and responding. Figure 2 illustrates the full implementation of this

assessment process.[142]

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[139] Guthrie, 209.
[140] Ibid., 212.
[141] Ibid., 214-215. See also Angelo and Cross, 25.
[142] Angelo and Cross, 35.
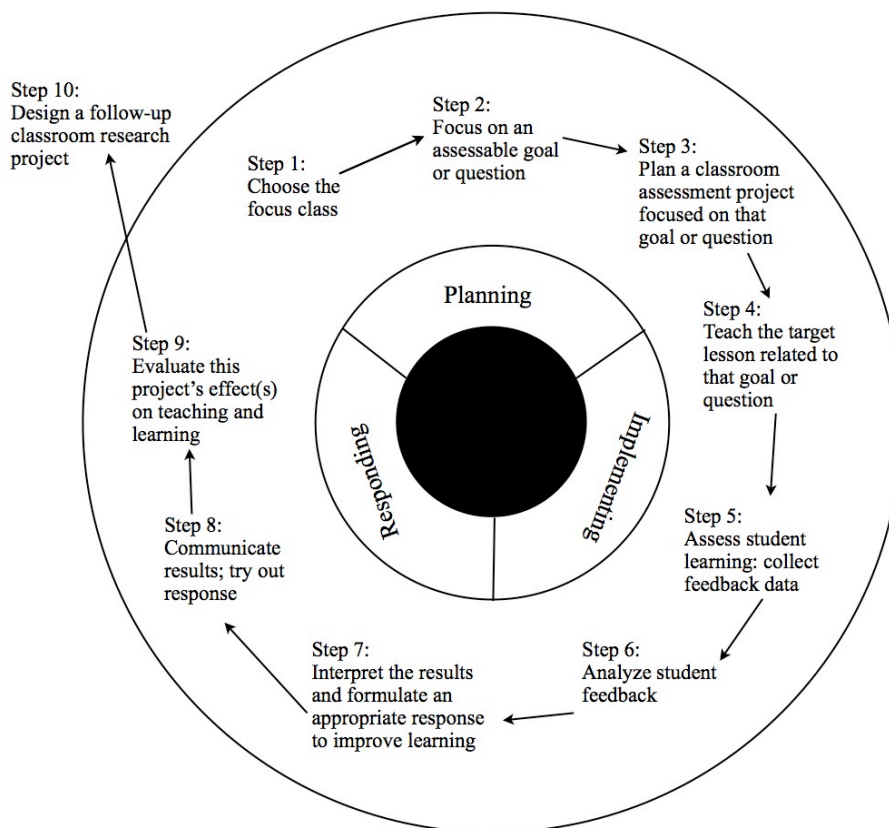
Figure 2. Map of a Classroom Assessment Project Cycle.

In the planning phase, the instructor chooses a simple CAT to use in order to assess the class. The teacher then implements the CAT with the class and immediately analyzes the feedback, looking for "particularly revealing or thoughtful responses." Finally, the teacher closes the feedback loop "by letting them know what you learned from the Classroom Assessment Technique exercise and what difference that information will make."[143] Classroom assessment continues by utilizing evaluation for the design of future classroom instruction with ongoing assessment.

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[143] Ibid., 28-30.

Angelo and Cross's book catalogues a host of CAT's, but before identifying specific techniques, they lay down certain ground rules for effectiveness. They stress the importance of identifying explicit goals and objectives which can be measured effectively.[144] "Without clear goals, we cannot readily assess the effectiveness of our efforts or realize when we are off course, how far off we are, and how to get back on the right track."[145] Once the goals have been expressly identified, the teacher develops an "'assessable' question, a question that is so well focused and limited in scope that it can be answered, in most cases, through the use of one Classroom Assessment Technique."[146] They give an example of a calculus teacher who wants to assess how well the students are developing effective problem-solving skills. Rather than asking completely open-ended questions, the instructor asks more focused, goal oriented questions such as: "How accurately can my students now determine when, where, and why they have gotten 'stuck' when they cannot solve a problem?" and "What techniques do they use now to get 'unstuck' when they don't know how to solve a problem?"[147] The questions are designed to relate to the teacher's goal in the class.

Wholey, Hatry, and Newcomer affirm these assessment techniques for a broader program market. The assessment process begins with the identification of questions that inform the primary goals of the program.[148] The formulation of evaluation questions is the crucial step in the process. They explain, "If evaluators and intended users fail to agree on program goals, information priorities, and intended uses of program performance information, those who are designing the evaluations may focus on

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[144] Ibid., 8.
[145] Ibid., 13.
[146] Ibid., 36.
[147] Ibid., 43.
[148] Wholey, ed., xxxix.

answering questions that are not relevant to policy and management decisions."[149]

Evaluation methods can take a wide variety of forms, from questionnaires and surveys to

focus groups. Their handbook gives an excellent introduction to the use of surveys,

including issues such as defining selection samples, designing survey instruments,

developing good questions, and determining methods for collecting data.[150]

While it is beyond the scope of this study to consider surveying techniques in

detail, some of the suggested assessment techniques appear relevant. Evaluators should

focus on uncovering the perspectives of the participants themselves, and so the questions

should be oriented toward the learner's experience. According to Wholey, Hatry, and

Newcomer, "Questions are only as good as they are clear and answerable for

respondents. Crafting questions should be undertaken with the target respondents in

mind."[151] For the same reason, evaluators should gravitate toward open-ended questions

in face-to-face interviews. Focus groups bring added benefits, such as "eliciting detailed,

introspective responses on people's feelings, thoughts, perceptions, actions, behaviors,

and motivations and are best used in evaluations aimed at determining what, how, and

why," but they are not as useful for quantitative data.[152]

To this point, the literature has only considered formal evaluation techniques.

Rosemary Caffarella, however, offers a larger perspective on effective evaluation. She

notes that not all organizations and programs lend themselves to scientifically-oriented

evaluation. "For example, education and training programs whose major objectives are to

foster changes in personal, organizational, and/or societal values and beliefs are

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[149] Ibid., 34.
[150] Ibid., 257-291.
[151] Ibid., 273.
[152] Ibid., 342.

especially difficult to evaluate."[153] Although she does not mention religious

environments, the "values and beliefs" nature of church ministry makes preaching a more

difficult context for formal evaluation because it aspires to more than the mere

transmission of facts. All hope is not lost, however, because evaluation does not have to

be formal to be effective. Caffarella explains:

> Program evaluation is most often defined as a process used to determine
> whether the design and delivery of a program were effective and whether
> the proposed outcomes were met. Although systematic or strategically
> planned evaluations are important, so are the more informal and
> unplanned evaluation activities.[154]

Cafarella does not go into detail about how informal evaluation can or should be pursued,

but she does legitimate informal evaluation processes in general. Both formal and

informal processes can provide information which helps the preacher to evaluate whether

the intended objectives of preaching are being received by the hearers.

Evaluation in Preaching

Tools for evaluation of preaching exist, but they must be understood in light of

the uniqueness of preaching as a means for communicating God's message to God's

people. Preachers increasingly pay attention to the role of the listener in their preaching.

As David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis observe:

> [C]ommunication theory has highlighted the critical role played by those
> who receive the message. No communication has taken place, it may be
> claimed, until the message has been processed… As every preacher
> knows, sometimes to his or her chagrin, each listener processes the
> message in a personal and idiosyncratic way… It has led to a renewed
> interest in strategies for ensuring that the preacher gain insight into the
> thought worlds of the congregation and take account of differing
> personality types within a single group of listeners.[155]

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[153] Caffarella, 235.
[154] Ibid., 225.
[155] David Day, Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, eds. *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*,
Explorations in Practical, Personal, and Empirical Theology (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 5.

The listener's role has been an acknowledged part of the communication process for centuries. St. Augustine, in his work *The First Catechetical Instruction*, pointed out the possibility of the hearer being offended by the words of a speaker. From the listener's perspective, a perceived offense might not preclude genuine learning. But from the speaker's perspective, an offended listener provides a test, as it were, from God, "to see whether we can endure correction with calmness of mind, that we may not hasten to the defense of our error with a still greater error."[156] As David Dunn-Wilson explains, Augustine "reminds preachers that it is their *congregations'* perception of their sermons which is truly important, so they must heed their hearers' reactions, neither being 'flattered by reverence' nor angered by 'correction.'"[157] Feedback from the listener informs the speaker how well the intended message is being received.

Some recent research has taken a philosophically postmodern approach to evaluation in preaching. In an article entitled "Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching," Thomas Troeger points to the increasing distrust of certainty in communication.[158] Every individual hears a sermon from a different set of "cultural values and theological presuppositions." For this reason, Troeger suggests, "The development of a contemporary homiletic begins not by defining first principles but by considering the actual phenomenon of preaching as experienced by members of the congregation."[159] For Troeger, the responsibility for effectiveness in the communication

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[156] Augustine, "The First Catechetical Instruction [*De Catechizandis Rudibus*]," (Westminster, MD: The Newman Bookshop, 1946), 11.16.
[157] Dunn-Wilson, 99. Augustine, 2.3, 13.18, 11.16.
[158] Thomas Troeger, "Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching," in *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*, ed. David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 116.
[159] Ibid., 118.

process shifts from the message in its essence to the listener. Thus, Troeger requires that

we reflect on the sermon from three perspectives:

1. the sermon the rector delivered
2. the sermon as responded to by each individual
3. the sermon that is defined as the conglomerate effect of all the individually heard sermons upon the corporate life of the congregation.[160]

With this postmodern homiletic, Troeger concludes, "We, therefore, find ourselves

having to define more closely the transaction between preacher and congregation and

what qualities of personal presentation best serve to express and awaken the living truth

of God in the congregation."[161]

One recent study by William Avery illustrates how the relationship between the

pastor and congregation can be clarified through the process of evaluation.[162] In the

project, Avery collects feedback from congregants in a particular church on their

"understanding of the relationship between the Word of God and the sermon." In

response to the question, "Did you understand the sermon as the Word of God? Why or

why not?" Avery reports that "responses clustered around two foci: the Bible and the

personal qualities of the preacher."[163] Avery concludes from the data collected that:

> The nature and quality of emotional relationships between laity and clergy and laity's perceptions of how clergy regard them appeared to be the most influential factors in determining "how" parishioners listen to sermons and what they listen to. Further, these two factors appeared to be critical criteria for judging if the Word of God has been proclaimed.[164]

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[160] Ibid., 119.

[161] Ibid.

[162] William O. Avery and A. Roger Gobbel, "The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher," in *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*, ed. David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 268. This article is based on research done for the final project for the Doctor of Ministry degree for William Avery, with Gobbel as the project director. The title of the project was, "The Word of God and the Words of Men." The document is located in the Abdel Ross Wentz Library, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325.

[163] Ibid., 269.

[164] Ibid., 272.

In other words, the quality of the congregants' relationships with the pastor directly affected how they received the pastor's sermon. Avery describes the effect of perceptions in the pastor-congregant relationship:

> When that relationship is positive, the laity are most prone to say that their minister is "preaching the Word of God;" [*sic*] they are likely to assert that the Word of God has been spoken with almost no reference to the content of a particular sermon. Where that relationship is perceived as negative, the laity quickly dismiss sermons which express understandings contrary to their own. That negative relationship becomes the occasion for doubting the presence of the Word of God in a minister's preaching without reference to the content of particular sermons.[165]

With the aid of an evaluative mechanism, both the congregation and the preacher learn something about how perceptions of their relationship affect the reception of the message preached.

Evaluation helps ministers grow in their effectiveness as preachers in relationship with their congregations. In general terms, Robert Burns calls this "learning in practice," in which ministers "grow through experience and reflection on that experience."[166] He explains, "We recognized that pastors learned by thinking through a situation after it happened. They constructed knowledge by reflecting on their experience."[167] Pastors must be allowed "permission… to take time to reflect on their experiences" and to grow from these reflections.[168] One of the main goals for this reflection-in-action is for pastors to learn how congregants' expectations may differ from their own expectations. Burns labels these expectations *interests*: "When ministry is being planned, participants bring their interests to the table. Interests are the complex set of goals, values, desires, concerns

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[165] Ibid., 274.
[166] Burns, "How Pastors Learn the Politics of Ministry Practice," 309.
[167] Ibid.: 310-311.
[168] Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice", 238.

and motivations that lead people to act."[169] Burns cites research that shows "the largest

source of occupation stress for ministers is their job in the local congregation," primarily

relating to "personal or ideological conflict with parishioners."[170] If evaluation can

uncover difficulties in the pastor-congregant relationship that affects the stress of the

pastor, then this realm of emotional understanding must also be explored.

Emotional Intelligence

Any consideration of using evaluation to uncover the state of relationships

between pastors and congregations opens the door for emotional stress. The Bible has

established the essential component of relationship in preaching. Stress in that

relationship affects the communication of the gospel message. The awareness and

management of the emotional component of relationships is described in literature as

"emotional intelligence."[171] For this study, the pastor's maturity in emotional intelligence

will be considered through two lenses: a corporate lens using systems theory, and an

individual lens using the concept of differentiation.

Emotion and Leadership

Preaching is more than the communication of words; it is the sharing of the

incarnate gospel of Christ. Preaching involves the heart of the pastor, not just the mouth.

Peter Scazzero contends that the emotional health of the church is dependent "primarily"

on the spiritual and emotional state of the leadership. "In fact, the key to successful

spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader's internal life than with the

leader's expertise, gifts, or experience."[172] Burns adds that in spite of the critical nature of

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[169] Ibid., 2.
[170] Ibid., 35-36.
[171] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 6.
[172] Scazzero, 20.

interpersonal dynamics in leadership, the pastors in his study "were not prepared for these

interpersonal realities upon entering the ministry."[173] Rein Nauta agrees on the

importance of the emotional health of the leader:

> It is the minister who, if only by his or her presence as religious leader,
> has the biggest influence on anything happening in the parish. As both a
> social outsider and a central figure in the work of the church, it is the
> pastor who possesses the potential for change and adaptation. Trusting
> there to be a certain affinity with the parishioners, the parish appoints a
> pastor who fits in. At the same time, this pastor is also different from the
> mental image the parishioners had of the good shepherd. It is precisely this
> gap between similarity and difference, an appropriate gap, that allows the
> minister to lead others on the road towards change.[174]

Edward Kemery adds that pastors may be "susceptible to role conflict," especially when

"the sent role is inconsistent — when laity, colleagues, supervisors, policies, and

procedures disagree."[175] Differing expectations about the role of the pastor in relationship

with the congregation can cause emotional stress - both in the pastor and in the church at

large.

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee take the concept of emotional intelligence and

apply it to leadership. Their book *Primal Leadership* asserts that how a leader leads

emotionally is the first principle of leadership: "Even if they get everything else just

right, if leaders fail in this primal task of driving emotions in the right direction, nothing

they do will work as well as it could or should."[176] The authors refer to research in

neurology to show that, "we rely on connections with other people for our own emotional

stability."[177] Relational stress and the subsequent breakdown in connection with others

can be shown neurologically to hinder "the brain's ability to process information and

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[173] Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice", 225-226.
[174] Nauta: 48.
[175] Kemery: 562.
[176] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 3.
[177] Ibid., 6.

respond effectively."[178] Leaders must learn to recognize and to manage the emotional

barriers caused by relational stress.

Leaders can learn to change through a process that begins with discovering the

leader's real self - both strengths and gaps. This self-discovery usually does not happen

without the leader's intentionality:

> To become more effective, leaders need to break through the information
> quarantine around them - and the conspiracy to keep them pleased, even if
> uninformed. Rare are those who dare to tell a commanding leader he is too
> harsh, or to let a leader know he can be more visionary, or more
> democratic. That's why emotionally intelligent leaders need to seek the
> truth themselves.[179]

The authors suggest that leaders must pursue feedback, particularly from multiple

sources. "Multiple views render a more complete image. In a very real sense, you are a

different person with different kinds of people and in different settings…"[180] This

feedback, then, should inform the leader how to pursue the mastery of new habits,

allowing time for the brain to create "the new neural pathway" for change.[181]

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky have also written much on the emotional life of

the leader. They identify the push for change as the source of much of the relational stress

between leaders and followers. "Asking an entire community to change its ways… is

dangerous. If leadership were about giving people good news, the job would be easy."

Followers perceive this push for change in terms of loss: "Although you may see with

clarity and passion a promising future of progress and gain, people will see with equal

passion the losses you are asking them to sustain."[182]

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[178] Ibid., 12.
[179] Ibid., 133.
[180] Ibid., 135.
[181] Ibid., 157-158.
[182] Heifetz and Linsky, 12.

Heifetz and Linsky argue that leaders must discern the difference between two types of problems: "technical problems" and "adaptive challenges." Technical problems are problems for which organizations and communities "already [know] the solutions." They only need to apply the correct policies and procedures in order to solve these problems.[183] Adaptive challenges "cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high…because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community….The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself."[184] Leaders must discern the need for deep-seated change in the society and resist the temptation to apply superficial remedies - changing outward behaviors or policies without addressing underlying motives and assumptions. "Indeed, the single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify - in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector - is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems."[185]

Tackling adaptive challenges requires courage on the part of the leader. Heifetz and Linsky warn of four dangers in leadership through adaptive change: "getting marginalized, diverted, attacked, or seduced."[186] Each of these negative responses from followers is a reaction to perceptions of loss, and followers in this condition of loss often take out their frustrations on the leader. "…[W]hen you take on an issue, you *become* that issue in the eyes of many; it follows, then, that the way to get rid of the issue is to get rid

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[183] Ibid., 13.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., 14.
[186] Ibid., 31.

of you."[187] The solution, according to Heifetz and Linsky, is for the leader to strive to lead the people to an awareness of their own ability to solve the problem. "You stay alive in the practice of leadership by reducing the extent to which you become the target of people's frustrations. The best way to stay out of range is to think constantly about giving the work back to the people who need to take responsibility."[188]

To lead through adaptive change, a leader must first be willing to listen to the various voices within the organization. People trust the leader more willingly when they perceive that their own perspectives are the starting point for change.[189] This is where evaluation and feedback enters into the process. However, Heifetz and Linsky warn:

> But hearing their stories is not the same as taking what they say at face value. People naturally, even unconsciously, defend their habits and ways of thinking and attempt to avoid difficult value choices. Thus, after hearing their stories, you need to take the provocative step of making an interpretation that gets below the surface. You have to listen to the song beneath the words.[190]

Evaluation may uncover emotional stress, but as David Gortner observes, "Left unaddressed, these issues become Achilles' heels for leaders: anxiety binds effective assertiveness and decision-leadership, patterns get repeated in continuous cycles of frustration, and subtle lack of interest leaves people questioning leaders' involvement."[191] Nauta explains that congregations are naturally formed based on attraction and common preferences. When the people perceive a change in their community environment, they tend to resist the change. "Necessary for accommodation is a radical change of culture, a change in personality brought forward by the leadership provided by the minister as

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[187] Ibid., 123.
[188] Ibid., 139.
[189] Ibid., 63.
[190] Ibid., 64-65.
[191] Gortner: 209.

outsider."[192] For this reason, pastors must learn to see themselves both as members of the community and as individuals outside of the community.

The Corporate View: A Systems Approach

Pastors must understand their role in the community as a whole. In their book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World,* Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky call for diagnosis followed by action, described "in two dimensions: toward the organizational or social system you are operating in and toward yourself."[193] In other words, "you are a system (an individual) within a system (your organization)."[194] How do leaders, particularly pastors, function as members of the society in which they lead or preach?

Systems theory[195] describes this view of leadership, acknowledging the dual role of the leader: both as a member of the organization and as a separate entity. In their book *The Leader's Journey*, Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor explain that leaders "influence and are influenced by the interaction of the complex systems in which we live."[196] The functionality of a system - whether it be a family, a company, or a church congregation - depends on two variables: "*the level of emotional maturity* of the people in the system and of the leadership in particular" and "*the level of anxiety and tension* to which the system is subject."[197] Herrington, et al., suggest that in order for leaders to think systems, they must learn "to recognize how anxiety holds chronic

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[192] Nauta: 46.

[193] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 6.

[194] Ibid., 89.

[195] For a detailed introduction to family theory and systems thinking applied to a congregational context, see Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

[196] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 8.

[197] Ibid., 33.

symptoms in place, and how each person in the system has a role to play in keeping

things in balance."[198] In particular, the leader must answer two questions: "'What is my

role in keeping this problem in place?' and 'How can I change my role?'"[199]

At the turn of the century, little had been written about how family systems theory

relates to preaching,[200] but recent years have brought out much research along these lines.

Peter Steinke has utilized systems theory to counteract an over-emphasis in church

ministry on individualism and personality theories.

> We tend to assume that individuals live with a fixed nature or according to
> a personality type. But we do not always act in concert with our nature or
> type. We live in emotional environments that influence our functioning.
> We do not act merely on the basis of a personality type. In fact, we may
> show many different properties, depending on our context.[201]

Individuals' personalities may be described according to various schemes, but

personalities are neither static nor isolated. Church leaders tend to think of their

parishioners as individuals without considering the collective wholeness of how the

individual parts interact.[202] Steinke offers a helpful chart, a portion of which is

reproduced in Table 1:

Separate Parts Thinking	**System Thinking**
Atomistic	Holistic
Problems belong to the individual	Problems belong to the system
Problems are intra (within a part)	Problems are inter (between parts)

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[198] Ibid., 49-50.

[199] Ibid., 50.

[200] Lukas L. Bouman, "Preaching toward a Healthy Congregation: A Study in the Relationship between Preaching and the Congregation as an Emotional System" (DMin thesis, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2001), 2.

[201] Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 8.

[202] Ibid., 6.

Separate Parts Thinking	System Thinking
Whole can be understood by reduction into parts	Whole can be understood by interaction of the parts
Understanding comes from breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces	Understanding comes from looking up (larger and larger wholes)
Parts can be understood in themselves	Parts mutually influence one another
Think in lines	Think in loops

Table 1: A Comparison of Two Ways of Thinking: Separate Parts and the System[203]

Not only do pastors view their churches atomistically, the people also tend to "overfocus" on their pastors. When congregations overfocus on their clergy, they also fail to see how other parts of the system contribute to problems and successes. This blindness to the system often results in undue scrutiny of the pastor (as has been discussed in the previous section).[204]

Systems thinking also encourages the identification of emotional triangles. James Lamkin defines an emotional triangle as "*any three members of a relationship system or any two members plus an issue or symptom.*"[205] For example the three legs of a triangle may be the preacher, the congregation, and a sermon text. Another example may be the preacher, the elder board, and a congregation member.[206] Lamkin offers the example of Moses in Exodus when Moses tells the people, "Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord."[207] Lamkin explains, "Moses remembered that there is more going on

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[203] Ibid., 12.
[204] Ibid., 45.
[205] Lamkin: 469.
[206] Ibid.: 471.
[207] 1 Cor. 2:1–2.

than 'the congregation is upset with the minister.' There is a third leg to the triangle."[208]

Emotional triangles tend to follow several patterns, which Lamkin expresses as rules:

> Rule #1: You can only change a side (relationship) of the triangle to which you are connected.
> Rule #2: if you try to change the side to which you are not connected, usually the results will be opposite that you intend.
> Rule #3: If you break rule #2, you will end up with the stress of that relationship.[209]

The awareness of emotional triangles allows pastors to analyze what they can and cannot change. For example, a pastor cannot manage the relationship between a congregant and the elder board; the pastor can only manage his or her own relationships with the two other parts of the triangle. A pastor can be tempted - whether because of low self-perception or willful assertiveness - to respond to relational stress by "attempting to control and/or manage the impression that self has on others."[210] Lamkin suggests that identifying emotional triangles reduces anxiety for the pastor. "By wrestling and naming the triangles (with their problems and wonderful possibilities) and what role I play in them, I am less anxious while standing with the congregation in those triangles."[211]

Two recent studies have added credibility to the use of systems theory in the context of church leadership. In her PhD work on "Psychological Exchange between Leaders and Followers: A Grounded Theory," Mary Valentine conducted a qualitative study utilizing interviews with "Roman Catholic parish priests/pastors" in Peoria, Illinois.[212] "The findings convey a greater awareness of a far-reaching range of

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[208] Lamkin: 471.
[209] Ibid.: 473.
[210] Ibid.: 474.
[211] Ibid.: 476.
[212] Mary Diane Valentine, "Psychological Exchange between Leaders and Followers: A Grounded Theory" (PhD thesis, Regent University, 2007), 67.

contributors involved in the psychological relationship between leaders and followers."[213] Valentine describes an intangible exchange that "arises out of perceptions of what is occurring and happening in the relationship, not what can be physically determined." These perceptions act as the "currency" of interactions between the two parties.[214] In other words, both leaders and followers approach their relationship with expectations of how the other party will meet their needs.[215] These expectations affect the perceptions of each party and thus "contribute to the active social processes in a relationship.[216] In another study, Steve Lyon sought to apply the principles of systems theory in conflict management in various Southern Baptist congregations.[217] Lyon concludes, "One of the most effective ways to apply family systems directly to conflict in the congregation is through understanding and dealing responsibly with emotional triangles."[218]

The Individual View: Differentiation

While leaders are themselves members of the systems in which they lead, they also distinguish themselves in a role that functions outside the system. Jesus himself, as Scazzero points out, did not allow himself to be consumed by the expectations of others.[219] "He was deeply aware of who he was and what he was doing. This enabled him to break from the expectations of his family, friends, disciples, and wider religious culture and to follow God's unique plan for his life."[220] Similarly, leaders cannot lead a system through change without a sense of differentiation from the system.

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[213] Ibid., 174.
[214] Ibid., 158.
[215] Ibid., 5.
[216] Ibid., 158-159.
[217] Steve M. Lyon, "Leading in Congregational Conflict: A Family Systems Model," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* XLIII, no. 3 (2001): 37.
[218] Ibid.: 52.
[219] Scazzero, 33.
[220] Ibid., 75.

Differentiation involves seeing oneself as part of, but distinct from, the system as a whole. In *Generation to Generation,* Edwin Friedman argues that the overall well-being of any system depends primarily on the well-being of the leader(s).

> [A]n organism tends to function best when it's "head" is well-differentiated. The key to successful spiritual leadership, therefore, with success understood not only as moving people toward a goal, but also in terms of the survival of the family (and its leader), has more to do with the leader's capacity for self-definition and with the ability to motivate others.[221]

To put it simply, self-differentiation is "the ability of a leader to be a self while still remaining a part of the system."[222] Building on Friedman's work, Herrington, et al., elaborate that well-differentiated leaders "are people who can hold on to their own sense of personal vision and principles despite the resistance and pressure of their relationships in the system."[223] They urge leaders to "develop the capacity to set boundaries on the things that drain their vitality and establish space for the things that nourish the soul and renew the mind."[224]

Lamkin applies the language of differentiation to the realm of pastoral ministry. "It is crucial for me as a pastor to be committed to the life-long job of working at my self-differentiation *while paying attention to staying connected.*"[225] He submits that a healthy approach to pastoral leadership focuses on position rather than technique.[226] The pastor does not want to over-identify with the congregation and become enmeshed. Lamkin adds that pastoral burnout begins "at the point of taking on the responsibility for the church's health, rather than being present with the church as it works or does not work on

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[221] Friedman, 221.
[222] Ibid., 229.
[223] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 65.
[224] Ibid., 12.
[225] Lamkin: 467.
[226] Ibid.: 477.

its own health."[227] On the other hand, the pastor does not want to become so distant that the people will not follow.

Heifetz and Linsky describe what this process of differentiation can look like for a leader. They start with a truism: "When you belong to the organization or community that you are trying to lead, you are part of the problem."[228] The leader is both a member of the organization and the leader over the other members of the organization. This reality can result in anger directed at the leader as a person, but as they advise the leader, "If you can hold steady long enough, remaining respectful of their pains and defending your perspective without feeling you must defend yourself, you may find that in the ensuing calm, relationships become stronger."[229] Heifetz and Linsky are describing in practice how leaders respond to criticism with what Friedman defines as self-differentiation. Lamkin likewise encourages leaders to differentiate themselves from their received criticisms by focusing on position rather than on technique.

Leaders gain perspective on how they are interacting with the system by creating distance for reflection and analysis.[230] Heifetz and Linsky call this having a "balcony perspective," which involves " taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment."[231] Leaders must learn to observe themselves objectively as well as the functioning of the system as a whole.[232] Differentiation is the process of navigating between stepping out to gain perspective, and then reengaging to effect change.

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[227] Ibid.: 481.
[228] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 90.
[229] Ibid., 145.
[230] Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 7.
[231] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 53.
[232] Ibid., 54.

Leaders also separate themselves from the roles they play in the system. "When you make a distinction between the roles you play and yourself, you gain the emotional strength to ignore personal attacks your opponents hope will stymie your initiative."[233] This strategy protects the leader from criticism and flattery, both of which can be dangerous attempts to manipulate.[234] They remind the leader that "people see you in your role more than they see you as a person…. They see not your face but the reflection of their own needs or worries. These dominate their perceptions of you."[235] Heifetz and Linsky explain the critical nature of this distinction:

> To anchor ourselves in the turbulent seas of the various roles we take in
> life, professionally and personally, we have found it profoundly important
> to distinguish between the self, which we can anchor, and our roles, which
> we cannot. The roles we play in our organization, community, and private
> lives depend mainly on the expectations of people around us.[236]

Emotional stress comes partially from confusing self and role. Heifetz and Linsky remind the leader, "Remember, when you lead, people don't love you or hate you. Mostly they don't even know you. They love or hate the positions you represent."[237]

Lukas Bouman brings the theories of self-differentiation into the field of preaching. He encourages pastors to remain connected both to the text of scripture and to the people in their congregations.[238] Bouman explains that the process of self-differentiation in preaching "will serve to invite the hearer into the text, thus giving them the emotional context in which the Gospel is not only heard but comes alive for the

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[233] Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 213.
[234] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 190.
[235] Ibid., 170.
[236] Ibid., 187.
[237] Ibid., 198.
[238] Bouman, 29.

community of faith."[239] He suggests that preachers change their perspective from a

straight line, running from God through the preacher to the people (and vice-versa) into a

systems triangle. He describes his own process:

> I have often placed myself in the responsible position in the relationship between the people and the text, or God's Word, or even God in the preaching moment… In a sense I related to the text, and in effect to God, for the people, and I related to the people for God. Doing this has the effect of creating distance rather than closeness between people and God… Instead, following the model of systems theory, I decided to step out of the responsible position in order to allow the people to draw close to God, and in drawing near allow themselves to hear God speak clearly… To avoid the unhealthy triangle, I knew that I had to relate both directly to God (and to the Word of God) and directly to the people.[240]

In this way, Bouman demonstrates how the preacher - through preaching - can at the

same time remain distinct from the people but connected. "By staying out of the position

of responsibility, I could model and encourage, rather than interfere, in the relationship

between the people and God."[241]

Sermon Preparation and Delivery

Pastors preach in the context of relationships with their congregations.

Expectations about this relationship can both help and hinder the communication of the

gospel message to the people of the congregation. Evaluation helps pastors understand

what is happening relationally between the delivery and the reception of their sermons.

However, the sermons themselves also affect the system. As Ronald Allen notes,

> A sermon may generate ripples that the preacher intends. However, a preacher cannot always predict how a sermon will affect the congregational system. When a sermon is released into the system, the effects are sometimes altogether unforeseen. Consequently, ministers need

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[239] Ibid., 30.
[240] Ibid., 42-43.
[241] Ibid., 43-44.

feedback on their preaching. Indeed, a sermon may become a part of a life process in the congregation that calls forth another sermon.[242]

How do pastors use the evaluation mechanisms to inform their ongoing preaching? Formal seminary education normally separates the "practical" theology such as evaluation and leadership from "theoretical" theology related to exegesis and homiletics, but it rarely connects the two.[243] This section takes a step toward connecting the process of evaluation to the preparation of sermons. It will consider the role of ethos in rhetoric, how pastors preach toward their particular congregations, and whether there are any hermeneutical keys that may help preachers carry the gospel message to their congregations more effectively.

Ethos in Rhetoric

Communication theorists write of ethos in speaking because relationship cannot be separated out of the communication process. Discussions of ethos often begin with Aristotle's classic work *The "Art" of Rhetoric*.[244] Ethos, simply put, is "persuasion through the character of the speaker."[245] Ethos cooperates with logos, "the logical argumentation of the speech itself," and pathos, "the way in which the hearers are moved to emotion in the speech."[246] As has already been mentioned, Aristotle determines ethos to be the most powerful of the three modes of persuasion:[247]

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[242] Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and Practical Ministry*, Preaching and Its Partners (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 20.

[243] Burns, "How Pastors Learn the Politics of Ministry Practice," 315.

[244] Aristotle, "The "Art" Of Rhetoric," Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). However, Aristotle did not introduce the concept of ethos in rhetoric. For excellent surveys of the treatments of ethos in classical rhetoric, including the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian, see Bohannon: 48-56; Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 9-37.

[245] *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), s.v. "Ethos."

[246] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 19.

[247] Muehlhoff and Lewis, 95.

> The orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence; for we feel confidence in a greater degree and more readily in persons of worth in regard to everything in general, but where there is no certainty and there is room for doubt, our confidence is absolute. But this confidence must be due to the speech itself, not to any preconceived idea of the speaker's character; for it is not the case, as some writers of rhetorical treatises lay down in their
> "Art," that the worth of the orator in no way contributes to his powers of persuasion; on the contrary, moral character, so to say, constitutes the most effective means of proof.[248]

The *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age* traces Aristotle's influence through Augustine: "Because Augustine considers inner piety to be linked to the apprehension of truth, the status of ethos in Augustine's overall theory is quite high. Like Quintilian, Augustine believes that the entire success of oratory depends on a preexisting state of moral character in the speaker."[249] Stegman defines ethos as "the complex of attitudinal, behavioral, and ethical traits that mark a certain person in his or her individuality."[250] André Resner adds that the ethos of a speaker is developed within community, and for this reason, the speaker's "real" character is subject to the perceptions of the listeners.[251] In other words, it is the way audiences perceive the character of a speaker that measures the effectiveness of a rhetorical event.

Augustine develops the theme of ethos in rhetoric for the Christian preacher. Preaching differs from other forms of teaching or debating because listeners lack the opportunity to interact with or to question the speaker:

> In debates everyone has an opportunity to ask questions, but when all hush their voices to listen to one speaker and turn their attentive faces towards

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[248] Aristotle, 1.2.4.
[249] *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, s.v. "Ethos."
[250] Stegman, 71.
[251] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 23.

> him, it is not usual or acceptable for someone to ask questions about something he has not understood. So the speaker's sensitivity must come to the aid of the silent listener.[252]

Preachers aid their listeners by giving voice to the questions that they anticipate from their congregation. As in educational models, preachers use questions to draw listeners into the process of learning from the text. According to Augustine, speakers must learn the art of speaking with both eloquence and wisdom. Where eloquence falters, the speaker should possess a solid life example such that "his way of life becomes, in a sense, an abundant source of eloquence."[253]

Modern communication theory has revived an appreciation for the classical consideration of ethos in speaking.[254] According to the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, twentieth-century texts have stressed "that the writer and speaker must take presentation of self into consideration when planning an essay or speech." Although the word ethos might not be used, this principle is often discussed using other names, such as "writer's voice," "credibility," and "considering an audience."[255] Resner points out that some, like Karl Barth, have worked to remove consideration of the person of the preacher in homiletics. "These homiletical theorists bracket the human preacher out of preaching's equation, sometimes almost as a matter of homiletical theodicy - the defense of God's power and providence to alone provide preaching's efficacy." Resner counters, "Preacher hypocrisy or moral uprightness are factors in listener receptivity to the message spoken whether Barth likes it or not."[256] Because "the preacher's perceived person is intimately

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[252] Augustine, "On Christian Teaching," *Oxford World's Classics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.10.25.

[253] Ibid., 4.28.61.

[254] Resner calls communication theory "the grandchild of classical rhetoric." Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 66.

[255] *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, s.v. "Ethos."

[256] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 3.

bound up in the hearers' decisions about the message" the preacher is forced "constantly to reevaluate the nature of his or her implied *ēthos*."[257]

According to Resner, homiletical theory tends to emphasize either the rhetorical or the theological aspects of preaching.

> Those who start with "*ēthos*" often begin from the standpoint of the hearer and from the nature of the rhetorical situation. Rhetorically oriented homiletics are predominately hearer-driven. Those who begin with "preacher" often begin with the message he or she conveys in the theological conviction that the preaching event is prompted and empowered by God. Theologically oriented homiletics are in the main message-driven.[258]

Rather than choosing one over the other, Resner advances a proposal for a "bilingual" approach.[259] He appeals to Augustine's "both/and" argument, where "One should *both* do all one can in interpretation and articulation *and* should be expectant that God will bring the message God chooses."[260] The preacher cannot focus on the listener or the message to the exclusion of the other. Because "people do judge a speaker's words in view of their perception of that speaker's lived witness," the preacher must remain mindful of the effects of ethos on the message.[261] However, meaning does not originate from the hearers. Therefore, a preacher's "task is not just to leave our hearers and viewers with their way of judging us. Rather, part of our stewardship consists in reframing the way they are to judge us, namely from the frame of reference that the cross itself provides."[262]

In his dissertation "The Ethos Factor in Preaching," Philip Thompson used his own congregation as a case study to evaluate the effects of using feedback groups in his

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[257] Ibid., 140.
[258] Ibid., 40.
[259] Ibid., 3.
[260] Ibid., 52. See Augustine, "On Christian Teaching," 4.15.32.
[261] Ibid., 150.
[262] Ibid., 150-151.

preaching. Specifically, he sought "to enhance my ethos in the eyes of [my congregation] by receiving and responding to evaluations of my preaching."[263] He theorizes that "Each preacher possesses an 'ethos account' similar to a bank account."[264] A preacher's sermons can either add to or withdraw from this ethos account. "Constructive evaluations of his preaching would help him to monitor deposits and withdrawals, but receiving quality feedback is difficult for preachers."[265] This echoes Caffarella's assertion that values-and-beliefs programs do not lend themselves well to formal evaluation techniques.[266] Thompson reaches two conclusions concerning the benefits of close relationships with church members through the feedback during the study. "First, the preacher's involvement in the lives of church members fosters identification with them which, in turn, enables him to preach sermons that meet their needs."[267] "Second, listeners' close relationship with the preacher has a positive effect upon their response to his sermons."[268] The process of investing relational capital into the congregation results in a greater receptivity to the sermons.

Addressing the Listeners

Recent writing in hermeneutics has renewed attention on the listeners' role in the process of preaching. Authors characterize preaching as dialogue.[269] Stott describes preaching as a "silent dialogue" in which the preacher anticipates and responds to the perceived reactions of the congregation in the sermon.[270] Michael Emlet observes, "In

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[263] Philip W. Thompson, "The Ethos Factor in Preaching" (DMin thesis, Harding University Graduate School of Religion, 2001), 30.
[264] Ibid., 13.
[265] Ibid., 15.
[266] Caffarella, 235.
[267] Thompson, 184.
[268] Ibid., 185.
[269] Stott, 60. See also Allen, 18.
[270] Stott, 61.

ministry we are reading two 'texts' simultaneously, the story of Scripture and the story of

the person we serve… Reading the Bible without reading the person is a recipe for

irrelevance in ministry."[271] Listeners consider sermons to be irrelevant when preachers do

not help them place their lives "within the grand drama of God" as revealed through a

particular text.[272] For this reason, preachers study the conditions and thoughts of their

listeners in addition to time spent on biblical exegesis.[273]

Speakers attempt to understand their listeners in order to communicate more

effectively to each particular congregation. Muehlhoff and Lewis call this process

"perspective taking" in which the speaker asks: "Who is this person? Why is she or he

acting this way? What kind of person is this? Are my perceptions of this person

accurate?" The difficulty, as they point out, "is that we have no direct access to another

person's thoughts or feelings."[274] Exacerbating the problem is a postmodern skepticism

of the speech process itself. Postmodern listeners tend to distrust any persuasive speech,

including preaching, either because they see it "as an attempt to persuade, manipulate, or

subject the receiver" or because they conceive of truth "as a tool for personal

fulfillment."[275] Preachers address these difficulties primarily through listening. As Roger

van Harn puts it, "listening is a two-way street in the Christian church. Preachers are

called to listen to their listeners before, during, and after they speak."[276] Preachers who

demonstrate a dialogical character to their preaching - in which they ostensibly listen to

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[271] Emlet, 90.
[272] Ibid., 105.
[273] Stott, 216. Also see Jeffrey Arthurs, "The Postmodern Mind and Preaching," in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 190.
[274] Muehlhoff and Lewis, 50.
[275] Arthurs, 186, 190.
[276] van Harn, xi.

their congregation while addressing them - can actually increase the receptivity of their message by helping the listeners to feel part of the conversation.[277]

Thomas Swears describes benefits of a dialogical approach to preaching. He considers the relationship between the preacher and the congregation to be an essential factor in the effectiveness of preaching.[278] In order for a listener to engage with the sermon on a heart level, the listener desires to feel recognized and valued by the preacher[279] and to feel addressed personally in the sermon.[280] How does the preacher accomplish these ends? Swears suggests, "the preacher possesses something the text does not: corporality, and that is a significant difference." The congregant not only listens to the words of the sermon but also experiences the sermon "as a living encounter communicated through the physical presence - the body, the heart, the mind - of the preacher."[281] The preacher needs to develop a curiosity about the listeners, to anticipate what kinds of questions or resistances they might have in response to the sermon.[282]

Ronald Allen combines the themes of dialogical preaching with systems thinking. He describes sermons as "monological in form but dialogical in character." The preacher, in effect, engages in "a conversation in which the congregation joins the preacher in exploring the significance of the gospel for the circumstances of the community."[283] Allen defines the role of the preacher in broad terms, "…to interpret the life of the congregation and the life of the broader world from the perspective of the gospel. More

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[277] Ibid., xii.
[278] Thomas R. Swears, *Preaching to Head and Heart* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 71.
[279] Ibid., 61.
[280] Ibid., 71.
[281] Ibid., 71-72.
[282] Ibid., 73.
[283] 1 Cor. 2:1–2. Allen, 18.

specifically… the preacher is called to interpret the congregation as a life system intended to be shaped by Christian practice."[284]

In other words, the preacher leads the congregation to see itself as a system functioning within the broader system of the world. The preacher seeks to understand the condition of the system and adjusts the content of sermons in order to speak to the needs of the congregation.[285] The preacher listens attentively to the congregation through various methods - through "general pastoral listening in the course of pastoral calling, visiting people on their jobs, paying attention to the comments that people make," or through more structured interviews or surveys.[286] Bouman agrees with the importance of preachers being aware of their presence as members of the system in which they preach. He warns that "work with the congregation's emotional field and my participation in it, must be done before and kept in mind throughout the sermon process or the communication runs a great risk of missing its mark."[287]

When preachers pay attention to the concerns, attitudes, and questions of the congregation, their sermons take on a more realistic character. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg suggest, "The linking of shepherding with teaching demands teaching earthed to reality, so that we deal with genuine and not merely hypothetical situations in our preaching."[288] Zack Eswine agrees: "Preaching is mentoring. When we preach, we publicly model for a community how a human being is meant by God to relate to reality." Homileticians like these are describing an increasing value for moving preaching from

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[284] Ibid., 25.
[285] Ibid., 26.
[286] Ibid., 42.
[287] Bouman, 20.
[288] Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 129.

mere explication of doctrine toward doctrine that connects to individuals' experiences in real life.[289] In their book *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies,* John McClure, et al., highlight the importance of the relationship between preachers and their congregations in the act of preaching, which they describe as "negotiating a hearing" over time.[290] From small group interviews, the researchers observe that congregants typically find sermons more meaningful when they are themselves in times of transition, distress, or questioning.[291] The effectiveness of an individual sermon is never wholly related to the effectiveness of the sermon itself or of its delivery; preachers must also consider the life-context of the listener.

With this value for making the sermon feel connected to reality, homileticians suggest an effort to make sermons practical and relatable. Jim Belcher describes this push toward connection with reality as "…making the text practical to listeners. This requires contextualization, so the listeners can hear it in their culture."[292] In practical terms, as Greidanus advises, "Congregational involvement can be further heightened by aiming the sermon at specific needs in the congregation, by addressing the sermon, as the text before it, to specific questions."[293] From a negative vantage point, Dan Doriani describes the fallacy of ignoring the practical in preaching: "Even if [pastors] avoid the ultimate crime of propagating falsehood, they commit the penultimate crime of making Christianity seem boring and irrelevant... Scholars confess that they give little serious thought to the

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[289] Eswine, 85.
[290] McClure and others, 15.
[291] Ibid., 122.
[292] Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 153.
[293] Greidanus, 184.

relevance of Scripture."[294] In other words, preaching remains unfinished until preachers consider how the hearers will receive and process the message.

As preachers increase their awareness of the presence of their listeners in the preaching event, variety becomes a more necessary strategy for connecting with the community as a whole over time. Swears observes that the Bible itself necessitates "using different preaching styles for different literary forms of biblical text… because it provides for integrity of form between text and sermon."[295] Likewise, Eswine observes that God himself uses "multiple preaching postures" - sometimes speaking prophetically, sometimes through wisdom, and sometimes as a priest.[296] God also uses "a variety of language types," from "technical, precise, and propositional language" to "poetic and imaginative" language.[297] Similarly, as preachers listen to the needs of their congregations, they will tailor different sermons to address different learning styles and expectations over time.

The "Hermeneutical Key"

Notwithstanding the value for an increased awareness of the listeners' active presence in the sermon event, homileticians seek to ensure that the message of the sermon arises from the text of scripture and not from the demands of the audience.[298] Resner decries the practice of preaching "hearer-driven" messages that are derived from the source of the congregants' needs or desires rather than from the text of scripture. "[W]ithout a clear idea of just what the message of preaching is and how it has priority in

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[294] Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 2.
[295] Swears, 27.
[296] Eswine, 105.
[297] Ibid., 106-107.
[298] See 2 Tim. 4:3-5.

the situation of Christian proclamation, the guidelines for conceiving the nature of preacher-*ēthos* naturally slip to those which are either rhetorically shaped, i.e., hearer-driven, or are abandoned altogether in the name of theological purity."[299] In other words, if the preacher and the congregation do not begin with a mutual acceptance of the priority of God's word in preaching, then the authority to define meaning will shift away from scripture itself. Either individuals will create meaning according to how they hear the sermon or preachers will impose meaning based on the force of their personality.

Current social research confirms such a tendency of contemporary congregations to receive sermons individualistically. The National Study for Youth and Religion reveals that today's younger generation views most all religion as a means that "helps people to be good, to make good choices, to behave well."[300] Furthermore, as James Tonkowich points out, "The preeminent cultural fact working against serious Christian commitment among emerging adults is an individualism, so extreme, that it rejects any authority beyond, 'What seems right to me.'"[301] Stott points out one reason why this kind of hearer-driven demands on preaching falls short: "If we become exclusively preoccupied with answering the questions people are asking, we may overlook the fact that they often ask the wrong questions and need to be helped to ask the right ones."[302] Preachers need to encourage the people to receive the scripture message as it speaks to their lives without imposing a message upon scripture that is defined by their experiences. In an effort to

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[299] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 142.
[300] Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 286.
[301] James Tonkowich, "When Scripture Becomes an a-La-Carte Menu," *ByFaith Magazine*, Summer 2010, 19.
[302] Stott, 139.

counter an over-emphasis on hearer-driven preaching, homileticians are seeking ways to promote the authority of the text itself in preaching.

David Dunn-Wilson suggests a continual re-definition of preaching with each new generation of listeners. He builds on Augustine's urging for preachers to read their audiences' emotional apprehension of the message as part of the art of persuasion.[303] Then he suggests that the ancient church fathers modeled a new apologetic for each preaching context.

> Origen, Turtullian, Athanasius, and Leo all grasped the truth that Christology must be plastic enough to fit new situations. As churches see their imperialistic powers crumble and their protected status fade, they will be driven to experience the vulnerability of Christ. They will be compelled to ask how he will be 'transfigured' again to reveal himself afresh from within a pluralist context.[304]

Dunn-Wilson argues that effective preaching must not only re-consider the delivery of the gospel, but it must re-define it as well. The cultural changes demand a change in the way we view and preach Christ. He is careful to set boundaries on the change that allowable by scripture:

> First of all, congregations must understand that theirs is a unique faith, distinct from orthodox Judaism and from the popular cults. It is unique because Christ alone is the climax of God's self-revelation and only those who believe his claims and obey his teaching will be saved… The sermons [of the NT letters] are saturated with references to Jesus as the Christ whose messiahship is divinely authenticated by the resurrection and ascension.[305]

Thus, Dunn-Wilson calls for a consistently Christ-centered message, but he treats this more as a temporal emphasis based on the needs of the church in a given age in establishing the gospel.

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[303] Dunn-Wilson, 99.
[304] Ibid., 124.
[305] Ibid., 19.

Walter Brueggemann also argues for a more definitively scripture-focused approach to preaching. In his book *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word,* Brueggemann suggests, "Preaching must perforce be grounded more securely than in the easy assumptions of a consumer culture."[306] He agrees with the analysis of postmodern culture being dominated by a therapeutic mindset in which, "The end result is a self-preoccupation that ends in self-indulgence, driving religion to narcissistic catering and consumerism, to limitless seeking after well-being and pleasure on one's own terms without regard to any other in the community."[307] Rather than centering the message on the perceived needs of the listeners, he argues for both the preacher and the congregation "to entertain the possibility that there is indeed a word other than our own, a word that comes from outside our closed systems of reality."[308] As an effective summary of the whole point of his book, Brueggemann defines faithful preaching as "redescription of the world, with reference to YHWH by appeal to the text through poetic imagination that is connected to particular context."[309] He envisions the purpose of the scripture text as "a sub-version of reality, a *sub-version* that intends to *subvert*."[310] In other words, the perceptions of reality held by both preacher and congregation are transformed by the scripture rather than the other way around.

In order to accomplish this, Brueggemann suggests, "Preaching thus must be conducted in a context where one makes proposals and advocacies but not conclusions."[311] Brueggemann seeks to embrace the pluralism of postmodern culture but

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[306] Walter Brueggemann, *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 12.
[307] Ibid., 24.
[308] Ibid., 13.
[309] Ibid., 17.
[310] Ibid., 19.
[311] Ibid., 22.

to speak truth to it from God's word. In this way, the preacher speaks truth without forcing the acceptance of that truth. The relationship between the preacher and the congregation becomes more important than the communication of truth by itself. He picks up on the language of systems theory and triangulation in describing the preacher's relational position between the congregation and the scripture. He pictures the triangle of the preacher, the scripture text, and the congregation. Rather than preachers viewing themselves in a triangle "with the text against the congregation," Brueggemann proposes an intentional view of the themselves "with the congregation against the text." The purpose of this suggestion is that the preacher must give the text its own voice by providing "some visible interpretive distance between pastor and text," so that authority for transformation will lie with the scriptures rather than with the skills and abilities of the preacher.[312] He explains:

> The strategy of triangling invites us to perceive the text very differently
> from the way we have conventionally received it. In order for the triangle
> to work, the text must have power and freedom to utter its own voice as a
> real voice in the conversation. This is in part a theological matter
> concerning inspiration, revelation, and authority."[313]

Brueggemann then warns both liberals and conservatives against "silencing the voice of the text" through either dismissive criticism or by subverting the text to a theological system.[314]

Other homiletics authors agree with Brueggemann's emphasis on the authority of voice of scripture in preaching. Proponents of expository preaching, for example, base the authority of preaching in the text rather than in the preacher. Roy Clements proposes two key distinctives of expository preaching. First, expository preaching pays equal

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[312] Ibid., 37.
[313] Ibid., 38.
[314] Ibid., 38-39.

attention to the two horizons of contemporary problems and interests and to the biblical text itself, but of those two horizons, "expository preaching begins with the biblical text." Clements contrasts this with topical preaching, which typically begins with the horizon of contemporary problems and "scans the Bible for relevant material."[315] Haddon Robinson agrees that expository preaching "draws its substance from the Scriptures."[316] Expository preachers begin with the text and move toward the life situations of the listeners.

Other authors insist, however, that the authority of scripture additionally demands a cohesiveness to the message of preaching. Out of this respect for the authority and power of the Bible, Chapell says, "The meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon. The text governs the preacher."[317] Pressing the argument forward, if preachers are going to "let the text speak for itself" – the heart of expository preaching – then, "The particulars of a passage need to be related to the overall purpose of Scripture."[318] Chapell identifies this overall message in Christ-centered terminology: "The necessity of grace in balanced preaching inevitably points both preacher and parishioner to the work of Christ as the only proper center of a sermon."[319] The Bible, in all of its various parts, points to its climactic whole in the message and work of Christ. Resner, in his study of 1 Corinthians 1-4, concludes that "Paul's response to the Corinthian Christians' confusion over ministerial identity took the route of redirecting their consciousness via the cross-event-proclaimed. For Paul, this was the foundation for ecclesial reflection on ministerial

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[315] Clements: 179.
[316] Robinson, 82.
[317] Chapell, 32.
[318] Ibid., 73.
[319] Ibid., 40.

identity."[320] In other words, both message and messenger (preacher) are defined by

Christ's finished work on the cross.

Graeme Goldsworthy calls this message about Christ, the gospel, the

"hermeneutical key" of the whole Bible. "By referring to the gospel as the hermeneutical

key I mean that proper interpretation of any part of the Bible requires us to relate it to the

person and work of Jesus."[321] He explains, "Any sermon, then, that aims to apply the

biblical text to the congregation and does so without making it crystal clear that it is in

Christ alone and through Christ alone that the application is realized, is not a Christian

sermon."[322] Preachers want their hearers to walk away with the big idea that Jesus is the

one and only solution to the fallen human condition. Preachers strive to show their

congregations the connections between God's promises and their obedience in the

context of their experiences. Emlet puts it this way:

> Because we tend to use "bits" of the Bible for disconnected "bits" of daily
> life without paying attention to the whole, the whole of people's lives
> don't change. A dis-integrated Bible often leads to dis-integrated,
> compartmentalized lives. That doesn't mean we have to tell the whole
> story every time we minister the Word…. But it does mean that the
> sweeping, Christ-centered plotline of Scripture increasingly shapes the
> way we view and use any passage.[323]

Emlet argues that scripture demands this emphasis because of its overarching

redemptive-historical character."[324] Martin Luther noted that the primary task of a

preacher is to "grasp the main point" of the text, but some preachers then "say the words

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[320] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 7.

[321] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 84.

[322] Ibid., 124. Both Chapel and Goldsworthy give excellent introductions to Christ-centered preaching as a whole.

[323] Emlet, 62.

[324] Ibid., 171.

all right, but the sum and the ultimate meaning of the law they corrupt altogether."[325]
This hermeneutical key prompts listeners to focus on Christ rather than on the
instrumentality of the preacher.

Summary of Literature Review

Preaching is a relational activity. The New Testament affirms the uniqueness of
this relationship in which the preacher stands both as an ambassador between God's word
and God's people and as a member himself of the community of God's people. Ethos in
preaching - the perceptions of this relationship between preacher and people - can
enhance or hinder the communication of the gospel message itself. Preachers can use the
tools of evaluation - whether formal assessment techniques or informal feedback - to
learn much about what is happening relationally in the delivery and the reception of
sermons. By listening to and analyzing feedback on their sermons, preachers gain deeper
insights into the characteristics of their congregations and into the health of their
relationships with them. Relational stress often damages the emotional health of the
preacher and thereby introduces stress into the relational system of the church. Thus
preachers must learn to develop in their emotional intelligence – the ability to pursue both
connection and differentiation – for the sake of health and leadership. Pulling all this
information together, preachers may improve their effectiveness in preaching by
investing in healthy relationships with the people and by speaking more proactively to the
perceived needs of the congregation. With the hermeneutical key of consistent Christ-
centered messages, preachers are able both to engage their congregations on a personal

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[325] Martin Luther, "On the Sum of the Christian Life, 1532," in *Luther's Works*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 266.

level and to settle authority questions in the text of scripture rather than on the perceived relational successes and failures of the preacher.

This chapter examined current literature dealing with ethos in rhetoric, evaluation, and emotional intelligence, but very little of this research combines these topics in the realm of preaching. The question remains: how do preachers come to understand how relationships affect the communication of their sermons in practice? In pursuit of this question, it is necessary to research the experiences of preachers in how they conduct evaluation of their preaching, how that evaluation affects them emotionally, and how they utilize that evaluation in ongoing sermon preparation and delivery.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how preachers use evaluation as a means for understanding how relationships with their congregations impact their preaching. The research consisted of the intersection of three areas of study, including evaluation, emotional intelligence, and sermon preparation and delivery. In order to examine these areas from a practitioner perspective, the researcher conducted six interviews with pastors who preach regularly. The interviews followed these four guiding research questions:

1. How do pastors understand their role as a preacher in relationship with their congregation?

2. How do pastors conduct evaluation of their preaching?

3. How do pastors respond emotionally to this evaluation?

4. How do pastors use this evaluation in their ongoing sermon preparation and delivery?

Design of Study

This study followed a qualitative research method for analyzing the views and the experiences of pastors who preach in the context of a single church. In her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation,* Sharan B. Merriam describes the goal of qualitative research as an interest "in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they

attribute to their experiences."[326] The qualitative approach to research lends itself to the goal of this study, which was to gain an understanding of how pastors experience and interpret the relational aspect of their preaching. Caffarella differentiates between quantitative data which "give precise numerical measures" and qualitative data which "provide rich descriptive materials."[327] This rich descriptive data provided a deeper understanding of the best practices of how pastors evaluate the influences of relationships with their congregations on their preaching.

Merriam describes four key characteristics of a qualitative study.[328] First, the study focuses on meaning and understanding. The researcher seeks an emic perspective on the material – an understanding of the issues from the participants' point of view. Second, the researcher becomes the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data. Third, the data is analyzed inductively, allowing the data itself to lead the research toward a theory, rather than seeking data to confirm a hypothesis. Finally, the researcher utilizes rich description to describe the data deeply. The researcher in this study gathered data through a survey of current literature related to the purpose of the study and through semi-structured interviews. The experiences of the interview participants, both positive and negative, produced valuable data in the discovery of best practices for evaluative methods which help pastors understand and analyze the impact of relationships with their congregations on their preaching.

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[326] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 5.
[327] Caffarella, 254.
[328] Merriam, 14-16.

Participant Criteria

In order to acquire rich, experiential data relating to the topics of evaluation and relationship in preaching, the researcher interviewed six pastors who preach on a regular basis within a particular church congregation. For the sake of doctrinal and ecclesial continuity within the data, the researcher sought participants who were teaching elders in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).[329] Due to this denominational affiliation, all of the participants were male. The participants were required to have served with one congregation for a period of at least three years so that sufficient time could elapse for the development of and reflection upon pastoral relationships. It was also preferable that the participants subscribe to a Christ-centered model of preaching. This criterion of a common preaching philosophy limited one potential variable in that each preacher shared a common goal for communication in their sermons. The participants may or may not presently use formal methods of sermon evaluation, since both methods were considered as applicable to this study.

Most of the participants serve as solo or senior pastors in small to mid-sized churches.[330] Larger churches were initially avoided because the nature of the pastor-congregant relationship could potentially change with the large-church dynamics.[331] However, during the course of the study, it was discovered that smaller churches tend not

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[329] One pastor was previously a teaching elder in the PCA before his congregation voted to withdraw from the denomination. The reformed commitments of the congregation and pastor remain in effect, and an exemption was granted due to the rich experiences this pastor had in relation to the topic of this study.

[330] While church size categories can be somewhat arbitrary, for the purposes of this study, small churches were considered to consist of under one hundred members, mid-sized as one hundred to four hundred, and large as over four hundred.

[331] Tim Keller suggests that the larger the church, the more the pastor's responsibilities shift from direct congregational shepherding toward staff-team management. Tim Keller, "Leadership and Church Size Dynamics," *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 12, no. 12 (2010): No pagination. http://reformedperspectives.org/article.asp/link/http:%5E%5Ereformedperspectives.org%5Earticles%5Etim_keller%5Etim_keller.Leadership.html/at/Leadership%20and%20Church%20Size%20Dynamics (accessed April 6, 2011).

to implement as many formal methods of sermon evaluation as larger churches. As a result, the researcher chose to expand the limits of church size to include pastors of larger congregations in order to gain insight into the experience of pastors who preach under more formal sermon evaluation structures. Geographical and demographical variety were achieved with congregations representing urban, suburban, and rural settings from the southeastern and midwestern United States.

The participants for this study were chosen from a pool of recommendations by other pastors or Covenant Theological Seminary professors. Each potential pastor was sent an introductory letter followed by a personal phone call. After giving written informed consent to participate in this study, the participant was asked to complete a one page demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire identified possible variables of interest to the study, such as congregation size, the length of the pastoral relationship with the congregation, and whether the church currently has a formal annual review process in place for the pastor.

Six pastors were selected for participation in this study - allowing for sufficient variety and the identification of themes in the data. The participants were encouraged to share their personal views and experiences without prejudice. Participants' names and identifying information have been changed in order to protect their identities. Introductions to the participants will be given in the next chapter.

Design Tools

Interviews were designed in a semi-structured format following the main research questions. The main questions were followed by various detailed questions based on the insights and the experiences of each participant. Thus the interviews were allowed to

explore more deeply the participants' experiences and reflections. Initial questions for the

interview protocol were developed based on the data collected in the literature, but the

interviews themselves potentially initiated further development and refinement. Merriam

suggests the use of "*the constant comparative method* of data analysis" (emphasis hers),

in which the transcribed interviews are compared during the interview process for the

identification of patterns and themes in the data.[332] The interview protocol followed the

four main research questions (RQ's) in this way:

RQ #1. How do pastors understand their role as a preacher in relationship with their congregation?
1. How does preaching fit into everything else you do as a pastor? Time? Priorities?
2. How do you view your relationship to your congregation as a preacher?
3. What biblical descriptions or analogies help you to define your role as a preacher in relationship with your congregation?
4. What do you hope to accomplish with your sermons? What is your desired outcome in your congregation?
5. What do you think people in your congregation expect to receive from your sermons?
6. How have people communicated their expectations of your preaching?

RQ #2. How do pastors conduct evaluation of their preaching?
1. How do you evaluate your sermons once you have preached them?
2. Do you follow any kind of structured method for eliciting feedback on your sermons from members of your congregation?
3. How do you receive informal feedback from members of your congregation?

RQ #3. How do pastors respond emotionally to this evaluation?
1. Tell me about a time when you received positive feedback on your preaching. How did that make you feel? How did that affect your relationship with that person?
2. Tell me about a time when you received negative feedback on your preaching. How did that make you feel? How did that affect your relationship with that person?
3. Tell me more about your emotional response to this evaluation. What else did you do or feel?
4. How did this evaluation help you to understand what was happening relationally between you and your congregation? Did you gain any insights about yourself or your congregation?

RQ #4. How do pastors use this evaluation in their ongoing sermon preparation and delivery?

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[332] Merriam, 30.

1. How have you adapted your preaching to address the feedback you have received from people in your congregation?
2. Tell me about a time when you could tell that the sermons were impacting some of your relationships in the congregation. How did you handle that situation?
3. How does feedback, either positive or negative, affect the way you think about your audience in preparing sermons?
4. What practices have you found to be helpful in clarifying your relationship as a preacher with the congregation?

The researcher conducted a pilot test of the interview protocol to ensure the clarity and usefulness of the questions in bringing out data which addressed the research questions.

The interviews were conducted over a two month period for a duration of sixty to ninety minutes each. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in the participant's church or home. Due to financial and time restraints, two geographically distant interviews utilized computer video-conferencing via internet connection. All of the interviews provided a safe environment for the participant to share openly about potentially sensitive and emotional experiences and allowed the researcher to write field notes with observations on both verbal and non-verbal responses. The interviews were recorded on a portable digital device, then transcribed personally by the researcher onto a computer word processing document. They were then analyzed for themes related to the participants' perspectives on evaluating their sermons and responding to these evaluations. Emerging themes were identified and coded for further exploration in successive interviews.[333]

Limitations of the Study

This study considered only one approach toward understanding the impact of pastor-congregation relationships on preaching. The complexities of relationships make it impossible to consider all of the ways pastors interrelate with their congregations. For

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[333] Ibid., 181-182.

this reason, this study focused primarily on the use of evaluation as an entry point to understanding how relationships may affect the preaching of God's word. Homiletical teachers may vigorously point out that preachers should eschew preaching to whatever their congregants' "itching ears want to hear."[334] As Bryan Chapell, author of *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, reminds, "The efficacy of the truths in God's message rather than any virtue in the messenger transforms hearts."[335] However, this does not nullify the benefit of evaluation methods in helping preachers understand better how to communicate the message of grace in Christ in spite of those itching ears or wounded hearts.

The research of this study was necessarily limited in scope. The literature review encompassed a substantial, but limited, representation of the material concerning the areas defined by the research questions. Inclusion of more than six participants would have produced more data, however the qualitative nature of this study allowed the data to be explored more deeply. This study did not take into consideration the influences of denominational, generational, or sociological distinctions such as rural vs. urban, southern vs.western, or traditional vs. emergent churches. One region, for example, may consist of people less inclined to offer open and honest evaluation than would exist in another cultural landscape. Due to the limitation on PCA affiliation, variations in theological stance and ecclesiology were not considered. Readers who wish to generalize the principles derived from this study are encouraged to test those principles in their own particular contexts. The experiential nature of qualitative research itself places a

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[334] 2 Timothy 4:3.
[335] Chapell, 26.

responsibility on the reader to determine how the material can be appropriately applied to their context.

Researcher Position

The interpretation of data in this study was influenced by the researcher's position which, as Merriam describes, consists of "the biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken."[336] The researcher serves as a pastor in the PCA with a strong commitment to reformed, Christ-centered preaching. The research itself was motivated by the researcher's own experiences of dealing with relational issues uncovered through sermon evaluation. Thus, the researcher related to the participants as an insider-outsider, as both a member and an observer of the group under study.[337] This stance may have biased the researcher toward certain experiential assumptions in forming interview questions and in analyzing the interview data, but the personal experience also gave the researcher a common language for dialogue with the study participants. The researcher desires to use this study to assist pastors who want to grow in their effectiveness in communicating a Christ-centered message to their congregations.

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[336] Merriam, 219.
[337] Ibid., 108.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how preachers utilize evaluation as a means for understanding the ways in which relationships with their congregation impact their preaching. The research consisted of interviews with six preachers through four areas which explored how the preachers perceive their relationship with their congregations, how they conduct evaluation of their preaching, how they respond emotionally to this evaluation, and how they use what they learn in their evaluation to inform their ongoing sermon preparation. This chapter summarizes the data from these interviews and identifies themes and insights which contribute to the stated goals of the study.

Research Participants

Participants' names have been altered in order to protect their identities;[338] however a brief introduction to their preaching contexts may assist in the analysis of their reflections. Six preachers participated in this research, all of whom are currently (or have been recently) preaching regularly in a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Jim serves as a solo pastor of a rural midwestern church of under one hundred members. He has been preaching regularly for five to ten years at this church, which is his first pulpit. Marcus has been the senior pastor of a multicultural, urban church of two to four hundred members in the midwest for close to five years. Marcus is

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[338] The researcher has made necessary grammatical corrections to participants' quotes, but care has been taken not to alter the intent of their observations.

the primary preacher but shares the pulpit with other preachers (both staff and visitors) about one quarter of the time. Aaron has served for over fifteen years as the senior pastor of his suburban congregation of one to two hundred people. His church is located in the suburbs of a midwestern city. Michael has served in his church for ten to fifteen years, but only for the last five to ten years as its senior pastor. His church is a larger congregation of over four hundred members, located in the suburbs of a mid-sized, southeastern city. David's church recently left the PCA, but remains theologically reformed. David has served for five years as the founding pastor of this one to two hundred member church in the urban area of a larger midwestern city. He served previously in two other PCA congregations. Kurt is the senior pastor of a four to five hundred member church in a more affluent suburban area of a midwestern city. He has been preaching regularly with this congregation for five to ten years.

The Preacher in Relationship

In order to study how relationships and preaching affect one another, the first research question sought to establish a baseline understanding of how pastors perceive their roles as preachers in relationship with their congregations. The literature review revealed that word pictures are often used to describe the pastoral relationship. The researcher began the interviews by asking the participants to describe in their own words how they characterize their roles as preachers with their congregations. Then the participants were asked to reflect on the ways in which they feel either agreement or tension with their congregations' perceptions of these roles.

Perceptions and Word Pictures

When asked to define their roles and to describe their relationships as preachers, most of the participants started by stressing the priority of preaching in their ministries. Michael ranked preaching as the number one priority among his pastoral activities. Jim went so far as to call it "the priority" of his ministry – both because of its being a primary means of grace and because of the amount of time invested in preaching. Marcus tempered the priority of preaching, putting it on equal footing with three other pastoral responsibilities: shepherding the sheep, equipping the saints, and casting the vision and values of the church. Some of his energy and focus has migrated toward leadership of a growing staff team. Kurt noted that preaching is "just what I do every week; it's really the solid mass in the week." Furthermore, Kurt called preaching "in a very helpful way, the thing that gets started and finished in a week when lots of other things don't in ministry." David agreed with this sentiment, reflecting, "If I am going to neglect anything else it's not going to be preaching." In their week-to-week experience, these pastors perceive the role of preaching to be among the most important of their regular activities in terms of both value and time.

When asked to define their roles as preachers, the participants shared a wide variety of word pictures which can be grouped into four broad categories: directorial, instructional, pastoral, and familial. Some of the pastors, especially the two who serve in larger churches, saw their roles as preachers in terms that emphasized direction and leadership. Michael, while ranking preaching as his most important responsibility overall, also sees preaching "pushed down" by the tyranny of the urgent. He hesitantly acknowledged that there is an aspect to his role which functions somewhat like a CEO of

a nonprofit organization. Marcus embraced the directorial aspect of his role and expressed it more in ministerial terms. "We talk a lot here about Prophet, Priest, and King. Again, I think if I tend towards any one direction it's the King: builder-leader." Being the lead pastor, but not preaching every week, he saw his priority in preaching "as the place to keep the mission, vision, values, health, unity of the church in mind." For these two participants, their preaching contributes to their responsibilities of leadership with their congregations.

Several of the participants emphasized the instructional aspect of preaching, although they used different words to describe this perception. Jim called himself a "herald" with the thought "that you're proclaiming the good news, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." This concept is what makes him feel "humbled to be called into such an important ministry." Kurt's first thought was to call himself a "Bible teacher." He expressed a desire not only to teach the content of the Bible, but to "model sound exegesis." As he prepares sermons, he keeps the thought in mind how he can "help people gain those kinds of tools that they can read scripture on their own."

Aaron felt compelled to identify himself as more of a "theologian than a preacher," claiming that his "ideas are much better than…the emotional connection with people." He declared that his priority in preaching is "wanting to inspire people to see and to some degree feel the depths and the practical implications of the propositional truth that they know in their mind… inspiring people to grasp with their heart what their minds tells them is true." David identified with the picture of an attorney. "I've got my case, and it's kind of like they [the congregation] are the jury… I am there advocating for the truth, for the word, for God himself." All of these word pictures have in common the

idea of preaching as a means for teaching, sometimes persuading with, the content of

God's word to God's people.

All of the pastors who emphasized the instructional aspect of preaching also

included a pastoral component to their perceived roles as preachers. Jim emphasized the

biblical source of the shepherd imagery, citing both Psalm 23 and Christ as the "Good

Shepherd"[339] in John 10. The shepherd picture accentuates the activities of the pastor as

the one who not only leads and feeds, but who also protects and provides for the sheep.

Kurt specifically tied the two terms together: "shepherd-teacher." For him, the word

picture of a shepherd adds the reality of relationship to the task of instruction. Aaron

explained this pastoral emphasis in preaching as trying to get at the "real existential

drama" of the text:

> It seems to me that every text God has spoken into the human situation,
> every text has an existential drama…which means you have to get the
> existential drama of the text, but you also have to then be able to
> determine what's the existential drama in people's lives as that comes to
> them. So if I'm preaching on possessions, I'm always thinking about: okay
> here's this middle-class people here; we all are with our minivans and our
> CRV's and stuff like that. What's the existential drama of our own lives
> that this text is trying to speak into?

So, the participants have expressed a desire not only to instruct the congregation in the

content of the scriptures, but also to highlight the relevancy of the scriptures to their day-

to-day experiences.

Two participants in particular observed a shift over the years in their own

perceptions about the pastoral aspect of their role as preachers. Kurt observed, "For a

long time I saw myself just as a teacher first, [but now] that blend of shepherd-teacher is

probably more my own self-perception." Why the shift? He has learned that it is "hard to

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[339] John 10:11.

speak to their [the congregants'] issues if you don't know what those issues are." Because of his growing awareness of the pastoral aspect of his preaching, he analyzes the needs of the congregation differently now than he did before. "Because, working with the model I think most of us work with, our sin is really the result of us not believing the gospel in some level. And so in preaching I'm just re-presenting the gospel from this particular text." David experienced a similar shift, about which he reflected, "I started out thinking that I would pastor, like as a shepherd, so that I could do what I really wanted to do, which was preach. And that has changed for me over time where I have seen the importance of pastoring that goes on." He recalled listening to "good preachers" during seminary, and when asked what he thought made a preacher "good," he replied, "not only did they care about theology but the theology actually changed my life." Now, even though he still feels more strength in the exposition of scripture, he finds himself "always trying to be more pastoral to balance that out a little bit."

Several of the participants articulated terms that emphasized a more intimate, familial relationship with their congregations. Michael preferred to see himself as a friend of his congregation, explaining, "I think my approach to preaching is to really come alongside the congregation as much as possible as a friend." Michael drew this thought from the biblical imagery of the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. "Christ walking beside them in opening up the scriptures until their hearts burned would be, for me, the analogy I'd like to use for my relationship with this church." Michael expressed frustration, however, that the size of his congregation makes it hard "having more relationships than I can maintain."

Jim and Aaron both brought up parental imagery. Aaron picked up on the biblical images of both a mother and a father. "Paul says we were like nursing mothers among you, and if the pastor is the spiritual father, he will care for the well-being of the flock, ready to instruct, ready to protect, wanting to motivate." Jim referred to Paul's fatherly statements in 1 Corinthians 4, but he followed up with an observation that the depth of this father-child relationship depends on the different people, "because when you come into an area that you've never been to before, you're not going to be the father in the face to so many people in the congregation."

The participants' answers affirmed the variety of perceptions about this pastor-congregation relationship that the literature review suggested. Each of the participants saw their roles as complex, using multiple word pictures to describe the different ways they relate to their congregations through their preaching ministry. There was variety and complexity in the word pictures used by the participants; yet, the pictures overlapped as they fell into the four categories of directorial, instructional, pastoral, and familial.

Agreement and Tension

When asked to compare their own perceptions of this preacher-congregation relationship with the expectations and perceptions of their people, the participants noted both areas of commonality and tension. Many of the participants suggested that they feel on the same page with most of their congregations in characterizing the relationship. Kurt observed, "By and large, I really believe people want a pastor in the pulpit. They want someone who knows them and who has their needs in mind." Marcus said that he believes that tension over relational issues is not a "pressing issue" because their church has many pastors and leaders involved in the lives of the people. They have tried

intentionally to present the leaders of the church as approachable, and they regularly communicate to the congregation that "house churches are the first place to get care." Because the people feel cared-for, they do not express dissatisfaction over their relationship with him as their primary preacher. Agreement does not always come cheaply, however. As Jim pointed out, he mostly feels agreement with his congregation over relational perceptions, "but to say that that has not come without a struggle would not be true."

Two participants highlighted a particular factor that they felt increased the feelings of agreement with their congregations – the fact that they were in church planting situations. Church-planting removes the variable of previously-held group experiences. Aaron pointed out that his particular gifts and personality as a "theologian" more than a "preacher" seem to be a good fit for his congregation. "There are a lot of places that wouldn't stand for it…My delivery's not great. I think my affect isn't great in the pulpit, sometimes the clarity and the cohesiveness of the sermon is not great, the illustrations aren't great…" but he feels like he can "get away with it" because he started the church. The people accept his personality because of the comfort of experience and longevity. David likewise explained the reason why he feels more resonance with his current church plant congregation:

> These people came with no prior pastoral experience with me or at that church. So I have attracted people - the Lord has brought people - that resonate with me. I mean it wasn't their church before I came. Where always before, I went to churches – it was their church before I came…and they had expectations.

In the absence of a previous pastor, the people felt the freedom to accept the way of relating with their pastor because it was the only context they had experienced. But with pastoral succession comes change in experiences and expectations.

Almost none of the participants had difficulty pointing out tensions that they feel with their congregations over perceptions of their preacher-congregation relationship. Some of the perceived tensions involved a difference of priority between the various categories of preaching ministry. In David's case, his previous church was a larger church of 350–400 people which had grown under his predecessor. When David became their pastor, he began to hear common stories about the previous pastor:

> He was a great guy, he was always there. Like when you had a headache he knew it, and he was always there. If you had a death or something, he didn't just come by…he stayed. And so that's what was normal, that's what was expected. Where I'm trying to say, "Look how important preaching is!" They were like, "Well, okay…but we want your presence."

Where David wanted to bring greater emphasis to the instructional aspect of his relationship with the congregation, the people wanted a far greater emphasis on the pastoral aspect. David further noticed that this tension tended to come from established groups within the congregation. He explained, "They had small groups that got together before I came, and they met together when I came, and I'm sure they're still meeting together. They were the people who had staying power; they always outlasted every pastor; they were there 'back when.' It was their church!" The fact that this tension came from a long-lasting group who claimed ownership over the vision and the priorities of the church significantly damaged David's ability to preach effectively in that context and ended up providing an impetus for his eventual transition to a new call.

Michael felt a similar tension between the instructional and the pastoral categories. While he acknowledged the necessity of providing directorial leadership to a large congregation, he also felt pressure from the congregation to mold himself to what he termed "a CEO model." He admitted that he recently told his congregation that "I think that they would be incredibly grateful and thankful if I'd just run [the church] like a great nonprofit." To substantiate his observations, Michael explained that a small group of people might send him an e-mail and complain if he does not check his inbox because he was having a study day. He also reflected:

> Although I think most people at their heart want a pastor at their beck and call, it's still the South. "It's great the assistant pastor came to visit, but I really need the senior pastor to come…" That to me is a little bit the CEO model: "Keep all the administrative things going well, keep all the programs running, and we will settle for mediocre or less profound preaching."

He has observed even the leadership of the church contributing to this expectation: "The session…I think every now and then that they do slip into that mindset of: 'Michael's running the church.'" Michael would rather emphasize the pastoral and the familial sides of his ministry; although, even there, the large size of the congregation becomes a hindrance. In his attempts to preach and relate as a friend, he recognized that "More people feel like they are my personal friends than I feel like I'm their personal friend." So, the different values or priorities between the preacher's roles affected the perceptions of the relationship.

For other participants, the tensions came not between role categories but from within a singular category. Kurt felt agreement with his congregation over the priority for the instructional aspect of his preaching relationship. However, within that shared priority for instruction, he still hears tension over expectations. "More often than not, I'm

hearing: 'It's too long…It's too dry…Does this make any difference to me?'" He explained, "It feels a lot of times like people are thinking, 'Gosh this guy just lives in a different place than I do. It's easy to stand up there and say this is what we should be, etc., etc., but he's never been there.' A bit of the idea of being removed from the rough and tumble where these things are." Even though both pastor and congregation value instruction-oriented preaching, the people still want that instruction to come from a base of pastoral connection. This often shows up as criticism over form and content in his preaching.

Kurt similarly explored the different expectations he feels from his congregation in the area of instruction.

> In my context, I think what is often a place of tension for some is that they also want somebody who…is going to speak to their particular social issue, whether it's abortion or homosexual marriage or pornography or even family issues – whatever it might be that's kind of their hobbyhorse. They also want you to speak to that a lot, and they also want you to be sort of a professor of systematic theology.

Kurt recognized different groups in his congregation who wanted different approaches to instructional style. Even though, "Generally speaking, most people want a pastor," he also noted that some people wanted him to focus on "the prophetic stuff on their particular issue" and others on "the professor stuff – they want to hear about systematic theology, especially of the reformed variety!"

Even though all of the participants felt some measure of agreement with their congregations over how to define preaching roles and relationships, all of them easily articulated the areas where they feel tension because of differing expectations. Kurt offered a hopeful thought: "I think a lot of those kind of tensions are resolved – at least you can live with them – because most people just want a pastor at the end of the day.

And they're willing to live with not getting their illustration, their issue talked about, if they feel cared for." But how do preachers know whether their congregations are feeling cared-for through their preaching? Thus, this study pursued their approaches toward sermon evaluation.

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The Process of Evaluation

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The second research question sought to find out how pastors conduct evaluation of their preaching. Sermon evaluation may provide useful feedback through both formal and informal methods. The interviewer asked participants to talk about their methods, intentions, and experiences in seeking this feedback from their congregations.

Formal Evaluation

Most participants scoffed at the mention of formal evaluation – not that they were critical of evaluation itself, but they considered themselves to be lacking in that area. When asked if his church had any formal processes for sermon evaluation, Jim replied bluntly, "We don't." Kurt did not hesitate: "I don't! In general it's informal conversations, conversations on the staff occasionally, and annual evaluations." Marcus added that he does not receive much feedback on his preaching, even from his session. A few pastors could articulate proactive evaluation mechanisms, but even those who could not, upon reflection, related some intentionality in their pursuits of congregational feedback.

For some, formal evaluation was limited mostly to periodic pastoral reviews. Aaron's church conducts a pastoral evaluation every four years, "as to whether or not the pastor's gifts continue to match the needs of the congregation." Congregants are provided questionnaires in which they can "give feedback." The elders gather the questionnaires

and then summarize and reflect the findings back to Aaron. Marcus, in his cross-cultural context, did not talk about pastoral reviews, but he did mention occasional staff conversations in which they will discuss their effectiveness in communication concerning "language, translation, culture, illustrations, all that kind of stuff." This broader conversation sometimes specifically relates to preaching and leads to ideas like "team preaching" of some sermons.

Kurt described an annual review process in which the church follows a 360 degree evaluation process. Each staff member reports to a team of six people from different categories (officers, superiors, or co-workers) who provide feedback on his or her ministry. For the pastor, preaching is not a specific focus in that review beyond "a couple of comments." Kurt also provides sermon discussion question that are used in their small group Bible studies. He estimates that about half of their ten or fifteen groups use the questions where he might be able to "elicit feedback from the small group leaders." None of these participants could categorize these experiences as formal evaluation tools for sermons, but they do provide opportunities for congregations and officers to give some feedback.

Two of the participants described more formal evaluation mechanisms in their churches. David meets with the church elders about once every six to eight weeks purposefully to evaluate the preaching in the context of the overall ministry of the church. David said that most of the focus of these discussions falls on his current sermon series and how it has "addressed certain things that they see in the congregation and where they would like to see future sermons go to address things in the congregation." Michael articulated the most intentional and formal sermon evaluation process of all the

participants. He admitted, "What is really helpful is that I don't talk about it at all anymore with my wife. Early on, I would ask her opinion over lunch, and I found that I started writing sermons basically to please my wife because I was so emotionally attached to her." As Michael matured in ministry, he began to seek sermon evaluation through a more detached system.

Michael's sermon evaluation process flows from two groups, one meeting weekly and the other monthly. The weekly evaluation comes from a Monday morning meeting between the pastors and the liturgy team. This weekly meeting was not originally intended to focus on sermon evaluation but on the service as a whole. However, as the group grew closer together, they developed a sense of trust and honesty. Reflecting on why this group provides valuable feedback, Michael gave two reasons: "[I]t's a little bit more confidential…and that group in and of itself is diverse enough that I get some pretty rounded feedback." He added, "But there is difference of opinion within that room, and I think it ultimately comes down to views on culture within that room." Michael also said that their church has tried "valuation processes" before, but they felt that the pre-packaged question-and-answer evaluation programs "just felt hokey." When asked what made the programs feel hokey, he could not recall the specific tool, but it asked them to analyze statements like: "Did it meet your people's needs to be loved?" He added, "It was some church planting book or something, and as we went through it we were we felt like we kind of know what our people are like and what they need."

Michael also meets monthly with a group of older men, most of whom are elders emeritus. He initiated this group at the recommendation of a pastor-mentor of his. With this group, "they critique me, not just preaching but largely in preaching, just whether

I'm connecting or whether I'm overstating my case. And that's been very helpful because they're a different generation." Michael appreciates this group of men who have "already fought all the wars, and they love the church" because they usually encourage him. Because these men do not represent the larger demographic of the church, he worries that they will say he is "pushing the envelope too much with preaching." Instead, they often reply, "No, you're going too slow! Keep going!" Most of all, Michael feels supported by this group when they say, "'We've got your back. We'll cover you, we'll run your lines.' So I think without them, I would have been overly cautious."

So, for these participants, formal evaluation comes through periodic pastoral reviews and periodic evaluation teams. The reviews solicit reflections from the congregation at large or from particular groups. The most formal evaluation methods involve teams which possess a level of relationship and mutual trust. However, the formal evaluation only provides one portion of the feedback preachers receive on their sermons.

Informal Evaluation

According to the participants of this study, a large majority of sermon evaluation comes through informal means rather than through the use of planned evaluation tools. When Marcus was asked, "Once you have preached a sermon, how do you evaluate your sermon?" he responded with laughter. His comments represented the observations of many of the participants:

> I should, but I don't very well. It's very subjective. It's kind of based on
> the feedback while I'm preaching, the immediate conversations with
> people afterwards, conversation with my wife, some follow-up – not
> always, but often [with] other guys who are on staff. So it's certainly more
> anecdotal than systematic.

He expressed the pull, or the desire, to pursue sermon evaluation on a more intentional or "systematic" level, but felt that he had to fall back on "subjective" and "anecdotal" feedback. The types of informal feedback preachers received varied widely from casual comments to pointed criticism.

The most common type of informal evaluation mentioned was the casual comment. Several participants referred to the comments received immediately after the worship services while greeting members, usually at the door. Michael makes a practice of standing up front for "as long as anyone wants to stand and talk," where he usually hears "a lot of 'good job… good to see you' stuff." In this growing technological age, many of the participants also receive emails with comments about this week's sermons. Michael estimates about five or six emails about the sermon per week. Kurt estimates that about eighty percent of his comments come directly on Sunday mornings, but he will also receive email comments on Sunday nights and Monday mornings. Other participants didn't even need the verbal comments in order to receive casual feedback. Marcus commented, "We have a pretty engaging congregation. I mean, they are pretty responsive in terms of body language, which I love. So I can often tell if people are connecting while I preach." David also claimed a growing dependence upon non-verbal feedback by "watching the people" while he preaches.

Several of the preachers brought up their spouses in the context of sermon evaluation. Some, as represented by Michael's earlier quotation, felt a need to distance themselves from pursuing spouse feedback due to the emotional connection. Others, however, valued their spouse's input. Marcus mentioned that he valued "processing" the sermons with his wife. Jim went so far as to proclaim his wife as his "first evaluation

process." She has agreed to take extensive notes during his sermons, and on Sunday afternoons "I just have her read back to me everything that she's got, so I'll know if what I thought I was saying is what she heard."

Some participants offered ways that they make use of casual comments in general. Some comments do not actually provide much useable feedback on their preaching. Michael, for example, said, "[T]o be honest, if the comments are too effusive with praise, I cut those off. If they're too negative, I cut those off." He simply discards the comments that amount to simple pleasantries, or heated reactions, or do not seem to be of substance. But when he does receive a comment that seems substantial, either positive or negative: "If somebody tells me that they liked the sermon for whatever reason or didn't like it, I just try to ask follow-up questions: 'Why?' so I'm hearing specifically what they think." Jim and David both said that they listen to their own sermons in order to try to listen objectively to the message as it might be heard by the congregation. David listens to his own sermons every Monday morning. He admitted that it can be "painful sometimes," but he tries to listen so that "I'm actually listening to it!" Jim said that he listens to see if "what I thought that I said and wanted to get across actually is what I got across."

Some of the informal evaluation received comes not from casual comments, but from substantive criticism. Substantive criticism need not be negative, but useful. David attempted to qualify what he considers to be substantive:

> Feedback that is not substantive is: "That was a great sermon." That's fine, and for some people that's all they…feel comfortable doing. But when you get people who say, "Now when you said this…" they really want to know what, where I can read about that, how can I think about this? And that's really substantive feedback.

David also quantified substantive criticism as much more rare than casual comments.

Marcus gave anecdotes of two instances where he received substantive criticism, one

positive and one negative. On the positive side, Marcus noted a lady who produces the

church newsletter. She recently included a teaching point that came from a sermon that

he had preached quite a long while ago. Marcus said, "So whether it's ministry leaders or

just someone in the church who will say something back that is related to a sermon that I

preached, that's always encouraging." The second story came from one of the members

of the Monday worship evaluation team. Marcus describes this staff member as "a super

priestly type, super creative…He has not preached a lot, but he is still wrestling with who

he is and what he is called to." In their conversations, this staff member will sometimes

critique Marcus' preaching style, pointing out "that I speak more to the head than I do to

the heart." Marcus does not perceive this as an attack, but walks away with the feeling

"that I need to find ways to be more creative or empathetic."

Substantive criticism was much more difficult for the participants when it came

across as negative and confrontational. Aaron described a scenario in which he had been

preaching through the "seven deadly sins." When he prepared to preach on the topic of

gluttony, he knew that this might be a good time to preach on the Bible's perspectives

concerning alcohol. He carefully spent two weeks focusing on the dangers of alcohol and

its abuses before he announced the next sermon celebrating the Bible's depictions of

alcohol as a blessing in certain contexts. Aaron recounted:

> Well, this one older guy who had been an elder…he had been here for
> sixteen years, and all he had to hear was that next week we're going to talk
> about "alcohol is a blessing," and he just shut down… I'm saying, "Wow,
> this is the word of God!" and I'm thinking "I've got to hide behind this,"
> because he didn't really even care that was in the word of God, he just

screened it out. It gets very demoralizing for preachers that people are just hearing what they want to hear.

Aaron recognized in that circumstance that people hear his sermons from different vantage points. He commented, "It appears to me often people have their own convictions, their own prejudices, their minds are already made up, so it's like, 'Don't confuse me with the facts. My mind's made up already!' And they hear the word of God through that grid." Jim agreed with this analysis when he said, "Not only do we all come into the room with preconceived ideas, we all come into the room with everything that distracts us." This reality of the preacher and the listeners all coming into the preaching event from different sets of experiences and expectations often made the substantive criticisms difficult to bear.

All of the participants noted, to some degree, the discomfort involved in receiving substantive criticism. Some of this substantive criticism could be categorized as what Aaron called "respectfully critical." This kind of feedback pointed out a perceived flaw in the participant's preaching, but it was not intended to hurt the preacher as a person. Other feedback, however, crossed over the line of "respectfully critical" and emotionally hurt the participants. Jim pointed out that there is a "relational aspect" of what is going on in preaching that is different from the "objective truth" of the words that are spoken. The interviews here turned to the emotional impact of the evaluation process on the participants.

Emotional Responses to Evaluation

The third research question sought to explore how the pastors respond emotionally to the evaluation they receive. The participants talked about the emotional investment that is involved in their preaching. Michael revealed the vulnerability that he

feels about his preaching: "I've just never felt good about a sermon I preached… Almost after every benediction I just wish the pulpit would swallow me and I could be lost; that there's just some kind of trap door I could slip through." When congregational feedback is added on top of this self-evaluation, it often amplifies the emotional state of the preacher, whether positively or negatively. This part of the research explored the emotional impact of receiving sermon feedback, the ways the participants determine the validity of feedback, and the insights they learn from the process.

The Effects of Feedback

In broad terms, preachers tend to perceive sermon feedback with either positive or negative emotions. Positive feedback tends to produce encouragement. For example, Jim talked about a recent experience when the congregation was prompted to write personal notes in observation of pastor appreciation month. Jim found that, "Almost to a card, it addressed the preaching and the means of grace and how much that has meant to that person." Jim found himself built up, "not just because you got new information or that they said something apart from what you believed that you are trying to do, but it does matter because you don't always hear." In other words, he learned that people were hearing grace in his preaching, and he felt validated by the people in his value for preaching with an emphasis on God's grace. Jim talked about the "emotional roller coaster" that he can feel from preaching over time when he focuses on the "horizontal level" - getting "excited when I see spiritual growth in someone," but feeling "so upset" when he faces challenges. Jim's conclusion from the experience of receiving the encouraging notes was, "We all need encouragement. If we say that we don't, we are

kidding ourselves. We all want to be loved, and we all want to be appreciated, and we all need encouragement."

Several other participants confirmed the emotional value of receiving positive feedback. Marcus said, "I was encouraged, thankful. I felt sort of reaffirmed in my calling. Strengthened in that somewhat, humbled because I'm aware of my own weakness." The affirmation made Marcus feel that his perceived weaknesses in preaching were minimized - that God used his preaching in spite of his deficiencies in delivery. He also introduced the idea that positive feedback reaffirmed his calling; that he needed the positive feedback to assure him that he was indeed pursuing God's calling on him to preach. David shared the story of a trainer that he had befriended in a local gym. The trainer was not a Christian, but he agreed to come listen to David's sermons. The man ended up coming to David's church fairly regularly, and they would talk about the sermon at the gym the next day. Mostly, the trainer's interest came from "an academic, intellectual sort of pursuit." One Sunday, David preached a sermon on Thomas and his doubts.[340] After the service, the trainer came up to David and asked if he could be baptized. In David's words:

> And I said, "Well… that's something for believers." And he said, "I believe!" And so I said, "Well, when did this happen? What are you talking about?" Because we were just talking on Thursday, and he didn't believe. And he said, "I didn't believe when I walked in this morning; I just wanted to believe." And he named off specific points in the sermon and he said, "That's what I was doing. I was unwilling to say I found, I believe. I was so critical."

Of course, a conversion testimony can always encourage a pastor, but this man told David specifically that it was his sermons that opened up his heart to the gospel. David recounted, "He said he did not feel manipulated by the sermons, that he felt like I was

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[340] John 20:24ff.

trying to be compelling, I had a case to make." The trainer appreciated "all the different aspects of the passage: literary, historical, all that stuff." David was so encouraged that his response was: "So when a guy like [this] gives me specific things that he likes in the sermons, I'm doing those things like crazy – in all future sermons!"

Sometimes the participants reflected a need for perspective in order to balance the positive feedback with humility. Aaron laughed as he said, "Probably the sermon I got the most positive feedback from, I got the positive feedback not because the sermon but just because of the text!" Kurt added that positive feedback is "definitely a boost… but it's rather that clichéd story of: the Holy Spirit really is active through what I'm saying - it's not really about me after all!" Michael actually felt unsettled with positive feedback. He spoke of positive sermon evaluations he received from a small group of elders, and he commented, "Emotionally it made me feel very insecure and a little bit frustrated, actually." He explained that he is "typically cynical about praise" because "if I feel like somebody is [commenting] overly with praise, I tend to react straight on and say, 'You must be wanting to get something out of me that I'm not really wanting to give,' because my closest friends are critical, and appropriately so."

Marcus captured the potential for discomfort in receiving too much praise when he opined: "I'm confident I could preach in a way that would tickle more ears than I do, but obviously we are called to stand before God more than we are to minister before people… I think there's a danger in being too self-conscious as a preacher, and somehow to be reflective without being self-centered." Each of these men sought to accept the praise as fuel for their ongoing passion in preaching without at the same time aggrandizing the perceptions of their self-importance.

Substantive criticism, on the other hand, intensified negative emotions in the participants. For some, like Michael, who wished that the pulpit would swallow him up after each sermon, they already feel vulnerable and unsure of their preaching. Negative comments intensify the self-blame and thoughts of inadequacy that already exist. Aaron related a story about a funeral service he officiated that went too long. Even though the length of the service was partially due to family members who spoke at length in the eulogies, he felt bad after preaching his message that he did not cut it shorter. When an elder pointed out to him that his sermon was too long, he reflected, "It does make a really deep impression on me because this funeral service was an embarrassment to me. So sometimes it has the effect of being extremely chastening." Aaron already felt bad about the length of the sermon, but the criticism heightened his embarrassment and added to his feelings of guilt. As a result, Aaron is rethinking how he conducts funeral services in the future. Aaron also talked about how this kind of experience makes him less likely to seek out feedback: "So I think sometimes because I'm fearful, I don't want to get criticized. I wind up not asking the session for input, but I probably should."

Other participants recognized in themselves a reflex to challenge negative criticisms. Kurt acknowledged an instinctive reaction which he described as "defiant, and I guess defensive." He perceived the comments as attacks on his person which needed to be repelled or defeated. David recalled that , even though he has mellowed somewhat, "I used to try to fake it when I got something negative, but it hurt me so much that I couldn't really even fake it. And so sometimes I would speak in a very defensive and harsh…not harsh, but I saw it as a fight that I needed to win."

These pastors perceived the negative feedback either as a confirmation of their failures and weaknesses or as a challenge to their worth and effectiveness. David described an important realization, however, when he said, "They're really not being critical of me, they're really being critical of what they think they heard." Michael said that it was at this point he began to understand the value of tempering his emotional responses. "For me, relationally, there is a sense where I have to learn to detach myself from the congregation in order to preach to the congregation…If I'm listening too much to the congregation, I'll never say the hard things I need to say." Even though he did not use the technical word, Michael's comments reflect a value for the concept of differentiation.

Some of the participants contemplated the influence of their families of origin on their emotional responses to evaluation. Michael talked about his unbelieving parents – a father who was "passive aggressive" and a mother who was "effusive with praise" – both of whom avoided dealing with conflict. Michael was led to faith in Christ by a youth pastor who spoke very honestly and graciously about Michael's sin. Michael suggested that "being led to the Lord by this one guy, and seeing the gospel – being painfully honest with me with my sin, with my idols and desires – I think that's probably why I feel most loved when I'm constructively critiqued." He connected his life experience to his current tendency of reacting cynically about praise. David reflected on possible sources of his instinctive reactions to fight back against negative criticism: "Criticism in my family was…swift and terrible!" But even worse, David did not learn how to accept praise graciously. "I got lots of compliments, and I didn't believe them. I felt like they were just trying to encourage me because they were my parents, not because I was actually

worthy." David noted that he still has a hard time trusting when people give him compliments now. Reflections on their upbringing led the participants to conclude that flawed patterns of dealing with criticism and praise in their families of origin contributed to the flawed ways that they respond now to criticism and praise of their preaching.

The Validity of Feedback

As the participants explored their emotional reactions to sermon feedback, they also realized that they tended to seek ways to judge whether individual criticisms merited their serious consideration. Michael said that it takes him about two weeks to figure out if a particular criticism is "valid" or not. "I initially have to take it and run it through other avenues. For example, if somebody says something, I'll take it and run it past other people, like at the liturgy meeting." If he determines the criticism to be invalid, he tends to react with defensiveness. The concept of validation the way Michael presented it is a subjective standard based on his emotional response to feedback. He attempted to clarify what he meant by "invalid" feedback: "By invalid I mean if I can write it off very quickly, like the guy who wrote me a letter…because I wouldn't endorse a political candidate from the pulpit, that I was therefore as bad as Satan as far as the Holocaust because I'm not supporting pro-life candidates, that I'm killing babies." But if he determines that the feedback is valid, then he considers it worth his while to listen and to consider adjusting his preaching accordingly. The word "validity" was not used by any other participant until Michael introduced it late in the interview process; however, most of the pastors talked naturally about ways they have tried to analyze the usefulness or applicability of feedback.

Some of the participants talked through objective methods that they use to determine feedback validity. Aaron looks for patterns. He described a scenario in which "I've got three or four people in the space of a couple of months who are telling me the same thing, different kinds of people, different levels of education." This kind of variety and repetition lends credibility to the substance of the comments, as in the biblical principal of two or three witnesses confirming a charge.[341] Aaron also considers his appraisal of people's reputations in the church: "The more mature they are, the more I respect them for their insights, and the more key a person they are in the life of the church." Jim expressed a value for finding the objective truth of what he said in his sermons. He asserted, "Whether or not you have preached a clear message of grace in a sermon is pretty much an objective truth." The way he pursues this objective truth is to look back at his manuscripts and to listen to his recorded sermons. He admits that perceptions can differ: "I know the sermon that I wrote; I can't always know how someone might have heard that," but he also re-listens to his sermons to test the criticism with a fresh hearing. In one particular case, he also took his sermon to another respected preacher in his presbytery for outside validation. Objective methods supplied information which assisted these pastors in evaluating the validity of their preaching evaluations, but more was needed.

The participants overwhelmingly agreed that the largest component of validating sermon feedback was to look at the status of their relationships with the particular people giving the feedback. As Jim observed:

> Over time, I think that you find that most of these things that are being said, you end up that there is a deeper issue there, a kind of a root problem, that might've stirred that…I can tell you right now that some of

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[341] Deut. 19:15.

the harshest criticism that I've received, oddly enough, came from people that I was the closest to.

Jim raised the possibility that negative criticism might spring from a deeper relational cause. A perceived break in the relationship between the congregant and the preacher (regardless of the original depth of the relationship) may stir the congregant to react with negative criticism.

Many of the other participants shared similar insights. Michael said, "If I think it is just negative, but it's coming from a friend – if I feel relationally connected – then I think I'd do okay with that. If I don't feel relationally connected, I don't." In other words, Michael tended to validate criticism in his mind when he perceived that criticism coming from someone with whom he felt "relationally connected." The absence of relational connectivity tended to make it harder to receive the criticism. He added, "If it's someone who's been faithful to the ministry of the church for the last several years, and they've always been gracious and loving – even if I'm not relationally or emotionally connected with them – I kind of feel like their lives have won the right for me to listen to them." Even without the relational connectivity, Michael could validate the criticism if he perceived a pattern of grace and faithfulness in the person giving it.

The participants spoke of the necessity of trust in their relationships with their congregations. David offered, "I think when I have a more trusting relationship, there is more time that passes between the sermon and the negative feedback because they want to see if they heard it right." When congregants perceive a trusting relationship with the preacher, they are more willing to give the preacher the benefit of the doubt when they have negative reactions to something they heard in a sermon. Marcus said that he is more willing to perceive critical comments as friendly when he trusts the person giving the

feedback. "Sometimes it's just a matter of the state of my own heart when we're having a conversation. Sometimes it's a question in my mind of whether this guy is for me or against me." Kurt, in particular, noted his frustration when he receives feedback that is given anonymously. "It annoys me," he commented. When asked whether he prefers to receive feedback more directly, he responded, "I don't know that I preferred the direct because I don't think anybody loves conflict and confrontation, but I feel like it's the more mature way to go. It's also the more effective; you're able to get more things out and move things along a little quicker." Anonymity removed his ability to gauge the trust level of the relationship. From both sides, perception of trust in the relationship improves the effectiveness of the evaluation for the preacher.

Other participants noted the reality that people respond to sermons differently because of their own individual situations in life. Marcus observed that the response to a sermon does not simply depend on the effectiveness of the preacher giving the sermon. "So much of what happens in the life of any particular member of the church in relation to the sermon relates to where they are before God." Marcus related this to Jesus' parable of the soils, "and whether the seed falls on the hard path, the thorns, or the rocks, or the good soil."[342] David pictured this varied response to a sermon as people having different numbers of pegs on a hat rack. "And if you're tossing hats at the hat rack, the more pegs you've got the more hats you're going to catch. If a person has only a couple of pegs then they don't catch many hats." David explained himself, "They're actually saying: I think you over emphasized this too much. But the reality is they only have three pegs, and that's their whole world. So, it's changed in me with feedback to see people as coming from a place of their weakness."

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[342] 1 Cor. 2:1–2.

Kurt provided an example of how this might look in practice for the preacher receiving feedback:

> Depending on who gives it, the person who gives the feedback alters the way I receive the feedback. And so somebody who I know is going to come up to me every single Sunday and have a comment about sermon, I hear that feedback differently than a person who comes up and says, "Hey I just wanted to tell you that really meant a lot to me," or calls me and says, "Can I talk to you about the sermon?"

He continued:

> There are people who are just unhappy in their life, they're unhappy with church, they've had all kinds of experiences that cause them to be rather cynical about everything in life, and their comments about you and your preaching may very well flow out of that. You've disappointed them in some way, you've let them down as their pastor, you weren't there for something, you weren't there for them, whatever it was. I don't think you're really going to win them back with your preaching, and that's an easy target.

The preacher cannot always know what life experiences each individual congregant brings into the sermon event. When people give feedback on sermons – especially negative feedback – the preacher only hears the critique itself. But Kurt revealed his understanding that there is often more to the critique than meets the ear. "It's hard as a pastor to be realistic about people, to be shrewd and not be cynical. Because there are people you know who are just going to be grumpy, cantankerous, but you can't view them unredemptively." His struggle, he concluded, is to listen and evaluate the validity of the critique, but at the same time to refrain from judging the person unfairly. Even though validating feedback relies on subjective analysis, all of the participants discussed some sort of process by which they determine whether a particular critique is worthy of their attention. Once they determine that feedback is valid in this sense, they explore what they can learn from it.

The Insights of Feedback

The participants also talked about how the process of receiving sermon feedback has given them valuable insights into how their congregations hear their sermons. Aaron realized "that people like to be affirmed. They kind of liked the positives." As a result of this insight, Aaron looks for ways to emphasize positive encouragements from any text he is preaching. Michael brought up a common criticism he has received in which, "I will preach or say something, and I think I'm being very clear. Then I'll find out they thought the second point was the main point, and it was actually a tertiary point. And I will think, 'How did they miss that?' Listening to it through their ears completely changes it." By listening to the way people respond to his sermons, he has learned that his intentions in speaking are not always received by people in the same way.

In a similar vein, Kurt related an incident in which an elder approached him with second-hand feedback. The elder said, "People really want you to use more illustrations from church history and C.S. Lewis…and he said they just feel that's more important or more appropriate than pop-culture references." Initially, Kurt became defensive because he felt he was trying to appeal to four different generations of people with his illustrations. Then he remembered, "Upon reflection I said: well, if I'm going to make the argument that the people eight to twenty-eight need a certain reference to feel connected to what I'm saying, I probably should think that people sixty-eight to eighty-eight – that I should be willing to meet them where they are as well." He realized through the feedback that his choices of illustrations were not quite as broadly relatable to the congregation as he had thought.

The participants noted some limitations on the effectiveness of using feedback as an evaluative tool. Kurt, for example, imagined: "if you were to chart out the feedback on the sermon week to week that you get informally" that he would see a pattern of significant amounts of both praiseworthy and critical feedback. "If that were the case, you would walk away saying, 'Well, there's people who absolutely love me with whom I could do no wrong, and then there's all these people that don't really like me or don't like my preaching.' And in fact there may only be about fifteen grumpy people and fifteen people who think you are the cat's pajamas." Kurt wondered whether the feedback he hears might actually skew his perception of the congregation because he's only hearing from the people motivated to speak.

Marcus noted that the feedback he receives deals with more than just the sermon. He commented, "So people whose lives are deeply affected by the music, the worship, the prayer, the house churches, serving on ministry teams…it elevates other things in addition to the sermon that create a context for a healthy life in the context of the church." His reminder leads to this insight: "But in the reformed tradition, we make a whole lot of the sermon. I think it's right to make a lot of the sermon, but I don't think that the church can be fed only on the sermon…The volume of feedback that I hear about all the great stuff that's happening in other ways puts the sermon in context." So, even though all the feedback does not address the sermon directly, it does inform the place of the sermon in the context of the whole worship experience.

Two of the participants identified ways in which their own preaching goals for their congregations were not matching with the people's expectations. Michael learned through his feedback that his people "typically love it if I give them seven things to do

for the next week. We have a lot of legalists, and so they eat junk up." However, Michael

would rather them hear a focus on grace through Christ: "And what I really try to

communicate is: we want you to see Christ more clearly and be more in love with him

when you're leaving those doors than when he came in and realize that he loves you more

than you thought he did." David noticed a similar desire among his congregation that

conflicted with his own priority in preaching:

> I want them to love. That's the biggest thing. I feel like what they want to
> do is change. They want to grow in grace, they want to know more, they
> want to do a better job with their family…They want to change. And I
> think we're terrible at changing. Because there's a sense in which they're
> saying what they want is law. But they wanted it to be well spoken; they
> want the law interesting. But the power is not in the law. So, what I want
> them to do is love the gospel. Because the power to change comes not
> from trying to change, the power to change is a fruit of loving. Loving
> truth, loving God, loving each other, these sorts of things.

David touched on his desire to use what he has learned about his congregation to help

him communicate the gospel more clearly in his preaching. This leads to the last portion

of the research, which deals with how pastors use sermon feedback to adjust their

preaching.

Adjustments to Preaching

The last research question dealt with how the pastors in this study have used the

information gained from sermon evaluation to adjust their ongoing preaching. David

shared a dawning appreciation for how feedback has benefitted his preaching in the

context of his congregation:

> Just as we are talking, you've made me realize how much the feedback is
> affecting preparation. I didn't realize how much it was until we started
> talking about it. I hope this isn't overly simple, but I think when I first
> started preaching, I was preaching sermons that could have as easily been
> preached to a brick wall as to a congregation of people. But then, as I have
> grown pastorally, it's like I have them in mind. Sometimes it's a specific

person. Particularly with encouraging things – sometimes there will be something in there that I know will help everybody, but it's really for somebody. So I guess I really didn't realize how much I'm focused on the congregation during sermon prep. The only way for me to have that is through feedback.

As they answered questions dealing with adjustments to their sermon preparation and delivery, the participants uncovered a two-way process in which relationships with people in the congregation affected their preaching and vice-versa.

Relationships Affect Preaching

The participants recounted a variety of ways that they have adjusted their preaching in response to insights they have learned about their congregations through sermon evaluation. Michael referred to some broad applications: "I'm learning to be more repetitive, learning to review more and not presume that people know the Bible story." The peoples' responses revealed to him a struggle to keep up with Bible content in his sermons, and he is adjusting by adding teaching techniques oriented toward solidifying foundational Bible knowledge. Aaron offered, "I've gotten shorter! I've been much more intentional about trying to be clear, trying to have a structure. I think that that's been positive. I also have very self-consciously tried to introduce more humor." Aaron's adjustments were in response to feedback that told him people had a hard time following his sermons due to his theological style that lacked emotional connection. He also came up with ways to keep himself from dragging the pace of his sermons. "For a while, I was actually taking little sticky notes, and I put one on every page of my sermon because I basically read through my sermon, and it just says, 'Fast! Fast!'" Every time he turned to a new page, that word "fast" was reminding him not to say too much. Through

feedback, these two pastors learned about the needs of their congregation related to pacing and background Bible knowledge.

Two pastors brought up a common adjustment dealing with the use of illustrations. Aaron expressed a desire to improve his use of illustrative material in response to the perceived lack of emotional connection in his preaching. "One of the things I am very self-consciously trying to do now is to work at finding good illustrations and stories. I'm always self-consciously thinking about that." Marcus explained that his particular context of a multi-cultural congregation made the use of illustrations both more important and more difficult than traditional mono-cultural congregations. As he explained, even though an emphasis on story-telling is growing in Western culture, "Most of the people who are here from around the world still come from oral cultures." Because their cultural backgrounds predispose the people of his congregation to learning better through narrative than through straight exposition, he has tended to lean more on preaching from narrative texts in scripture. "It's been good for me to try to let the narrative carry the sermon rather than deconstruct the narrative so much that it ends up looking like Galatians," he commented.

However, this need for narrative-heavy preaching also presents a difficulty for Marcus in preaching a sermon that connects across cultural divides. "Here, there's no predominant cultural context narrative." For example, a simple baseball story does not connect well with people from a different country who have no experience with the traditionally American sport. In response, Marcus reflected, "I probably do less from contemporary culture in terms of illustrations than from biblical stories and illustrations, more from the history of the church around the world." Rather than relying on American

pop culture, Marcus will draw from world events and church history, "because in some ways it's an illustration that helps people learn about where some of the members of our church are coming from or oftentimes where they are coming from that they don't know." Both pastors have been learning how to improve the use of illustrations in their preaching in order to connect with their particular congregations.

By far the most frequently mentioned adjustment to preaching regarded the way the pastors have learned to think about the listeners as they prepare their sermons. Several participants discussed a process in which they have been thinking even more proactively about their congregants during sermon preparation. Michael, for example, thinks through several people in the room as he writes:

> I just try to pick twenty random people in my mind….Thinking about that single mom who just got divorced; how would she have heard that? That member who is not a believer, how would he have heard that? That member for twenty years, how would he have heard that sermon? That seventeen-year-old kid, how would he hear it? I think because I know a lot of their life situations that helps me to figure out: am I being balanced in my preaching or not?

He further explained that he used to try to speak directly to each of these people in his sermon applications, but he found that trying to address everyone's circumstances ended up distracting people more than it helped. "I would just try to go through and categorize everybody, and a couple of guys critiqued me for that, all lovingly. And I realized through them that I'm not leaving room for the Spirit to do that conviction." Now he tries to think through the different circumstances present in the room, but he refrains from trying to guess what each person is thinking.

Kurt explained the first pass of his sermon preparation this way: "In my preaching, I usually start with myself. So I'll go to a text and say, 'What am I responding

to here? What about this do I need?' And I don't think it's that big of a jump to say,

'Well I'm going to go ahead and assume that other people need it too.'" He has realized

that his relationships with people throughout the week help him to speak to the various

circumstances that people are bringing to the Sunday morning sermon. "I don't know the

people always appreciate, on either end of the spectrum, the fact that I'm pastoring as

many people, and trying to talk to as many different kinds of people, as I am week to

week." His pastoring informs his preaching. As a result, Kurt talks about a desire for

preaching "that requires a certain versatility, it requires a certain isolation of moments in

the sermon, either stated or otherwise, that I think is sometimes difficult for people to

appreciate." These "isolations of moments" are what speak to different people, from the

seniors to the silly stories that catch the ears of the five-year-olds.

The participants also discussed cautions in their efforts to reach their congregants

where they are. In the context of thinking through how specific people might respond to a

sermon, Aaron said, "It's made me cautious on the one hand… because sometimes

preachers take a lot of cheap shots from the pulpit. So particularly when it comes to the

social and political application of biblical truth…I want to be careful that I don't just rely

on what's trendy." In other words, Aaron considers his listeners, but he avoids letting his

perceptions of his listeners' response drive the message of the sermon away from the

message of the scripture.

David described this corrective as an effort to keep the sermons focused on the

gospel, the grace-oriented message of Christ. "Christians need to be gospel-ized, so that

kind of thing has caused me to adjust in sermons – not really preaching to unbelievers,

but preaching to believers who may be doubting or struggling." One of David's

techniques to keep this gospel focus comes in the scripting of his sermons. "On each page, I circle one thing on there that after saying it, I can say: that's the gospel! And there's going to be at least one on each page, and I actually do circle it… It forces me to make sure that I'm not preaching us, I'm preaching Christ." In all of these ways, the pastors demonstrated that they have learned from their sermon feedback how relationships with their congregations can teach them to improve communication in their sermons.

Preaching Affects Relationships

Some of the participants shared insights on how the feedback they received has helped them to understand conversely how preaching affects relationships. Jim expressed his goal of using feedback on sermons to grow professionally: "Positive or negative, we hope by God's grace that it becomes a growing thing. Even if you disagree completely, before God you're saying, 'How can I grow through this?' This cannot be something to be embittered about." Then Jim added that this growth is not merely a mechanical adjustment to preaching methods: "How can I become closer to this person? We know that there is a relational context in ministry." The process of preaching to the congregation and receiving the congregation's feedback actually helps him to deepen the pastoral relationship with his church. Aaron explained his goal in using sermon feedback this way: "People's inability to reproduce your outline three days later is really quite beside the point. The purpose is to shape the heart as people are engaged." Ryan also noted a desire to make feedback be perceived as a safe process for the people, in particular for his staff, because the pastor "can become the guy that no one wants to criticize, and who increasingly is not used to getting criticized." Receiving feedback

without acting defensively has allowed Ryan to build an environment in which the people feel safe to relate honestly with their pastor.

Michael talked about a conscious effort to move the church through a philosophical shift "away from programs into a relationship philosophy." Part of this effort has been birthed out of a desire to "decentralize" the focus in ministry. He meets with an assistant pastor each week before the sermon, and together they write community group questions that are distributed to the group leaders. The leaders have the questions with them when they listen to the sermons on Sunday morning. He explained:

> Then on Sunday night we have like a vesper service, but about 690 people meet in homes around [town] and all they do is discuss the sermon…and that has been a tremendous treasure trove of feedback. Because I will hear from other community group leaders what their community group has picked up from the sermon.

In the process, he has found that providing opportunities to talk about the sermon actually builds community among these small groups.

Two of the participants expressly brought together the roles of preacher and pastor in the process of sermon evaluation. Jim stressed the importance of continuing to develop deep relationships with the congregation in order to reach them with preaching. In answer to the question, "How do you think about your audience as you are preparing the sermon?" he responded, "I think the only way you can do that is first of all you are living life with them. When they are hurting, you know about it. When they're in the hospital, you're there." If the people feel secure in the pastor's investment in them relationally, then they will be more likely to be receptive to the pastor's sermons. As Jim reflected, "At the very end of the day, what I want is: I know it's impossible to have a close relationship with everyone, but I try as much as anything that someone would say

of me that I may not like what I'm hearing you say, but you're saying that because I

know that you love me." For this reason, Jim strives to keep his sermons focused on

God's grace:

> You do have to make sure somewhere in that sermon either at the front
> door, the end, or in the middle that when… you have an imperative or
> command that you're going to have to say this text addresses, you always
> have got to set that in grace. You can't do this in and of yourself. You are
> doing this not to be accepted by God but because you already are
> accepted… Don't miss the grace in this passage. Or you're just going to
> come out hurting people and not helping people.

Along similar lines, David spoke of his growing understanding of who he is in his

role as pastor. He reflected back on his statements about how previously, "I thought I was

going to pastor so that I could do the real thing that I wanted to do, which was preach,"

but now he sees the two as inseparable:

> Pastoring helps them listen with trust. And good preaching, doing a
> quality job – because as long as we've been doing it we could get up there
> and wing it if we have to – but doing a quality job is pastoral. And so they
> work hand-in-hand: the preaching helps the pastoring, and the pastoring
> helps the preaching – helps in receiving the preaching.

All of the participants expressed ways in which they have realized the value of sermon

feedback in improving both their preaching and their pastoring with their congregations.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the research participants confirmed the complexities that exist in the

relational dynamics of preaching. Their testimonies affirmed that differing perceptions of

the state of the pastor-congregation relationship either enhance or hinder the effectiveness

of their preaching. These differing perceptions often spring from role expectations and

differing values for emphasizing one pastoral function over another. The participants

gave examples of how they conduct sermon evaluation through both formal and informal

means. This evaluation affects the preachers emotionally in positive and negative ways, but it also provides information which helps them to understand how the congregation is receiving their preaching. This knowledge helps the pastors to adjust their preaching in ways that improve their receptivity among their congregations.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Christian preaching is much more than an exercise in weekly public speaking. Pastors stand in a unique role between God and his people, and one of the pastor's primary responsibilities is the regular communication of the divinely-given word to a particular community of faith through preaching. Pastors generally receive extensive training for preaching in the areas of exegesis and homiletics – the studies of understanding and of proclaiming scripture. However, preaching literature largely avoids a third leg of preaching, which is the relationship between the preacher and the congregation. Pastors need a means for understanding the relational aspect of preaching so that they might improve the communication of the gospel of Christ to their people. This study explored how preachers use sermon evaluation as a means for understanding the way relationships with their congregations affect and inform their preaching. The study was guided by these four research questions:

1. How do pastors understand their role as a preacher in relationship with their congregation?

2. How do pastors conduct evaluation of their preaching?

3. How do pastors respond emotionally to this evaluation?

4. How do pastors use this evaluation in their ongoing sermon preparation and delivery?

Summary of Study

This study has shown that pastors can learn much about how relationships can inform their preaching through the means of sermon evaluation. Chapter two sought to fill a hole in preaching literature at the intersection of two streams of thought: the relational aspect of preaching and the use of evaluation as a tool for growth. The chapter surveyed relevant literature in the fields of ethos in rhetoric, evaluation, emotional intelligence, and sermon preparation and delivery. Chapter three described the methodology used in this qualitative study, in which six practicing preachers were interviewed according to the research questions. Chapter four reviewed the findings from these interviews on how the pastors have experienced role agreement and tension with their congregations, how they have conducted and analyzed evaluation of their preaching, how they have responded emotionally to this evaluation, and how they have used the evaluation to adjust their ongoing preaching. This chapter will synthesize the data collected in the study and discuss opportunities for practice.

Preaching as Relationship

What is good preaching? Can this question be answered only with reference to the content and the delivery of sermons? You might conclude, based on the amount of space dedicated to those two aspects of preaching in textbooks, that exegesis and homiletics are the only two disciplines that matter. A pastor can deliver an exegetically sound and oratorically pleasant sermon and have it fall flat in some listeners' ears. In my own experience, I have preached sermons that have communicated well with some people and not at all with others. This study inspires a renewed attention to the person of the preacher. Preaching is not merely speaking; preaching is also relationship. There has been

a growing emphasis in the literature on the pastoral side of preaching, and preachers are growing to appreciate the importance of who they are in relationship with their congregations.

Relational Reality

From the time of Aristotle, rhetoricians have recognized the power of the perceived character of the speaker, but they have been reluctant to address the practical side of the speaker-audience relationship. This relational component of rhetoric is what Aristotle called "ethos," put simply: "persuasion through the character of the speaker."[343] Bryan Chapell rightly recognized Aristotle's three categories of rhetoric in the apostle Paul's reflection on the effectiveness of his gospel preaching ministry in a local church. He explained: "because our gospel came to you not only in word [logos], but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction [pathos]. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake [ethos]."[344] In Paul's case, his relationship with the people confirmed and authenticated his preaching.

The preacher speaks to the church from the timeless word of God, but God uses the person of the preacher to communicate that word to a particular people. As John Stott put it, "…preaching is not exposition only but communication, not just the exegesis of a text but the conveying of a God-given message to living people who need to hear it…"[345] The Bible stresses God's own relational priority in communicating with his people through statements like: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people,"[346] and, "the

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[343] *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, s.v. "Ethos."
[344] 1 Thess. 1:5.
[345] Stott, 137.
[346] See, e.g., Gen. 26:24; 48:21; Exod. 3:12; 6:7; Isa. 41:10; Jer. 7:23; Ezek. 36:28.

Word became flesh and dwelt among us."[347] If God himself leads his people through incarnational means, then preachers today must acknowledge the biblical importance of relationship in all aspects of their ministry, including preaching.

Because preaching is necessarily relational, pastors must seek to understand the nature of their relationships with their congregations, particularly in perception. As André Resner pointed out, because "the preacher's perceived person is intimately bound up in the hearers' decisions about the message" the preacher is forced "constantly to reevaluate the nature of his or her implied *ēthos*."[348] In other words, preachers cannot evaluate the effectiveness of their preaching without also evaluating how the people perceive them as persons. Ethos for a minister is most visible through the role of pastoring, or shepherding.

Preaching and pastoring are not two distinct and divided roles. William Willimon affirmed this unifying principle when he exclaimed, "Preaching derives part of its power because it is done by *pastors*."[349] This is exactly what David shared in his growing experience as a minister who desires to preach effectively with his congregation. He said, "Pastoring helps them listen with trust. And good preaching…doing a quality job is pastoral. And so they work hand-in-hand: the preaching helps the pastoring, and the pastoring helps…in receiving the preaching." We must avoid a false dichotomy between the roles of preaching and pastoring. That is not to say that we should never partition time for tasks related to one or the other role – setting aside time for study or for visitation, for example – but we must recognize that one role flows into and affects the other.

Once we accept the reality and the importance of ethos in preaching, the next question becomes: can we realistically know anything about the perceptions of our ethos

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[347] John 1:14.
[348] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 140.
[349] Willimon, 67.

as preachers? Without delving too deeply into a philosophical discussion of epistemology, this is a difficult question to answer. Chapell admitted in his seminal book on Christ-centered preaching: "Although this book of homiletical method necessarily focuses on the elements of logos and pathos in preaching, the Bible's own emphases remind us that pastoral character remains the foundation of ministry."[350] Why would Chapell mention the priority of ethos, but then write almost entirely about the logos and pathos aspects of preaching? This traditional stream of homiletical instruction primarily deals with preparation and delivery in distinction from matters of ethos. Although ethos may serve as "the foundation" of preaching ministry, it is much more difficult to describe, to understand, to teach than are the aspects of logos and pathos. Plus, as André Resner points out, the preacher's ethos is subject to the perceptions of the listeners[351] rather than to objective methodology.

The logos and pathos elements of preaching can be taught; managing the perceptions about character and relationship does not lend itself to transferable instruction. William Avery's research provided an example of how one congregation's perceptions of the preacher affected the reception of the word of God in his sermons. He concluded, "The nature and quality of emotional relationships between laity and clergy and laity's perceptions of how clergy regard them appeared to be the most influential factors in determining 'how' parishioners listen to sermons and what they listen to."[352] If pastors desire to improve their communication of the gospel through their preaching, then they must find ways to address the perceptions of their relationships with the people to whom they preach.

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[350] McClure and others, 35.
[351] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 23.
[352] Avery and Gobbel, 272.

Capitalizing on Agreement and Resolving Tension

If the perceived relationship between a pastor and congregation is difficult to understand, it is even more difficult to manage. Robert Burns highlighted the complexity of ministry when he described the way every person approaches ministry from a different vantage point: "When ministry is being planned, participants bring their interests to the table. Interests are the complex set of goals, values, desires, concerns and motivations that lead people to act."[353] Every person in a church community, including the pastor, has expectations of how the pastor-congregation relationship should look, with varying amounts of agreement or tension. This should be expected. The Bible itself uses a host of word pictures to describe the pastor's role in relationship to the church. The academic literature presents several word pictures, including "herald," "sower," "ambassador," "messenger of the good news," "teacher," and "witness." The interviews corroborated a great variety of role-perspectives through the pastors' choices of word pictures. The participants' responses fell into four broad categories: directorial (CEO, king, builder-leader), instructional (herald, teacher, theologian, attorney), pastoral (shepherd), and familial (friend, father, nursing mother). Each label represented a different set of expectations or emphases in the pastoral relationship. If the pastors displayed such a wide variety, congregation members would likely provide even greater variety in their definitions.

In light of this variety of interests in defining the pastor-congregation relationship, Ronald Osborn's question seems pertinent: "How can you and I agree as to my effectiveness in my ministry when we measure it by different standards based on

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[353] Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice", 2.

different conceptions of what a minister is?"[354] Osborn answered his own question with

the idea of best fit: "It falls to each of us in ministry to think through as best we are able

the model of ministry that, given our particular abilities and inclinations, will enable us to

make our largest contribution."[355] Osborn rightly embraces the diversity of ministry

paradigms as a gift to be celebrated, but he over-simplifies the solution to the problem.

He suggests that if there are so many options for defining the pastoral relationship, then

the pastor must simply choose a paradigm that works. Unfortunately, just choosing a

legitimate paradigm doesn't resolve the complexity. What if a pastor chooses to model

his preaching after the instructional paradigm of a theologian-teacher, but one-third of the

congregation cannot follow his sermons because they value the warmth and relational

connectivity of a more pastoral preacher?

Preachers must work to capitalize on the agreements and minimize the tensions in

the varying expectations that are brought to each and every sermon event. David

expressed a very helpful insight that he has learned along the way in his preaching

ministry. He said, "I started out thinking that I would pastor…so that I could do what I

really wanted to do, which was preach. And that has changed for me over time, where I

have seen the importance of pastoring that goes on." David thought he could make a nod

to the pastoral side of ministry, but only so he could focus on the instructional part that he

enjoyed more. What he found was that a significant segment of his congregation was not

being instructed because of his perceived lack of care in pastoring. The people needed to

feel pastored in order to receive instruction. The same could also be said for the

directional and familial categories of relationship. No one pastor can be truly "all things

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[354] Osborn, 5.
[355] Ibid., 198.

to all people,"[356] but every pastor must strive to communicate with the people who bring their various "interests to the table."

Jonathan Edwards' paradigm for the pastor-congregation relationship is helpful, because it holds a benign tension between two seemingly antithetical roles. In his ordination sermon, "The Church's Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God," Edwards emphasizes that the pastor stands in a dual role: both as an ambassador representing the groom to the bride and as a member, himself, of the bride. "A faithful minister espouses a christian [*sic*] people, not in his own name, but as Christ's ambassador: he espouses them, that therein they may be espoused to Christ."[357] This dual emphasis describes the kind of desire that Kurt talked about when he said: "I think a lot of those kind of tensions are resolved… because most people just want a pastor at the end of the day. And they're willing to live with not getting their illustration, their issue talked about, if they feel cared for." The pastor shows love to the people so that they will hear the love of Christ through the word preached.

Finding just the right label to define relationships will not create good preaching, but pastors must wrestle with understanding how their relationships do, in fact, affect how people receive their preaching. Attention to relationships can result in a sort of rhetorical power in preaching. When preachers learn to invest relational capital, they are more likely to earn the dividends of a congregation that is prepared to listen. In effect, the more people feel content in their relationship with the pastor, the less they will see the pastor standing in the way of the sermon, and the more they will hear the message that is being preached.

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[356] 1 Cor. 9:22.
[357] Edwards, 23.

Preaching Beyond the End of the Sermon

As mentioned at the beginning of this project, preachers tend to view sermons as completed once they have been delivered to the congregation. However, preachers do themselves and their congregations a disservice if they do not pursue evaluation of their preaching on some level. John Stott is correct when he says, "In nearly every church, closer and more cordial relations between pastors and people, preachers and listeners, would be beneficial. There is need for more cooperation between them in the preparing of sermons, and more candour in evaluating them."[358] Evaluation is a potential key for preachers in understanding the state of their relationships and how people are hearing and receiving their sermons. Evaluation can extend the effectiveness of a sermon beyond its delivery by reinforcing the relational connections between the preacher and the congregation.

The Need for Evaluation

Pastors need not feel intimidated by the word "evaluation." As one handbook defined it, evaluation simply informs leaders "how their programs are performing so that they can improve them and learn from the information they gather."[359] This especially holds true in the educational fields. Donald Guthrie describes an expectation that teaching consists of a three-part process of "plan, conduct, and evaluate."[360] Teachers need this evaluative mechanism for making sure their message is being received by the students. Likewise, preachers should consider evaluation as a necessary part of preaching in order to understand how their sermons are being received and how they can improve their

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[358] Stott, 11.
[359] Wholey, ed., xxxiii.
[360] Guthrie, 209.

preaching accordingly. Preachers who ignore evaluation will fall to the dictum of Angelo and Cross: "[Preaching] without learning is just talking."[361]

Sermon evaluation can consist of either formal or informal means. Only a few of the pastors in this study used formal evaluation methods in their churches, and these consisted of periodic pastoral reviews or periodic meetings with leadership teams. The other participants felt bad, almost apologetic, about their lack of formal evaluation. Marcus said in response to a question about his use of evaluation in preaching, "I should, but I don't very well. It's very subjective…it's certainly more anecdotal than systematic." But evaluation tools do not need to be formal in order to be effective. Rosemary Caffarella affirmed as much in her evaluation manual for teachers, "Although systematic or strategically planned evaluations are important, so are the more informal and unplanned evaluation activities."[362] The priority in evaluation is to acquire useful feedback which will inform the preacher about how sermons are being received by the congregation.

What preachers need more than techniques for formal evaluation tools is the motivation for pursuing such evaluation. In the educational realm, Angelo and Cross describe the benefit of involving students in the evaluation process in that they tend to perceive it "as evidence that faculty are aware of their learning levels and progress and care about their opinions and ideas."[363] Similarly, congregants who are asked for their feedback on preaching are likely to feel more relationally connected to the preacher since they are part of the process. This means that pastors need to find ways to ask their congregations evaluative questions regarding their preaching. Simply because they have

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[361] Angelo and Cross, 3.
[362] Caffarella, 225.
[363] Angelo and Cross, 374-375.

been asked for their feedback, people in the congregation will feel more a part of the process in the communication of God's word, and they will feel valued for their input. As the congregants feel valued, they will be more likely to listen to the sermons from a stance of positive expectancy.

Making Evaluation Useful

Without advocating any particular evaluation program, this study has uncovered two broad principles that will enhance the usefulness of evaluation, whether formal or informal. Evaluation manuals provide a myriad of potential techniques and tools, but these manuals also give underlying guidelines that govern all of the methods. Angelo and Cross stress the essential principal of developing explicit goals and objectives which can be measured effectively.[364] In preaching, this translates into being strategic with our questions for feedback. We should avoid overly general questions such as: "How did you like the sermon?" or "What would you like to see changed in the preaching?" Instead, we should work on developing goals for our preaching and then asking questions which address those goals.

Wholey, et al., suggest that we remind ourselves to ask questions that are oriented specifically to the listener's experience rather than to the ability to regurgitate information given in the sermons. "Questions are only as good as they are clear and answerable for respondents. Crafting questions should be undertaken with the target respondents in mind."[365] Aaron captured this point in the interviews, "People's inability to reproduce your outline three days later is really quite beside the point. The purpose is to shape the heart as people are engaged." The important point with making evaluation

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[364] Ibid., 8.
[365] Wholey, ed., 273.

useful is for the pastor to find ways to listen to their congregations as they hear the sermons. Reflecting on Augustine, David Dunn-Wilson urged preachers to remember "that it is their *congregations'* perception of their sermons which is truly important, so they must heed their hearers' reactions, neither being 'flattered by reverence' nor angered by 'correction.'"[366]

A second principle that benefits usefulness relates to the environment in which the evaluation is pursued. This principle was not highlighted in the assessment literature concerning educational settings, perhaps because a classroom generally consists of a static, closed group that meets together only for a limited period of time. In the church setting, however, an environment of trust becomes essential. Pastors need to be somewhat selective in forming groups for evaluation to ensure balanced and honest assessment. Michael described meeting with two groups: a weekly Monday morning meeting with the pastors and liturgy team, and a monthly meeting with a group of older men. Michael cited diversity and confidentiality as the two main reasons why he thought these groups were so valuable in providing useful feedback to him. Diversity within the groups can help avoid a mob mentality, either with superficial affirmation or with inappropriate attacks. Aaron observed this reality in his comment, "It appears to me often people have their own convictions, their own prejudices, their minds are already made up… and they hear the word of God through that grid." Pastors should include people with differing personalities, demographic categories, and life situations to remind them that every person hears the same sermon differently. Michael even pursued feedback from two

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[366] Dunn-Wilson, 99. Augustine, "The First Catechetical Instruction [*De Catechizandis Rudibus*]," 2.3, 13.18, 11.16.

different groups, ensuring a well-rounded variety of opinions for him to use in evaluating how his sermons are being heard.

A second characteristic of a useful feedback group is confidentiality. Because Michael's groups are relatively closed and they have met together for a long period of time, they have been able to build a relationship of mutual trust. The thoughts and opinions shared within the groups are not shared outside of the groups. This allows the ones giving opinions to speak freely and the ones receiving the feedback to assume the good intentions of the ones speaking. Pastors need to provide leadership in these groups to ensure that the conversation will be conducted in an atmosphere of honesty and grace. The important thing, as Ryan noted, is to make the evaluation setting a safe environment for all who participate. He acknowledged that people generally hesitate to criticize the pastor, and as a result the pastor "can become the guy that no one wants to criticize, and who increasingly is not used to getting criticized." Whatever format is used for soliciting sermon evaluation, the pastor must reject the impulse to respond defensively for the sake of providing an environment in which people will feel safe in giving honest and loving feedback. Goleman, et al., describe this principle for the business realm:

> To become more effective, leaders need to break through the information quarantine around them – and the conspiracy to keep them pleased, even if uninformed. Rare are those who dare to tell a commanding leader he is too harsh, or to let a leader know he can be more visionary, or more democratic. That's why emotionally intelligent leaders need to seek the truth themselves.[367]

The same is true for pastors. As leaders in the church, we need to provide environments in which people will feel heard, valued, and respected.

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[367] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 133.

Preachers can actually improve the effectiveness of communication with their congregations simply by engaging in a dialogue about how the people are hearing the sermons. Pastors need to take the lead in seeking feedback from people because most of the useful feedback will not be offered spontaneously. Evaluation does not necessarily need to be a highly structured ministry in the church, but it does need to be intentional and thoughtful. If preaching and pastoring are not two distinct and divided roles, then evaluation can be one means for preachers to help congregations feel well shepherded through the ministry of preaching. Evaluation in the context of mutual trust is one way in which preaching can actually improve the people's perceptions of the pastoral relationship.

Preaching with Emotional Balance

Regardless of the methods they use (or do not use) to conduct evaluation of their preaching, preachers consistently receive feedback. This study has corroborated the principle that the relationship with the person giving the feedback is a huge factor in how the pastor receives it. Robert Burns' research suggests that "the largest source of occupation stress for ministers is their job in the local congregation," primarily relating to "personal or ideological conflict with parishioners."[368] Feedback is one vehicle that communicates to the pastor the conflicts that exist in the pastoral relationship. How the pastor responds to and manages the emotional stress uncovered through feedback is what is commonly termed emotional intelligence.[369] The good news is that pastors have tools which can help them respond to feedback in a balanced manner which will improve their ability to communicate the gospel through their preaching.

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[368] Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice", 35-36.
[369] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 6.

Validation

The first step in managing our emotional response to feedback is to decide which feedback is worthy of serious response and which may be passed over lightly. In the previous section, Goleman, et al. suggested that "emotionally intelligent leaders" will take the initiative to "seek truth," whether they receive specific feedback or not.[370] These leaders do not accept all feedback uncritically, and they do not try to change every time they receive a different kind of feedback. Instead, they will take the feedback they receive and analyze it for its truthfulness and helpfulness. The interviewees used the word "validation" in this sense.

The pastors in this study provided some insights for how they validate the feedback they receive. Feedback that focuses on a congregant's pet interest may give insights into the values of this particular individual, but it does not necessarily help the preacher communicate the gospel more clearly to the congregation as a whole. Michael's example of a man who wrote a letter to complain that he "wouldn't endorse a particular political candidate from the pulpit" reflects this kind of relatively invalid feedback. While this person's political views may have been informed by biblical principles, the criticism itself deals with opinion more than it does with biblical imperatives. The preacher should not adapt preaching based solely on the whims of "itching ears."[371]

However, the preacher may use this kind of "invalid" feedback to learn how better to relate with the individuals giving these critiques. Patterns of feedback, on the other hand, help the pastor confirm the usefulness of a particular critique. If an individual (or perhaps a small, isolated group) offers a particular criticism that is not mentioned by

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[370] Ibid., 133.
[371] 2 Tim. 4:3.

others, then that weakens the reliability of that criticism. A criticism that does not come from multiple sources gives insight into the individual, but it does not necessarily reflect the interests of the congregation as a whole. However, if a pastor receives similar comments from different people over a period of time, that tends to validate the point that is being made. This is another reason why pastors should seek feedback from a diversity of people.

The second insight into validating feedback deals with the pastor's perception of their relationship with the person giving the feedback. Jim observed that "some of the harshest criticism that I've received, oddly enough, came from people that you are the closest to." Michael added that "If I think it is just negative [feedback], but it's coming from a friend – if I feel relationally connected – then I think I'd do okay with that. If I don't feel relationally connected, I don't." If the pastor provides a safe environment for evaluation, then the people will feel strengthened in their relationship with the pastor. The converse is true as well. If pastors feel "relationally connected" with people giving feedback – even negative feedback – they are much more likely to receive that feedback as friendly criticism.

If the pastoral relationship is perceived as broken or damaged, however, then the feedback will be much less useful. As Kurt commented, some people become unhappy or cynical when they perceive that the pastor is responsible for this relational breakdown: "You've disappointed them in some way, you've let them down as their pastor, you weren't there for something, you weren't there for them, whatever it was. I don't think you're really going to win them back with your preaching and that's an easy target." Pastors need to consider how perceptions about their relationships are affecting the

reception of their preaching. This is another way evaluation can help bridge the perceived gap between the preaching and pastoring roles. As pastors receive feedback which alerts them to brokenness in the pastoral relationship, then they can work on restoring those relationships rather than reacting defensively.

Connection with Differentiation

Much of the literature on emotional intelligence came down to leaders viewing themselves as simultaneously connected and differentiated from their followers. In discussing a leader's relationship with the followers, the literature began with the perspective of a corporate view (systems theory) and moved toward an individual view (differentiation). Truly, systems theory encompassed both aspects of the leader's dual role: "You are a system (an individual) within a system (your organization)."[372] Systems theory becomes helpful in practical church work because it encourages pastors to view themselves as part of the system of the church as a whole. When pastors and their congregations ignore this interconnectivity, there tends to be an undue focus and stress on the pastor in the church's failures and successes. Evaluation helps pastors see how all the parts of the system (the pastor, the staff, the members of the congregation, the sermons, even the visitors) work together to produce the outcomes that are observed.[373]

This sense of connection with the people can help the preacher with encouragement and growth. In David's retelling of a conversion story, he explained his natural reaction to receiving positive feedback from the new convert on his preaching: "So when a guy like [this] gives me specific things that he likes in the sermons, I'm doing those things like crazy in all future sermons!" As David received positive feedback on his

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[372] Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 89.
[373] Steinke, 45.

preaching, he learned something that worked well in his system. Marcus told how

receiving positive feedback on his preaching reaffirmed his sense of God's call as pastor

to that church. The positive feedback increased his sense of connectivity with the

congregation.

Systems theory also introduced the concept of identifying emotional triangles.

James Lamkin defined an emotional triangle as "any three members of a relationship

system or any two members plus an issue or symptom."[374] Aaron confessed at one point,

"So I think sometimes because I'm fearful, I don't want to get criticized." As a result,

Aaron found himself reluctant to pursue evaluation of his preaching because he did not

want to go through the emotional heaviness that often comes with criticism. Lukas

Bouman described an appropriate example of how identifying emotional triangles can

help a pastor negotiate the emotional waters of criticism that Aaron and others tend to

avoid. When we view preachers as standing in relationship between God's people and

God (or God's word) as through a straight line, this puts the preacher in the position of

responsibility. Whether or not the people understand and receive the word of God, for

example, is dependent upon the preacher's skill and performance. This, Bouman

suggests, "has the effect of creating distance rather than closeness between people and

God." By viewing the preacher's relationship as a triangle, with the preacher, God, and

God's people each standing on a vertex of the triangle, the people relate directly with

God through his word, rather than through the preacher. He concludes, "By staying out of

the position of responsibility, I could model and encourage, rather than interfere, in the

relationship between the people and God."[375] In other words, the preacher puts himself in

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[374] Lamkin: 469.
[375] Bouman, 43-44.

a position in which he remains at the same time both connected to and distinct from the people.

The literature defined this dual perspective on the pastor's relationship with God and the people as differentiation. As Friedman defined it, self-differentiation is "the ability of a leader to be a self while still remaining a part of the system."[376] Lamkin said basically the same thing concerning pastoral relationships: "It is crucial for me as a pastor to be committed to the life-long job of working at my self-differentiation while paying attention to staying connected."[377] Two of the pastors expressed in their interviews an awareness of this tension and how difficult it is for them to live it out in practice. Kurt said, "It's hard as a pastor to be realistic about people, to be shrewd and not be cynical." Marcus, in mulling over the dangers of taking praise too easily, said, "I think there's a danger in being too self-conscious as a preacher, and somehow to be reflective without being self-centered." Both of these statements suggest that these pastors understand the balancing act between empathy and analysis, between connection and differentiation. How can a pastor walk this line in a healthy, productive manner?

The literature on systems theory suggested that once leaders have gained a clearer vision of how they relate to the system as a whole, they should take a step back from the actual relationships for reflection.[378] Heifetz and Linsky warned against the emotional stress that comes from confusing self and role: "Remember, when you lead, people don't love you or hate you. Mostly they don't even know you. They love or hate the positions

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[376] Friedman, 229.
[377] Lamkin: 467.
[378] Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 7.

you represent."[379] David affirmed this principle in practice when he said about those who communicate criticisms of his preaching, "They're really not being critical of me, they're really being critical of what they think they heard." By receiving negative feedback without feeling attacked as a person, a pastor is exercising the "shrewd and not cynical" response. Heifetz and Linsky drew the conclusion, "If you can hold steady long enough, remaining respectful of their pains and defending your perspective without feeling you must defend yourself, you may find that in the ensuing calm, relationships become stronger."[380] Even negative criticism can result in a strengthening of the pastoral relationship. As Jim put it, "Even if you disagree completely, before God you're saying how can I grow through this?…How can I become closer to this person? We know that there is a relational context in ministry."

This is one outworking of Jonathan Edwards' paradigm of pastors seeing themselves as both married to the church (part of the system) and as one who prepares the bride for the groom (differentiated from the system). Pastors view themselves and their congregations through the lens of mutual union with Christ. Because all believers are united with Christ, they are also united with one another, including pastors and their congregations. As members of the church, preachers should seek to build relationships with the people to whom they preach, to show care and concern for the people in their preaching, and to empathize with those who struggle and express dissatisfaction with their sermons. As pastors who mediate between the people and God, preachers should prioritize the people's love and commitment for their Savior rather than the pastor's reputation among the people. It is the pastors' individual unions with Christ which take

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[379] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 198.
[380] Ibid., 145.

priority in determining their evaluation,[381] their message, and their priorities. As Michael said, "For me, relationally, there is a sense where I have to learn to detach myself from the congregation in order to preach to the congregation…If I'm listening too much to the congregation, I'll never say the hard things I need to say." By managing their emotional responses to sermon evaluations, preachers make themselves open to improving their preaching as a result of the feedback.

<div align="center">**Preaching to *This* People**</div>

The purpose for conducting evaluation of preaching is so that the preacher can learn how to more effectively communicate the gospel of Christ to a particular people. Preaching happens in the context of relationships, and sermon evaluation often provides a window into the nature of the pastor's relationship with the congregation and how that relationship might be affecting the reception of the sermons. As Ronald Allen noted, the sermons themselves affect the system of the church. "[A] preacher cannot always predict how a sermon will affect the congregational system…Consequently, ministers need feedback on their preaching. Indeed, a sermon may become a part of a life process in the congregation that calls forth another sermon."[382] Preachers need to use the feedback they receive to adjust their preaching for reaching *this* people.

Think Through the Listeners

The first way preachers grow from their sermon evaluations is to think through the listeners as they are preparing their sermons. Muehlhoff and Lewis wrote of "perspective taking," in which speakers ask questions about their audience in order to understand them and how to communicate with them. The difficulty, as they point out,

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[381] 1 Cor. 4:1-5.
[382] Allen, 20.

"is that we have no direct access to another person's thoughts or feelings."[383] This difficulty can be bridged, in part, by pursuing feedback from their audience. Roger van Harn put it this way: "Listening is a two-way street in the Christian church. Preachers are called to listen to their listeners before, during, and after they speak."[384] Preachers understand the text of scripture through the discipline of exegesis. They craft a sermon through homiletics, but the preaching process is unfinished until they listen to how the people in the congregation are receiving and processing the message. Michael Emlet suggested, "In ministry we are reading two 'texts' simultaneously, the story of Scripture and the story of the person we serve…Reading the Bible without reading the person is a recipe for irrelevance in ministry."[385] Michael, for example, found it helpful to listen to his own recorded sermons after he preached them. In his experience, this allowed him to listen to the sermon "through their ears," and it helped him to understand how people might hear things differently than he had thought when he spoke them.

Several of the participants explained how they think through their congregations as they prepare their sermons. David talked about how he previously would preach without any thought of the people to whom he was speaking. "But then as I have grown pastorally, it's like I have them in mind. Sometimes it's a specific person. Particularly with encouraging things, sometimes there will be something in there that I know will help everybody, but it's really for somebody." The sermon feedback helped him to bring the listeners to his mind as he studied scripture and prepared his sermons. Kurt spoke about "isolations of moments" in which he would purposefully address different groups of people within his congregation, telling a joke that would catch the attention of the

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[383] Muehlhoff and Lewis, 50.
[384] van Harn, xi.
[385] Emlet, 90.

children at one point, and giving an illustration later that would be meaningful for the older generation at another point. This follows Sidney Greidanus' advice, "Congregational involvement can be further heightened by aiming the sermon at specific needs in the congregation, by addressing the sermon, as the text before it, to specific questions."[386] Thinking through the listeners while doing sermon preparation should not change the meaning of the scripture being preached, but it will make the communication of the message more accessible to the congregation.

The danger in thinking through the listeners in sermon preparation is the preaching of hearer-driven sermons rather than scripture-driven sermons. The research for this project has suggested two correctives for this error. First, when thinking through the listeners, pastors must deal with the question, "Who are the people to whom I preach?" rather than "What do the people want to hear in my sermons?" Preachers know their congregations through relationships, not just through taking feedback surveys. As Philip Thompson wrote, "[T]he preacher's involvement in the lives of church members fosters identification with them which, in turn, enables him to preach sermons that meet their needs."[387] Jim agreed with that sentiment in practice when he was asked how he thinks about his congregation as he is preparing sermons. He said, "I think the only way you can do that is first of all you are living life with them. When they are hurting, you know about it. When they're in the hospital, you're there." To put it in the terminology of a previous section, preachers preach as pastors. They know and care for the people as they preach to them, and their sermons will be heard in the context of trusting relationships.

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[386] Greidanus, 184.
[387] Thompson, 184.

The second corrective against preaching hearer-driven sermons comes from Resner's direction to embrace both the God-given message from scripture and the needs of the hearers: "One should both do all one can in interpretation and articulation and should be expectant that God will bring the message God chooses."[388] Pastors cannot worry about changing the way people perceive them as preachers, "Rather, part of our stewardship consists in reframing the way they are to judge us, namely from the frame of reference that the cross itself provides."[389] In other words, because pastors know the people to whom they preach, they bring them to the cross of Christ in a way that they need, given their current life situations. This highlights the utter necessity of Christ-centered preaching.

Focus on Christ and Cross

Preaching must focus on Christ and his cross in order to transcend relational hindrances to the communication of the gospel message. Preaching, by definition, is conducted through the personality of preachers. Sometimes the personality of the preacher, or more accurately, the perception of the personality of the preacher, distracts certain members of the congregation from hearing the gospel message as intended. If they are not watchful over the conditions of their pastoral relationships, preachers may find that their preaching exacerbates a struggle of wills mentality toward God's word.

Walter Brueggemann attempted to address the gap in perceptions of truth and meaning between the preacher and the individuals in the congregation. People approach a sermon from different vantage points. Brueggemann suggested that preachers must appeal to the authority of scripture as something that comes from outside of themselves –

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[388] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 52.
[389] Ibid., 150-151.

their experiences, their expectations, their perceived needs.[390] This appeal rightly undercuts the postmodern tendency to identify truth and meaning solely through individual perceptions and reaffirms the source of truth and meaning in the text of scripture. However, he went on to argue that preachers should speak truth from the word of God without demanding acceptance of that truth: "Preaching thus must be conducted in a context where one makes proposals and advocacies but not conclusions."[391] This part of Brueggemann's solution weakens the power of God's word and stunts the gospel message.

A proper exegetical and hermeneutical focus on the person and work of Christ, what Graeme Goldsworthy called the "hermeneutical key" of the whole Bible,[392] transfers attention from the preacher to the text. As Goldsworthy explained, "Any sermon, then, that aims to apply the biblical text to the congregation and does so without making it crystal clear that it is in Christ alone and through Christ alone that the application is realized, is not a Christian sermon."[393] Resner recognized this strategy in the preaching of Paul in the letters to the Corinthians. Paul wanted to draw attention away from himself and toward Christ in his preaching. When Paul preached *kata stauron* ("according to the cross")[394] he avoided the errors of overemphasizing and underemphasizing the person of the preacher. Overemphasizing the preacher tends to make the church divisive over the personalities leaders. Underemphasizing the preacher tends to make the congregation not respect the preaching of the cross. When Paul claims,

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[390] Brueggemann, 13.
[391] Ibid., 22.
[392] Goldsworthy, 84.
[393] Ibid., 124. Both Chapel and Goldsworthy give excellent introductions to Christ-centered preaching as a whole.
[394] Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, 115.

"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake,"[395] he affirms the essentiality of both message and messenger.

In practice, preachers must know the individual people and groups in their congregations, and they must lead them in their preaching to the cross of Christ for the meeting of their needs and expectations. Preachers do not preach hearer-directed sermons, but hearer-informed sermons. David observed in his interview that the people in the congregation generally want to change – to change their behaviors, or their knowledge, or their practices. Change, however, comes through the gracious work of Christ. As a minister of Christ's grace, David preaches every sermon from the framework that both believers and unbelievers "need to be gospel-ized." Preachers must preach with the expectation that God uses them and their relationships to bring God's people into contact with God's grace through every sermon.

Summary of Findings

Not only is it impossible, it is also unwise to try to take the person out of the sermon. Sermons are delivered by people, and they are received by people. These people exist together in the context of a pastor/congregation relationship. Seminaries and preaching textbooks focus on the content and delivery of sermons, but they tend to shy away from addressing the impact of ethos on preaching. Preachers need to put themselves back into the preaching process. Congregants listen to sermons differently based on the ways they perceive the pastors as people or the ways they perceive the nature of their relationship with their pastor.

Preachers improve the receptivity of their sermons when they intentionally invest in healthy relationships with their congregations. For educators, the teaching process

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[395] 2 Cor. 4:5.

follows a complete circuit described as: "plan, conduct, evaluate." Pastors need a more relational approach to preaching than: "prepare, deliver, evaluate." Perhaps a better way of describing the preaching process would be: "prepare, deliver, shepherd." The roles and responsibilities of pastoring and preaching should be held in a beautiful symbiosis. Preaching does not end when the sermon is delivered. It is an ongoing dialogue between preacher and congregation, shepherd and sheep. In this context, sermon evaluation, whether formal or informal, provides an excellent tool for understanding who the people are, what their expectations and needs are, and how they are perceiving the sermons. These insights should help pastors both in their emotional responses to sermon feedback and in their adjustments to future preaching.

Recommendations for Further Study

Many preaching textbooks refer to the preeminent role of ethos in preaching, but they do not develop the topic in any depth, especially in terms of practice. So many disciplines coalesce in the ministry of preaching: exegesis, hermeneutics, rhetoric, sociology, and more. As with any research, there are limitations on how extensively this study could integrate these many disciplines. This study sought to take a small step toward filling the ethos gap in preaching literature by examining how a simple tool like sermon evaluation can provide insight into how congregants' perceptions impact the way they hear sermons. There are several avenues for further study which could prove fruitful in equipping preachers for the relational realities of the ministry of the word.

One approach could deal with the processes of conducting sermon evaluation. Pastors could benefit from training in evaluation tools and methods. How can they plan an effective sermon evaluation process for their church? What tools are most helpful in

the context of church ministry and preaching? Since many pastors seem reluctant to pursue feedback mechanisms on their own, a study like this would take away some of the inhibitions that are often associated with evaluation tools.

Another set of topics could address the teaching of ethos principles in seminary preaching courses. How can seminaries better prepare preaching candidates for the relational complexities of ministry roles? How does a person preach with both self-awareness and self-differentiation? Much of the education on these relational realities seems to be left solely to the learning-by-experience forum, but students would benefit greatly if they were given more preparation ahead of time in how to integrate emotional intelligence principles and systems theory in the sphere of preaching. Within this context, one could also develop best practices for conflict resolution as it may relate specifically to the ministry of preaching.

One of the unexpected findings from the interview process dealt with the concept of validating feedback. Not all feedback qualifies as useful evaluation. After the interviews were completed, this topic rose to greater significance than originally anticipated. Research could be conducted on how preachers may determine what feedback is helpful or applicable to their preaching. What variables or observations might contribute to the usefulness of the feedback? What practices would increase the likelihood of acquiring useful feedback? What are some of the potential abuses of evaluation?

This study assumed preaching in the context of a church setting with a full-time pastor. Another potential area of research could look into the presence of the ethos component of preaching in other media: in writing, in audio recordings, or in internet-

based ministry. How do relationship and personality influence the message in those contexts? How can preachers address perceptions and expectations in those contexts that do not involve long-term, direct relationships?

Each of these potential study areas would build health and vitality into the preaching ministry of the church today. The goal of this study has been to add to current efforts to encourage and to equip preachers for fruitful ministry over the long haul. Preachers can improve their communication of the gospel message by listening to the feedback they receive from people in their congregations. Preachers often become disheartened when they perceive negative feedback on their sermons as personal attacks, but they can reduce emotional stress, which affects performance in all areas of ministry, as they utilize feedback as a means to understand themselves and their congregations better. Preachers can also improve the receptivity of their sermons as they invest in the pastoral relationships that they have with their congregants.

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