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Intergenerational Preaching:
Accounting for the Various Dynamics
of Multigenerational Churches

By
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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Covenant Theological Seminary

**Integrational Preaching:
Accounting for Various Dynamics
of Multigenerational Churches**

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Abstract

In the worship services of many churches, people are segregated by age groups. In the cases of many smaller churches, the membership consists of only older or only younger people. Even when multiple generations are present, one or more of them may feel left out of the message. No matter what the reasons or manifestations, dividing generations for the hearing of God's Word leads to disunity in the particular church as well as in the church universal. Segregating generations deprives the church of the ability to harmonize the wisdom of the elders and the energy and freshness of the young people.

Developmental cognitive listening literature suggests that understanding how particular aged people receive the spoken word will enhance the ability of a preacher to reach all those who attend intergenerational worship services. Multigenerational dynamics literature suggests that understanding the multigenerational aspects of the church will also help a preacher to preach to the multiple generations who attend worship. Preaching literature suggests preachers must maintain a Christ-centered, expositional approach to preaching while considering the multigenerational cognitive abilities of the listeners.

One way generational segregation can be overcome is for pastors to preach to the multiple generations at the same time and in the same message. However, preachers must not sacrifice the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching while attempting to reach every generation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how preachers in intergenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations without sacrificing the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching.

Four research questions guided this study: (1) In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account for differences and commonalities due to developmental cognitive listening ability? (2) In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account for the dynamics found within multigenerational churches? (3) What do expository preachers avoid when they preach in intergenerational worship services? (4) How do expository preachers know their sermons are reaching the multiple generations present in their intergenerational worship services? The study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with ten preachers from multigenerational churches who preach Christ-centered expository sermons in an intergenerational worship service. In order to obtain the broadest perspectives on this narrow study, the participants were preachers from both large and small churches, both rural and metropolitan contexts, and various denominational backgrounds, but all were Reformed in doctrine and practice. Five interviewees are from America and five interviewees are from Australia. The researcher used the constant comparative method of data analysis, comparing the various segments of data from the interviews in order to identify patterns of similarity and difference.

The findings of the study revealed that preachers should be cognizant of differences in listening comprehension between those at differing developmental stages of life. Primarily, that there are significant differences in young children under about age 7, children from around 7 to 11, teenagers who have the adult tools for mature listening comprehension, and more mature adult listeners. Also, the preacher should understand that failure to be intergenerational is a negative dynamic in multigenerational churches

and that being intergenerational is how God designed multigenerational churches to operate, even if that is counter to the surrounding culture. Both of these factors must be considered by the preacher to preach effectively, but ultimately the preacher must preach faithfully clear, simple, Christ-centered, expository sermons. In order to unify the intergenerational congregation, the preacher should avoid several preaching pitfalls and be willing to receive feedback from listeners, and particularly those who are mature in their faith, have knowledge of Christ-centered expository sermons, and knowledge of the people to whom the preacher preaches.

The significance of this study is that it will help preachers preach to multigenerational congregations so that the preached Word of God will reach everyone from the infant to the nonagenarian.

Dedicated to the memory of Rev. Harry O. Nelson; he walked with God.

I do not ask for these only, but also those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given to me I have given to them, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them as you loved me.

— Holy Bible (ESV): John 17:20-23.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.”¹

Brief Introduction to the Problem

Church divisions can take many forms. One variety that many fail to recognize is the way congregations segregate their worship service based on generational differences, preferring to cater to the wants and desires of each generation in order to avoid upsetting the members of any one generation. Jesus prayed that all believers would “be one” and “be perfected in unity.”² Therefore, catering to each generation based on its particular wants and desires may undermine what is demanded by God: the uniting of the body of Jesus Christ in worship. Such a church may stand under a single name, but it is a church divided. In other instances, one generation of people from a particular church will leave their church in order to form a new church that they see as more appropriate for their generation. They form these churches with the purpose of attracting others of their generation, sometimes attracting them from other nearby churches. These churches may stand under separate names, but they are the church divided.

Howard Vanderwell, a resource development specialist for pastoral leadership for the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, observes that

¹ Mark 3:25.

² John 17:20-24.

for all kinds of reasons, many congregations have practiced a kind of generational segregation on Sunday morning. Some churches schedule Christian education sessions during worship so that families are split up during their hour at church. Some churches schedule different worship services for Boomers, Busters, and Gen X ‘audiences,’ tailoring each service to the tastes and preferences of each generational cohort. The result of moves like these is a deepening division in the body of Christ that is vexingly difficult to overcome.³

This is not a localized problem, but an American and Western cultural problem affecting many particular churches. Vanderwell concludes, “...congregations, and even whole denominations, have been fragmented, with old, young and the in-between cut off from one another. Intergenerational worship has become ‘counter cultural’ in a society where the segregation of age groups has become the norm.”⁴ In their essay, “Foundations for Cross-Generational Ministry,” Noland D. Martinson and Diane E. Shallue observe these results of separating generations in society:

Segregating the generations from one another adversely affects not only the young. Parents are often overwhelmed as they attempt the near impossible task of balancing career, parenting, and homemaking without the help of elders or older children. The elderly are becoming more and more isolated and deprived of the energy, imagination and hopefulness of the young... This lack of intergenerational contact leads each generation to see itself as a separate subculture rather than as an integral part of an entire community, perspectives that often lead to conflict and competition rather than cooperation.⁵

Separating generations negatively affects communities, which need the contributions of every generation in order that people of all ages would not only integrate and cooperate.

³ Howard Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*, The Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations Series (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), xi.

⁴ Ibid., xiv.

⁵ Vicky Goplin and others, eds., *Across the Generations: Incorporating All Ages in Ministry: The Why and How* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 4.

Could the effects of this separation in culture have the same impact upon the church? Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter think so: “The Christian church is polarizing along generational lines, and the generation gaps are intensifying this divergence.”⁶

The generational polarization that is occurring in many churches affects the multitude of ministries each church offers, whether music ministry, teaching ministry, programming ministry, pastoral care, or preaching. Churches desire to draw people into their fellowship, but in order to do so they may sacrifice the unity of their fellowship by catering to the polarization of the generations. A problem facing preachers is how to avoid marginalizing one or more generations and instead unite all people in the worship of God, while still preaching Christ-centered, expository sermons. Preachers may have difficulty doing this because of people’s differing expectations for the communication of words and ideas, both in hearing and speaking, which are sometimes specific to particular generations. The preacher’s challenge will be to gain an understanding of generational differences and cognitive obstacles to communication.

It may be common to think that churches divide over music styles, but music is not the only thing that drives churches to separate generations or that drives one generation to leave one church in order to start another. Sometimes generations separate from one another because of what is spoken or not spoken from the pulpit. Carl Weaver explains that “Listening capacity, or ability, improves with increasing sophistication and age... [A]lthough the capacity for listening rises linearly with age and experience, at

⁶ Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 7.

some point it begins to decline.”⁷ An eight-year-old listens and learns differently than an 18-year-old; and both listen and learn differently than a 38-year-old, 68-year-old, or 88-year-old.

“Today, shifting core values and fast-paced contemporary lifestyles are pulling the generations apart. Postmodern societies’ high value on individualism and mobility fragment communities and isolate age groups from one another.”⁸ Society may fragment and isolate age groups from one another, but should it be so in the church’s worship of God? Preaching to multiple generations at the same time may be a vexing challenge, but rather than pulling generations apart, would it not be possible for preaching to unite the generations, for the sake of the Savior?

Review of Selected Studies

How does a preacher preach to multiple generations in one sermon without sacrificing expository Christ-centered preaching? There is plenty of literature that can be helpful for pastors seeking to overcome this vexing difficulty. The relevant literature reflects three main areas of study: 1) literature that reveals how people listen and comprehend as they develop through the stages of life, 2) literature that describes the dynamics of multigenerational churches, and 3) literature showing how to preach Christ-centered sermons.

In order for a sermon to connect specifically with the members of each generation, the pastor must learn how to communicate in a manner that is general enough

⁷ Carl Harold Weaver, *Human Listening: Processes and Behavior*, The Bobbs-Merrill Series in Speech Communication (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 13-14.

⁸ Goplin and others, eds., 4.

to reach the ears of all generations alive today. Through the study and analysis of relevant literature, the researcher will seek to understand how various generations receive the spoken word and how that word can be presented in a way that enables the listeners not only to hear but also to comprehend.

In this study, the first category of literature contains works relating to developmental listening. Helen Spencer-Oatey, Professor and Director of the Warwick Centre for Applied Linguistics, maintains that “all language has a dual function: the transfer of information, and the management of social relations.”⁹ Examining social relations is tangential to this study and not unimportant, but still, preachers need to remain mindful that social concern lies behind their listeners’ desire to listen. However, when one considers the multitude of differences that exist between people, including the range of their ages from very young to very old, one must be certain that each listener is receiving the information the preacher is transferring. Therefore, the preacher must understand what abilities people, of all age ranges, have to listen.

In his book, *How to Say It to Seniors*, David Solie examines how to communicate well with older citizens so as to best engage them and have them comprehend a message shared with them. Solie states that we need to learn how to nourish our elders *developmentally* in order to obtain meaningful responses from them.¹⁰ He summarizes his analysis like this:

⁹ Helen Spencer-Oatey, *Culturally Speaking: Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 12.

¹⁰ David Solie, *How to Say It to Seniors: Closing the Communication Gap with Our Elders* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 2004), 6.

The prevailing myth about aging—that it is nothing but slow and steady decline—is a by-product of our culture that worships youth and abhors getting old. It is not surprising that this view sees aging as nothing but systems failure when it looks at its older citizens. ...A culture obsessed with staying young has missed the most important part of getting old: The brain's physiology changes in ways that promote the person's need for reflection, insight, and innovation.¹¹

The brain's physiology changes throughout the lifecycle and it affects the way people listen at every age and stage of life.

On the other end of the age spectrum, Jean Piaget, in *The Language and Thought of the Child*, says, "...one of the characteristics of children's conversations is that each imagines he is understanding and listening to the others, even when he is doing nothing of the kind."¹² And, "He has not, like the adult, the art of seeking and finding in the other's mind some basis on which to build anew."¹³ Due to their developmental listening ability, children under the age of about seven will gain understanding because of common circumstances in which they listen to the spoken word. On the other hand, adults have the ability to understand simply based upon the conversation itself.

The science of examining developmental listening abilities shows clearly that "Listening capacity, or ability, improves with increasing sophistication and age... although the capacity for listening rises linearly with age and experience, at some point it begins to decline."¹⁴ In addition to the example of how those under the age of seven and

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹² Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*, 3rd ed., Selected Works (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 121.

¹³ Ibid., 122.

¹⁴ Weaver, 13-14.

those over the age of seventy listen, the data also show how those of ages in between develop their ability to listen.

For example, as children mature and become second through sixth graders, research by Juhani E. Lehto and Minttu Anttila in their article, “Listening Comprehension in Primary Level Grades Two, Four and Six,” reveals that they “...scored clearly higher on narratives than on expository passages”¹⁵ when tested for listening comprehension. The preacher must consider these variations in listening comprehension abilities among children. Even within this narrowly aged group, “...it seems evident that second-graders’ listening comprehension of rather simple stories is still under development.”¹⁶

People listen differently at each developmental stage of life. Should not the preacher, then, take responsibility to know how the people of each generation listen, so that the sermon will be comprehended by people from all age ranges? Understanding these developmental stages is very important to the preacher who desires to preach to every age of person in an intergenerational worship service.

The second category of literature will show how churches desiring to be intergenerational ought to conduct their ministry endeavors while considering all their members of every age group and at the same time maintaining biblical principles. With regard to preaching, this body of literature will lay the foundation for intergenerational preaching, exploring generational dynamics in the context of the church.

¹⁵ Juhani E. Lehto and Minttu Anttila, "Listening Comprehension in Primary Level Grades Two, Four and Six," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 47, no. 2 (2003): 139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

“There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.”¹⁷ In view of the biblical narrative of Joshua, it can be deduced that God’s Church is multigenerational according to God’s design, and each generation ought to be included when the Word of God is proclaimed.

Gil Rendle, Vice President for Program at the Alban Institute wrote, “The large clusters of long-tenured members and short-tenured members are commonly experienced as competing centers of influence in the life of the congregation. This tension between groups is often referred to as ‘the old guard vs. the new guard.’”¹⁸ A common dynamic of multigenerational churches is that there is tension between the older and the younger members of the particular church.

Rendle goes on to say, “The pinch comes when congregational leaders attempt new ways to engage new people while established members are looking over their shoulders telling them they were ‘doing it wrong.’”¹⁹ With this tension over church leadership, multigenerational congregations may also experience tension when it comes to people’s varying preferences for the worship service and other church events. Embedded in multigenerational ministry is the dynamic question of how to engage all ages well within the life of the church.

Jackson Carroll and Wade Roof, in their book, *Bridging Divided Worlds*, state that “the blended congregation may also develop other programs to address the needs of

¹⁷ Joshua 8:35.

¹⁸ Gilbert R. Rendle, *The Multigenerational Congregation: Meeting the Leadership Challenge* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

specific generations, or be distinctly intergenerational in character.”²⁰ Although the blending of generations causes tension, multigenerational churches at times alleviate that tension with some programming that caters to specific age groups. Likely, such accommodation is common in multigenerational congregations.

“As congregations bring people together on the basis of a shared faith, they breach differences of age”²¹; as well as other differences that may be encountered. In contrast, however, when those same differences occur in the wider culture, such differences tend to segregate people rather than bring them together. The shared faith of a multigenerational church brings together a multitude of generations against societal norms. Though these age differences do cause tension, the tension can be overcome by the common faith that transcends the culture.

The third category of literature will cover communication techniques that are specifically useful for preaching. This category complements the first two, broader categories, continuing to explore how preachers can improve their understanding of the preaching task in order to reach the ears and hearts of every generation with messages from God’s Word.

Graeme Goldsworthy states, “Preaching involves a transferring of the point of the passage to today’s hearers.”²² A preacher must preach so that the people who hear will comprehend the point of the message. Bryan Chapell adds, “Truths of God proclaimed in such a way that people can see that the concepts derive from Scripture and apply to their

²⁰ Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 140.

²¹ Rendle, 21.

²² Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 150.

lives preoccupy the expository preacher's efforts. Such preaching puts people in immediate contact with the power of the Word."²³ When people gain a clear understanding of God's Word, the preacher has fulfilled the goal of exposing the power of the Word, thus communicating the Word of God.

Communicating the Word of God is more than just the mere use of words, but includes other dynamics of communication as well. According to Michael Fabarez, "We must recognize that the greatness of the truths we proclaim *demands* [emphasis added] nothing less than excellence in the manner and mode of our presentation."²⁴ Preachers must strive for more than mere understanding; they must motivate through their delivery of the sermon. Though it may seem unnecessary on the surface, upon further examination it appears that how a preacher presents the sermon affects the usefulness of a sermon. Edmund Clowney reinforces this point, saying, "... we lose the reality of the Lord if we lose our focus on the reality of his presence."²⁵ Pride in the pulpit can prevent the people from seeing the presence of Christ, just as humility can promote it. A preacher must communicate the Lord more than the preacher communicates himself.

Finally, Michael Fabarez wrote, "Somewhere between explaining and applying each assertion we must adequately prove it."²⁶ What preachers tell people in a sermon must be reasonable to them. There is a logical pathway of understanding that leads people

²³ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 31.

²⁴ Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 99.

²⁵ Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 50.

²⁶ Fabarez, 106.

into the Word of God. The preacher must find it. It is important to appeal to the mind, as well as the heart.

The literature reviewed and studied exposes the importance of intergenerational preaching in multigenerational congregations. The first area of review enables the researcher to understand how people listen at the various stages of life. The second area of review allows for the researcher to understand the dynamics of multigenerational churches. And the third area of review seeks to show the characteristics of expository preaching. Combining the three literature studies sampled above will allow the researcher to adequately come to conclusions about how preachers ought to preach Christ-centered, expository sermons to multigenerational congregations in a single intergenerational worship service.

Problem and Purpose Statements

In the worship services of many churches, people are segregated by age groups; or, in the cases of many smaller churches, the membership consists of only older or only younger people. Therefore, in either case, the worship services are filled with only those of a particular generation. The reasons for age segregation may be many, but occasionally it is due to how and what the preacher preaches. Some larger churches separate the generations intentionally and have different messages prepared for each group. Some smaller churches have only a narrow generation gap between their members; their preachers therefore preach only to those present. However, even when multiple generations are present, one or more of them may feel left out of the message. No matter what its reasons or manifestations, dividing generations for the hearing of God's Word leads to disunity in the particular church as well as in the church universal. Segregating

generations deprives the church of the ability to harmonize the wisdom of the elders and the energy and freshness of the young people.

One way generational segregation can be overcome is for pastors to preach to the multiple generations at the same time and in the same message. However, preachers must not sacrifice the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching while attempting to reach every generation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how preachers in intergenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations without sacrificing the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching.

Proposed Research Questions

The following research questions guided the research of this study:

1. In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account differences and commonalities due to developmental cognitive listening ability?
2. In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account for the dynamics found within multigenerational churches?
3. What do expository preachers avoid when they preach in intergenerational worship services?
4. How do expository preachers know that their sermons are reaching the multiple generations present in their intergenerational worship services?

Significance of the Study

“Life and faith are passed on from generation to generation.”²⁷

The significance of this study is that it will help preachers preach to multigenerational congregations so that the preached Word of God will reach everyone from the infant to the nonagenarian. Many churches today choose to split along generational lines, but this cannot continue if churches wish to live in accord with the Scriptures. Martinson and Shallue agree: “The biblical witness is clear: God creates human beings through and for intergenerational life.”²⁸ More importantly, the Bible affirms the uniting, not dividing, of generations in the proclaiming of God’s Word: “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.”²⁹

God has ordained that the church participate in worship, worship that is centered on the preached Word of God. There is no unity of worship without the unity that arises from the preaching of the Word. Such worship is an opportunity for the church to show the world the body of Christ, unified and centered on God’s Word.

Definition of Terms

Christ-centered preaching – Preaching “the grace of all Scripture that secures and enables relationship with the Savior.”³⁰ Christ-centered preaching is the primary focus of the biblical apostolic preaching demonstrated in Scripture. For instance, when the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he said in relation to his proclamation to

²⁷ Goplin and others, eds., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Psalm 145:4.

³⁰ Chapell, 16.

them that he “decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”³¹ Also, the apostle Peter, when he preached in the Acts of the Apostles his preaching was focused entirely on Jesus Christ and believing in Him.³² Therefore, the researcher believes that all preaching should be centered upon Jesus Christ.

Expository preaching – Expository preaching explains the meaning or purpose of a particular Bible passage and provides application consistent with that meaning or purpose.³³

Intergenerational – Involving multiple generations who engage with each other.³⁴ Intergenerational in the context of worship in the church is to have all who are present engage in worship together despite age differences. See “Multigenerational” below.

Intergenerational preaching – Preaching “*in which people of every age are understood to be equally important.*”³⁵

Multigenerational – To have more than one generation make up the attendance at a particular church. In practice, multigenerational churches may not be intergenerational. Therefore, the researcher intends to have the reader understand that multigenerational churches should be intergenerational in their worship services.

Nonagenarian – Any person who is between 90 and 99 years of age.

³¹ 1 Corinthians 2:2.

³² Acts 2-4.

³³ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003).

³⁴ Vanderwell, xix.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11. Emphasis original.

Postmodernism – A current cultural ethos in which people are generally individualistic and relativistic, are searching for the spiritual, and believe in a pluralism of gods.³⁶

Maturity/Ability/Capacity – In most cases, when the researcher is referring to individuals or a segment of individuals, he has used these words in relation to cognitive maturity, ability, and capacity of people to understand (grasp the meaning) and comprehend (grasp the significance of what is understood) the spoken word. When those words are in reference to something other than in relation to cognitive comprehension of the spoken word, the context will make the meaning evident. When the researcher mentions a preacher or pastor, the word “ability” refers to his preaching.

³⁶ Chris Altmann, *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern Age* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 21-34.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Problem and Purpose Statements

In many worship services, people are segregated by age groups. In the case of many smaller churches, the membership consists of only older or only younger people. Therefore, in either case, the worship services are filled with only those of a particular generation. The reasons for age segregation may be many, but occasionally it is due to how and what the preacher is preaching. Some larger churches separate the generations intentionally and have different messages prepared for each group. Some smaller churches have only a narrow generation gap between their members; their preachers therefore preach only to those present. However, even when multiple generations are present, one or more of the generations may feel that the message neglects them. No matter what its reasons or manifestations, dividing generations for the hearing of God's word leads to disunity in the particular church. Segregating generations deprives the church of the ability to harmonize the wisdom of the older folks with the energy and freshness of the young people.

One way generational segregation can be overcome is if pastors preach to the multiple generations at the same time and in the same message. However, preachers must not sacrifice the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching while attempting to reach every generation. The purpose of this study, then, is to examine how preachers in multigenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations, therefore being

intergenerational, without sacrificing the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching.

Introduction to the Literature Review

How can a preacher preach to multiple generations in one sermon without sacrificing expository Christ-centered preaching? The researcher will begin by establishing a biblical framework for this study, followed by a review of literature from three related areas of study intended to help pastors overcome the vexing difficulty of preaching intergenerational Christ-centered sermons. The three relevant literature areas for this study are 1) literature that reveals how people listen and comprehend as they develop through the stages of life, 2) literature that describes the dynamics of multigenerational churches, and 3) literature that shows how to preach Christ-centered sermons in the intergenerational setting.

Combining the three literature studies listed above will allow the researcher to discern how preachers can preach Christ-centered, expository sermons to multigenerational congregations in a single intergenerational worship service.

Biblical Framework

This study is intended to help preachers preach to multigenerational congregations so that the preached word of God will reach everyone from the child to the nonagenarian. Many churches today choose to split along generational lines, but this is inconsistent with the model of worship prescribed in the Scriptures. In their essay, “Foundations for Cross-Generational Ministry,” Noland D. Martinson and Diane E. Shallue agree that churches must be intergenerational, saying, “The biblical witness is clear: God creates human

beings through and for intergenerational life.”³⁷ More importantly, the Bible affirms unity of generations when the word of God is being proclaimed, not division: “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.”³⁸

Time and again, with explicit clarity, the Bible proclaims that the church must worship as children and adults together. Worshiping together means not only singing hymns of praise but primarily attending to the hearing of God’s word preached so that people will understand and respond. Notice the biblical witness proclaiming God’s design for the young, the old, and the in-between ages to join together for this God blessed event of worship called preaching:

And Moses commanded them, “At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. *Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God,* as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”³⁹

In the new, promised land, following the event of the Exodus, “there was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before *all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.*”⁴⁰ In the days of the kings of Judah, “...*all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.*” And what happened when they *all* stood before the Lord?

³⁷ Vicky Goplin and others, eds., *Across the Generations: Incorporating All Ages in Ministry: The Why and How* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 6.

³⁸ Psalm 145:4.

³⁹ Deuteronomy 31:10-12 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁰ Joshua 8:35 (emphasis mine).

“Thus says the Lord...”⁴¹ They heard the word of God, the very thing for which they all were gathered together. Ezra read God’s word to all who could understand, “And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, *in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand*. And the ears of *all the people* were attentive to the Book of the Law.”⁴² The Bible itself pleads with us to let all ages of people worship God together, “Young men and maidens *together*, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.”⁴³

The phenomenon that God’s people gather *together* to hear the word of God is not relegated to the time before Christ’s life, passion, and resurrection. In the first century church, the people were dedicated to unity of purpose and of worship. The testimony of the Acts of the Apostles says, “And all who believed were... day by day, *attending the temple together* and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts *praising God* and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”⁴⁴ When the people of the first century church gathered together, it was to hear preaching accompanied by God’s grace, “And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ 2 Chronicles 20:13, 15 (emphasis mine).

⁴² Nehemiah 8:3 (emphasis mine).

⁴³ Psalm 148:12-13 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁴ Acts 2:44-47 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁵ Acts 4:33.

When one reads in the biblical letters, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ...Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord,” and, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged,” it seems evident that both parents and children were not only present, but were addressed in the message as the first century churches gathered together for to hear the written apostolic sermons.⁴⁶ They were intergenerational.

God ordained that the whole church, young, middle-aged, and old, must participate in worship that is centered on the preached word of God. Unity is not fully realized in worship without the unity that arises when God’s people gather for the preaching of the word. Such worship is an opportunity for the church to show the world the unity of the body of Christ centered upon God’s word.

How People Listen and Comprehend as They Develop Through the Stages of Life

The task for preachers is simple, but not easy: “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”⁴⁷ One problem, according to Carl Harold Weaver’s *Human Listening: Processes and Behavior*, is that “people in our culture are taught not to listen. ...our entire culture conditions us not to listen but to talk.”⁴⁸ Weaver notes that during childhood one’s mother repeats everything to ensure that nothing is forgotten, so much so

⁴⁶ Ephesians 6:1, 4; Colossians 3:20-21.

⁴⁷ 2 Timothy 4:2.

⁴⁸ Carl Harold Weaver, *Human Listening: Processes and Behavior*, The Bobbs-Merrill Series in Speech Communication (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 15.

that the child does not need to listen. Then, in school, the principal makes an announcement, the teacher repeats it, and it is posted on the bulletin board. Even then, if the child has not listened, someone will point the child in the right direction.

Commercials repeat and repeat and repeat, ad nauseam.⁴⁹ Who needs to listen? The talking and listening problem is exacerbated by the fact that there are various people in the church who are at different stages of learning and listening. Timothy Brown acknowledges this difficulty in the book by Howard Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*: “Let me get this straight; you expect me to preach a sermon for 20 minutes that will inform, persuade, and delight everyone from an 80-year-old with a hearing problem to an eight-year-old *with a hearing problem*. Thanks a lot!”⁵⁰ The preacher’s challenge does not only consist in the limitations of the human auditory system, but includes overcoming the listeners’ ability and willingness to receive the preached words. How can the preacher reach all the varied listeners in one sermon? The place to start is to understand how people listen at the various stages of life.

Listening and Cognitive Development: Generally Speaking

According to Carl Weaver, “Listening capacity, or ability, improves with increasing sophistication and age... [A]lthough the capacity for listening rises linearly with age and experience, at some point it begins to decline.”⁵¹ The preacher must understand the stages of the increasing capacity for listening in order to appropriately

⁴⁹ Ibid., 14-15.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Howard Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*, The Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations Series (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), 113.

⁵¹ Weaver, 13-14.

communicate to all the people attending the preaching event. Therefore, this study begins with an analysis of the stages of cognitive ability and listening.

The field of developmental learning and psychology is saturated when it comes to the study of personality development. When studying the narrower topic of cognitive listening, the monumental research done by Jean Piaget is conclusive.

Although the researcher believes that even infants ought to be present during the preaching event, he understands that cognitively the infant will likely not comprehend much, if any, of what the preacher says. Even though one could argue a child may not comprehend much of what is spoken, according to the examples given in Scripture even infants should be present during the exposition of God's word. Beginning about the age of two years, children become more aware of what is being spoken. They are more capable of understanding the spoken word and of making sense of it. Piaget notices that for children two through six years old, "...we may safely admit that children think and act more ego-centrally than adults..."⁵² These very young children are "me"-centered, and they hear primarily that which feeds their egocentricity. This does not necessarily mean that one should feed the ego of the infants, but one must be aware of the level of understanding infants have in spite of their egos. Piaget also says, "...one of the characteristics of children's conversations is that each imagines he is understanding and listening to the others, even when he is doing nothing of the kind."⁵³ Children feign understanding, so one must realize that children will not catch all that is said, but they will catch some.

⁵² Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*, 3rd ed., Selected Works (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 39.

⁵³ Ibid., 121.

Understanding the egocentric nature of young children (those under the age of about seven), can aid those seeking to understand these children's listening capabilities.

Piaget observed that

Up till the age of 7 or 8 children make no effort to stick to one opinion on any given subject. They do not indeed believe in what is self-contradictory, but they adopt successively opinions, which if they were compared would contradict one another. They are insensible to the contradiction in this sense, that in passing from one point of view to another they always forget the point of view which they had first adopted.⁵⁴

The minds of children at this stage of development are based in the moment and circumstances in which the children find themselves. Their listening is subjective, and their understanding is situational. Consistency is crucial for children to comprehend what they hear. Piaget confirms this when he says, "He has not, like the adult, the art of seeking and finding in the other's mind some basis on which to build anew."⁵⁵ Piaget means that the reason children (under age seven) comprehend is due to the common circumstances in which a conversation happens, whereas adults can comprehend simply based upon the conversation itself.

A child's immature ability to listen, of course, does not last forever. At about age seven, a developmental change occurs. Piaget describes this change: "... there exists between children of 6 and 7 and those of 7 and 8 a fundamental difference as regards their efforts to be objective. ...the effort to understand other people and to communicate one's thought objectively does not appear in children before the age of about 7 or 7½."⁵⁶ He goes on to say that the younger group tends to romance and invent rather than

⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 126-128.

understand objectively. Within the older group, if they do romance or invent, they know it, and willingly own it. The younger group does not distinguish between the invention of their minds and what was actually communicated. This does not mean they should not be communicated to, but one must understand that younger children will at times misunderstand due to their own developmental stage of life. The good news is that there is a point at which even greater understanding develops.

Even with new objective development, difficulties remain that must be overcome in order to enable more developed children to understand the spoken word. Piaget shares that a child between the ages of nine and eleven

...lets all the difficult words in a given phrase slip by, then he connects the familiar words into a general schema, which subsequently enables him to interpret the words not originally understood. This syncretistic method may of course give rise to considerable mistakes... but we believe it to be the most economical in the long run, and one which eventually leads the child to an accurate understanding of things by a gradual process of approximation and selection.⁵⁷

Although the preacher should choose his words carefully, he does not have to worry that the children will not understand every word. The child may be ignorant of a particular word or phrase but is unaware of his ignorance, and the “word is interpreted in function of the general schema.”⁵⁸ In other words, the child will figure it out eventually. Piaget even says that children will figure it out as they mature. He says, “The result is, that to begin with, only the largest and most distinct details are noticed, and only the coarsest of general schemas are constructed. At first, therefore, the distinctive details and the general affect are more or less mixed up together; then analysis and synthesis develop

⁵⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 155.

concurrently and at the expense of this initial syncretism.”⁵⁹ As children mature in their ability to listen and comprehend, they become capable listeners to the point of comprehending even what was previously not understood or what was previously misunderstood.

When children mature, as they develop the ability to analyze and synthesize, they begin to more fully comprehend all that they once only feigned to understand. One must accept that “...up till the age of about 11, the child cannot keep to a formal chain of argument, i.e., to a deduction based on given premises, precisely because he does not admit the premises as given.”⁶⁰ This does not mean one should not make an argument, but one must understand that what seems to be a logical deduction to a more mature person, may not be so logical to the mind that is still developing.

Regarding the development of children, Erik Erikson, in his book *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*, writes, “...one can say that a child at this stage learns to love to learn as well as to play – and to learn most eagerly those techniques which are in line with the *ethos of production*.”⁶¹ Children love to learn, but particularly if their learning brings a benefit. If preachers are willing to understand their place along the development curve, these children may be ready to benefit from sermons and be the excellent listeners of them. Older children are readying themselves to develop into productive adults, and hopefully, disciples of the Lord.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁶¹ Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1982), 75.

Preachers, however, must be aware of another issue with children (and probably adolescents and adults): the extent of their ability to understand certain literary genres. While testing second through sixth graders for listening comprehension, Juhani E. Lehto and Minttu Anttila discovered that “The pupils scored clearly higher on narratives than on expository passages.”⁶² Children’s listening skills are generally more developed for the narrative rather than the exposition of facts. Preachers may have difficulty coming to terms with this truth, especially those who are committed to the practice of expository preaching. Lehto and Minttu add, “...the event sequences of the oral and written narrative discourse have already been widely practised orally before school age. Graesser and his coauthors maintain that narrative discourse is, in fact, closely connected to language acquisition. In contrast, comprehending expository discourse might be more dependent on formal training.”⁶³ The preacher now must incorporate narrative into the sermon to help the children understand what is being preached. However, the incorporation of narrative into the sermon also leaves the learning door open, providing the opportunity to train children and adults to listen to the exposition of God’s word alongside the narrative descriptions. One must be aware that very young children may not fully understand even the narrative story. Lehto and Minttu continue, “...it seems evident that second-graders’ listening comprehension of rather simple stories is still under development.”⁶⁴ This does not mean that they should not attend the preaching event, but it does mean that they will

⁶² Juhani E. Lehto and Minttu Anttila, "Listening Comprehension in Primary Level Grades Two, Four and Six," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 47, no. 2 (2003): 139.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

interact with the sermon much differently than those who are older. Also, if Piaget is correct, they will practice the art of listening even if there is little understanding.⁶⁵

Beyond about the age of 11, individuals develop the ability to analyze and synthesize what they hear at varying rates of maturation, though all the tools are developed for full cognitive listening. At this point, cognitive listening is at the adult stage, but the young adult's abilities need to mature.

The young adults labeled culturally and psychologically as adolescents are maturing in their cognitive listening abilities.⁶⁶ Erik Erikson writes that "Adolescence and the ever more protracted apprenticeship of the later school and college years can... be viewed as a psychosocial *moratorium*: a period of... cognitive maturation..."⁶⁷ These young adults are able to analyze and synthesize what they hear, maybe at varying levels, but they do grasp the essentials if they are willing to listen.

Erikson sheds more light on the abilities of young adults, explaining that

The rudimentary strength developing at this stage, however, is *competence*, a sense that in the growing human being must gradually integrate all the maturing methods of verifying and mastering *factuality* and of sharing the *actuality* of those who cooperate in the same productive situation. ...On the psychological side, there is the verifying power of *cognitive growth* as it refines and expands with each stage the capacity for accurate and conceptual interplay with the factual world.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See paragraph related to footnote 17. Piaget says, "...one of the characteristics of children's conversations is that each imagines he is understanding and listening to the others, even when he is doing nothing of the kind." One might be surprised at what a young child might actually hear and understand according to the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁶ The researcher thinks it is unfortunate that there is a separate category of life called adolescence constructed by culture. Developmentally, those designated as adolescents are adults. They are at the beginning stages of adult development and would be better categorized as adults. Therefore, the use of "young adults" and "adolescents" is interchangeable for the sake of this paper.

⁶⁷ Erikson, 74.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 75-76.

Where a child may lack the ability to grasp expository speech, the young adult is not only capable, but is becoming competent to listen and comprehend the sermon exposition.

Preachers should still consider that individuals develop at different rates; however, the young adult will listen when they are shown that what they are listening to is productive.

Bob Pletka says, in *Educating the Net Generation: How to Engage Students in the 21st Century*, that “Teachers can help students see the relevance of new knowledge and content by having students answer essential questions, solve a problem, or make a decision.”⁶⁹ The students want to know “so what?” about the knowledge given to them, and they want answers to their questions. They want to be productive.

An important consideration that aids in understanding the listeners’ cognitive ability is to have a basic understanding of learning styles. Although learning styles are not age specific, they are held by the people who attend and listen to the preaching event. In Marlene LeFever’s article, “Learning Styles,” she indicates four learning styles of which a teacher ought to be aware, and to which a teacher ought to teach. The first learning style is labeled “collaborative” and seeks to answer the question, “Why study this?” The second style is “analytical” and seeks to answer the question, “What do I need to know?” The third style is “common sense” and asks the question, “How does it work?” The final style is “dynamic” and asks, “What can it become?”⁷⁰ The preacher must keep in mind that, in order for all who are present to listen and comprehend, he must answer

⁶⁹ Bob Pletka, *Educating the Net Generation: How to Engage Students in the 21st Century* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2007), 124.

⁷⁰ Marlene LeFever, *Learning Styles*, Educational Implications of Christian Education (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1995), 136.

these questions, regardless of the ages of those present. By doing this, the preacher may keep people engaged and learning at a deeper level.

People are at various stages along the developmental curve, usually, but not necessarily, according to their ages. In multigenerational churches, the varying maturities of individuals will be present and must be accounted for in an intergenerational way.

Dynamics of Multigenerational Churches

The second category of literature describes the dynamics of intergenerational churches. In reviewing this literature, the researcher begins with studying what is described as the antithesis of intergenerational. From there, the researcher considers what characterizes intergenerational churches, why churches should be intergenerational, and how churches desiring to be intergenerational can conduct their ministry endeavors while considering all their members of every age group and at the same time maintaining biblical principles. With regard to preaching, this body of literature will lay the foundation for intergenerational preaching in multigenerational churches, exploring generational dynamics in the context of the church.

“There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.”⁷¹ In the biblical narrative of Joshua, all people of every age group were present and, therefore, considered when the word of God was proclaimed. God’s church is multigenerational and intergenerational according to God’s design, and each generation must be included.

⁷¹ Joshua 8:35.

The Non-Intergenerational Church

Though some churches may be multigenerational, those same churches may not be intergenerational. Patty Meyers writes, in *Live, Learn, Pass It On! The Practical Benefits of Generations Growing Together in Faith*, "...many parents and communities have abdicated their responsibilities. In 1930 the average child spent three to four hours with an adult member of the family. In the 1990s, that time shrunk to roughly fourteen minutes."⁷² Meyers' words are a scathing commentary on the great divide between young and old in the family and in the culture. The individuals of the church must be the first to rectify this awful statistic that is symptomatic of the ruin of the family, the culture or society, and even the church.

The unfortunate truth is that many churches, mirroring Western culture, are not keeping the multigenerational intergenerational. When looking outside the church to the broader culture, one is likely to observe the scenario Roland Martinson and Diane Shallue describe in their essay, "Foundations for Cross-Generational Ministry": "Today, shifting core values and fast-paced contemporary lifestyles are pulling the generations apart. Postmodern societies' high value on individualism and mobility fragment communities and isolate age groups from one another."⁷³ When the church mirrors culture, it shifts core values and fragments its community. This effect upon the church is similar to the effect upon the culture. According to Martinson and Shallue,

Segregating the generations from one another adversely affects not only the young. Parents are often overwhelmed as they attempt the near impossible task of balancing career, parenting, and homemaking without the help of elders or older children. The

⁷² Patty Meyers, *Live, Learn, Pass It On!: The Practical Benefits of Generations Growing Together in Faith* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 19.

⁷³ Goplin and others, eds. 4.

elderly are becoming more and more isolated and deprived of the energy, imagination and hopefulness of the young... This lack of intergenerational contact leads each generation to see itself as a separate subculture rather than as an integral part of an entire community, perspectives that often lead to conflict and competition rather than cooperation.⁷⁴

Everyone is affected poorly when the multiple generations refrain from being intergenerational. People become overwhelmed by having to do life all on their own, some of them experiencing unwanted isolation. If age groups segregate and any one group sees itself or another age group as non-integral to the whole, the result is conflict and competition in the church, and thus the church fails.

Karl B. Johnson echoes Martinson and Shallue in his essay, "Beyond the Generations." He states,

The perceived demands and current understanding of the particular time in which each respective generation lives have divided the generations. The political structures as well as the social norms have continually been in the process of changing. Technological developments through science, coupled with the desire to control our futures, continues to drive a wedge between the goal that one generation sought and the next generation abandons. With each generation the demands, as well as the standards for success, continue to change.⁷⁵

The problems caused by age segregation permeate all of Western society, and as society "progresses," it appears that the division between age groups is increasing more rapidly, which should not be the case in the church. For the sake of the church, no generation can abandon the goal of the church to be intergenerational. The goal must be common to all ages, and it must be upheld by all ages of people together.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 21.

Division or segregation based upon age has a lasting impact on all people of every age group. Carol Merritt says in her book, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation*, that age

...separation in our culture causes us to miss the insight, history, and perspective of older generations. When contact with the elderly decreases, we become less in touch with their physical, emotional, and social needs, and in turn our own views of life, sickness, and death become gravely distorted. Our own ideas about living and growing old become unclear. ...Conversely, older people miss the vital company and hope that young adults and children can provide. Our empathy dulls when we do not communicate with other generations: resentment festers, stereotypes grow, and our society suffers from the misunderstandings of an ageist culture.⁷⁶

It is an awful situation in which society finds itself when people are segregated by age. Old and young alike become dull and do not develop as they would with greater intergenerational interaction. In addition, one's understanding of those who are of a different age is hindered, and all suffer many consequences.

Patty Meyers identifies the non-intergenerational sickness, saying, "Few would argue that today our society is often fragmented, dysfunctional, and challenged. Some would say that it is downright sick and in need of healing and wholeness. ...most citizens experience segregation, isolation, compartmentalization by age group, and until recently, insulation from the rest of the world."⁷⁷ Note that the sickness, present in many churches, is due to the segregation of age groups. The church, as well as the wider society, needs healing and wholeness, a repentance and return to the intentions of our Creator. A way to overcome the non-intergenerational sickness is for the church to stand on the biblical principal of unity, rather than segregation.

⁷⁶ Carol Howard Merritt, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007), 22.

⁷⁷ Meyers, 19.

Up to this point, the literature researched has specifically regarded the wider culture and society. The church is not immune to the cultural dynamic of age segregation. What is found in society is also seen in the church. Sharon G. Ketcham, in her article, "A Question of Capacity: Can Adolescents Practice Discernment?" says that much like the broader culture, adolescents in the church participate in peer groups isolated from adult community, therefore missing not only the resources adults can offer but also a full experience of Christian community.⁷⁸ Isolating any age group is indicative of the church not fulfilling its purpose of promoting the full experience of community. Isolation or segregation within the church is unwise and likely destructive to the church community. Howard Vanderwell in his book, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*, exposes the reality of the church:

for all kinds of reasons, many congregations have practiced a kind of generational segregation on Sunday morning. Some churches schedule Christian education sessions during worship so that families are split up during their hour at church. Some churches schedule different worship services for Boomers, Busters, and Gen X 'audiences,' tailoring each service to the tastes and preferences of each generational cohort. The result of moves like these is a deepening division in the body of Christ that is vexingly difficult to overcome.⁷⁹

There is a serious problem in the church when rather than designing worship according to God's revelation the church aims to worship according to tastes and preferences of fallible human beings. Preachers may be guilty, too, of designing sermons based upon the same fallible tastes and preferences. This vexing difficulty must be overcome. If not, the deepening division will grow deeper.

⁷⁸ Sharon G. Ketcham, "A Question of Capacity: Can Adolescents Practice Discernment?" *Journal of Youth Ministry* 6, no. 2 (2008): 14.

⁷⁹ Howard Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*, The Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations Series (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), xi.

Segregation and isolation are not just detrimental to specific local congregations, but to the whole church. Vanderwell explains that "...congregations, and even whole denominations, have been fragmented, with old, young and the in-between cut off from one another. Intergenerational worship has become 'counter cultural' in a society where the segregation of age groups has become the norm."⁸⁰ The issue is not whether intergenerational practices are counter cultural; rather, the issue is that this cultural phenomenon is permeating the church to its detriment. Intergenerational should not be counter church. The church ought to be intergenerational and in this way, as well as in most every way, counter to the culture.

If, based upon age (or any other criteria), the church segregates its worship services (a time in the week when a church could exhibit greater unity), then what Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter profess in their book, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church*, rings true: "The Christian church is polarizing along generational lines, and the generation gaps are intensifying this divergence."⁸¹ The gaps are intensifying, and it is the church's responsibility to close the gaps in order to unite their congregations with the hope that God will bring unity in the Church.

The Intergenerational Church

If the review above characterizes the non-intergenerational church, what does the intergenerational church look like?

What Is the Intergenerational Church?

⁸⁰ Ibid., xiv.

⁸¹ Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 7.

Howard Vanderwell explains, "...the Bible tells us that... unity ...exists because Christ has bound us all together. Yet on the other hand, it must be preserved because it can be fragile and easily lost."⁸² The place to begin to understand the intergenerational church is in the God-given Scriptures, which let the church know that intergenerational unity comes from Christ. Churches are made up of people with personalities and sensitivities that can be affected positively or negatively. Therefore the church must use all measures allowed by God to preserve the integrity of the unity of the church.

A church is, however, more than just a unit or institution. Lorna Jenkins, in *Feed My Lambs: A Handbook for Intergenerational Cell Groups*, claims that "...there is the family of God – brothers and sisters in Christ so that every child has a spiritual family beyond his natural one. This spiritual family supports and encourages the natural family in leading their children in the ways of God. The natural family is not on its own."⁸³ The church is the family of all who belong. The preservation of the unity of the church is the preservation of the families that belong to it. Families are multigenerational, but unless they are preserved in unity, they may fail to be intergenerational, and they will lack the ability to lead their children in the ways of God.

In *How to Minister among Older Adults: As Life's Journey Continues*, Charles T. Knippel portrays the beauty of the intergenerational church:

...we will do well to examine... how well we are intentionally working to break down unfortunate age divisions that separate members of the body of Christ from one another. Sociologically, churches are intergenerational institutions. They are a group of four or five very different age-divided and separated groups who might

⁸² Vanderwell, 20.

⁸³ Lorna Jenkins, *Feed My Lambs: A Handbook for Intergenerational Cell Groups* (Singapore: TOUCH Ministries, 1995), 14.

not know each other, enjoy each other, or serve each other. However, once in the door on Sundays the believers are truly the one body of Jesus Christ gathered around the Word and Sacraments. This is the strength and beauty of the family of God. Here age differences can and do disappear by the grace God gives us in Word and Sacrament.⁸⁴

The previous section included the observation that segregation of age groups in the church is a detriment to the intergenerational church. Charles Knippel affirms that segregating age groups in church is a detriment to the churches because churches are inherently intergenerational.⁸⁵ Difficulties are possible when a church is intentionally intergenerational; however, in Christ, the members of the body are one, manifesting their unity in the word of God and in his Sacraments, and intergenerational difficulties will be overcome.

Darwin Glassford, Associate Professor of Church Education at Calvin

Theological Seminary, says that not only is the church inherently intergenerational, but also

Intergenerational worship is a countercultural activity. In a culture that segregates and isolates children, preteens, and teens, and then appeals to them separately, the church is a truly countercultural community when it invites all generations to participate actively in worship. However, intergenerational worship is an essential element for the church that is going to retain a character and ministry consistent with the Bible.⁸⁶

The one place for churches to be clear in their unity across the breadth of ages is in worship. A worship service embodies what a congregation values most, thereby forming amongst the people what is most important to them. If worship does not engage people across generational strata, the church will demonstrate that unity is of little importance.

⁸⁴ Charles T. Knippel, *How to Minister among Older Adults: As Life's Journey Continues* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2005), 94.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Vanderwell, 71.

The church must—it is essential—worship together for the sake of Christ and to counter the culture, which tries to segregate, separate, and isolate against the cause of Christ. A church's being intergenerational should not be up for debate. Being intergenerational is essential in order for a church to be consistent with the Bible, or in other words, to be faithful to God.⁸⁷

For some, it may seem odd to see hope for intergenerational connections to be made anywhere, perhaps especially in the church, but for those who are truly seeking to be a part of the church, all hope is gained. Carol Merritt explains it like this: “When a young person walks into a church, it’s a significant moment, because no one expects her to go and nothing pressures her to attend; instead, she enters the church looking for something. She searches for connection in her displacement: ...connection with her neighbors through an intergenerational community...”⁸⁸ An intergenerational community is exactly what the church is supposed to be, and every time one walks into a church, one should know one will not be despised or segregated because of age or any other distinctive characteristic.

Martinson and Shallue summarize what an intergenerational church is in these words: “...biblical views of the community of faith are keys to intergenerational understandings of ministry. The primary goal is to communicate the good news of God’s reign in Jesus Christ to each other and the world. Individuals of all ages catch the faith from others. The community cannot love each other and the whole world in isolation.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Merritt, 16.

⁸⁹ Goplin and others, eds., 7.

Understanding the primary goal of the church, which is communicating the good news of Jesus Christ, and remembering the results of chasing that goal, which is the profession of faith in Jesus Christ by many, give those in the church the proper perspective for establishing and encouraging an intergenerational ministry focus.

Why Be Intergenerational?

The previous paragraphs established what an intergenerational church is, but why is it important to be intergenerational? Patty Meyers answers, “Local congregations are uniquely situated to address these needs [of interactive multigenerational life]. They still stand as places in the community where people can come together for the common good.”⁹⁰ Intergenerational (or according to Meyers “interactive multigenerational”) churches unite for the common good of the young, the middle-aged, and the old.

Meyers explains further that “Christian spiritual formation occurs best in community. We were made for each other and we need each other! From the very first moments of life, human beings thrive with gentle touch and caring communication from trustworthy caregivers. We cannot make it alone. We need one another for many reasons including learning from one another.”⁹¹ Christian spiritual formation is the common good for which the people of the church may come together. God created his people to unite because, although one may make it alone for a time, a person cannot thrive alone and cannot learn all a Christian needs to know without help from the whole body of believers.

Meyers shows more specifically that intergenerational interaction has a significant role and effect on all people in the church. She says,

⁹⁰ Meyers, 20.

⁹¹ Ibid., 19.

Spiritual formation and faith development across generations will have significant and long-lasting effects in the congregation and community as the generations have complementary needs. For example, children and youth need to be nurtured and adults have a need to nurture. The same is true for teaching and being taught. That's part of leaving a legacy. Older adults need to know that their lives have meaning, that they've done as well as they can with the life that they've led. Young people can connect to and learn from the experiences of their elders.⁹² ...[I]ntergenerational contact improves the lives of older adults physically, cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. Children who regularly interact with older adults develop personal relationships with these adults rather than stereotype them. Contact with frail people prepares younger ones to care for other older adults. Since young people generally feel more comfortable with change than elders, they can accept the aging process better and help the elders accept it too. ...If you don't think that you have anything to give to others, consider what you might need to receive.⁹³

Intergenerational churches offer abundant opportunities to fulfill the human need to both give and receive. The young offer their gifts and abilities to the elderly, complementing their strengths and helping them overcome their weaknesses, and the same is true in reverse and with those in the middle ages. Where one has a weakness, another will have strength to assist. Where one has strength, he offers it to another. The effects of intergenerational relationships are not only for the present generations but are to be passed along to generations not yet born. Where there is no intergenerational interaction, there is no legacy.

How to Be an Intergenerational Church

Jackson Carroll and Wade Roof, in their book, *Bridging Divided Worlds*, state that “the blended congregation may also develop other programs to address the needs of specific generations, or be distinctly intergenerational in character.”⁹⁴ Although the

⁹² Ibid., 41.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 140.

blending of generations may cause tension, multigenerational churches that are also intergenerational will at times alleviate that tension with some programming that caters to specific age groups. Likely, such accommodation is even common in multigenerational congregations. But is such accommodation intergenerational?

Gil Rendle states, “As congregations bring people together on the basis of a shared faith, they breach differences of age.”⁹⁵ An intergenerational congregation will gather around a common faith and will not only breach differences of age, but may breach other differences as well, in spite of the tendency of the wider culture and society, where such differences tend to segregate people rather than bring them together. The shared faith of a multigenerational church brings together a multitude of generations contrary to societal norms. Though these age differences do cause tension, the tension is overcome by the common faith that transcends the culture.

Meyers says, “We need a ministry that is planned, owned, developed, and based on a vision that embraces and builds on what every person has to offer.”⁹⁶ Every person, of any age, has something to offer that can help fulfill the needs of those of other ages. Such intergenerational help is an essential component of healthy church life. But how will the intergenerational church operate? It will operate according to the levels of each generation’s understanding.

Robert J. Keeley, Professor of Education at Calvin College, says that preschool “children will build their first ideas about faith from the impressions of what they see and hear in church. We should give them visual images that can stay with them and help them

⁹⁵ Gilbert R. Rendle, *The Multigenerational Congregation: Meeting the Leadership Challenge* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 21.

⁹⁶ Meyers, 41.

to begin to build accurate images of God. Much of the worship service, especially in churches that feature long sermons, will not connect to children of this age, but other parts certainly will.”⁹⁷ The preacher desiring an intergenerational church must depend upon other ministries and parents to help the preschool children comprehend what is spoken in the sermon. Although they are primarily visual learners, these children, Keeley admits, will hear and will build upon what they hear with what they see.

Children do develop greater understanding of the spoken word as they grow in age and experience. Keeley explains that children from about 6-12 years old have the following level of understanding:

Although they are beginning to connect the stories, they really aren’t yet ready for mental leaps that would enable them to develop a sense of the larger coherent story. These children are seeing these stories as disconnected individual stories that come from a book that they know is special. They are able to articulate their beliefs more clearly than they were before they began school, partly because of an increasing ability to articulate just about everything better. This change is an advancement in language ability as much as it is a step in understanding their faith. Still, these children believe pretty much what their parents have told them.⁹⁸

At the elementary school level, children begin to grasp, more fully, the spoken word. The preacher should keep in mind that children of this age do connect to stories. Still, the intergenerational church will depend upon the older members of the congregation, primarily parents, to help the elementary aged children understand the more difficult concepts of the preached word.

At the next age level, people begin to understand concepts outside of the contexts in which they are presented. Young adults, and even some late elementary children, are maturing in their cognitive ability. Keeley says about young adults, “Teenager’s quest for

⁹⁷ Vanderwell, 39.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 40.

identity will... cause them to emphasize the relational characteristics of God. They are naturally drawn to a view of God as One who knows them personally and who cares for them as individuals.”⁹⁹ The intergenerational church will want to exploit the teenager’s desire for relationship with God. The preacher, through the exposition of Scripture, is able to show teenagers the view of God that will fill their natural draw to Him who is personal and does care.

Regarding those who are young and “coming of age” in the church, Carol Merritt says, “...the knowledge of new technologies does not mean that this generation is any less interested in deep and meaningful relationships.”¹⁰⁰ Merritt agrees with Keeley about the young adults’ desire for relationship. The church that is intentionally intergenerational will not disregard young adults or interpret their interest in technology or other typically young-adult fads as a disinterest in relationships.

Merritt adds that “...there is also a growing interest in this generation to connect with deep, long-standing faith traditions. ...a remarkable resurgence among them for those forms of worship that value mystery over entrepreneurship...”¹⁰¹ The preacher should not judge outward appearances as a lack of interest in the biblical faith. The preacher ought to be encouraged, for when it comes to worship, one does not have to sell the gospel, just preach it for what it is—the mystery of God’s greatness, grace and mercy.

Teenagers are young adults who will eventually grow into older young adults. As they mature to college age and older, according to Keeley, “they are looking for a faith

⁹⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁰ Merritt, viii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

community that speaks to their individual view of faith.”¹⁰² The intergenerational church at this point must be sensitive to the individual view of faith, but does not need to compromise the faith that has been revealed biblically and handed down through the centuries. The preacher is to preach biblical faith but must understand that these young adults are being bombarded with multiple options for their faith. If these young adults are truly seeking the God of the Bible, the exposition of Scripture will shape their individual views of faith into biblical faith.

Carol Merritt describes the intergenerational church as “tribal.” She says, “A tribal church has certain characteristics. It understands and reaches out to the nomadic culture of young adults. This church responds to the gifts and needs of adults under forty by taking into account their physical, social, and spiritual circumstances. The term ‘tribal’ reflects ...a network of intergenerational encouragement.”¹⁰³ Young adults may not be in a particular church forever due to the mobility provided them by the modern culture. However, when they do appear in worship, they are seeking intergenerational interaction in which they can be encouraged as well as be an encouragement to others. They will want to hear the encouragement of God’s word for themselves and for the others.

The rest of the church is made up of middle aged adults and their elders. According to Keeley, “People in this stage [in their thirties and beyond] will want worship that mines the depths of their theology and also calls on the rich background of the faith community.” He also writes that these adults are more content with mystery in

¹⁰² Vanderwell, 46.

¹⁰³ Merritt, 8.

some things and will put their individualism aside for the sake of the community.¹⁰⁴ The people in this stage of life are mature; they will want the depth of wisdom from Scripture. They also seem to desire to be intergenerational in their newfound maturity. The preacher will do well to bring depth of exposition to these adults in preaching as well as help them comprehend the mystery and unity of God.

How does the church transcend culture to be intergenerational? Martinson and Shallue answer, "...in the world of the Bible, the family (or clan or tribe) provides individuals with deep roots into the past, bold visions for the future, a sense of purpose, and a set of priorities for the present."¹⁰⁵ All the intricacies of the intergenerational church, as it ought to be today, create together an image of the biblical world, in which there are past, present, and future concerns. The intergenerational church is as relevant today as it was in biblical times, and possibly just as counter cultural. Today we are reminded "...that faith communities convene, connect, and give sanctuary and context. They accompany people through life as they pray, bless, form and reform us."¹⁰⁶ To fulfill the mandate for faith communities, the church must be intentionally intergenerational, for the church must "accompany people through life."¹⁰⁷

How to Preach Christ-Centered Sermons

The third category of literature examines how Christ-centered sermons are preached. Exploring how preachers preach Christ-centered sermons improves one's

¹⁰⁴ Vanderwell, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Goplin and others, eds., 5.

¹⁰⁶ Meyers, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

understanding of how to reach the ears and minds of a multigenerational congregation, in an intergenerational way, with messages from God's word.

In this section the researcher will analyze data defining what Christ-centered preaching is, discovering what characterizes a sermon as Christ-centered, and showing that Christ-centered preaching is inherently intergenerational.

Defining Christ-Centered Preaching

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. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.¹⁰⁸

The Apostle Paul was ordained by God to preach. His preaching was defined not by how he spoke, but by the God-given message of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit that gave him words to preach and gave the listeners understanding. Preaching, in its simplest form, is preaching Christ crucified by the power of the Spirit of God.

The twenty-first century preacher, Jim Shaddix, in *The Passion Driven Sermon*, expresses an expanded definition of preaching, saying, "Authentic preaching ... could be defined as a God-called man with a God-given message, driven by a God-glorifying passion, empowered by a God-endowed Spirit, aimed at a God-given faith. Only men whose messages are rooted in those realities are truly preaching!"¹⁰⁹ True preaching is proclaimed by a man¹¹⁰ called of God to speak the words God has given him to deliver to

¹⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

¹⁰⁹ Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 124.

¹¹⁰ While different churches have different practices, the researcher's particular tradition only ordains qualified men to the preaching office.

God's people for the sake of God's glory. It is Spirit-empowered preaching that gives new or improved faith to the listener.

Central to preaching is a person, Jesus Christ, and the sermon must focus upon Him and His message. Michael Fabarez, in *Preaching That Changes Lives*, clarifies what the message of preaching must be: "The indispensable ingredient in God-centered preaching is Jesus Christ. God is in the business of glorifying His Son and calling people to abide in Him."¹¹¹ True preaching centers on Christ and accomplishes God's purposes. The preacher must strive to accomplish God's purposes—to glorify Christ and call people to Christ—thus the term Christ-centered preaching.

The central message of Christ-centered preaching is found in one place, the Bible. John Stott, in *The Preacher's Portrait*, says that the message of "preaching is a 'manifestation', *phanerosis*, of the truth which stands written in the Scriptures."¹¹² Arturo Azurdia adds that, after diligent exegesis of the Scriptures, preaching "is infused with a power, *a vitality*, that infinitely exceeds the scope of human strength. It is a vitality that can only be attributed to the divine; a vitality that originates from heaven itself."¹¹³ There is no other source for preaching than God's word in the Holy Scriptures, illuminated by the Holy Spirit to the mind and speech of the preacher; this should remove all anxiety from the preacher, knowing that it is God's word that he preaches and God's Spirit that makes the word preachable.

¹¹¹ Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 114.

¹¹² John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait; Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 24.

¹¹³ Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 11.

As well as the message of Jesus Christ and the source of that message, a preacher must depend upon the Holy Spirit for the understanding and effect of Christ-centered sermons. Arturo Azurdia III affirms the necessity of the Spirit in his book, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, proclaiming that “...the efficacious empowerment of the Spirit of God is indispensable to the ministry of proclamation.”¹¹⁴ The man of God who desires to preach the message of God, with the purposes of glorifying God and dispensing God-given faith, is incapable unless the Spirit of God gives such effects. Only by the providence and sovereignty of God will the preacher be truly able to preach as God demands.

Jim Shaddix further states there is “...one mandate for the pastor’s primary weekly preaching ministry: *to rightly expose the mind of the Holy Spirit in every given text of Scripture.*”¹¹⁵ The Holy Spirit is requisite to preach what is written in God’s word, and the preacher must attend to preaching while depending upon that truth.

Bryan Chapell, in *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, defines Christ-centered preaching as preaching “the grace of all Scripture that secures and enables relationship with the Savior – making preaching a joy to our hearts and strength to God’s people. The ultimate purpose of preaching is the promotion of this union with Christ, which is our hope, joy, strength, and peace.”¹¹⁶ Christ-centered preaching seeks to share what God has revealed in Scripture, extending the grace that reconciles people to God through the Savior, in the power of God’s word spoken and heard. Dr. Chapell adds

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁵ Shaddix, 4.

¹¹⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 16.

Christ-centered preaching must "...incorporate the motivation and enablement inherent in proper apprehension of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ... Preaching that is faithful to the whole of Scripture not only establishes God's requirements but also highlights the redemptive truths that make holiness possible."¹¹⁷ Preaching sees "...all of God's word as a unified message of human need and divine provision."¹¹⁸ Preaching is not merely speaking a message about Jesus Christ; it must provide the proper response to the Christ-centered message and explain how that response will be accomplished.

John Stott writes that the responsibility of the expositional preacher is to explain the chosen biblical text "in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, and without addition, subtraction or falsification."¹¹⁹ The message, with the power of God's Spirit, must be spoken with clarity and completeness. The fact that it is God's word means the message is relevant, and a preacher ought to preach as though that is true.

To summarize, preachers are men¹²⁰ called and driven by God to preach for God's glory and are dependent upon the power of God to proclaim through preaching what the mind of the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Bible. Therefore, a preacher must call upon people to believe, through faith, the clear and complete message of the Bible which is Jesus Christ crucified. A man should preach with the expectation of divine intervention from the Holy Spirit to illuminate the message for the listeners. He ought to proclaim that

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹¹⁹ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1982), 126.

¹²⁰ While different churches have different practices, the researcher's particular tradition only ordains qualified men to the preaching office.

by God's grace we have secure union with Christ, and by God's divine grace be enabled and motivated to respond as God requires. That is Christ-centered preaching. Or, as Edmund Clowney says, "Gospel preaching presents Jesus Christ."¹²¹

Characteristics of Christ-centered Preaching

"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."¹²² Jesus, the Son of God, said those words, establishing that preaching is a necessity to fulfilling his purposes. But what did he preach? In other words, what must happen for a sermon to be truly a sermon preached according to God? In this sub-section, the researcher analyzes and examines the characteristics of the Christ-centered sermon with regard to its substance, purpose, and delivery.

Substance of the Christ-centered Sermon

The substance of the Christ-centered sermon is Jesus Christ, the Word of God, revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

The biblical record indicates that the primary substance of Christ-centered preaching is the word of God and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Beginning with Jesus, the Son of God, it is clear that the substance of preaching is God's word, for Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."¹²³ Jesus preached the word of God the Father. But Jesus also established the fact that he is the fulfillment of God's word. This truth is confirmed in Scriptures by the apostle John, "In the beginning

¹²¹ Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 45.

¹²² Luke 4:43.

¹²³ John 8:28.

was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”¹²⁴ John the apostle connected this eternal Word with Jesus Christ when he wrote, “...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”¹²⁵

The Apostles of Jesus Christ continued the ministry of preaching that Jesus established and handed it to the Church in perpetuity. The Apostle Peter confirmed this ministry saying, “And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.”¹²⁶ Also, the Apostle Paul, in multiplying the ministry of preaching to the expanding Church of the first century said, “preach the word...”¹²⁷ Not only are preachers to preach the word, but it is necessary that they do so, “For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”¹²⁸ The substance of the ministry of preaching established and handed to the Church is of a singular source, the word of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and not a mixture of word and something else; it is written, “...we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word...For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord...”¹²⁹ The word of God is the

¹²⁴ John 1:1.

¹²⁵ John 1:14.

¹²⁶ Acts 10:42.

¹²⁷ 2 Timothy 4:2.

¹²⁸ 1 Corinthians 9:16.

¹²⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:1-5.

singular substance of preaching in the worship by the Church. The biblical record firmly establishes that it is so.¹³⁰

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his book, *Preaching and Preachers* says, “Any true definition of preaching must say that that man is there to deliver the message of God, a message from God to those people.”¹³¹ Jesus said that he preached what God the Father gave him to preach, the Apostles confirmed and established that practice in the Church, and still today, the preacher is to preach the message of God to the people of the Church. Not only is the substance of a sermon to be the word of God found in the Scriptures but Michael Fabarez claims “As preachers, we are called to proclaim the word that God has already spoken—*nothing less, and certainly nothing more*.”¹³² The word of God is the sole substance of true preaching.

Does that mean that only words of Scripture are to be spoken and nothing else? John Piper, pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, explains, “So preaching is expository. It deals with the Word of God. True preaching is not the opinions of a mere man. It is the faithful exposition of God’s Word.”¹³³ Preaching is not merely reciting God’s word, but includes the exposition of God’s word, studying it and bringing forth faithful explanation of the word of God, always maintaining that the substance of the explanation is the word of God itself.

¹³⁰ See the following Scripture texts: 1 Corinthians 2:1-2; 1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11; Ephesians 3:8; Mark 2:2; Acts 6:2; Acts 8:4; 2 Timothy 2:15.

¹³¹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), 53.

¹³² Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 13.

¹³³ John Piper, “The Place of Preaching in Worship,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-place-of-preaching-in-worship> (accessed February 9, 2012).

Jim Shaddix, in his book *The Passion Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen*, claims that it should be the uncompromising position of preachers to preach what God has revealed in Scripture. He says, “It is incomprehensible that any man who calls himself one of God’s shepherds would do anything else but *report* what God has said.”¹³⁴ The preacher is a reporter and is to make certain that the people listening to the sermon understand that he is reporting God’s authoritative word by explaining, illustrating, and applying what God has said. Not only that, but Mike Gilbert Smith, in his 9Marks ministries article says that it is the God-given authority of the preacher to do that very thing, saying, “...authoritative preaching consists of *faithfully speaking God’s words under God’s authority*, much like an ambassador speaks “authoritatively” on behalf of his or her king.”¹³⁵ Authoritative preaching retains the historical idea of God’s prophets of the Old Testament who often began their preaching with these words, “Thus says the Lord.”¹³⁶ The preacher ought to be this direct because God has given them His authority to do so. Jim Shaddix adds, “As the pastor takes his people on a journey into God’s Word. . . so pastors must maximize the voice of God in their sermons.”¹³⁷ Preachers are reporters of a message that originates in God, and they have no authority to deviate from it.¹³⁸ However, they do have the authority to

¹³⁴ Shaddix, 13.

¹³⁵ Mike Gilbert Smith, "A Conversational Approach: Will It Preach?" <http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/conversational-approach-will-it-preach>, (accessed February 6 2012). Emphasis original.

¹³⁶ For example: Isaiah 56:1 “Thus says the LORD: ‘Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed.’”

¹³⁷ Shaddix, 128-129.

¹³⁸ Deuteronomy 4:2. Also, Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators* (Grand Rapids, MI:

preach it faithfully. The principle to be maintained by the preacher is that the sermon is God's word taken from God's revealed word in Scripture, which always points to "Jesus Christ and him crucified."

If the word of God is the substance of preaching, then Jesus Christ is the substance of the word of God. Christ is the Word, the word of God is fulfilled in Christ. Michael Fabarez states, "The indispensable ingredient in God-centered preaching is Jesus Christ. God is in the business of glorifying His Son and calling people to abide in Him."¹³⁹ The substance of the written word of God used for preaching is the Son of God. Every word of the word of God points to Jesus Christ and therefore the sermon must do the same. Graham Goldsworthy adds, "If our congregations would see God, they must see him in and through Christ."¹⁴⁰ The preacher, therefore, must show God to the congregation by taking the word of God and showing them Christ in it.

Purposes of the Christ-centered Sermon

The purposes of the Christ-centered sermon are to glorify God; to elicit belief in the clear and complete message of the sermon; to enable people to respond as God requires, according to God's divine grace through the working of the Holy Spirit; and to motivate people to respond as God requires, according to God's divine grace through the working of the Holy Spirit. Fulfilling the purposes of the Christ-centered sermon is

Zondervan, 2005), 59. In which David Helm in his essay *Staying On The Line* says, "You don't add and you don't subtract, so you might keep the line, the Word. The Word is to mediate. When you add to the Word, the Word is no longer mediating. Therefore, you're no longer keeping. When you take away from the Word, you are no longer mediating. Therefore, you're no longer keeping. Do not add, do not subtract, that you might keep the line, the commands."

¹³⁹ Fabarez, 114.

¹⁴⁰ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 40.

impossible for preachers to accomplish without divine intervention. Preachers must not try to fulfill the purposes of preaching by themselves alone. For the preacher who desires to preach to intergenerational congregations, the purposes of the sermon remain the same regardless of the age-makeup of the audience; when preaching to the young and the old, the sermon ought to fulfill the purposes that God intended.

To Glorify God

“...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”¹⁴¹ As with this proclamation from the Apostle Paul, the entirety of the revelation of the word of God emphasizes that the purpose of all things is to glorify God. Therefore, the primary purpose of preaching is also to glorify God.

Arturo Azurdia queries, “What is the aim of preaching, the objective to which all evangelical proclamation is directed?” He answers, “The aim of Christian preaching is the glory and honor of Jesus Christ through the means of the saving and sanctifying of sinners.”¹⁴² The glory of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, should be of the utmost consideration for the preacher every time he sets out to preach. Not only that, but the preacher must realize, as Bryan Chapell says, “When we preach, God is the true audience of our efforts.”¹⁴³ The preacher may preach to people, but he preaches for God and all effort in preaching is exerted for God’s pleasure. It is the primary purpose of preaching.

Haddon Robinson, in his essay *The High Call of Preaching*, proclaims, “*The Bible is a book about God*. It is not a religious book of advice about the “answers” we

¹⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

¹⁴² Azurdia III, 118.

¹⁴³ Chapell, 32.

need about a happy marriage, sex, work, or losing weight. Although the Scriptures reflect on many of those issues, they are above all about who God is and what God thinks and wills. I understand reality only if I have an appreciation for who he is and what he desires for his creation and from his creation.”¹⁴⁴ Since the substance of all preaching is the word of God about God, preaching that seeks to tell what the Scriptures say about who God is and what God thinks and wills exalts God to God’s glory and reveals the reality of that glory to the hearers. The Apostle Paul adds, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”¹⁴⁵ It is the preacher, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who unveils the glory of God; that is the power of God for the renewal of the mind which transforms the believing hearers.

Jeffrey Arthurs in his essay *John 3:16 in the Key of C*, says, “Preachers are worship leaders. Our job is to magnify God, explain his decrees, and urge response.”¹⁴⁶ Preachers are the instruments and agents God uses to magnify Himself, and it is their preaching that is the catalyst for people to see the glory of God. As the agents of God, preachers must follow God’s design for preaching and preach to please God alone. Notice what Jay E. Adams in his essay *Theology of Powerful Preaching* says, “It is a core belief of the faith that God is sovereign and all things must be done to please him. Pleasing a sovereign Creator means discovering what he desires and, through his grace, doing it. To preach God’s word God’s way should be the aim of faithful preachers. As sovereign, God

¹⁴⁴ Robinson and Larson, 23.

¹⁴⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18. See also Romans 12:2.

¹⁴⁶ Robinson and Larson, 43.

tells us what to preach and how to do so. Ministers of the word have no right to deviate from his instructions. Human ideas and speculation, therefore, must be foreign to the pulpit.”¹⁴⁷ To glorify means to express the highest praise, honor, distinction¹⁴⁸, and worship of the one glorified through all thought, word and deed.¹⁴⁹ For the sake of God’s glory, God determines the content of those expressions; the preacher is obliged by his calling to agree.

Michael Fabarez assures the preacher that “... it’s time for preachers in [our generation] to boldly stand up and declare that God does not exist for us, but rather, we exist for Him; he is not our servant—we are called to be His; we do not obey Him for our sake—we obey Him for His sake.”¹⁵⁰ And therefore, so does preaching exist for God and His glory.

Whatever we do, we are meant to do all to the glory of God. Worship is a requirement of God to be acted upon by all ages of people for His glory.

To Elicit Belief

“...there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”¹⁵¹

Bringing glory to God is the primary purpose of preaching, but when Jesus preached he also desired to elicit belief from his hearers saying, “The time is fulfilled,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴⁸ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. The dictionary definition of “glorify” and “glory” include “praise, honor, distinction.”

¹⁴⁹ This comes from the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31 (above) and Colossians 3:17 “...whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

¹⁵⁰ Fabarez, 113.

¹⁵¹ Luke 15:10.

and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”¹⁵² The Apostle John explained why he wrote his gospel saying, “...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”¹⁵³ All of Scripture bears testimony to Jesus Christ so that people will come to trust the knowledge of the salvation found in the Scripture and to trust that it is applied to them by the Holy Spirit. Preaching is God’s means for eliciting faith or trust in the God who saves.

The Apostle and preacher Paul explained about his preaching that “my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”¹⁵⁴ Jim Shaddix elaborates on Paul’s words, saying, “The goal of building authentic faith was also a counter to the ‘wisdom of men’ that Paul despised. From the beginning of his ministry in Corinth, he desired to ground his converts in the right kind of faith and to make them independent of human wisdom. That’s why he refused to employ techniques of coercion, excessive rhetorical arts, and subject matter that was palatable to secular interests. Instead, he concentrated on the simple message which was so unpalatable to natural men—the message of the cross.”¹⁵⁵ However, the message of the cross is the very message that foolishly elicits belief, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being

¹⁵² Mark 1:15.

¹⁵³ John 20:31.

¹⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

¹⁵⁵ Shaddix, 45.

saved it is the power of God.” God’s means for eliciting belief and trust in the one true savior, Jesus Christ, is simply the preaching of the message of the Bible: salvation in Christ alone. God has established His intention to elicit belief through the message of the Christ-centered sermon, which is itself the word of God. Therefore, Arturo Azurdia describes the preacher’s purpose this way, “Our aim is that the faith of sinners be real and saving faith, resting entirely upon the person and work of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁶ This means that sermons are preached to elicit, from every hearer, authentic trust in God’s saving grace.

The sermon is not meant to elicit authentic belief for no reason, however, but to elicit belief in the applied redemption needed for salvation. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones explains the need for the preached word to elicit belief: “We are all one in sin, one in failure, one in hopelessness, one in need of the Lord Jesus Christ and His great salvation.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the message must include the truth about the human need which redemption in Christ fulfills, primarily the need to be free of sin and all its’ consequences. John Stott, in *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, writes, “The main objective of preaching is to expound Scripture so faithfully and relevantly that Jesus Christ is perceived in all his adequacy to meet human need. The true preacher is a witness; he is incessantly testifying to Christ. ... ‘the chief effect of every sermon should be to unveil Christ, and the chief art of the preacher to conceal himself.’ But the preacher’s purpose is more than to unveil Christ; it is so to unveil him

¹⁵⁶ Azurdia III, 124.

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd-Jones, 133.

that people are drawn to come to him and to receive him.”¹⁵⁸ The preacher must show the relevant need for the hearer to believe the message. The preacher does this by unveiling Christ and his redemption so that the hearers will be drawn to believe that the message of God is for them, that salvation in Christ meets all human need for redemption, and that it is obtained by grace through the faith in which people come and receive, not just the redemption, but the Word himself, the revealed Savior.

Believing in the gospel is a constant requirement of God for salvation. The preacher’s purpose is to unveil Christ to every person at every developmental stage of cognitive ability to elicit belief in the Savior or strengthen their belief in Him.

To Enable People to Respond

The Bible speaks of a man named Abraham, one of God’s chosen servants, like this: “You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works...”¹⁵⁹ God had called Abraham to faith and works, Abraham was enabled by God to respond to God’s calling. Preaching must enable people to respond in belief and in action. Haddon Robinson says, in the book *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, that “It is difficult for our listeners to live by what they believe unless we answer the question ‘How?’”¹⁶⁰ A purpose of preaching is to enable people, by God’s grace, to respond to the preached word.

God has made it clear that he intends for preaching to enable people to respond to His word. Moses preached to God’s people and said, “Assemble the people, men,

¹⁵⁸ Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 325.

¹⁵⁹ James 2:22.

¹⁶⁰ Haddon W. Robinson and Scott M. Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 90.

women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”¹⁶¹ Moses told God’s people that there was a message coming from God. They were to hear it, learn it and do it; they would need to respond. How would they do that? Moses told them, “It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”¹⁶² By God’s grace they would be able to do what God said.

The message of the sermon should do something, and God has promised that it will, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”¹⁶³ God is glorified when people respond to His message in belief and appropriate action, which are evidences that God’s word has accomplished successfully the enabling of people to respond to the preaching of God’s word. Jim Shaddix states “...the pastor ...exposes his listeners to supernatural truth that can change their lives.”¹⁶⁴ God has appointed the preaching of His word to do something for the people who hear

¹⁶¹ Deuteronomy 31:12-13.

¹⁶² Deuteronomy 31:8.

¹⁶³ Isaiah 55:10-11.

¹⁶⁴ Shaddix, 128.

the message; it changes their lives through the divine grace and power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to respond.

John Ortberg in his essay “Biblical Preaching is About Life Change, Not Sermon Form” says, “Biblical preaching occurs when people listen, are able to hear that God is addressing them as God addressed the world of the Scriptures, and are enabled to respond.”¹⁶⁵ It is necessary that people are enabled to respond to the preached message of God. Daniel Doriani adds, “...the aim of Bible application is to enable people to know God and conform themselves to him.”¹⁶⁶ Conformity to God revealed in Jesus Christ is the expected life change which enables people to respond to the message of a Christ-centered sermon.

However, conformity to Christ that enables people to respond is not something that is worked up by the preacher or the hearer, but is a divine grace of God. Bryan Chapell says that people need to “understand that Christ’s work rather than their own supplies the only basis for God’s acceptance and that Christ’s strength rather than their own provides the only hope of Christian obedience.”¹⁶⁷ Therefore the preacher must help people understand their inability to respond without Christ’s strength in order that they will understand their need to be enabled by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit to respond positively to God’s word. Hughes Oliphant Old, in his book *Worship: Reformed*

¹⁶⁵ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 453.

¹⁶⁶ Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub., 2001), 280.

¹⁶⁷ Chapell. 297. Chapell also says on p. 312, “Messages that typify Christ-centered sermons: Grace despite our sin. Grace canceling the guilt of sin. Grace defeating the power of sin. Grace compelling holiness.”

According to Scripture records that Martin “Bucer defines the purpose of preaching as to offer to individuals the grace of Christ in such a way that it is laid hold of by faith and realized in a life of Christian love.”¹⁶⁸ The preacher enables the hearer to respond by offering the grace of Christ and trusting that the Holy Spirit must apply this grace, for this is the only hope that a listener has to be able to respond properly to God’s message, no matter their age.

To Motivate People to Respond

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.”¹⁶⁹

Once hearers are enabled to respond to God’s word, how will they be motivated to do so? This too is only by the grace of God, but it is through the preacher that God dispenses this grace. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”¹⁷⁰

Arturo Azurdia relates to us that “...a response drawn out by anything other than the naked gospel simply proclaimed will, more often than not, prove to be something less than a saving response.”¹⁷¹ The gospel is the motivation; it is the good news which

¹⁶⁸ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 74.

¹⁶⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:11.

¹⁷⁰ Ephesians 4:11-14.

¹⁷¹ Azurdia III, 101.

motivates people to respond. However, people must know that they need this gospel. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones expresses about the preacher that “He is dealing with living persons, people who are in need and in trouble, sometimes not consciously; and he is to make them aware of that, and to deal with it. It is this living transaction.”¹⁷² Michael Fabarez speaks in agreement when he says, “One of the principles used to discern the transferability of a biblical application from “then” to “now” is to draw from the ancient application those aspects which address man’s depravity. Identifying this unchanging human condition serves to preach Christ as it clarifies the desperate need we cannot meet ourselves.”¹⁷³ When the preacher reveals to the listeners their need for a solution to their fallenness, people will want to know the solution; when the solution is known and people are enabled to participate in the solution, they will be motivated to do so.

Motivating people takes more than just the presentation of a solution, the preacher must consider the whole person. John Piper says, “...in worship there is always understanding with the mind and there is always feeling in the heart. Understanding must always be the foundation of feeling, or all we have is baseless emotionalism. But understanding of God that doesn’t give rise to feeling for God becomes mere intellectualism and deadness.”¹⁷⁴ To counteract mere intellectualism and deadness and rather motivate the hearer, Jeffrey Arthurs explains that “Ethical (and effective) communicators use pathos to prompt people to act in accord with the truth. ...It is my

¹⁷² Lloyd-Jones, 55.

¹⁷³ Fabarez, 120.

¹⁷⁴ John Piper, "The Place of Preaching in Worship," <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-place-of-preaching-in-worship> (accessed February 9, 2012).

conviction that the Holy Spirit converts and sanctifies the whole person, not just the mind, and the Holy Spirit appeals to the mind and emotions to move the will.”¹⁷⁵ The Holy Spirit uses the preacher to motivate hearers when the preacher determines to reach the listeners’ hearts and minds. It should not, however, be just any knowledge and any feeling, but those which are intended by the particular Scripture text. Haddon Robinson states, “A true expository sermon should create in the listener the mood it produced in the reader. . . .the task of the poet, the playwright, the artist, the prophet, and the preacher overlap at this point—to make people feel and see.”¹⁷⁶ The preacher must unite proper exposition of a particular Scripture and proper emotion of the same Scripture in order to properly motivate those attending the sermon.

Chris Altmann says, “*Preaching needs language that not only convinces the mind but inflames the soul.*”¹⁷⁷ Preaching needs to convince and inflame the hearer to do what? The sermon is intended to have the hearer bear fruit so “that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”¹⁷⁸ Michael Fabarez states, “A good sermon is one that bears fruit—a message from God that transforms believers’ lives. A good sermon, once ingested by the hearer and molded by the Holy Spirit, will prompt its audience to abandon a sinful thought, value, or behavior. Likewise, it will embolden the

¹⁷⁵ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 591.

¹⁷⁶ Robinson and Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, 82-83.

¹⁷⁷ Chris Altmann, *Preaching to Pluralist: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern Age* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 131.

¹⁷⁸ 2 Timothy 3:17.

hearers to walk down paths of righteousness previously untraveled.”¹⁷⁹ It is not only that a good sermon motivates people to abandon sin and embolden them to righteousness, but it is a very purpose of the sermon. Jim Shaddix explains, “...every serious student of preaching knows that the purpose of each individual message should be to secure some moral action, not simply to communicate doctrine as an end unto itself.” From where does the proper motivation come? Mr. Shaddix continues, “But how do we go about determining the purpose of an individual message, a purpose that both glorifies God and can be obeyed by the listeners? The only way is simply to allow the inspired author’s purpose to determine the contemporary preacher’s purpose.”¹⁸⁰ God’s word properly preached and accompanied by the Holy Spirit will move hearers of all ages to respond according to God’s design and promises.

One final note regarding motivation from Michael Fabarez: “We dare not leave the impression that compliance to the practical teaching contained in the sermon is in any way a means to secure God’s divine approval.”¹⁸¹ One purpose of the sermon is that the preacher gives to the hearers the appropriate motivation to respond to God’s message. However, the preacher must be very careful to make sure that the hearer’s salvation is not dependent upon their being motivated into a particular action or response, rather that they be moved to respond out of love for God and gratefulness for the salvation obtained by grace alone.

¹⁷⁹ Fabarez, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Shaddix, 104.

¹⁸¹ Fabarez, 121.

By striving to give biblical motivation for people to respond to the message of the sermon, the preacher seeks to accomplish the inherent intergenerational aspect of preaching the Christ-centered sermon.

Delivery of the Christ-centered Sermon

Paul Mizzi, pastor of Trinity Evangelical Church in Msida, Malta, says, “Though both content and delivery are important in a sermon, people should be attracted to our churches by the content (primarily), and only secondarily by the delivery. The latter is subordinate to the former.”¹⁸² And yet, the preacher must deliver a sermon to the multiple generations of people so that they all have opportunity to hear God’s word.

In order to deliver the Christ-centered sermon, the preacher must depend upon the power of God to proclaim; proclaim what the mind of the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Bible; call people to believe the clear and complete message of the Bible; and expect divine intervention from the Holy Spirit to illuminate the message for the listener.

Depend Upon the Power of God to Proclaim

According to Arturo Azurdia, the great reformer Martin Luther said, “God is the preacher.”¹⁸³ This is a principle upon which all true preachers stand because as Lee Eclov proclaims, “Preaching is, by definition, an act of faith.”¹⁸⁴ The preacher does not stand alone in his preaching, and if he does, he is not a true preacher, for he does not depend upon the power of God to proclaim. The true preacher trusts God alone for his delivery of

¹⁸² Paul Mizzi, "Two Styles of Preaching," <http://www.tecmalta.org/tft278.htm> (accessed February 9 2012).

¹⁸³ Azurdia III, 178.

¹⁸⁴ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 618.

the preached word. John Stott warns against the pride of independence: “Pride is without doubt the chief occupational hazard of the preacher. It has ruined many, and deprived their ministry of power.”¹⁸⁵ And Edmund Clowney reinforces this point, saying, “... we lose the reality of the Lord if we lose our focus on the reality of his presence.”¹⁸⁶ Pride in the pulpit can prevent the people from seeing the presence of Christ, just as humility can promote it. A preacher must communicate the Lord more than he communicates himself.

Therefore the preacher must humbly depend upon the power of God to proclaim the message of God. Arturo Azurdia says, “It is not enough to possess the proper message. Nor is it enough to embrace the proper method. Gospel preachers desperately need the divinely appointed means; the clothing with power from on high.”¹⁸⁷ It is incumbent upon the preacher to be prepared to preach the message God gives and to preach it well, but it is all for naught if there is no dependence upon the power of God’s Holy Spirit. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones even goes so far as to say, “...if there is no power it is not preaching. True preaching, after all, is God acting. It is not just a man uttering words; it is God using him. He is being used of God. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit; it is what Paul calls in I Corinthians 2 ‘preaching in demonstration of the Spirit of power’. Or as he puts it in I Thessalonians 1:5: ‘Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance...’ there it is; and

¹⁸⁵ Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 320.

¹⁸⁶ Clowney, 50.

¹⁸⁷ Azurdia III, 112.

that is an essential element in true preaching.”¹⁸⁸ There is no preaching, and a man is not a preacher who is lacking the power of God.

However, with the power of God, the preacher has not simply ability to preach, but authority to do so. James McDonald, pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, says in an interview, “One of the pillars of our church from the very beginning was preaching the authority of God’s Word without apology. We believe God is at work in this world, and God is looking to get people to places where he knows they’re going to hear his heart. We believe that if God in his sovereignty brings some people to this place, they’re going to hear his heart. And if God’s trying to reach that person, then we’re going to get the privilege of partnering.”¹⁸⁹ God calls the preacher into partnership to give him authority to preach a God-given message.

Therefore the preacher must be bold in dependence upon the power of God to preach what God has given in His word. Michael Fabarez, in *Preaching That Changes Lives*, states, “If God’s thoughts, standards, and expectations are clearly expressed in a sermon, it inherently possesses His authority.”¹⁹⁰ God has revealed his thoughts, standards, and expectations in the Bible and it is up to the preacher who is truly submitted to the authority of God to take what God has given there and preach it boldly. Also, D. Martin Lloyd-Jones adds, “The preacher should never be apologetic... He is an ambassador, and he should be aware of his authority. He should always know that he

¹⁸⁸ Lloyd-Jones, 95.

¹⁸⁹ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 469.

¹⁹⁰ Fabarez, 128.

comes to the congregation as a sent messenger.”¹⁹¹ There is no authority given to the preacher except that which is from God, and when one has been given that authority, no matter his status in the world or his humble estate he must, as Zack Eswine states, “...preach boldly. ...The boldness is ‘in our God’ and not in ourselves.”¹⁹²

Delivery of a sermon begins, therefore, with dependence upon God, as Jim Shaddix writes, “...there is no spiritual power apart from the Holy Spirit. ...there is no preaching of God’s Word apart from spiritual power.”¹⁹³ Preaching is a spiritual event only available through the motivation of the Holy Spirit. The preacher’s expectation of success comes from dependence upon the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Proclaim What the Mind of the Holy Spirit Has Revealed in the Bible

The Apostle Paul sought supplication prayers from the people of Ephesus asking them to pray “...for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...”¹⁹⁴ He sought the mind of God that he might proclaim it boldly. In the New Testament a form of the word “proclaim” is used a minimum of forty-seven times with reference to preaching.¹⁹⁵ Proclamation is the means by which the preacher delivers a sermon. All the true preachers of God, from the first century to today, who depend upon the power of God, seek to proclaim only that which God gives them to preach. God has given the preacher the authority to preach for him to

¹⁹¹ Lloyd-Jones, 83.

¹⁹² Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 251-2.

¹⁹³ Shaddix, 40.

¹⁹⁴ Ephesians 6:19.

¹⁹⁵ For a few examples see: Acts 4:2; Acts 4:19; Acts 16:17; Mark 1:14-15; and Mark 16:15.

the gathered people. A true preacher will proclaim what the mind of God has revealed in Scripture and he will exclaim, “woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”¹⁹⁶

James McDonald says, “I see proclamation as a supernatural event. ...I think the biblical model is the foolishness of proclamation. There’s great power in that, and God blesses that proclamation supernaturally.”¹⁹⁷ Proclamation is foolishness to the unregenerate world that is looking on from the outside, but it is the wisdom of God when administered by the preacher. However, the preacher doesn’t merely proclaim, but proclaims God’s message. Timothy Brown says, “Preachers must do today what preachers have done for centuries: hide the Word deeply in their hearts and share it as liberally as they can.”¹⁹⁸ The preacher has a particular message to proclaim and he must know it well to proclaim it. Bryan Chapell adds, “Truths of God proclaimed in such a way that people can see that the concepts derive from Scripture and apply to their lives preoccupy the expository preacher’s efforts. Such preaching puts people in immediate contact with the power of the Word.”¹⁹⁹ When people gain a clear comprehension of God’s word through the proclamation by the preacher, he has fulfilled the goal of exposing the power of the word, thus communicating the word of God, because, as Lee

¹⁹⁶1 Corinthians 9:16.

¹⁹⁷ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 468.

¹⁹⁸ Vanderwell, 116.

¹⁹⁹ Chapell, 31.

Eclov expresses in his essay, “Our task is to make the text’s meaning clear and then let God speak for God.”²⁰⁰

Proclamation is not one method of many ways to preach, it is the necessary way to preach. In response to what is called “conversational preaching” Mike Gilbert Smith says, “Those who advocate a conversational format misconstrue the relationship between preaching and the gospel. The gospel is *news* to be heralded, not an opinion to be discussed. When we come together as God’s people, we need to hear that news proclaimed as a royal edict and brought to bear upon us. The preacher is not the king, but the ambassador. The authority of a sermon does not rest in the personal authority of the preacher, but in the authority of the word he is preaching. He is not a philosopher, but an ambassador. His ideas do not originate with himself; he faithfully proclaims God’s ideas to God’s people.”²⁰¹ As God’s ambassador, the preacher is destitute of any worthwhile message unless he proclaims the message of God found in Scripture and herald it as he is given authority by God Himself. Greg Laurie stated in an interview, “Bold proclamation is not speaking loudly, with more emotion, or even with more passion. It means working through Scripture, rightly dividing it, and then bringing it with unction from the Holy Spirit.”²⁰² This is true because, as D. Martin Lloyd-Jones explains, “...we are called to preach the Word and to present the Word, and to bring the Word directly to people. We are not simply to say things about it, we are actually to convey it itself. We are the

²⁰⁰ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 618.

²⁰¹ Mike Gilbert Smith, "A Conversational Approach: Will It Preach?" <http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/conversational-approach-will-it-preach> (accessed February 6 2012).

²⁰² Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 471.

channels and the vehicles through which this Word is to pass to the people.”²⁰³ True preachers are called by God as ambassadors to proclaim His Holy word.

Call People to Believe the Clear and Complete Message of the Bible

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”²⁰⁴ The apostle Peter wrote those words to believers telling them all the wonderful truths about who they are as those who belong to God through Jesus Christ. But how was it that they became God’s people? They were called! And the words of that call came by the preacher who proclaimed the excellencies of the word of God in dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God.

Robertson McQuilkin wrote about what he called “verdict-demanding preaching” and he said, “...virtually every preacher in the Old Testament and in the New followed this principle. When they opened their mouths, they demanded a response. Their preaching was verdict-demanding.”²⁰⁵ People who attended the preaching of God’s word are called to either accept or reject, as in a court of law, the evidence they hear proclaimed by the preacher, and the preacher’s intent is to have them decide. Jeffrey Arthurs clarifies this concept saying, “Preachers are worship leaders. Our job is to magnify God, explain his decrees, and urge response.”²⁰⁶ The urgent goal of the preacher in calling upon the people to believe is for the people to respond appropriately.

²⁰³ Lloyd-Jones, 67.

²⁰⁴ 1 Peter 2:9.

²⁰⁵ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 52.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 43.

According to D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, this is serious business, “The next element is that of seriousness. The preacher must be a serious man; he must never give the impression that preaching is something light or superficial or trivial. ...a preacher of necessity must give the impression that he is dealing with the most serious matter that men and women can ever consider together. ...he is speaking to them from God, he is speaking to them about God, he is speaking about their condition, the state of their souls. ...You remember the famous lines of Richard Baxter: I preached as never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men.”²⁰⁷ The call to the people to respond may be the most serious aspect of delivering the message, for people’s lives hang in the balance between eternal life and eternal judgment depending upon their condition or state of soul. The preacher gives out a call to those who will hear so that they might have a lifeline of hope in their dying state. Therefore Michael Fabarez mandates that preachers call upon the hearers to believe the one true message that saves from the pangs of death, he says, “Good preaching should regularly address godly motives for obedience. There should be a consistent call for them to trust in Christ’s merited favor on their behalf. We must call God’s children to trust in the secured love of the Father through the work of His Son. As we direct Christians to be Christ-like we must also direct them to fully trust in the finished work of Christ on their behalf.”²⁰⁸ The finished work of Christ is the content of the urgent message contained in the preacher’s call to the listener to respond in trust.

²⁰⁷ Lloyd-Jones, 85.

²⁰⁸ Fabarez, 124.

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones continues the plea for preachers to call listeners to believe the message when he states, "...preaching must always be characterised by persuasiveness. 'We beseech you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God.' Surely the whole object of this act is to persuade people. ...He desires to persuade them of the truth of his message; he wants them to see it; he is trying to do something to them, to influence them. ...he is dealing with these living souls and he wants to move them, to take them with him, to lead them to the Truth. That is his whole purpose."²⁰⁹ The call that must be proclaimed by the preacher, heard in the listeners' ears, and seen in their souls is the persuasive message of the finished work of Christ on their behalf accompanied by the Holy Spirit so that they will be reconciled to God. That is serious.

A sermon without a call for the people to a specific response is not really preaching, in the biblical sense. John Ortberg in his essay *Biblical Preaching is About Life Change, Not Sermon Form* says, "Far too many sermons have lots of information about the Bible but are not really biblical preaching because they do not call and enable people to respond to the Word."²¹⁰ This is an important and serious warning to preachers to take note that "As we preach we must appeal to people to embrace those solutions."²¹¹ The solutions the Bible presents are for the listeners, the preacher must not neglect to call upon them to embrace God's grace in providing them. Timothy Warren, quoted in Michael Fabarez' book, says about preaching that "...its goal is to manifest or reveal God's truth by living it out." Fabarez explains by saying, "God's Word *always* demands a

²⁰⁹ Lloyd-Jones, 91.

²¹⁰ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 452.

²¹¹ Fabarez, 123.

human response.”²¹² If God’s word demands a response, it is, therefore, the preacher’s prerogative to call for the response God demands.

Expect Divine Intervention from the Holy Spirit to Illuminate the Message

“*Don’t ever dare to stand in front of a group of people with a Bible in your hand and not expect change,*” writes Crawford Loritts in his essay *Preaching That Raises Our Sights*. He goes on to say, “We must have a holy confidence—confidence in God and his Word, confidence that God is going to change lives whenever we speak from his book.”²¹³ The preacher’s work is a supernatural work that is in the hands of God who uses the preacher to effect “the change God intends for the Bible to effect,”²¹⁴ that is, to change people. Mr. Loritts’ claim agrees with what God says through the prophet, preacher, proclaimer Isaiah, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”²¹⁵ There is no hint of doubt in God’s statement that His word accomplishes God’s very own purposes, it succeeds in the way He has designed. The preachers in the first century were abundantly aware of this truth and they proclaimed, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who

²¹² Ibid., 19.

²¹³ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 36. Emphasis original.

²¹⁴ Fabarez, 15.

²¹⁵ Isaiah 55:10-11.

are being saved it is the power of God.”²¹⁶ And, “...our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.”²¹⁷ Can the preacher today dare do anything other than proclaim God’s word in expectation that the Holy Spirit will powerfully accomplish God’s supernatural work with great success? He dare not!

According to Michael Fabarez, Richard Baxter wrote, “If you would prosper in your work, be sure to keep up earnest desires and expectations of success.”²¹⁸ Fabarez himself encourages preachers to preach expectantly, “...always preach with anticipation that God *will* work in the lives of our people.”²¹⁹ God has promised that when His word is proclaimed it goes out with power, purpose, and success. That word has an effect upon the listeners when it is preached. Paul Scott Wilson in his essay “The Source of Passion” says, “Passion in preaching is primarily a theological issue arising out of a preacher’s strong awareness that God wants to accomplish something through the sermon.”²²⁰ The preacher can depend upon God’s promise, and confidently and passionately desire to preach the word that God has given him, having no fear of man or failure of purpose.

What should be some of the expectations of the preacher? Mike Gilbert Smith answers, “With authoritative preaching, a preacher knows that what he says comes from having grasped what God has said; he then faithfully applies it to the congregation,

²¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:18.

²¹⁷ 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

²¹⁸ Fabarez, 104-105.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 104.

²²⁰ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 589.

trusting that God will do his transforming work. The answer isn't a conversational tone but truly expositional-authoritative preaching."²²¹ God has made preaching a means of His grace to transform the lives of the hearers, changing them. Michael Fabarez explains, "Biblical preaching always aims to change lives. If this is not the conscious goal of the preacher, then the preacher will miss the very point of his calling."²²² Not only is it God's purpose that preaching changes lives, but it should be the preacher's expectation and purpose as well. Graham Goldsworthy adds that a sermon should be preached "... with confidence that God's gospel is powerful and the Spirit is active to apply it."²²³

More specifically, Jim Shaddix explains that as a preacher "...what I can do is simply be faithful to preach the Bible and its Christ, believing that God will produce a faith in His people that will bind them together in community."²²⁴ The preacher may expect that faith will be produced and people will be drawn closer together. This is explained further by Jeffrey Arthurs in his essay *Preaching Life into the Church*, he says, "The work of salvation *starts* when the Word is preached, and the work of salvation *continues* as the Word is preached."²²⁵ Salvation given and sustained is the primary expectation of a message from God's word proclaimed to His people. Jeffrey Arthurs expounds further saying, "By the Word of God we are born again, and the church is

²²¹ Mike Gilbert Smith, "A Conversational Approach: Will It Preach?" <http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/conversational-approach-will-it-preach> (accessed February 6 2012).

²²² Fabarez, xii.

²²³ Goldsworthy, 19.

²²⁴ Shaddix, 46.

²²⁵ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, 53.

formed. By the Word of God that church grows up to be like the Head. Through preaching God unleashes the whirlwind of his Word.”²²⁶

There are other results which the preacher may expect in proclaiming God’s word. Ben Patterson, in his article *Why the Sermon? What is the eternal purpose in this weekly exercise in elocution*, writes, “Sermons are preached so that the hearers might praise, adore, and give thanks to God.”²²⁷ Remember that if the first purpose of preaching is to glorify God, God will bring fulfillment to that purpose in and through those that hear God’s word proclaimed.

In addition to bringing glory to God, people were also created to enjoy God. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones allows for further expectations for preaching when he queries, “What is the chief end of preaching? I like to think it is this. It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence.”²²⁸ The preacher may expect that his preaching will bring joy to the hearers. The preacher may expect that those that love God and are called according to His purpose will sense God and His presence and enjoy Him along with the enjoyment of their salvation, sanctification, and their response in worship.

According to Fabarez, one of “...the essence of expository preaching...” is that “...it effects the change God intends for the Bible to effect.”²²⁹ The preacher should fully expect that God will make it so. Thomas Chalmers, 19th Century Scottish minister, says about the preacher, “But His office, as defined by the Bible itself, is not to make known

²²⁶ Ibid., 56.

²²⁷ Ibid., 217.

²²⁸ Lloyd-Jones, 97.

²²⁹ Fabarez, 15.

to us any truths which are not contained in the Bible; but to make clear to our understandings the truths which are contained in it. He opens our understandings to understand the Scriptures. The Word of God is called the sword of the Spirit. It is the instrument by which the Spirit worketh. He does not tell us anything that is out of the record; but all that is within it he sends home, with clearness and effect, upon the mind. He does not make us wise above that which is written; but he makes us wise up to that which is written.”²³⁰ Expect it to be so. Amen.

A preacher is called upon to deliver a sermon to people of all age groups. It may seem an impossible task unless he depends upon the power of God to proclaim; proclaims what the mind of the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Bible; calls people to believe the clear and complete message of the Bible; and expects divine intervention from the Holy Spirit to illuminate the message for each listener, whether two years or ninety-two years old.

The Christ-centered Sermon is Inherently Intergenerational

With regard to the context of this study of intergenerational preaching the substance of the message does not change according to audience. According to Lloyd-Jones, “We have become such experts, as we think, in psychological understanding, and at dividing people up into groups... that we conclude as a result that what is all right of one is not right for another, and so eventually become guilty of denying the Gospel. ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free.’ This is the ONE gospel—the ONLY Gospel. It is for the whole world, and the whole of humanity.

²³⁰ Thomas Chalmers, "The Necessity of the Spirit to Give Effect to the Preaching of the Gospel," <http://www.newble.co.uk/chalmers/sermon9con1s1.html> (accessed February 7 2012).

Mankind is one.”²³¹ The substance of preaching is the gospel, the word of God, God in Jesus Christ for all people.

It should be noted, that in the previous words by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and in these that follow, that every person has essentially the same human need. He says, “...the preacher is in the position that he does not need to go into these different sections and grades and divisions of society. He knows the problem of the factory worker, he knows the problem of the professional man; because it is ultimately precisely the same. One may get drunk on beer and the other on wine, as it were, but the point is that they both get drunk; one may sin in rags and the other in evening dress but they both sin. ‘all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.’ ‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’ ‘The whole world lieth guilty before God.’”²³² For the sake of this study, this is quite important because all people need to hear the same message regardless of circumstance. There is one message; it is the same no matter the audience.

Timothy Brown, Henry Bass professor of preaching at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan sums up well that the source for preaching the Christ-centered sermon is inherently intergenerational, saying, “the preacher who wants to have the widest intergenerational appeal in his or her preaching will draw deeply and creatively from the most intergenerational resource we have available to us – the Bible.”²³³ And, “If the Bible was conceived by a God who is to be worshiped and loved from one generation to another, then it must be inherently intergenerational. If we simply

²³¹ Lloyd-Jones, 141. Emphasis original.

²³² Ibid., 135.

²³³ Vanderwell, 115.

let the Bible speak for itself, it will necessarily speak to all generations.”²³⁴ The Bible ultimately points to Jesus Christ, and therefore the message of the preacher should center upon Christ. The Bible and the truly Christ-centered sermon speak the message of God’s redeeming grace in the person of Jesus Christ to all generations. Both are inherently intergenerational. It is through Jesus Christ that the willing people, regardless of their age, are enabled to worship and love God.

Conclusion

John Stott says, “In a world which seems either unwilling or unable to listen, how can we be persuaded to go on preaching, and learn to do so effectively?”²³⁵ Because God has made people to listen, all at different developmental stages, but able at their particular level; because God has called the Church to come together intergenerationally in order to make the eight-year-old with a hearing problem or the eighty-year-old with hearing problem to hear; because God has given preachers the authority under His power to do so.

Combining the three literature studies sampled above will allow the researcher to adequately come to conclusions about how preachers ought to preach Christ-centered, expository sermons to multigenerational congregations in a single intergenerational worship service.

God has shown in the Bible that His intention for all the people of God, no matter their age in life, is for them to worship together as often as they gather, and in particular to attend together the word of God proclaimed by God’s preachers. To neglect this in the

²³⁴ Ibid., 118.

²³⁵ Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 92.

particular church is contrary to God's plan for the unity of the body of Christ and rather shows the disintegration of the church.

Some would argue, however, that it is impossible for young and old to be commingled together and expected to listen to the same message when they are so different. Although people do listen differently along the developmental line of aging, it is not unreasonable to expect them all to listen to the same sermon message. In section one of this chapter, the literature states that for children under the age of about seven, consistency is crucial for them to comprehend what they hear, and that they comprehend through the experience of common circumstances in which they hear the spoken word. As children age, and thus develop, they become less subjective listeners and more objective listeners being able to comprehend what they hear based upon the message itself rather than simply the context in which they hear something. They may not immediately understand everything they hear, but they are eager to learn and will over time learn the more difficult things they hear as they mature. The difficulty for preachers, however, is that children learn in a way more consistent with narrative than with exposition. But over time, they are able to learn to understand an exposition and their minds actually develop to be able to do so. This happens as they become young adults and then develop into the ages of maturity. The most difficult obstacle is out of the hands of the preacher and that is if the young or mature adult is willing to listen. They are certainly able, but, the willingness is up to the individual. All in all, even though everyone is at a different level of listening development, it is possible and necessary for the church to listen together to the preaching of God's word.

Therefore, the church must be intentionally intergenerational in its worship. In the second section of this chapter, the literature shows that it is a detriment to the Church when it fails to be intergenerational in its worship and it is antithetical to God's design for the church. Practically speaking, the church fails to be a whole body and therefore fails to function as such. The older people need the characteristics of the younger and the younger of the older in order to be complete according to God's design.

The integrity of the whole church as well as the particular church is maintained by its being intergenerational in all aspects and particularly in its worship. Being intergenerational begins with the root common denominator, Christ. The people of the church must not see themselves as many families or individuals coming together, but one family making up the body of Christ and all being brothers, sisters, parents, and children of each other, despite different genealogical ancestries. Being intergenerational is necessary for all the individuals of the spiritual family to be living in the way of God. It was even established that the unity of the intergenerational church is confirmed when the people gather together in worship through the grace of God's word and Sacraments, and that intergenerational difficulties are overcome through these intergenerational events of worship ordained by God.

Being intergenerational maybe counter to the surrounding culture, but by God's design, that is the nature of the church and it must not be tempted to succumb to cultural pressures to be otherwise than intergenerational, particularly in worship.

People listen differently at all the differing developmental stages of life, but the preacher can take all those stages into account in preaching the sermon and must do so because the church is to be intentionally intergenerational. But still, the preacher must

preach to a varied developmentally intergenerational church gathered for worship around the word of God.

The literature in the third section of this chapter concludes that the preacher, while taking into account the intergenerational nature of the gathered people, must keep God's word, found in the Bible and manifest in Christ Jesus, as the substance of the preached word. The preacher must also preach with purpose to include glorifying God, determining to elicit belief from the hearers, enabling them to respond, and motivating them to respond. To fulfill those purposes, the preacher must deliver the sermon proclaiming God's word in dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit, calling the people to believe, and in expectation that God will intervene to overcome the developmental and intergenerational aspects of the gathered congregation and apply the preached word to those with ears to hear by the grace of God.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how preachers in intergenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations while maintaining the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching. The assumption of this study was that some preachers have learned to use important principles involved in reaching all ages of listeners who are at varying developmental stages of listening and comprehension. In order to address the stated purpose, the research identifies three main areas that are keys which enable people of all ages in an intergenerational worship service to understand and comprehend the preached sermon. These include the areas of developmental listening and comprehension, dynamics of multigenerational churches, and characteristics of Christ-centered, expository preaching. To examine these areas more closely the researcher used qualitative research principles to interview a sample of Reformed, Christ-centered expository preachers. The researcher used the following questions to serve as the intended foci of the qualitative research:

1. How do Christ-centered expository preachers preach in order to account for differences in listening and comprehension development of those present in a single intergenerational worship service?
2. How do Christ-centered expository preachers preach in order to account for commonalities among those at different stages of listening and comprehension development in a single intergenerational worship service?

3. What do Christ-centered expository preachers avoid when they preach in a single intergenerational worship service?
4. How do Christ-centered expository preachers know that their sermons are reaching the varying developmental stages of listening and comprehension of those present in a single intergenerational worship service?

Design of the Study

This study employed a qualitative research design, in accordance with Sharan B. Merriam's book, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Qualitative research is "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied," which Merriam says, "offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives."²³⁶ Therefore, in this type of study, the researcher is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences."²³⁷

The researcher studied and analyzed three categories of literature: 1) understanding of the stages of developmental listening and comprehension, 2) dynamics of multigenerational churches, and 3) characteristics of Christ-centered, expository preaching. In combining the three literature studies, the researcher was able to discern how preachers can preach Christ-centered, expository sermons to multigenerational congregations in a single intergenerational worship service, which was the purpose of the study.

²³⁶ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 1.

²³⁷ Ibid., 5.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in order to allow for flexibility within each interview, yet, this enabled the researcher to collect specific data relevant to the study. The four research questions, listed above, were used to develop the protocol questions used as the guide for the interviews.

Participant Sample Selection

The researcher desired to learn how preachers in intergenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations while maintaining the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching. Therefore, in order to come to greater knowledge of how preachers do that, the researcher interviewed ten preachers from multigenerational churches who preach Christ-centered expository sermons in an intergenerational worship service. In order to obtain the broadest perspectives on this narrow study, the participants were preachers from both large and small churches, both rural and metropolitan contexts, and various denominational backgrounds, but all were Reformed in doctrine and practice. Five interviewees are from America and five interviewees are from Australia. These criteria were important because the researcher desired to show the similarities and distinctions between how pastors preach to multigenerational congregations in an intergenerational way, and desired to account for the varying circumstances that preachers may face within Reformed churches. In order to obtain quality data based on experience, the preachers interviewed had at least five years of intergenerational preaching experience.

Data Collection

Data was collected through ten semi-structured interviews with preachers who met the interview criteria explained in the above section, “Participant Sample Selection”. Following the collection of the interview data, the researcher proceeded to analyze the data from the ten study participants. The semi-structured interview format enabled the researcher to have flexibility in asking questions of the participants and provided the opportunity to probe deeply the participants’ more significant answers,²³⁸ as well as each participant’s distinctive answers.

The interviews were mainly influenced by the Research Questions. However, the literature review and analysis helped the researcher to be ready to ask follow-up questions throughout the interviews and prepared the researcher to probe where there are similarities and differences between the literature and the interviewees’ thoughts. The literature related to developmental listening and comprehension, in particular, helped shape the interview questions for the first two Research Questions (see questions below). It was very helpful for the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of how children develop in their cognitive ability in order to be ready to explain to the interviewees those differences as well as help them to consider how they preach to the various age groups.

The researcher used the first interview to test the interview questions, but also included data from this interview in the research. This provided a baseline and a means for adjustments to the interview protocol in the following interviews. Improvements were made as the interviewing progressed. This also helped the researcher to gain more applicable data in the later interviews.

²³⁸ Ibid., 90.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded on digital media, then transcribed for analysis and comparison. The researcher used the constant comparative method of data analysis, comparing the various segments of data from the interviews in order to identify patterns of similarity and difference.²³⁹ In order to identify patterns of similarity and difference in the data, the data that was relevant to the study was coded as such. It was then coded according to more specific categories and properties, so that core categories, propositions, and hypotheses would emerge from the data.²⁴⁰ Interview participants were chosen according to the participant criteria and signed a written or electronic consent that allowed the researcher to use the data acquired during the interviews. Prior to the interviews, the researcher notified participants of the interview protocol, as well as the purpose of this study.

The researcher conducted interviews according to a series of protocol questions that were based upon the four questions that have guided this study. The following are the interview protocol questions as they relate to each research question:

Research Question #1: How do Christ-centered expository preachers preach in order to account for differences in listening and comprehension development of those present in a single intergenerational worship service?

- Understanding that there are differences in listening development and comprehension between the multiple ages of people attending your preaching: How do those differences affect your preaching?

²³⁹ Ibid., 30.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 200.

- What changes have you made in your preaching in order to account for differences in listening and comprehension development of those present in a single intergenerational worship service?
- What do people in your worship services say about your preaching that demonstrates that your sermons account for differences in listening and comprehension abilities?

Research Question #2: How do Christ-centered expository preachers preach in order to account for commonalities among those at different stages of listening and comprehension development in a single intergenerational worship service?

- What things do the multiple generations attending worship have in common in order that they will hear and understand what you preach?
- How do commonalities among the multiple generations effect your preaching?
- What particular practices do you employ to preach to multiple generations in one sermon?

Research Question #3: What do Christ-centered expository preachers avoid when they preach in a single intergenerational worship service?

- What do you refrain from doing or saying when preaching so that you avoid alienating any particular aged group of people?
- What are some pitfalls that you would warn other preachers to avoid?

Research Question #4: How do Christ-centered expository preachers know that their sermons are reaching the varying developmental stages of listening and comprehension of those present in a single intergenerational worship service?

- How does a preacher successfully preach intentionally to all generations without sacrificing Christ-centered expository preaching practices?
- What do people in your worship services say about your preaching that helps you to preach in order to reach all who are present?
- How do you obtain feedback about your sermons so that you know whether your preaching reaches all generations present?
- What kind of feedback have you received from people of each age group represented in your worship services?
- What feedback has made a difference in the way you seek to preach to all generations during worship?
- What have you done to make your preaching more accessible to every generation present in your worship services?

Data Analysis

The researcher personally transcribed six interviews by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and typing out each transcript. The remaining four interviews were transcribed by a paid transcriber. This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. This method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories. When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using constant comparative method. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes and patterns among the participants; and (2) congruence or discrepancy between the participants. In addition, in order to compare the data to the literature review research,

coding for analysis included categories for listening comprehension, dynamics of multigenerational churches, and characteristics of Christ-centered expository preaching.

Researcher Position

The researcher's position in relation to this study is that of a Reformed (in doctrine and practice) preacher who, for eleven years, served in a small, rural Minnesota church that had a primarily elderly congregation. The researcher currently serves in a small suburban congregation in Adelaide, South Australia. This preacher also has several years' experience serving in the youth ministry at a larger (approximately 600 members) multigenerational church, which had a rural address but was located very near a small city. The researcher has a passion for the right preaching of God's word and for that word to be heard by every age, as all God's people – no matter their age – are one church, united in Jesus Christ.

Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations are inherent in this study. First, regarding the interviews, interviews were conducted in the state of Minnesota, via Skype, and in Adelaide, Australia. The researcher is uncertain how the global scope of the interviewees affected the data collected during the interviews. The participants are limited to preachers who serve in multigenerational churches that practice intergenerational worship. Additionally, participants are preachers who practice Christ-centered expository preaching, and are Reformed in doctrine and practice.

The researcher reviewed an extensive amount of written resources from each of the three categories of study as was necessary in order to complete the research.

However, it was not possible to review all available literature due to the sheer magnitude of written works on the subjects studied.

Because one particular focus of the study was on cognitive development, and not on spiritual development, the researcher was not able to come to any conclusions about the interaction between cognitive and spiritual development in the listeners.

The researcher's conclusions will be based solely upon the data collected from the literature reviewed and interviews conducted in this study. With further reviews of the available literature or with additional, more comprehensive interviews, other data could become available that is not accessible to the conductor of this study. Thus, the reader, upon further research, may come to different or revised conclusions.

Chapter Four

Interview Findings

In chapter one of this paper the researcher defined the problem addressed as being, in part, the fact that churches tend to separate people rather than unite them, particularly along generational lines, mirroring society. But this separation should not be so. One of the preachers interviewed for this paper made this observation:

Why are the kids going out? We live in an age now where kids have got to be entertained. I was just reading an article recently that we don't train our kids to be bored anymore. They may be bored during the sermon, but what a fantastic time to train them to sit still and listen during the sermon. But no, we've got to rush them out, and entertain them with something where they can be interactive. Yeah, we're missing out on that. They need to be ... They should be there."

If all people, regardless of age, need to be present, then preachers should make sure their preaching can be appropriately understood by those who attend. According to another preacher, "Obviously, as the pastor, if you're encouraging everyone to be there and you don't preach to everyone... that's just not a good thing. That's exasperating the congregation, and so you have to have something for everyone to the best of your ability." In these interview findings, the researcher sought to discover how pastors preach to help multiple generations in an intergenerational worship service comprehend and understand, at different developmental stages in life.

In this chapter, the researcher recorded the stories, details, and clues shared by the interview participants to help the researcher understand and explain insights

beneficial to other preachers so they may be better prepared to preach to the multiple age groups attending their worship services.

Introduction to Participants

The researcher interviewed ten preachers, five from America and five from Australia. At the time of the interviews, all the interviewees were preaching on a weekly basis in their respective churches and had been doing so for at least five years. Seven of them were located in suburban settings, one in a city location, and two from rural towns. Each of them claims to be Christ-centered expository preacher, and each holds to Reformed doctrine and practice. They were chosen for these traits so that through this analysis one might come to a greater understanding of the dynamics of the comprehension and listening capabilities of multigenerational congregations. With this understanding, the researcher hopes the interviewee insights and researcher analysis will help preachers more effectively preach to their congregations while maintaining Christ-centered, expository sermons.

Interview Questions

In developing the interview questions, the researcher's goal was to ask the interviewees about preaching practices that take into consideration the developmental stages of listening and comprehension ability in an intergenerational worship service. The questions were developed to focus on three areas of interest, based on the research questions in chapter one of this paper.

In the interview, the researcher began by asking the interviewee to state his definition of Christ-centered, expository preaching. After hearing this definition, the

researcher sought to discover how preachers account for differences and commonalities in listening and comprehension development in a single intergenerational worship service. Since some preaching mistakes may alienate listeners, another set of questions explored what preachers avoid when they preach in a single intergenerational worship service. The final set of questions examined how preachers assessed their sermons. The interview questions are those listed in the “Data Collection” section of chapter three.

The researcher also gave opportunity for a final response to each interviewee to allow for additional comments or issues previously overlooked.

The Interviewees

To gain a better understanding of how preachers in intergenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations without sacrificing the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching, the researcher interviewed ten preachers who are all Reformed in doctrine and practice and who desire to preach expository, Christ-centered sermons. The researcher used the following names for the interviewees so as to maintain anonymity:

Adam lives and preaches in suburban South Australia.

Ben lives and preaches in suburban South Australia.

Carl lives and preaches in rural Minnesota, United States.

David lives and preaches in rural Minnesota, United States.

Eli lives and preaches in suburban New South Wales, Australia.

Fred lived and preached in a Minnesota, United States, city at the time of his interview but has since moved to another location.

Graeme lives and preaches in suburban South Australia.

Henry lives and preaches in suburban Mississippi, United States.

Isaac lives and preaches in suburban Minnesota, United States.

Jeff Lives and preaches in suburban Queensland, Australia.

Analysis of Data

The literature reviewed for this study was intended to help the reader understand the dynamics of what a preacher might encounter in an intergenerational worship service so that he might preach effectively, understanding that many developmental stages of listening comprehension are present. The analysis of the interviewees' responses details more specifically what preachers do to account for various stages of listening comprehension.

The first section of data and analysis deals with the interviewees' cumulative definition of Christ-centered preaching. Following that, the organization of the data and analysis is according to the original research questions (RQs) from chapter one. RQs 1 and 2 are so closely related, the responses and analysis have been combined. The RQs are as follows: 1. In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account differences and commonalities due to developmental cognitive listening ability? 2. In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account for the dynamics found within multigenerational churches? 3. What do expository preachers avoid when they preach in intergenerational worship services? 4. How do expository preachers know that their sermons are reaching the multiple generations present in their intergenerational worship services?

Defining Christ-centered Expository Preaching

“They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”²⁴¹

The data that follows addresses what the preacher does to account for the listening and comprehension abilities of those who attend the preaching event. Even though listening and comprehension abilities must be accounted for, all the interviewees are convinced that a preacher must preach using both Christ-centered and expository practices. Therefore, the researcher began each interview by seeking the interviewee’s definition of Christ-centered, expository preaching. The researcher hoped to gain understanding of what preachers say preaching ought to be and then gather data from the interviewees about how they account for their listeners while preaching.

Expository Preaching

Each interviewee was asked to define and explain expository preaching. One pastor replied:

As a pastor, I have not been called to bring my own personal culture to the people of God. They are Christ’s sheep, not mine. I’ve only been called by, employed by him; called by him to administer his concerns. Therefore, I’ve got to make sure that scripture is the thing that I’m drawing from; I have no authority apart from scripture. At the end of the day, it’s got to be founded upon specific words of Christ or his apostles or examples from the Old Testament, which are concerns still consistent with today. As you preach... start with the text or bring it to the text, you have to correctly apply the text and not just use the words in it...

The preacher’s first responsibility is to please God by exposing the word of God to the people.

²⁴¹ Nehemiah 8:8.

Other interviewees defined expository preaching by saying, "... expository preaching is really... to preach the Bible," and "not avoiding the tough bits in between." Also, "Preaching is just making the truths plain. That's basically what it is. It's pretty simple. You're reading the text and explaining the text... and endeavoring to make it plain to the people." Expository preaching means "...that the Scripture provides your main theme... and takes you right into the application, coming to a grand focus on Christ, our redeemer..." Another preacher said, "...expository... preaching... is dealing with the text that is before you... bringing its understanding to light before the people of God and showing its relationship to the gospel." To explain further, "Expository preaching is preaching that comes from the text itself, preaching that is coming from the text using historical and grammatical features of interpretation and that historic or grammatical interpretation is then leading toward application of the text to the hearer." Also, "...an expository sermon is when you have a specific text of Scripture and you're seeking to explain that text of scripture and apply it to the contemporary audience in front of you." Furthermore, it was suggested that "I believe that the Bible is the word of God and God speaks primarily through the Bible and so, what God is saying to us in that passage is ultimately the goal of expository preaching." Expository preaching takes the entirety of God's word as the basis for the sermon, considers God's design for a particular Bible text, and endeavors to make God's word plain to the listeners through explanation of the meaning of God's word and application according to God's intended use of his word.

Lastly, for preaching to be expository, "...the text must be allowed to speak for itself. But Christ-centered preaching recognizes that there is a larger context, and we want to always keep that larger context before the people of God through the text, and

therefore, we truly can preach Christ from every nook and cranny of Scripture without being, in any way, destructive on the particular text that is before us.” Therefore, a sermon must be not only expository but also consistent with the larger context that centers on Jesus Christ.

Christ-centered Preaching

“Being Christ-centered, I think, is the whole context of the scripture. The central theme of preaching, which we preach from the word and preach the word, is Christ. From Genesis right through to Revelation, Christ is the center, and so it all hinges around him. ...we must all be drawn into Christ, it all points toward Christ. The whole redemptive theme of the word of God is centered on Christ. He’s got to be there. He’s got to be in there.” Since Christ has to be in the sermon and central to it, then there must be consideration of Christ-centeredness in preaching.

The interviewees gave the following descriptions of Christ-centered preaching: One preacher said, “... we have to show who Christ is. ...find the cross, or the link with the message of Christ...” and that “the larger context is always, I’m totally lost, can only be saved by his grace in Christ.” This teaching must include the fact that “Christ is the answer, but understanding the problem that he is the answer to, our total brokenness, the death of our sins, something of that has to be that sin is the problem and Christ is the answer.” In agreement with the problem and answer in Christ-centeredness, another preacher said, “...what makes a sermon Christ-centered is the text must take us from the condition of man, must take us to the gracious supplying of salvation by God in Jesus Christ. Those elements must be there.” Another preacher said, “Christ-centered preaching is keeping Christ before the people.” One interviewee gave this definition: “Christ-

centered preaching... puts the passage in question within the historical redemptive framework of scripture and... shows the way in which Christ addresses the particular need of the text.” In addition to that, “a Christ-centered sermon... points people to Jesus, and specifically, points people to Jesus for justification, adoption, sanctification, and consolation, encouragement and hope; so it wouldn’t be a justification-centered sermon, but it would be a sermon that presents Christ as the answer to human need; either as human beings or as sinners.” Also

Christ centered preaching does, at some point, have Christ as the focal point. ...we acknowledge Christ, in some respect, in his saviorhood or his authority over us. ...we would always acknowledge that Christ made us therefore he owns us. ...We would certainly often allude to the fact that Christ has died for us so that whatever we’re asking our people to do or to be, it’s in the context of Christ as a great savior. He is God’s answer to their needs as human beings; their need in terms of worshiping him, obedience to him. ...we preach Christ crucified but also Christ in his risen life. ...Our great duty is, ‘To teach them to observe all that I have commanded.’

One preacher thought it important to use care in presenting Christ, saying, “I want to be careful how we get to Christ, but ultimately, again, that’s the main message of Scripture is how sinners can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.” Another said, “For something to be Christ-centered, we must explain the gospel, the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.” And lastly, “I would regard Christ-centered preaching as proclaiming the full counsel of God as revealed in the word, the glory of the Father through the person and work of Christ by the power of the Spirit... Christ-centered preaching focuses on his person and on his work in the total scheme of God’s plan of salvation.”

To summarize the interviewees’ understanding of Christ-centered expository preaching, the data shows the following: Christ-centered preaching not only keeps Jesus

Christ and the message of Christ central but also explains who Christ is and what he does. First, Christ is the grace of God through whom God has provided the only solution to and salvation from the sin that dominates the whole human condition. Second, Christ reconciles people to God by saving them from sin and the consequences of sin. Finally, Jesus Christ affects people by delivering them to life from death, to reconciliation with God from being alienated from Him. The salvation he gives awakens hope when life seems hopeless, provides consolation in despair, and is encouragement when disheartened. Christ-centered preaching proclaims to the people that God, through Jesus Christ, has authority over people to command them how to live according to Christ and opposed to sin.

Listening Ability and Dynamics in Multigenerational Churches

Accounting for Differences in Listening and Comprehension

When it comes to preaching there are two kinds of exegesis. The first kind of exegesis that you do is the scriptural passage, and you make sure you understand that. Then the second exegesis that you need to do is to look at the congregation, and anticipate the congregation that you will be preaching to and do an exegesis of that congregation and try to understand their needs; what stage in life they are. Obviously if they are young people, they think differently, they have different perspective, a different set of goals, than people who are in their nineties and waiting for the Lord to call them home. So, obviously, you need to understand the makeup of the congregation and be in touch with the needs of people of all different ages.

This statement by Jeff indicated the thoughts of the other interviewees too. All of them agreed it is important to know not only what one preaches but to whom one preaches.

The researcher sought to know if preachers understood differences in listening ability and comprehension due to the ages of people in their congregations. Half of the interviewees indicated with simple affirmation, while the others affirmed and elaborated.

Those who elaborated understood developmental listening and comprehension in the following ways:

Obviously there's a difference in vocabulary. There's a difference in reading comprehension. There's a difference in critical thinking skills, logic. There's a difference in nuance. There's a difference not only in vocabulary but in the kind of idioms and things that children pick up on... sometimes we use things to mean them figuratively, and children have the tendency to take them super-literally... and then even not only when we're talking about children, but adults and senior citizens. Age has an impact on the way your mind works.

Also,

Attention span; I think that younger kids' attention span is probably shorter, kids are more concrete and you need to be using a lot of language that is concrete. Again, at the older level I think attention span is probably a bigger issue, but that's less so the more adults grow in the intermediate realm. Other differences that I know of: complexity of understanding of concepts. ...obviously younger kids can only take in so much at once and you can't give them too many ideas all at once. I think also the older ones, the cognitive processes are slowing down, so not able to consume quite as much in one go.

The data shows some understanding of the differences, and the need for preachers to know there are young and old alike in the worship service.

In addition to theoretical developmental concerns, the interviewees agreed that they needed to know their people at a developmental level by personal interactions with them. Henry said:

any time... I preach I need to be aware that I'm always preaching to those people that are in front of me... it's a matter of not just... writing a theological paper on the particular subject that I'm preaching on that Lord's Day, but it's a matter of seeking to communicate God's truth to those specific people that are going to be in front of me. So I think there is an awareness of who those people are, and awareness of that is certainly helped by pastoral interaction with people, as I get to know our congregation and the entire congregation, and all ages and stages of life."

Therefore, according to Isaac, "...it's important to know where you are, to know what time you're in, to know what type of people that are there..." Preachers need to get to

know the people to whom they preach to gain greater understanding of the differences within the congregation so that they might apply such understanding to their preaching.

How Differences Affect Preaching

Many of the interviewees recognized that the differences among people to whom they ministered affected their preaching, but, more important to them was that those differences affected their entire ministry. Therefore, the effect filtered into their preaching, rather than being a direct or conscious consideration in preaching. The general consensus was that the differences, although accounted for in preaching, were dealt with more readily in the broader ministry of the preacher, the church, and the families. “When I’m preparing, I’m more conscious of whether I’m understandable to the younger than to the older. ...if we’re not catechizing, teaching, training, giving a language and a vocabulary to children, then preaching is always going to either have to be so general that it’s basically unprofitable, or... it’s going to go over their heads. So, there’s that delicate balance of teaching outside the sermon context and then bringing them along in the sermon context.” The same preacher went on to say, “I don’t try to fix everything in a sermon, in the pulpit ministry, on a Sunday morning. ...you cannot divorce the preaching moment from the context of teaching behind the scenes whether it be home or a church context.” He further observed:

I guess I would say there probably is a certain part of letting the chips fall where they may, although I don’t know if I would put it that way. I certainly don’t target the six-year-old and hope that it will sweep in the 90’s. I hope that I’m preaching at the level that is accessible to all people, and I guess I’ve always operated from the standpoint that the gospel, you know, it’s not complex: sin is sin, Christ is Christ, his death, his burial, his resurrection. These are things that are pretty easy for kids and adults together to get their heads around. They may ask those questions... what is heaven like? Can God create a something big enough that he can’t lift? Kids ask the most profound questions, but the preaching moment is not designed to be a complicated moment. The job of the pastor is to bring light, not

confusion, to the scriptures and to draw out of it the simplicity of the gospel. Now there are moments where you really do have to kind of deal with the problem of the text, and I suppose you're going to get some and leave some behind at that point. But on a general basis, I'm fairly confident my preaching is simple, is clear and accessible to virtually anybody who's of an age of understanding... and therefore it can be a blessing to all. It's the nature of preaching. You can have very intelligent doctors, professionals in your congregation; you have truck drivers; you preach the same message and be a blessing to both. They don't really require two different things. And children and adults don't require two different things.

All the interviewees understood the reality that there are infants, children, teenagers, and adults present for the sermon, and the reality of that truth "...does affect my preaching to a degree." But:

...it doesn't dominate my concern as I prepare a sermon. The reason why it doesn't dominate is because I think preaching, to a lot of degree, is being romanticized to be the oration that contains everything for everyone. It is the definitive statement. From start to finish, you say all that needs to be said and you say it in a way that meets everybody's needs as they hear so that when it's finished, it's full and complete. I just don't believe that's preaching. Preaching to me as a pastor? I preach to people with whom I have continuing relationships. I also preach to the people who have relationships with each other. For instance, my biggest concern is not if the five-year-old understands all what I'm saying. It's far more important to me that his parents understand what I'm saying, because his parents will then add, around the meal table, what was not gathered by the five-year-old... Not only that, but my relationship with those people continues; I don't regard my sermon as finished when I say 'amen.' My sermon continues afterwards with discussions with people. While it does affect the preparation of my sermon and the delivery of my sermon to a degree, it's not a dominant concern that I sweat over because my relationships continue with people all the way from house-to-house. It's much more than a single oration every week or twice a week. The church is not merely a preaching center; it's relational as well... It does affect but not that dominant.

The researcher got the sense that none of the interviewees allowed differences to dominate how they considered presentation of their preaching. The preachers noted that the message of scripture does not change because of the people who are present to hear it. Their primary goal was to preach the message God gave them and not to be guided by

differences in their people. Nonetheless, they did consider differences, and some stated how it affected their preaching.

Therefore, when considering the preaching itself, the interviewees almost uniformly addressed how they handled differences in terms of how they explain, illustrate, and apply sermon messages.

You explain the text clearly, you want clarity with courage. ...if you have courage without clarity, then you're going to have no understanding of where you are going, but if you have clarity without courage it's going to be boring and no one's going to follow along and know where you're headed. So, you need to be clear in your structure, clear in how you understand, or how you explain things... so there needs to be good biblically based sermon illustrations, there need to be good biblically based applications of the text.

Explanation

Particularly when addressing explanation as part of a sermon, almost all the interviewees said that preaching should have a simplicity of ideas presented and of words used to help the listeners comprehend. Particularly important, for most of them, was to structure their sermon clearly so the flow of thought was easy to grasp. Some of the preachers mentioned having an explicit structured outline.

...the thing that I have learned to do is simply develop a simplicity in preaching. I used to have far more complex structures in sermons. ... for kids and elderly the simplicity of structure has been a helpful thing. I have learned to spend a lot more time on each particular point. Giving people the opportunity to chew things over has been an important thing; that's good teaching practice for everyone, but it will especially help those who have more difficulty in hearing. ...saying the same thing in three different ways... without it being obvious... to spend a bit more time so that people catch it. ...explaining the point, illustrating the point, applying the point, and working through that actual sequence of having a very easy to follow structured sermon... helps people.

Another affirmed that structure is important by saying, "I...give out my heads, and I almost always repeat those headings back to the congregation in order for people taking

notes. My own children when they come back are usually able to repeat at least what the various headings of the sermon were, and so I try to keep those headings very short, very simple, and, Lord willing, memorable. So I think having that structure... is at least a way I attempt to make it understandable.”

Some were more concerned about considering the presence of children when they developed their preaching explanations, and others were less concerned. Those less concerned wanted to explain properly what they felt transcended the composition of the congregation. Even so, all of them acknowledged the need for simplicity in presenting ideas and using the simplest words without being condescending. Yet, all of them also agreed that simplicity should not lead to a compromise in the depth of explanation necessary.

With regard to the five-year-old or the fifty-year-old, I would say the key is really to use words that are simple words, straightforward words, and seek to use words which a five-year-old will understand without compromising the meaning. If you are going to use words that are beyond the scope of the five-year-old, then you really need to explain the words, and often you will find that the words that a five-year-old failed to understand are the same words that the fifty-year-old failed to understand. So you would have to explain the words, what you mean. So, in a sense, you have to aim at using the simplest words possible to describe the concepts that are lodged within your mind that you're trying to convey to the congregation.

One preacher made it clear that children were not the primary audience. “My primary audience is probably not children, and the children are addressed more as an aside. I try to include them whenever I can but know probably most things are over their head... I'm probably preaching to... someone with maybe high school age comprehension. That's kind of my general communication level, maybe even higher than that.” All the interviewees would agree that children are not the primary audience. Therefore, each of them would aim for either a certain age level of comprehension or

simply consider that if they preach with clarity, simplicity, and depth that each listener will receive the message if they want to receive it, and if the Holy Spirit allows. It is important to make "...sure that the redemptive plan of God is pointed out, the solution found in Jesus Christ for our condition. I try to define terms so that the kids will understand. ... there are some things that I can do, but then most of the work is done by the Holy Spirit. I can define terms, I interact with people, but in the end I simply make the text plain, hopefully by the grace of God, that's it."

Those who did want to account for all differing age groups present acknowledged that some effort needs to be made to address the less developed listener but also to give deeper explanation to challenge the more hearty listeners. One said:

I do seek consciously to have something for everyone, realizing that there are different stages, realizing that our children are not going to understand everything I say in the course of a sermon. ... if I were to simplify things to such a degree, then I would not be... challenging those who are developmentally advanced in the way that I ought to. But nonetheless, I do seek to have something, at least, for everyone. ... one thing that I do seek to do very much is to have a clear outline in my preaching...

One interviewee recognized that a preacher could move from the simpler to the more complex in order to address the issue of differences in ability to listen and comprehend:

Over the years, I've been forced to write down my sermons into distinct thoughts. I start off each of those distinct thoughts with the simplest heading you can then go to the next ... Increase its complexity a little bit for the next few statements. Then you might have some hard things to say... at the end, the need of every person is met. Even the five-year-olds should be able to remember at least the heading if they're listening, and be able to bring home something.

A simple way to approach different learning styles is to vary what is said, "...some personalities just come alive when there are some hard facts and some are more inclined to be touched with something with some slightly emotional slant. By covering

both those bases, I find it easier to keep people's attention." The variations that might be used in providing explanation in preaching are also useful in illustration.

Illustration

The use of illustration is seen as necessary by all the preachers, and many strove to use illustration well. The interviewees always implied that their illustrations must be easily connected to either (or both) explanation and application. "I very intentionally seek to illustrate and ... to try to keep illustrations simple and direct. Now sometimes I know, for the youngest of children, illustrations don't work because it involves a level of abstraction to make a comparison between one thing and another thing, for example." The interviewees desired to express illustrative ideas simply in order to make a point. They also wanted to avoid mystery in illustrations that might confuse the listener and instead use illustrations to help the listeners comprehend.

Most preachers accepted that illustrations enabled them to connect better to those who have not yet developed fully in their listening and comprehension. When asked about having ten-year-olds in the congregation, one preacher replied, "I'll try to have a bit for them, a story that's specifically aimed at them, and just ask the older people to ignore me for now. I know they don't. They often remember. That's the one bit everyone remembers, but I have to just give them the grace and say, 'This is going to be below your level; I know you know this.' I always found them very gracious to do that." The illustration that seems elementary to some will still have an impact upon them and has the benefit of reaching all who are present. The same preacher said, "A kid's mind does wander, and that's why I specifically say, 'I'm going to talk to you now,' to just bring their attention back, and their moms elbow them and get their attention, and tell a story,

and they listen a bit afterwards, and then I can see them disappearing.” For those moments of attention, children will likely be engaged with the preacher and God’s word.

The interviewees would all agree that some illustrations will sometimes be more appropriate for one type of listener and some more appropriate for another type of listener. “I seek to strike balance. I will use illustrations pertinent to five-year-olds. I will use illustrations pertinent to middle-aged folks and older.” Another said, “... sometimes you need to use numerous illustrations to convey a concept... I think that what we fail to understand is that often people go away and they remember your illustration more than they actually remember the words of the text, and I have had feedback to say that they remember the illustration, and that when they read the text, it all clicks, and they understand why the illustration is applicable to the text.”

One of the most useful types of illustration for all the listeners, according to the interviewees, is the use of story, “...there is no doubt about it that everyone prefers a narrative. ...everyone prefers narrative, even the elderly...” Some of the interviewees were informed by the researcher about the cognitive ability of younger children to grasp narrative, but that children have more trouble grasping exposition. Latching on to this truth, several implied or explicitly observed that not only do children prefer narrative, but most adults resonate with illustrative stories too.

Application

All the preachers indicated application is also necessary, although to varying degrees, depending on the preacher and sometimes upon the particular message. They also recognized a need to address specific groups with certain applications. The fact that people have different levels of comprehension

...very much affects the way that I apply the word and thought... when I'm sitting in my study thinking about application, usually it's with the faces of those people in my mind's eye, and... thinking... of my pastoral interactions... Some applications... are going to be very intentionally directed at younger age. I often... at some point... will address children directly... I'll even call them out, 'young children who are sitting here' or 'covenant children' ...making some kind of particular application to children... they've been doodling on their paper, being distracted . . . hopefully, by saying that much, it will draw their attention, at least, that this is something that they need to hear.

One preacher said, "...I will try to very intentionally address people at different stages of life... in a variety of different applications."

Another interviewee said, "There are kids in our congregation, and I'll make a specific application to them; when I go into that frame, my tone changes. ...when you speak to children, ...the kinds of words that they use change; the precision... is not as important; it's more accommodated to their capacity, and so I do that. It's harder to do that... as you move up in the age bracket, because then you can come across as condescending. So that's a trick, but I do think about it." As with all the aspects of preaching, the interviewees emphasized clarity and simplicity of presenting applications from the text. They also felt that their applications should be driven by interactions that occur in the whole ministry, not merely as a preaching exercise. "I think it's highly important to be approachable. If you're not approachable, you rather limit your ministry." Also, "It's spending time with people in the week to find out their thinking and their problems and also inquire about their non-Christian friends and people they might invite occasionally, but aren't serving God, understanding their thinking." Therefore, "...you cannot divorce the preaching moment from the context of teaching behind the scenes whether it be home or a church context."

When asked about addressing certain age groups specifically one preacher said, “I have kind of the habit of using bulleted applications and that lends itself very nicely for that. Although I do kind of weave application into a text where it’s warranted as well, and if I’m aware of something that has particular relevance, perhaps where a teenager’s at, I will say, ‘Now young people, I want you to listen up here.’ So you can do that. ... I don’t consciously do it every week.” Even so, there was effort by preachers to “... think just about the application for the people who might feel, ‘this doesn’t apply to me.’”

Changes Made in Preaching to Account for Differences

The changes that preachers made over their years of preaching were mostly focused on becoming more clear and simple and creating better structure to assist the listeners.

Clarity and Simplicity

The preachers determined that it was beneficial to make their sermons easily grasped by most. To do so, one preacher said that “using clear, vivid language is important... you can communicate more complex ideas sometimes. Again it’s what language you’re using to describe... Is it clear? Is it direct?” In addition, in order to help people grasp ideas, it helps to emphasize important points or say important things in a variety of ways. For instance:

I’ve learned that if you’re making an important point, not only should you repeat it but you should also say it a lot slower than you would normally speak, so that the point is actually reinforced, that they grasp it, and that they understand it more. It would also show itself in the fact I’ve taken to telling stories; more narrative in the sermon today than I’ve had before, and everybody enjoys listening to a story, and the unfolding of the story captures the imagination more than the straightforward speaking of the facts.

This preacher went on to say that he would “... choose texts which are suitable for a wide range of people.”

Simplicity and clarity were particularly important when addressing children in the congregation. Even if they do not comprehend everything, they can comprehend some things.

Children actually understand simple instructions; they’ve not yet developed a philosophical mind; and so anything that is theoretical is a total waste of time on a five-year-old. You can’t say to them ‘imagine this scenario’ and then work out what you would do. In some ways children of that age are black and white, and you need to try and have questions which are black and white... remember, in that particular age group, what a child is really fighting with, from a sin perspective, would be the issue of ‘life is all about me.’

To be simple and clear means to take what may be complex to the listener and make it easily understandable for adults and children. One preacher said:

I just endeavor to make it plain. I’ll even, sometimes, use illustrations that children will understand. I try and cross right over through illustrations, and endeavoring to make my explanations clear and simple. ...it never ceases to amaze me how simple that you have to break things down. You can’t get tied up with all the words and jargon. We’ve got a whole other generation coming on; they don’t understand theological jargon. I try and teach them Biblical words, like “sanctification” and “justification,” and we can use those words freely here. They know what they mean, but that wasn’t always the case.

It is important for the preacher to break down complicated ideas and words over and over so that eventually people will grow in ability to understand and hopefully have greater clarity over time. One other said:

I used to get some feedback or pushback about using big words. I took those really to heart, because if I discovered that I was using words that in just a general vocabulary that people didn’t understand, I received that as a legitimate complaint, and I tried to modify and be more simple in my preaching and my language choices. I like words; sometimes I will use one because I like the sound of it. ... when I found pushback on words that I believe they should know and didn’t, I did more to explain, and I used them more repeatedly.

The same preacher said:

“Justification” or “sanctification,” those words are very vague in a lot of people’s minds. You have to use them repeatedly so the people at least get to hear it so the language is familiar, and then you begin to teach it both in sermon and Sunday school, and whatever. So, I would often also take this kind of language and vocabulary and point it out in hymns that they have sung all their life. You know, “no merit of my own to his anger to suppress my only hope is found in Jesus righteousness.” People would sing that hymn all their lives and be very familiar to them, but never really thought about the message of justification there. Often taking the familiar to them in the sermon, or before a hymn before the sermon and just point that out, I think that has gone a long way in making people more comfortable with a Christian vocabulary which enables them to hear messages and track with what you’re saying.

Another said, “I preach more simply today than I ever did, ten years ago. I think keeping it simple, both in terms of the structure of the sermon and then the ideas that are expressed, and the applications that are made...” He went on to say that he would “Make a more conscious effort to explain words that I’m using as well. ...I think coming out of seminary you sort of assume that people have the kind of theological vocabulary that you do...”

According to one preacher, many members:

...found it very hard to understand me and a group of them decided to come and speak to me in terms of making the sermons a whole lot simpler. ... There was a connection in that way, and then I realized from that conversation that actually it’s not about academics, it’s about communicating what the word of God actually says, and the simpler you can say what the word of God says, the better for the people who listen to you, because you can easily speak in a way which is true, which is good, which your professors at university would applaud, but your congregation would be absolutely nonplused by what you say, because it does not mean a thing. So, the first realization was that it was all about connecting at the level where the people are. ...preaching looks at that communication rather than saying some wonderful things about the text which are true, but really have little impact on the man or the woman in the pew. It also worked its way through where I spend a whole lot more time in seeking to phrase questions in a way which are totally unambiguous; questions which don’t need a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer; questions that are thought provoking; and questions which they understand.

Many preachers, when more difficult things needed to be said, changed their way of explanation, illustration, and application so as to make the complex meaning plain and

simple by using words common to the whole congregation, and by connecting with the people where they are in their capacity to comprehend. Many would warn to be careful about appearing to be arrogantly condescending.

Structure

With regard to structure:

I started in my current series... doing sermon outlines, with fill in the blank... it has made me be more precise with my points in my outline, because I know that they're looking on the page so I have to say it more concisely, simply... I don't try to preach in a way that I'm being driven by this outline out there, but my knowledge of it makes me much more pointed and clear. I was kind of amazed at the kind of discipline it's created in me. ...it just makes you tighten the sermon...to make it more explicit. Now I haven't really seen how children have been using that. I haven't really discerned that, but I certainly have seen how it's reshaped my exactness a little bit, my care with which I present something.

Creating better structure enables the preacher to also be clearer and simpler.

Another preacher agreed:

...a clear structure to the sermon is extraordinarily helpful and important. I mean it gives pegs for people to put things on. ...It keeps me from rambling or following rabbit trails where people say, 'I have no idea where this is going.' That's a way that you can communicate more complex ideas in a way where people are more likely to grasp them. It certainly helps people if they're jotting down notes.

Improving sermon structure by using outlines or announcing changes in the direction of one's preaching enables the listeners to understand and comprehend more easily. It also creates discipline for the preacher to stay on track with the particular idea or thought of a point or sermon.

There were two other changes helpful for consideration. One preacher changed the way that he engaged the congregation based upon body language feedback during the sermon and awareness of feedback from other times of ministry. "If I'm not watching the people as I should, I can't read where they're at. ...I try and be more engaged with the

people, by observing the people rather than being so tied to my notes.” Immediate feedback is useful for the preacher to consider how people comprehend a message and allows for a change if they do not comprehend the message.

Another preacher explained, and many others realized, that to comprehend a concept, a preacher would do well to incorporate a greater amount of application. “If there’s one fault in my own preaching, and I’d say in many people’s preaching, is that it doesn’t spend enough time on application.” Another indicated that he also made a change regarding application saying, “I make it a practice typically to apply as I go along, so if I’m making point... I’ll be making applications as I’m going along. A part of that is to keep the sermon from just being kind of one proposition after another after another after another. But to be taking these truths that we’re seeing coming out of the text, that we’re seeing it in other portions of the word of God, and then hopefully using illustrations where those are helpful.” The interviewees generally acknowledged that by getting to know individuals, and the congregation as a whole, better helped them to develop more specific and therefore clearer applications and illustrations.

Accounting for Commonalities among Listeners

The interviewees were also asked to comment with regard to what people in their worship services have in common. The first set of the comments explored those commonalities and are followed by comments that account for those commonalities.

Sin, being created in the image of God, and basic human need were the primary observations regarding commonalities.

Sin

The most evident commonality was that everyone is a sinner. “All of us are sinful, and we all are blind; we don’t see it. We see the brokenness in others, and we don’t see the brokenness in ourselves. We see how wrong the other people are, but somehow we are excluded... we and the people who think like us...” Not only is sin common to all, but the interviewees suggested that people must be reminded of their own sin, the magnitude of sin and its consequences, and its solution. “Everyone has in common the need to say that we’re sinners before God. Even as Christians, we still have the capacity to sin. That’s why we need the sanctifying power of the spirit of God and his word in our lives, all the time. We all have that in common, no matter what ethnic background we come from, what culture. I punctuate that all the time.” Others agreed saying, “We’re all sinners; and us people -- sinner, saint -- know that we’re flawed deeply, and not all aware of just how deep that flaw is, and what that does on the eternal realm,” and “what we all have in common... is sin. We all need to be reconciled to God in Christ.” Also, “We all have in common our spiritual need that we’re all sinners, we have in common that we’ve all broken God’s rule, and we all experience the consequences of that. We experience the alienation from God; we experience the consequences in terms of our relationships with others and in terms of seeking to connect with people. I think that we do want to be speaking to highlight their spiritual need.” And lastly, “Their sin they have in common, and they have in common their need for Jesus, their need for Christ; whether they’re five or ninety-five.”

Although sin is common amongst listeners, the response to preaching, with regard to sin, would differ amongst the hearers, but not necessarily according to age or cognitive ability. Rather, it was recognized that responses are more related to spiritual ability.

They are all sinners. Sin has the effects of blinding people, and so, it is to realize that the differing responses that people give to any given sermon are not necessarily those based upon the level of development, educational attainment, whatever. But there are spiritual forces at work while you're preaching, and so sometimes, those who are more simple, in terms of education level, in terms of sheer intellectual ability, often are capable to grasp truths that those who are more educated and have greater intellectual aren't able to grasp because there are things that are spiritually grasped, ... it's that sense that's at work here among all these people. [It's] the blinding work of sin, but it's also the reality of the Holy Spirit at work, illuminating hearts and minds and so all of those who truly belong to God are those who the Holy Spirit himself is at work in; and that's the most important factor in our preaching, that God is at work here, and he's going to bring his word to bear. So these spiritual categories again are things that cut across every age, every stage, every level of development. The most important thing that we can say about anybody is: are they in Christ, or are they not? If they are, then the Holy Spirit is at work in them, illuminating his word, and they're going to grasp some things at some level.

“You're preaching to sinners. And the fact that you're preaching to sinners means that truth is going to be applicable to all of them. How they respond to the truth is in some ways out of your hands. That's in the hands of the Holy Spirit whether the truth convicts them.”

Made in the Image of God

There was also recognition that everyone is made in the image of God. In contrast to sin, which would hinder one's ability to comprehend, this commonality contributed more to one's ability to hear and understand the preacher. For instance, “by virtue of being made in the image of God, there is the ability to hear and understand. Of course that's at different levels, but it's there.” Also, “All people are made in the image of God... for fellowship with God. So, God has hardwired us to experience him and to know him, and he has made us in such a way we're distinct from all other creatures that he has made, and that we are made to know and to enjoy the living God; and so I think knowing that the people to whom I'm preaching are capable, in that sense.” In agreement,

another said, “The fact that we’re made in the image of God; from being conceived in the womb to age 100, everyone is made in the image of God, so we all have minds, and emotions and feelings and a heart and a will and affections. And so you’re preaching with all those things in mind, we’re not just giving a lecture, but you’re preaching to engage the head and the heart and praying that the Holy Spirit does it. As we preach we’re called to be faithful, but only the Holy Spirit can work in someone’s heart...”

Ordinary Human Need

In addition to the need to address sin in the listener, the interviewees showed that preaching addresses another commonality of ordinary human need. “Hey, we’re just ordinary people, with the same common needs, as far as spiritual things go, and even as far as physical needs go.” Also, “Just human things: a desire to be loved, to be appreciated... tendency to gossip and be unloving. The need for Christ, need for salvation... Love of a good time, the terrible hurts of life, just very human experiences are all over.”

As is evident, many of the common human needs are spiritual beyond the need for a solution to sin. “Human experience is common. We all have that God-shaped vacuum that leaves us unfilled until God fills it with his grace through Christ. Five or ninety-five, rare is the person that does not have a sense that there is something out there that must be laid hold of by faith. Faith comes fairly easy to a child.” Whether young or old, there is a need that is addressed in the preaching of God’s word. Typically, the people that are there, as adults, are there because they want to be there and ought to have an expectation that they will hear preaching. “...when you come to adults, the commonality is that they are there and there is a desire, obviously stronger in some and less in others to hear what

the word of God actually says. There's also a commonality of a desire to worship God, although sometimes people don't understand what it means to worship God. By that I mean they would see the sermon as being the most important area, and they would look to the sermon to be an entertainment rather than a lesson." Some who attend will have a skewed idea of what preaching ought to be, but if they are believers in Jesus Christ, the preacher can address them as such and provide for the varying levels of comprehension; at least to some degree.

Another commonality: "Their need, if they're believers, for sanctification, their need to grow more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ; and I'll address children, I'll address parents, I'll address single people, I'll address elderly people, because at different stages of life they're dealing with different struggles; and we all have fears so, that's one thing in common, the fears that we have." Whether commonalities or differences are considered by the preacher, the preacher must understand that "people want to connect with something that is bigger and outside themselves and they don't know how to do it outside of Christ and outside of divine revelation, grace, and so the divine light is at work, you know the beam of light shining upon our soul from God. I think we all have minds that have ability to grasp ideas, but only the light of God's Spirit can make those ideas personal and real to us."

A final commonality that must be recognized is that a particular church has its own character, culture, and heritage. "First of all, many of them are from a similar heritage. They have a similar history, families are interconnected. In a smaller community, there are certain attributes that you do not find in a suburban or urban setting. You would find them, but not as formed." In agreement, another said, "Common

issues as well as common events; ...churches that have been going for any length of time, there is an affection in the assembly and a common bond.”

Recognizing commonalities ought to help the preacher preach. Therefore, the interviewees explained how commonalities effected their preaching.

Preaching to Commonalities

What people have in common was not a great obstacle for the interviewees. The thrust of many answers was that preachers ought to get to know their people and preach to them according to what is known about them; and then, just as before, use simple and clear explanation, illustration, and application. “As you’re preaching, if you’re highlighting Christ, you’re going to be as the answer to that spiritual need, you’re going to be connecting with something that is common across a variety of generations.”

Another went on to say, “I... make sure I bring their experience into this preaching exercise, and that I do so in a way that’s faithful to the text. Again, with the head and the heart engaged, both. And part of that is, I try to meet with people. A big part of how you preach to the age groups is you know your flock.”

Intergenerational Expository Christ-centered Preaching

After considering all the differences and commonalities and their effects upon their preaching, the interviewees were asked how they intentionally preach in intergenerational worship.

Our job description is the ministry of word and prayer. That’s all the Bible gives us. We would say the sacraments and the ordinances of the church, because this is the word visualized. So, word, sacrament, and prayer, this is what we do, and that’s where our focus needs to be. And what is preaching? It is opening the text to set forth Christ, showing the people what the scriptures teach concerning the Lord Jesus from the Bible; I would no more deny expository preaching than I would the doctrine of the Trinity. I believe that is so, I believe expository preaching is so very important to the life and health of the church as a whole way

doing things, not that there might be topics addressed from time to time, but as a whole. So I'm committed to it, I believe it is important, it teaches people how to read the Bible because this is the way God gave it to us. People become more confident in the scriptures as they sit under an extended period of time of expository preaching. It's something that you cannot expect: to transform a church in three years with expository preaching. It is not designed for the short run. It is designed for the long run, both in building a church and in nurturing an individual heart.

This sentiment summarizes the views of all the interviewees regarding the importance of expository preaching. Furthermore, the act of preaching may need to be taught to some of the people who will come to hear it, for instance, "There are things that are lost if you change this act of oral communication that's preaching. Preaching is what the Lord has ordained and is the means for the up-building of his people. Part of it is teaching your people the importance of preaching. At points you have to realize, 'Okay, people might need to be led along more gradually.'"

Most emphasized their trust in the Holy Spirit as necessary to preach generally, and also to preach inter-generationally. "I do think about kids, but there's probably a certain sense where I recognize that... you do the best you can and let the Holy Spirit do what he comes to do, and he makes up for an awful lot of lack, and both in the young and old alike." Another preacher said, "The emphasis on the body of Christ is vital. I don't want to make too much of the difference between the age groups, because I'll only be dismantling the body. I want to recognize that there are different age groups out there." He went on to say, "I have to understand that the person of the Holy Spirit can and does bridge those gaps, brings us together." A bit earlier in the interview the same preacher recognized that "I will craft a sermon and prayerfully, word-fully craft a sermon, and present it to the congregation, defining words here and there, but trusting God, who created us, in any case by the power of the Holy Spirit to bring the message home. There

is a hidden harvest out there, and the Bible doesn't say, as many worldlings do, 'Oh you have to be a certain age to hear this.' That's baloney."

The attitude of the preacher also impacts the preaching, and the preacher must take seriously the preaching of God's word. According to one interviewee, "If you really fear God, and you know the scripture is the only real source of truth... If you have a real sense that you have been given the duty to both grasp what that truth is and prepare it in such a way as to feed people, it does become your life. Therefore you will be heavily impacted if you sense you're not doing it well or people are complaining you're not doing it well or if you feel you're not being effective." Preaching for these preachers was for the sake of God and for the sake of people, and they considered both; for instance, "I want to realize that by the grace of God I keep my ears open to what people are saying, interact with the various age groups somehow, some way, pray about it."

When considering the people to whom they preach, the interviewees' emphasis was to strive to reach both the intellect and the soul, or heart, of their people. All would agree that it is God's work to make it happen, but they also agreed that they must put forth the effort as best they are able. Therefore:

We preach the text to the head and the heart by proclaiming Christ to all nations and to all peoples from a basis of preaching the whole counsel of God, to God's people. So it involves the head and the heart, it involves Christ, it involves the entirety of the historical and biblical and redemptive narrative, and it involves knowing the hearts of your people, the struggles of the sheep and the delights of the flock as they're living at this particular time. ... it involves bringing out the glories of the text and illustrating it, and applying it, and pointing everyone to Jesus, because again, our sin is the same, our need for grace is the same, and so we need to be able to unpack that faithfully to the five-year-old, to the university graduate and to the man on his deathbed in his eighties.

When the preachers specifically considered children in their preaching they all felt that it was important for all children to be present. For example, when asked, "Do you

think a two-year-old can benefit from being in a worship service during the sermon?” one respondent said, “Yes, and I’ll tell you why. ...I think that as the preacher preaches, and the child squirms, the parent attends to the child, afterward (and I have more than one family who does this), they take their kids and on their way home they talk about what Jesus said through the sermon, and they’ll highlight it. So what we have here is a partnership between preacher and parents.”

When they specifically considered the elderly, most recognized the importance of considering that their cognitive and physical abilities may be on the decline, but that they also should be considered for their wisdom.

If it’s an elderly person that has a mind that is still relatively sharp, you want to listen to them, in terms of how they’re hearing what you’re saying especially because they’ve lived life, I haven’t, I’ve lived thirty-five years, they’ve lived ninety years. And as you listen to them, we have a lot we can learn from them about life, about living the Christian life, about raising kids, about catechizing, about evangelism, about missions, about the word of God in our homes on a daily basis, and so I’m listening to them to hear: is this clear? Does this resonate with what you’ve experienced as a Christian? And how in your maturity as a Christian of ninety years can you help to teach me how better to explain this text? How better to apply this to your experience, to your heart? I even ask some of those questions at times.

When asked how comments from the elderly changed his preaching, he replied, “I would say, you would make me more forthright, it would make me more urgent, it would make me more compassionate, it would make me, hopefully, less of a Pharisee, It would make me preach towards a view towards eternity more faithfully, as well as living as a Christian today, but it would focus me on our citizenship being in heaven, it would focus me on helping people... Living well and dying well.”

However, all the interviewees had the whole congregation in mind when they considered their preaching. Each thought that much of their preaching can be understood

at various levels of comprehension. “I found that grounding [what I preach] in one particular passage helps people across a wide range of ages because they know exactly where you are.” Expository preaching, by design, grounds itself in a particular passage and lends itself to intergenerational preaching. Therefore, a consensus would agree to preach the gospel simply to all the people:

Like Lloyd Jones says, when you’re preaching to a young child, middle-aged, a graduate of Oxford, we are all ordinary common human clay, and miserable sinners like everyone else. And the gospel is for all peoples, and so we do apply it specifically to different age groups, but despite someone’s intellectual or social background, we’re preaching the same gospel. I would say we’re preaching to people who are together born in sin, together need to be reconciled to God in Christ, and the best way to preach to the different ages well is to know your sheep, because then you’re actually knowing exactly what these people are like, how they spend their time, what’s on their mind, what are their hearts dealing with, what sins are they struggling with, what trials are they dealing with, what sufferings are they going through.

Although most agreed that each preacher is allowed personal style, each would acknowledge a basic practical concern to be clear and simple for everybody’s sake, for instance, “In terms of language, it’s important to keep language clear and crisp. I use a lot of simple sentences. I don’t use many complex sentences. I’m moving from one thing to the next to the next. It’s important when you’ve got that wide variation of hearers. It is possible to do it in a way that isn’t making people feel like they’re kids. It’s possible to have that simplicity of communication and still hold people across a range.”

Finally, there was general understanding among the interviewees that it was important to consider the needs of specific people to whom they would preach, “When I said you need to exegete the congregation, you need to look and see what are the languages, what are the people’s background, and what are the thinking that have influenced them most of all, and then try and speak in such a way that it actually

communicates to them in that particular circumstance.” Preaching, for these preachers, was about preaching expository sermons that build up the people who will listen, attempting to preach to both mind and heart while trusting God the Holy Spirit to reach the listeners at their level of comprehension. They desired to consider young, old, and those in between but did not let that dominate their preaching. They also desired to listen to the listeners to make sure they were communicating in a way that the message could be received; to be clear and simple, but not condescending.

Things to Avoid in Preaching

There is possibility that preachers can turn listeners into ignorers by doing or saying things that might alienate listeners. Therefore, each interviewee was asked how to avoid alienating listeners.

None of the preachers would avoid a topic that arises in a biblical text, but all would recognize that some items in scripture must be treated with sensitivity, particularly when it comes to young listeners. For example, regarding human sexuality, one interviewee said, “These are normal and good gifts, but there is a delicacy which Christians should observe about them that is not observed in the world today, and just because the world is very explicit doesn’t mean that that’s good.”

All the interviewees would avoid speaking of pastoral or confidential conversations that could in any way embarrass or point to a particular person or group. One preacher would avoid, “Definitely, speaking of people in my illustrations, or anything about people. I wouldn’t ever name people.” Another said,

I’m very careful, not to bring up in the sermon discussions I’ve had with people during the week, particularly things that are confidential. I may hear lots of things talking with people in confidentiality, but the time to preach on it is not the week after you’ve had that conversation, so that people somehow get the idea that if

they share anything with the pastor he's going to think, "I'm going to hear it again in the next sermon." I've known pastors who've done that, and it's always blown up in their face. It's not wise, it's not compassionate, it's not being a shepherd.

Poking fun at anyone but themselves was considered a dangerous pitfall by the majority of the interviewees, as well as criticizing specific age groups or making other generalized criticisms. "I refrain from bagging other churches and belief systems or churches that I know that are in error. I just feel the way to refute error is not by naming the errors, necessarily, but it's by endeavoring to preach truth." Another said, "I have sought to avoid, very strongly, a practice which you find in public and a practice which is quite commonly accepted in everyday conversation, and that is to make and to use generalizations; ...to single out a particular age group and to criticize them, unless it's a criticism that is directly linked to a sinful expression or attitude of life." Furthermore, said one, "I don't want to poke fun at their heritage. I don't want to poke fun at their age. I don't want to laugh at something that is serious to a younger person. I'm not going to bring something up that is unnecessary, that might embarrass them. I want to just preach the text, and apply the text in such a manner that by the grace of God it can bring change to their lives." Offending others with anything other than the gospel message damages the sermon message.

How a preacher handles the lives of others is important, but he must also avoid being an offense in his person. The consensus among the interviewees was that the preacher should avoid being inauthentic by failing to practice what he preaches, by trying to preach like someone else, or by trying to incorporate a personality or generational trait that they simply do not have. For instance:

People really, and whether they're five or fifty year olds, need to see that you are authentic and, in the pulpit, you are exactly the same as you are in everyday life.

Don't be in the pulpit as somebody who keeps expressing principles, but doesn't live them; and who keeps pointing out the ideal but doesn't live it. Always recognize that. In the pulpit, never come across as being holier than thou; always come across as 'I'm a fellow sinner who has struggles that you people who aren't preachers know nothing about, and my sin is a real issue in my life, and I'm trying to deal with it. So, when I point to you there's four fingers pointing back at me. I'm four times more guilty than you are.' That produces a sense of humility and quite often preaching has the criticism that the preacher's a very arrogant person who speaks in the accusatory stance, and I think you need to be very careful in that and remember that when you preach it's not you against the people.

Another added, "I think it's really important to act your age. I have witnessed older guys again trying to be cool, hip, to reach younger people. It's been very obvious to me that not only had they alienated the older group but they also alienate the group they're trying to be cool with because they can't do it very well, and it appears unnatural." Also one preacher gave this related comment, "If you're relating to youth or relating to older people, don't pretend to be something that you're not, but on the other hand, don't be so overly sensitive to not being something that you're not, that you don't make an effort to try to straddle the cultural divide." It is well explained by this preacher who said, "Don't try and copy someone else, sound like someone else, or whatever. Be yourself."

How a preacher speaks can be as important as what a preacher speaks. Therefore, how something is said can prevent alienating listeners. "In the pulpit you want to apply, but you don't want to apply rigidly. You don't want to apply in an overly pharisaic, moralistic type way, and you don't want to make your personality overshadow the text. There's an example of Christ himself, and the gospel being a stumbling block, but we should not be a stumbling block." Another said, "In your preaching you have to encourage people to be more like Christ, rather than pick them to pieces each week with regards to the fault God finds in them." Another said, "You don't want to confuse

people,” and “I avoid politics, I try to avoid being pedantic and heavy, I want to be devotional and hortatory.”

A couple of the interviewees avoid “treating the sermon like a theological lecture. Something like that would very easily alienate those who have either less interest or ability, intellectually, and I think would make it seem as if Christianity [is] only for those who have more interest in books, or those who have attained a certain level. ...Just in terms of seeking to preach so as to be understood, it’s important to realize it’s vital for everybody to be understanding the word of God spoken, it’s not just for some, but it’s for all, no matter who they are or what level they’re at.”

The same interviewee encourages preachers to be “...careful in the use of illustrations, not to use illustrations that would appeal to one generation rather than another...” and, “when you do apply the text, just make sure that you are cutting across all different ages and stages of development, that you are not just consistently, often unintentionally, aiming at just one segment of the congregation.”

Another interviewee said, “The other thing that I would seek to refrain from is to not use complicated words. And look to see what words are falling out of use, complicated words, theological words, I would explain the theological word and then try and use a simpler word, recognizing I’ve explained what that word actually means. And sometimes you can get away with it, you don’t have to use the word ‘omniscient,’ you can use the word ‘all-knowing.’ And it’s adequate to express exactly what you mean.”

One preacher was particularly concerned with the presence of the preacher and other practical concerns. “We need to have an awareness of ourselves in terms of how long we preach. In the end I made a decision that I’d rather have people wishing that I

had spoken for longer than wishing that I had finished five minutes earlier,” and “if you start saying the same thing again and again and again and again and again, people switch off and you find it harder to pick them up again.”

One practical issue is the length of the sermon, but another might be how one looks while he preaches. The same pastor said, “My view is that there is a cultural divide between young and old in terms of the way that people dress. I tend to try to straddle that cultural divide. I ditched the tie but I still dress in a smart way because I know that the older ones appreciate that. ...I think that if people overdress it can come across to younger people as stuffy. They find it harder to hear you because they can perceive you as stuffy.” These practical issues may have an effect upon the congregation as the preacher speaks to the whole group and at least need to be considered.

Lastly, it was important to one preacher to keep personal ministry or pastoral difficulties from infiltrating the sermon. He said:

Avoid being angry with people, you know, bringing your frustrations with the congregation to the pulpit. We're Christ to the people, and these are people whose lives are ruined by sin, we're all ruined by sin, and for a moment we represent the Lord Jesus as a loving and welcoming savior. So there is a kind of character we have to bring to the pulpit that shows the fragrance of the gospel as well as the message of the gospel, and they need to see it in the pastor, and I certainly would caution young ministers to leave their frustrations at home, or with another pastor in their study, or at the prayer table. That can be very ruinous to a call.

In summary, the preacher should avoid practices that keep him from saying what needs to be said, keep him from preaching in a thoughtful and reverent way, and prevent him from having due consideration for the people who are listening, and even consideration for those who are absent. The preacher should avoid inauthenticity and simply be himself. However, he must also think about how he presents his sermon and himself for the sake of God and for the sake of the people.

Feedback on Sermon Comprehension

Since comprehension was a key aspect to the researcher's study, the interviewees were asked to describe feedback that had increased their effectiveness in preaching intergenerationally. The data is grouped by how feedback is obtained and what feedback has affected their preaching.

Obtaining Feedback

How do preachers obtain feedback so they know if listeners comprehend their sermons? Most of the interviewees said that they get profitable feedback from their wives, elders, and both mature and less mature congregation members; as well as through some self-reflection:

First of all, there's your own feedback. After you've preached a sermon you can feel that that was an absolute marvelous, wonderful, and the Apostle Paul would envy you for having preached that amazing sermon, but the people in the congregation might label it as one of your duds. If it appeals to you, don't take that feedback very, very seriously. So, that's the first source of feedback. The second feedback that I would say that you really need to take note of is what your wife says. If your wife, who loves you, is committed to you, believes in you, supports you in your ministry, has something to say negatively about your preaching, then really work hard on trying to change whatever you're doing that she is saying is not really in line with that. And then the third area is deliberately court from your elders their critique with regards to your sermon.

A few interviewees said that they got feedback from staff or elders. For instance, "I had a meeting with my staff, and it always started with feedback on the sermon, and they weren't paid to give good feedback. I really wanted to hear what parts worked, what parts didn't work or didn't communicate well." Although all the interviewees received feedback from their congregation, they did so with caution. "Be very, very cautious about the feedback you get from the congregation unless it comes from somebody who is a mature thinking believer." This preacher wanted to give a warning to be very careful

about taking casual comments about one's preaching as valuable feedback. Instead seek and accept feedback from those who are sincere and truthful with what they say rather than merely being cordial.

The following comments describe an effective feedback loop: "I sometimes review the sermon with them [his children; 7 and 8], often on a Sunday evening we'll review a sermon together. It gives me a sense of whether I am connecting with them and that they often, not always, but often have gotten the main points at least, or at least gotten the first point. You know how children's attention wanes; they often will have gotten the first point." A preacher can gain valuable input from children who are willing to share their thoughts about one's preaching.

Feedback comes from the wide range of people in the church and several interviewees indicated they would have "...pastoral interaction with your people, and you're going to, Lord willing, get some sense of whether you're being understood or not." Another said, "...when I do pastoral visitation, not directly but indirectly, I try and pick up what they are taking in with regards to the sermon." Similarly another said, "in terms of the elderly, it's just visitation, asking questions, getting feedback, giving the opportunity for them to talk about the sermon, to talk about other things they are reading in the word of God." And a final approach, "I listen. I listen to what people are saying. I watch people's conversations. Not necessarily right after church, although that's of interest to me, but I watch their conversation of life, and their demeanor, and afterwards ... it's not just the response you get audibly from someone who shakes your hand and says they like your sermon. I gather response from how I see the ministry of the word affecting people's lives. That often comes not just from one sermon, but from the whole

emphasis on scripture... on expository, Christ-centered type of preaching.” This preacher emphasized being aware of the people in his care and how they react to the ministry of the word and the pastoral ministry. Thus, a conscious awareness of feedback from the entirety of his ministry can increase the effectiveness of his preaching ministry.

Helpful Feedback Obtained

The interviewees received feedback from many sources, and they found the following feedback helpful to their preaching ministry. To begin receiving feedback, the preacher needs to begin with himself and have a readiness to receive feedback. To receive feedback “...means we need to have a heart of humility to take the criticism in a way that ultimately will be helpful, to see the grain of truth in it.” The preachers interviewed seemed to be willing to take critical feedback and use it for their good, looking for the truth in what people were saying.

Most of the feedback that the preachers received came from others and not mere self-reflection. Therefore, the interviewees shared what others have said or done in response to their preaching, and in some cases explained the differences the feedback has made in their preaching. “I’ve had people say both that I preach too simply and others that I’m too complex. ...I really try to learn from people when they say those things.” Even contradictory feedback can be helpful, and the preacher can learn from such feedback. It may be that both comments are valid and refer to multiple and different moments in preaching, encouraging the preacher to thoughtfully consider how he preaches and probe the reasons for such criticisms. Similarly, another interviewee said, “I would say that generally, that if I get criticisms ‘it’s too up here, it’s too intellectual, too academic in delivery’ than anything else. ...I get that it has to be simple enough for

people to understand. Jesus' method of communication was very simple, memorable, and transferrable, but not everything in the Bible is simple."

Some helpful feedback has come from children. Many times what children say or show gives helpful insight into those things that they are able to comprehend. For instance, "...several times the children have come up to me after the service, and they've drawn a picture of something I said in the sermon. And normally it's been an illustration, but thankfully, the times they've done it, it's been an illustration that's captured the essence of the sermon." Another preacher also found children's feedback in pictures helpful, "...periodically I began to ask the kids, not every week, but to draw a picture of the main point for me, show it to their parents, and show it to me. And I found when I started doing those kind of things, I found the young people would listen more." Children are able to help the preacher understand how to preach for their sake and the interviewees give respect to children for their feedback and listen to them, "we should never underestimate how much they actually take in."

Older folks have helpful feedback too. When one preacher freed himself up from looking at his notes, an older woman said, "you're talking to us, not at us." He also found that she observed other helpful changes, for instance, "... slowing my voice down, and having some longer pauses than I would do, to let things sink in. She was really appreciative, as an older person, I guess." Another said, "they tell me to speak up, they say 'don't be afraid to speak out loud we need that.' ... they want to hear more." A preacher must consider several practical concepts merely in order for people to hear the spoken word, "I have been told by some of the more elderly that I speak too fast, so that has been helpful feedback."

Changes Made Due to Feedback

Much feedback bridged the varying levels of comprehension and age groups.

...so what I would do is incorporate more illustrative, basic material so even the youngest would understand. ...As the, and this is important to me, as the age demographic changes within the church I think how I define, when I define, what I define, and how I illustrate will alter. That's the key to me. ...How I illustrate, how much of illustration will vary. For instance, if I'm dealing with an older group, I will illustrate, I will use illustrations from the Bible, and I will use common illustrations that they might be familiar with, for instance agricultural illustrations. With young people I will use illustrations from the Bible, illustrations from their life, not so much agriculture, but the life that they're looking at out there. I will, I will seek to pull in illustrations from there.

The same preacher said, "What I do is I average," meaning, he averages the illustrations so that illustrations vary to reach all age groups. "I'm pushing for body, the body of Christ." By doing this, he was encouraging the younger and the older people to interact with each other by having the ones to whom the illustration was more applicable, explain the illustration that he used in his sermon to those in the other age group who may not have understood. "I'll try to hit each age group. Each... has something that is on their minds, and I know it's there and I can use it because I interact with them, and then I'll push them toward each other. That's what I'll do. So, using my law of average, I'm just going to spread it out." Another changed his approach from feedback he received, saying:

One of my techniques in trying to reach a number of different people is to use illustrations and applications that apply to a wide variety of different ages. I don't regularly use those sorts of illustrations or applications in relation to one particular group, but I will on occasion do so. Yes, I will sometimes make applications to Facebook or to the internet or to things like that. I don't do it exclusively because I don't want to alienate others who don't use them, but when I do, the teenagers go, "all right, I appreciated that." Yes, that was one bit of feedback that I received.

Feedback reveals whether or not congregations comprehend the sermon, and the preacher can take seriously what others are saying for the sake of the souls that need to hear the preached word. One preacher put it this way:

I remember a woman in our church some years ago whose grandkids were going here. She's concerned about their salvation and so forth, and she was hearing things through their ears in a sense, you know, she was hearing as she expected they might be hearing. So every word she didn't understand she thought they wouldn't understand, that's a kind of feedback that you get that you realize that there's a soul out there that is concerned about her grandkids that might be hearing the scriptures and how they're hearing it. ...you become more cognizant of the language that you are using...

Therefore what another preacher observed is particularly helpful, "I overwhelmed people with too much information. ... I have received more criticism for my preaching when I have been too conceptual and not concrete enough. That's not specific to any one particular age group."

All the interviewees understood that feedback must be applied, and the accumulation of feedback moves a preacher to improve for the sake of the people listening. "It's important that pastors are closer to their people to hear the things that people are talking about. It's not that a child raises a question, and it becomes the topic of the sermon next time. But, if you hear a comment two or three or four times or repeatedly over the years that certainly begins to shape the way, what you emphasize, because you know people are asking that." To gain helpful feedback, the preacher will interact with the people listening and take in what they are saying to improve his preaching for the sake of the congregation.

Summary of Interview Data

The data revealed that the interviewees want to preach sermons that please God by explaining the meaning of a particular scripture text and applying it according to the meaning of that text. Also, the preachers desired to keep Jesus Christ, his person, work, and message, central to their preaching. The data also shows they have a secondary goal: to account for differences and similarities in their congregations while maintaining expository preaching and Christ-centeredness. They think those goals fulfill their desire to preach Christ-centered, expository sermons to multigenerational congregations in a single intergenerational worship service.

All the interviewees understood, theoretically, the variety of cognitive abilities amongst their people. However, they considered differences and similarities observed in pastoral interaction to have greater affect upon their preaching than cognitive differences or similarities. In order to preach to people despite their differences, the preachers determined that sermon explanation, illustration, and application should be expressed in simple ideas and commonly understandable words. It is especially important to them to make sure illustrations were easy to understand and were helpful to illustrate the explanation or application or both. Differences amongst the congregation are addressed most often in the preacher's applications. All the interviewees mentioned some pitfalls to avoid. The researcher concluded that avoiding pitfalls was best accomplished by being authentic, sticking to the text, making sure one doesn't embarrass others, and avoiding language or explanation that is too graphic for sensitive ears. Lastly, the interviewees thought it was important to receive feedback from multiple sources. They also indicated that they use feedback thoughtfully and carefully in order to improve their preaching.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to examine how preachers in intergenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations without sacrificing the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching. In chapter two, I reviewed literature and established a biblical framework to bring light to this study. Following that, I reviewed appropriate literature intended to help preachers overcome the difficulty that may be present in preaching to multiple generations in an intergenerational worship service. The foci of the literature review was to help the preacher understand how people grow to listen and comprehend through the stages of life, give insight into the dynamics of multigenerational churches and evaluate their intergenerational focus, and explain how to take into consideration listening comprehension in the intergenerational setting.

In chapter four, I summarized and analyzed the data obtained through interviews with ten preachers to investigate how preachers understand commonalities and differences in the understanding and comprehension of the various age groups attending the preaching of sermons and how they preach to all in the intergenerational worship service. I also sought to receive from the interviewees an analysis of how they received feedback and applied it to their preaching. I asked them to give advice explaining pitfalls or things to avoid while preaching in order to best avoid alienating any in the congregation. The interviews and analyses endeavor to aid the preacher in preaching a sermon in an intergenerational worship service.

Summary of the Study

This study provided insight into how preachers in intergenerational worship services preach intentionally to all generations without sacrificing the essentials of expository Christ-centered preaching. Both the literature and the ten one-on-one interviews reveal the need to consider the various developmental learning capabilities of people as they age.. The interviews revealed that developmental learning capabilities may not be the preacher's overarching concern when preaching to multiple generations of people. Although it is of some consideration, both the literature and the field work reveal that faithfulness to the preaching task and the Biblical passage being preached are more central to how preachers preach to multigenerational congregations.

Discussion of Findings

“If you come to hear the word of God, you will be blessed by Him; if you come to hear, if you sense you need it, if it must become like food to you, have an appetite for it, you will tend to be blessed by it; you will retain, and your thinking process actually becomes more attuned, too ... It's the same with children.” -- Anonymous

In this section, I will review and interact with both the literature and the interview research to identify what I found necessary considerations in preparing to preach in an intergenerational worship service. For the structure of this discussion, I will supply answers to the stated research questions according to the results of the literature and interview data. The research questions that guided the entirety of the research are: 1. In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account differences and commonalities due to developmental cognitive listening ability? 2. In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account for the dynamics found within multigenerational churches? 3. What do

expository preachers avoid when they preach in intergenerational worship services? 4.

How do expository preachers know that their sermons are reaching the multiple generations present in their intergenerational worship services?

Due to the similar content of the research results for research questions 1 and 2, the discussion of the data relating to research questions 1 and 2 will be addressed jointly. Research questions 3 and 4 will then be discussed separately.

Developmental Cognitive Listening Ability and Multigenerational Dynamics

In this segment, I discuss the conclusions reached for the following research questions: “In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account differences and commonalities due to developmental cognitive listening ability?” and “In an intergenerational worship service, how do expository preachers preach in order to account for the dynamics found within multigenerational churches?”

To begin the research, I set out to establish a biblical framework for intergenerational worship and preaching. I found in the biblical framework that God has called upon the whole church, infants, young children, middle-aged, and old, to participate together in worship that is centered on the preached word of God. The church is designed by God to be inherently intergenerational and therefore should be intergenerational in practice, particularly in the God-ordained public gatherings like worship. To neglect this in the particular church is contrary to God’s plan for the unity of the body of Christ and fosters the disintegration of the church.

According to the interview data and the literature reviewed in chapter two titled, “How People Listen and Comprehend as They Develop Through the Stages of Life,” I discovered that for the sake those who desire to preach and consider everyone in an intergenerational worship service, the preacher must account for the multiple aspects of age-related developmental cognitive listening ability and consider the dynamics found within their multigenerational churches.

Developmental Cognitive Listening Ability

Preachers must consider everyone and their abilities to grasp the meaning and significance of a sermon message and their willingness to receive it. Therefore, I have drawn conclusions indicating what preachers can do to help others comprehend what is said. John Stott says, “In a world which seems either unwilling or unable to listen, how can we be persuaded to go on preaching, and learn to do so effectively?”²⁴²

The results discovered in reviewing the biblical framework and the literature in “How People Listen and Comprehend as They Develop Through the Stages of Life” reveal that God has created people to listen with comprehension but that everyone listens and comprehends differently in relation to their stage of cognitive development. Children in their developing years are meant to join with adults who have matured in their abilities in order to exhibit the inherently intergenerational church. Each will hear and comprehend according to their own capabilities at their particular stage in life and maturity. God has given preachers the authority under his power to preach to all of them. Therefore, preachers should endeavor to gain fundamental understanding of how people

²⁴² John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1982), 92.

listen at the various developmental stages of life, and how their capacity for comprehension increases. By doing this, preachers will help themselves to effectively communicate their sermons to their congregations.

Some people argue, however, that it is impossible for young and old to learn together in worship when they are so different since the very young will not comprehend what the preacher says in such a setting. Although people listen and comprehend differently according to their developmental stage of life, the literature review and the interview data show it is not unreasonable to expect them all to listen to the same sermon message. Therefore I offer the conclusions below.

The literature review shows that beginning about the age of two years, children begin to be capable of understanding the spoken word, comprehending meaning, making some sense of it. They are more aware of the spoken word and their understanding and comprehension increases in contexts familiar to them. They comprehend because of context more than the actual words spoken.

From the literature I conclude that for children under the age of about seven years, their listening is subjective, and their understanding is situational. Having consistency of environment and teaching is crucial for young children to help them understand and comprehend what they hear. If they are taken out of their normal context, their ability to comprehend a message is diminished. Although they will try to appear as if they understand what is said, young children will sometimes feign understanding, invent new understanding, or embellish what they thought they heard. It is likely they are not aware of their own invention and embellishment and conclude that their inventions and exaggerations are true. Therefore it is important to realize that young children will

not comprehend everything, but they are able to grasp bits and pieces. The minds of children at this stage of development are based in the moment and circumstances in which they find themselves. When the moment and circumstances change, so does their understanding, even if they heard the same thing as before. Adults, on the other hand, have the ability to understand and comprehend based upon the conversation itself. The preacher ought to be aware that children's listening skills are generally more developed for the narrative rather than the exposition of facts.

As children reach about the age of seven, they become less subjective listeners and develop into more objective listeners, able to understand a message outside of the context in which they heard it. At this stage, they tend to make efforts to grow and develop their ability to listen and comprehend. They may still invent and embellish, but they are aware of this and willingly own their inventions and exaggerations. They do not necessarily consider them as truths but are using their creativity. Although this age may not immediately comprehend everything they hear, they are eager to learn and will over time mature in their ability to comprehend the more difficult things. Preachers face the reality that older children, like younger children, comprehend better with the use of narrative than with exposition. However, as they grow into young adults and develop their adult cognitive abilities, they will mature in their ability to understand and comprehend expositional preaching.

Children typically love to learn. To help children, preachers should encourage them to be present in worship. Preachers should understand their level of ability and help them develop their listening and comprehension skills to become excellent listeners of sermons. They need consistency and challenge to grow and mature, since children at

about age seven are readying to develop into productive adults, and hopefully, disciples of the Lord.

The literature reveals that beyond about the age of eleven, individuals gradually develop the ability to analyze and synthesize what they hear. At this point, a person's cognitive ability is at the adult stage, all the tools are present and ready to be developed. However, the use of their adult cognitive listening skills needs to mature. Unlike a child who lacks the ability to grasp expository speech, the young adult is not only capable but is also becoming competent to comprehend the sermon exposition. Preachers should still consider that individuals develop at different rates. For the young adult listener, they are generally willing to listen when they see that it is productive to their lives. Preachers will be helpful to young adults by giving them applications to show them how their message benefits them. At this age and throughout, there is little difference between the cognitive abilities of a twelve-year-old and an elderly adult, except in how far they have developed their abilities to comprehend a spoken message.

The preachers interviewed admitted they were not experts at understanding the differences in listening comprehension between particular age groups and could not offer much insight into that particular science. Therefore, it should be noted that differences in cognitive listening ability did not dominate their considerations for preaching. Nonetheless, they did consider the differences, and some discussed the effects upon their preaching. Despite their lack of scientific expertise, the interviewees do have experience that confirms the theories of the experts in the science of developmental listening comprehension abilities.

A few of the preachers thought that a child's comprehension most likely comes from their regular interactions with parents. Since that is the case, preachers should encourage parents or other trusted adults to discuss sermons with their children. Parents might ask their children questions about the sermons and help them understand what they missed. They could tell stories to illustrate the main points or develop their discussion into a game of questions and answers. Children are better accustomed to visual learning, and pastors could suggest visual aids to help children understand.

Dynamics of Multigenerational Churches

Through the research in the second part of the literature review, "Dynamics of Multigenerational Churches," and the results of the interviews, I have come to the conclusions below regarding the dynamics of the multigenerational church.

The integrity of the universal multigenerational church, as well as each particular church, is maintained by its being intergenerational in all its aspects and particularly in its worship. When the church fails to include all generations in its worship, it is antithetical to the kingdom of God and thus his design for his church. When the church is intergenerational in worship, and by God's grace, difficulties and differences are overcome, the unity of the church blesses the people of every generation.

The people of the church should not see themselves as families or individuals coming together but as one family in the body of Christ -- brothers, sisters, parents, and children, of every genealogical ancestry. Failure to be intergenerational leads to many instances of isolation. Isolation hinders spiritual and cognitive development and thus damages both the isolated minority and the church as a whole. Failure to be intergenerational may make some people see others as non-integral to the church. The

result may be conflict and competition in the church. Even if the consequences are not dire, old and young alike do not develop as they would with greater interaction. Being intergenerational is necessary for all the individuals of the spiritual family to live in the way God intends for his people.

Intergenerational churches offer abundant opportunities to fulfill the human need to both give and receive. The younger people offer their gifts and abilities to the elderly, complementing their strengths and helping them overcome their weaknesses. Older people also have gifts and abilities that complement the younger generations and are able to help them overcome their weaknesses too. Those who are older can nurture and offer them wisdom as vital contributors for the health of the church. Thus, both offer encouragements to the other for their good and can enjoy God's intergenerational design for the church.

The literature revealed that God has designed the church as counter to Western culture, which promotes individualism, nonconformity, and separation. The church must not succumb to cultural pressures to be something other than intergenerational, particularly in worship.

The interview responses indicate that the preachers desire to have intergenerational churches. They recognized that preachers need to understand the differences and commonalities amongst the people in their congregations. They indicated the most effective way to understand the dynamics of their churches was through personal interactions outside of their preaching ministry.

The research focused on generational differences and primarily differences in comprehension according to particular age groupings. However, the interview data also

revealed commonalities among the people in churches: they are sinners, they are created in the image of God, and they have basic human needs. The preachers indicated that they think sin hinders people's response to preaching but not because of age or cognitive ability. Instead, the preachers recognized that responses to preaching are more related to spiritual maturity. On the other hand, the interview responses indicate that being created in the image of God is beneficial to one's ability to hear and to comprehend the preacher.

One final conclusion from the interviews was that preachers should learn each particular church's own character, culture, and heritage; individual contexts affect the preachers' sermons.

Conclusions

People comprehend differently depending upon their cognitive stage of life. Therefore, because the church is intended to be intentionally intergenerational in its worship, preachers must take into account each level of cognitive ability when preaching a sermon. The literature review and interview data lead me to the conclusions below.

To account for children in worship, preachers should be aware of children's developing ability to comprehend sermons. To assist such comprehension, preachers can integrate narrative in their exposition since children remember narrative better than exposition. Preachers must note that even very young children are capable of grasping basic themes and ideas. Therefore, the preacher can enlist parents and other adults to help children under about age seven get the gist of the sermon messages. Children are primarily visual learners and can be assisted by visual aids to build upon what they hear.

As preachers consider those with developing cognitive abilities, which begin to develop at about age eleven, they will want to incorporate things that touch on the young teenage adult's desire for a relationship with God. Preachers can explain how that

relationship is gained and maintained by God and developed through personal discipline. The preacher, through the exposition of scripture, is able to show teenagers God's power to foster good relationships and draw them near to God who is personal and does care.

Preachers will also need to consider those who are college age and older, whose cognitive abilities are reaching maturity. Preachers should be sensitive to their generational tendencies toward a situational view of faith. Therefore preachers will want to encourage them to keep the one true faith handed down through the centuries. They must preach the biblical faith, and at the same time, remember that these young adults are being bombarded with multiple worldviews. The sermon is the means God has given the preacher to shape individual hearts with the one faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore preachers will need to guide young adults into that faith through their sermon message.

Preachers must account for those middle-aged and older whose cognitive abilities have been tested for years. They will typically desire the deeper things of God's word and a stronger desire to be intergenerational. The preacher should bring depth of exposition to these adults, give them an understanding of the mystery and unity of God, and therefore feed their more mature thoughts and feelings. The preacher can encourage these older adults to take their desire for being intergenerational and have them show those who are younger how they might grow in their faith, show them the relational aspects of God, and help them to mature in their comprehension by challenging them to appreciate the depth they will find in expository, Christ-centered preaching.

From my analysis of the third section of literature "How to Preach Christ-centered Sermons" and taking into account the intergenerational nature of the church, I conclude the preacher must keep God's word and manifest Christ Jesus. The substance of a

message should not change according to audience and circumstance; the most intergenerational resource we have for our preaching is the Bible.

Preachers must also preach with these purposes: to glorify God, to elicit belief from the hearers, and to enable and motivate them to respond. To fulfill these purposes, preachers should proclaim God's word in dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit. They should call upon people to believe and respond as God demands. They should expect God will intervene to overcome the developmental and intergenerational differences in the congregation and apply the preached word to those who, by the grace of God, have ears to hear. The interview data and the literature review show that preachers should preach messages that are both Christ-centered and expository.

The literature review suggests and the interview data confirms that preachers should give consideration to cognitive listening capabilities and dynamics in their multigenerational churches, as they preach Christ-centered, expository sermons. In light of these truths, the literature review and the interview data lead to the conclusion that the preacher should be a man called and driven by God to preach for God's glory. He must be dependent upon the power of God to proclaim what the mind of the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Bible. He must call people to believe the clear and complete message of the Bible by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. He should expect divine intervention from the Holy Spirit to illuminate the message to the listeners so that by the strength given them by God they are enabled and motivated to respond as God calls.

The interview responses were especially helpful in providing more specific conclusions about the intergenerational preaching event. Therefore, preaching Christ-centered expository sermons should proclaim a message that builds up the people who

will listen and attempt to reach both mind and heart while trusting God the Holy Spirit to affect the listeners at their developmental level of comprehension. Preachers should desire to consider young, old, and those in between, but this desire should not dominate one's preaching. They must practice listening to listeners to make sure sermons are communicated in ways that hearers with varying abilities for comprehension receive the message, and therefore the preacher should be clear and simple in his preaching but not condescending.

The preponderance of evidence from the interview responses is that preaching, for the sake of the listeners, should have clear and simple explanation, illustration, and application. A preacher should make the effort to address those who are less developed in their listening comprehension and also give depth of explanation to challenge those who have matured in their ability and knowledge. Illustrations are especially helpful for the preacher to connect with nonlinear thinkers. However, the preacher should consider varying illustrations from week to week in order to account for the various intergenerational aspects and learning styles of the people in the congregation. The same principle should be used for applications. A preacher may vary both illustration and application by sometimes aiming at specific age groups, by sharing personal interactions that happen within the church, as long as the preacher doesn't speak of confidential or embarrassing things, or by speaking about local community and congregational circumstances or events. When a preacher gives illustrations or applications to a specific age group or another group, he may encourage intergenerational interaction outside of worship between those to whom the illustration or application was intended and those who may not have understood.

The preachers also described changes they have made to improve their preaching over the years. They altered their preaching to be more clear, simple, and structured. Therefore, I conclude that clarity and simplicity are particularly important, especially when addressing children in the congregation. They may not comprehend everything, but they can comprehend some things. Being clear, simple without being simplistic or condescending, and structured is beneficial to the more mature listener as well. To preach a clear and simple message, a preacher should have good structure, enabling the listener to better comprehend. It is also an important for preachers to get to know the people in their congregation outside of the preaching ministry, enabling the preacher to be more clear and simple in his particular context. Lastly, the interview responses indicated the preacher should preach to both the minds and hearts of the people.

Things to Avoid in Preaching

Both the literature research and interview responses indicate that pride in the pulpit can prevent people from seeing the presence of Christ, just as humility can promote it. Pride exhibits itself when a preacher thinks he is capable of preaching without God's help. It also appears when a preacher makes himself the focus of the message rather than keeping to the Bible's authorial intent, or when he is inauthentic in appearance, demeanor, or attitude. Humility recognizes Christian preaching is only by the power of God, and its results depend solely upon him. A preacher must communicate the Lord more than he communicates himself and avoid a prideful attitude and demeanor.

A preacher should avoid speaking about pastoral or confidential conversations that could in any way embarrass a particular person or group. A preacher should not poke

fun at anyone nor should they make generalized criticisms of specific age groups or other segments of people.

The preachers concluded that a preacher should avoid being inauthentic by failing to practice what he preaches, by trying to preach like someone else, or by trying to incorporate a personality or generational trait they simply do not have.

The interview responses indicated clearly that the whole Bible text is to be used for preaching and that a preacher should not avoid a difficult or sensitive topic that arises in a biblical text. But a preacher should also recognize that some items in scripture must be treated with his own godly discernment, care, and sensitivity, particularly when a biblical text addresses something that is too mature for young listeners or is beyond their developmental comprehension.

To summarize, a preacher should avoid practices that keep him from saying what needs to be said, keep him from preaching in a thoughtful and reverent way, and that prevent him from having due consideration for the people who are listening and those who may not be present. The preacher should simply be himself. However, he must also think about how he presents his sermon and himself for the sake of God and for the sake of the people.

Receiving and Applying Feedback for Preaching

The interview responses indicate preachers receive profitable feedback from their wives, elders, and both mature and less mature congregation members, as well as through some self-reflection. The preacher should begin with self-evaluation and have a readiness to receive feedback, knowing that one who is willing to take critical feedback, use it for his good, and look for the truth in what people say will preach more effectively. Even

contradictory feedback is helpful, and the preacher can learn from such feedback. It is possible that contradictory comments are valid and likely refer to multiple and different moments in preaching. The preacher should probe the reasons for such criticisms and seek what may be true in others' comments, even if some comments are unwarranted.

In order to preach more effectively in intergenerational worship, the preacher should accept feedback from people of every age group. Some helpful feedback comes from children, and what children say or show in pictures can give insight into those things that they are able to comprehend. Feedback from the preacher's spouse and from the elders is particularly valuable, but the preacher should not neglect feedback from both mature and less mature listeners. Feedback enables the preacher to understand ways to adapt his preaching in order to unify those who differ according to comprehension and age. Not all feedback is useful and the preacher should consider the source and content of feedback with caution and discernment.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the literature and interview responses revealed that preachers should be cognizant of differences in listening comprehension between those at differing developmental stages of life. There are significant differences between young children under about age seven, children from around seven to eleven, teenagers who have the adult tools for mature listening comprehension, and the more mature adult listeners. Also, preachers should understand that failure to be intergenerational is a negative dynamic in multigenerational churches. Being intergenerational is how God designed multigenerational churches to operate, even if that is counter to the surrounding culture. Being intergenerational and counter-cultural must be considered by preachers to preach

effectively, but ultimately the preacher must preach faithfully clear, simple, Christ-centered, expository sermons. To unify the intergenerational congregation, preachers should avoid several preaching pitfalls and be willing and ready to receive feedback from listeners, and particularly those who are mature in their faith, are familiar with Christ-centered, expository sermons, and know the people to whom the preacher preaches.

Recommendations for Practice

In light of the findings described above preachers are well advised to:

1. Grasp the understanding of how people listen and comprehend at every developmental stage of life by:
 - Considering one's own understanding of the different abilities of listeners at various developmental stages of life.
 - Supplementing what can be known by personal interactions with the reading of literature about how people listen and comprehend at every developmental stage of life.
2. Seek to understand the dynamics of their own particular churches by:
 - Having pastoral and social interactions with their congregation. This interaction should help them to know the dynamic differences and commonalities among their people in order to address them more personally.
 - Accounting for the various levels of understanding in a congregation including the recognition of different vocabularies, comprehension abilities, and attention spans.
3. Preach clear and simple Christ-centered expository sermons by:

- Giving understandable structure to a sermon message and informing people of that structure.
 - Explaining, illustrating, and applying the scripture message in simple ideas and understandable words.
 - Keeping to the substance of scripture: God himself revealed in Jesus Christ for the redemption of people.
 - Having solid purposes for preaching and expecting God to use the preaching of His word for the good of people and God's glory.
4. Avoid pitfalls and destructive practices that hinder others' listening and comprehension. Therefore, avoid:
- Being careless with biblical texts or topics that are beyond the cognitive maturity or age maturity of children, and avoid offending adults with graphic language.
 - Using confidential or embarrassing pastoral interactions in sermons.
 - Being inauthentic in the pulpit and in life.
 - Trying to sound intelligent by using difficult to understand words or concepts. Instead, make the difficult things easy to understand.
5. Seek and use faithful feedback from a variety of people including wives, church leaders, congregation members, and children. Prayerfully seek feedback from God. A preacher can accomplish this by:
- Examining his preaching and asking himself if what he said had a structure that were easy to follow, a language and ideas that were

simple, and gave clear understanding of the main points of the sermon.

- Asking others of various ages if the sermon structure was easy to follow and if the language and ideas could be clearly understood.
- Looking for the truth in what others say about his preaching even if he disagrees with certain aspects of their feedback.
- Probing for reasons for particular feedback. If after careful discernment the feedback is valid, resolving to adjust preaching according to such feedback.
- Praying for God's wisdom in receiving and using feedback.

6. Implement intergenerational practices in preaching and in the multiple other ministries within their multigenerational churches by:

- Promoting intergenerational unity as often as is practicable, and particularly in worship.
- Demonstrating personal intergenerational living and ministry focus.
- Encouraging intergenerational interaction to exploit people's desire for relationship with God and others by showing what they have in common and explaining how they are able to help each other.
- Using a variety of explanations, illustrations and applications in preaching that over time are helpful to multiple age groups.

- Seeking to accommodate various learning styles through answering certain learning questions. See page 28 for an introduction to four learning styles.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on preaching to multiple generations in an intergenerational worship service. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the focus can be. The recommendations below come from both the literature and the preachers who were interviewed for this dissertation. The preachers wanted to speak about the first and second recommendations below, and there is a wealth of literature that I discovered in my research that pertains to the third recommendation.

The first recommendation is for research evaluating how to enable and motivate the younger and the older people to interact with each other in order to have them each gain a better understanding of their commonalities and differences and how to reconcile them in order to be truly intergenerational and united as a body of Christ.

The second recommendation is to study cultural differences and how to reconcile them, particularly when two, or more, cultures are commingled in a congregation.

The third recommendation for research is to examine basic or complex differences in learning styles so that the variety of learning styles may be accounted for in both preaching and teaching ministries. This research would also help individual members understand differences among those whom they know and enable them to be more accepting of those who may learn differently than themselves.

The fourth recommendation is to examine preaching from the listener's point of view. This research could include a study of the interaction between cognitive and spiritual development in the listeners.

The fifth recommendation is to examine how covenantal and non-covenantal preachers preach and how their congregations hear a Christ-centered message.

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