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Covenant Theological Seminary

TAKE CARE HOW YOU HELP OTHERS LISTEN
SERMON LISTENING IN AN AGE OF DISTRACTION

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

By
Sebastian Y. Kim

Saint Louis, Missouri

2017

Covenant Theological Seminary

**Take Care How You Help Others Listen
Sermon Listening in an Age of Distraction**

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By

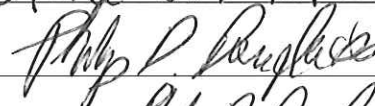
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Abstract

In most congregations, preachers are expected to preach engaging sermons, whereas hearers are expected to be passive during Sunday morning preaching. While there may be numerous challenges to listening to sermons, one of the most pernicious challenges, as confirmed in the literature review, is distraction due to unchecked smartphone usage. In order to hone hearers' listening skills in the smartphone world, it is important to diagnose how hearers engage in sermons. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how adult congregants of a local church engage in the Sunday morning preaching event.

The following research questions guided this study: (1) How do adult congregants describe what their pastor is trying to accomplish during Sunday morning preaching? (2) How do adult congregants describe their engagement in the sermon? (3) How do adult congregants describe how their engagement with the sermon impacts their worship experience? (4) How do adult congregants describe the role of other congregants in their engagement during Sunday morning preaching? The study employed qualitative research methods using semi-structured interviews with fourteen adult congregants who are members of the same congregation in the United States. The data was analyzed using an inductive, constant comparative method.

The findings of this study were that hearers are not interested in hearing the word, especially given their media-saturated culture. Recent research revealed that smartphones and other digital devices can cause neurological and psychological issues such as

addictive stimulations, anxiety, depression, learning disabilities, degradation of empathy, and an unprecedented urge to multitask. Due to these challenges, contemporary hearers can be addicted to being distracted. Both distractibility and healthy engagement were found to be contagious.

The study provided four primary conclusions on the themes of Christian education and discipleship: The church should teach hearers how to listen to a sermon, raise awareness of digital addictions, pursue disciple-making parenthood, and reclaim meaningful conversations and relationships both corporately and individually. Over all, the church must prayerfully work on meaningful discipleship because Christ is the only one who can save hearers and preachers from being distracted, which is a heart issue.

To my wife, Jade,
whose continued love and sacrifice
bring joy into the momentary affliction
Christ has graced us to share

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory
beyond all comparison.

2 Corinthians 4:17

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Chapter One

Introduction

Many young Christians use their mobile phones while they listen to Sunday morning sermons. The applications on their phones provide various versions of English Bible translations for free. It seems reasonable for people to use a Bible that is already in their phones—not only for convenience, but also because it is easy to quickly turn to a particular passage. In addition, many of these young Christians communicate with others who are also listening to the sermon. People can communicate with their friends during the service even if they are not sitting next to each other (e.g., “I’m hungry,” or “What are your plans after the service?” or “I like his hair style,” or “It’s boring”).

Congregants also use their phones to interact about the sermon. One new convert texted her friend during a sermon to say, “Hey, the Lord is speaking to me through the sermon.” Her friend replied, “Likewise; his sermon is so good today.” People do participate in Sunday morning preaching in real time. They naturally engage using smartphone technology, perhaps because they are so used to posting comments while they watch sermons on Facebook, YouTube or live streaming video.

Traditionally, congregants were encouraged to keep quiet until the sermon was over. Now many of them are trained to share their feedback, both instantaneously and simultaneously. If congregants are involved in social media networks, they may even share their sermon feedback with their friends in Africa, Europe, China, and to the ends of the earth. But what if they do not know how to listen to and/or watch a sermon?

Congregants are not born with the natural ability to listen well to sermons, even if they demonstrate some level of interaction. Pastors can improve engagement by helping congregants improve their sermon listening skills.

In the gospel of Luke, Christ emphasizes the significance of listening. He commands, “Take care then how you hear.”¹ Christ not only sends people out to preach the gospel; he also requires the hearers to listen carefully. Unfortunately, the general cultural assumption seems to be that preachers are expected to preach good sermons, while congregants bear no responsibility for the way they listen. Pastor and author Christopher Ash shares his frustration when he notes, “There are books and courses to help people preach sermons (I run one!) but I’ve not read anything written in the last 200 years on how to listen to sermons.”² Ash may not be the only one struggling with the lack of resources on sermon listening skills along with unhealthy expectations inside the church. In *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out Of A Sermon*, Jay Adams notes:

Nowhere today can you find information—books, courses, or otherwise—about how to listen to a sermon so as to get the most out of it. Indeed, no one seems to be concerned about training Christians in the fine, but difficult, art of listening. The false assumption is that if only a preacher would do his job well enough, effective communication would take place.³

The lack of instruction on how to hone people’s sermon listening skills seems to imply that it is the preacher’s job to make people stay tuned and actively listen to a sermon. The

¹ Luke 8:18.

² Christopher Ash, *Listen Up!: A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2009), 2.

³ Jay Adams, *Be Careful How You Listen: How to Get the Most Out Of A Sermon* (1991; reprint, Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 12.

corollary assumption is that congregants are not required to engage in preaching by listening carefully.⁴

Thus, author Roger E. Van Harn proclaims,

The question is essential to what happens in Christian worship. The church commissions people to preach and gathers others to listen. Preachers need to know that the people are hearing their words so they can get the message. “Can you hear me?” is typically the preacher’s question to the people.⁵

If preachers and listeners work together in Christian worship, they must realize that preachers need good listeners as much as churches need good preachers. Moreover, if listeners are equipped to properly listen to Sunday morning preaching, their good sermon listening skills will likely contribute to their own spiritual growth, even as preachers grow through learning how to preach.⁶ Unfortunately, congregants are not required to take any course to improve their sermon listening skills to function as a believer in their community of faith. Many local churches do offer various types of membership courses. Yet, those courses do not necessarily equip future members to properly engage in Sunday morning preaching, or to understand the purpose of preaching.

⁴ Nevertheless, the Bible does say more about the listener’s responsibility than the preacher’s responsibility: “This is astounding when you consider that the number of listeners far exceeds the number of preachers and even more so when you realize that the Bible says more about the listener’s responsibility to hear and obey the Word of God than it does about the preacher’s responsibility to explain and apply the Word of God. From cover to cover, the Bible is jam-packed with verses and passages that talk about the vital necessity of hearing and obeying God’s Word. God is very concerned about how preachers preach. But based on the sheer amount of biblical references to hearing and listening, it is unmistakable that God is just as, if not more, concerned about how listeners listen.” See Ken Ramey, *Expository Listening* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Biblical Resources, 2010), 3.

⁵ Roger E. Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), xi.

⁶ In order to cultivate listeners’ spiritual growth, the Puritans taught listeners practical ways to listen to a sermon. They also provided instruction through the Westminster Larger Catechism in Question 160, according to Joel Beeke: “The Puritan movement teaches us much about cultivating the transforming power of the Word. Puritan teachers clearly explained how the Word effected personal transformation. They offered practical direction on how to read and listen to God’s Word.” See Joel R. Beeke, *Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 6.

The problem is that those who should help their church members improve their sermon listening skills may not understand the urgency of the matter: the church should consist of good listeners who have ears to hear.⁷ What if adult congregants of a church do not adequately understand the purpose of Sunday morning preaching? What if they do not know that they play a major role in the pulpit ministry? What if their pastors blindly believe that their congregants are good listeners? Perhaps church leaders should not assume their congregants appreciate expository preaching and that they will continue to grow in faith by listening well.⁸

Statement of Problem and Purpose

The church trains ministers to preach for Christian worship services and gathers others to listen. Preachers need good listeners as much as churches need good preachers. However, the lack of instruction on how to sharpen people's sermon listening skills implies that it is the preacher's job to make people listen attentively to a sermon. The corollary assumption is that congregants are not required to engage in preaching by listening carefully. In most congregations, hearers are expected to be passive during Sunday morning preaching. Listeners typically depend on their preacher's good performance to actively engage them, with the result that preachers may be tempted to impress their hearers to make them listen well.

The purpose of this research is to explore how adult congregants of a local church engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. The following research questions will guide this study:

⁷ Luke 8:8.

⁸ Romans 10:17.

1. How do adult congregants describe what their pastor is trying to accomplish during Sunday morning preaching?
2. How do adult congregants describe their engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event?
3. How do adult congregants describe how their engagement during Sunday morning preaching impacts their worship experience?
4. How do adult congregants describe the role of other congregants in their engagement during Sunday morning preaching?

The reason this study is important is that the church will function differently when the role of the audiences in preaching is appropriately redefined.

Significance of the Study

It is necessary to diagnose how adult congregants of a local church understand the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching event in order to promote good listening and engagement. The results will affect the adult education ministries of a local church. If a church's leadership finds out that their people do not really know why they need to sit through the Sunday morning sermons, the teaching staff might not be able to start helping people improve their sermon listening skills. Congregants must understand the purpose of corporate preaching first. Even if some church members seem to understand the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching better than the average members of a local church, church leaders might still consider an appropriate teaching for those who do not understand. Thus, churches may redesign their membership courses or offer a seminar based on the results of this study.

Moreover, the findings of this study may challenge the way adult congregants respond to the Sunday morning sermons not only during the service, but also after they leave the church campus. Teaching people the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching is one thing, but helping them improve their sermon listening skills is another. Because careful listening entails action, those who do listen to the Sunday morning sermons carefully may continue to go to war with their sinful nature in order to live out the imperatives of the sermons. Congregants may feel more comfortable sharing their struggles in small group settings where they can ask their brothers and sisters who also listened to the sermon to intercede for them to put the word of God into practice. Congregants may also work together with accountability partners to hold each other accountable to specific areas in which the Sunday morning sermon required repentance or change. The findings of this study could produce a new spiritual atmosphere amongst adult congregants of a local church and set a positive example for younger members in listening and conduct. When it comes to adult congregants' engagement in the Sunday morning preaching, the significance of this study cannot be overstated.

Definition of Terms

Application – The portion of the sermon that is geared toward encouraging hearers “to consider the Bible’s solutions and instructions for contemporary life” after identifying a passage’s fallen condition focus (FCF-see definition below).⁹ The “fact that the message is focused on an aspect of” human “fallenness precludes simplistic, human-centered solutions.”¹⁰ “Preaching without application may serve the mind, but preaching with application results in service to Christ. Application makes Jesus the source and the objective of a sermon’s exhortation as well as the focus of its explanation.”¹¹ Thus,

⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 53.

¹⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹¹ Ibid.

“Bible application promotes a relationship with God and conformity to him. This dual goal of knowing God and conforming to him pervades Scripture, from Eden and Sinai to the teaching of Jesus and Paul.”¹²

Church – A “community of disciples of Jesus. The community takes many forms—churches come in all sizes and brands, but at the core there must be a commitment to follow Jesus.”¹³ When churches lose their fundamental focus and “calling to be a community of Jesus’ disciples, they become institutions, existing to preserve their own organizations and traditions.”¹⁴

Discipleship Training (DT) – A course designed to help adult congregants make a public confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to live a life of obedience to his teachings. “The first steps of living in obedience to Jesus’ teaching begin *before* we confess him, because in his call, Jesus commands us to repent, believe the gospel, and follow him. We continue and grow as disciples by staying focused on Jesus and learning what he is calling us to do, which is why the essential work of churches is to make disciples. Discipleship is not one program of the church, but rather the primary intent or essence of its mission.”¹⁵ “It is not only overseas missionaries or preachers who make disciples, but *all* disciples are to be involved in making more disciples.”¹⁶

Exegesis – An interpretation of the text based primarily upon the author’s intent. “Such a definition implies that authors are intentional and that good historical investigation can provide a reasonable approximation of their intent ... Therefore, the exegetical task is first of all a historical one, and the first requirement to do good exegesis is to bring good historical sense to the task. Furthermore, ‘meaning’ is located primarily in the author’s intent. For the believing scholar, God’s Word is very closely tied to the intention of the divinely inspired author.”¹⁷

Expository Listening – The act of “listening for the meaning of a passage of Scripture and accepting that meaning as the main idea to be grasped” for hearers’ “personal and corporate lives as Christians.”¹⁸

¹² Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 14.

¹³ Stephen Smallman, *The Walk: Steps for New and Renewed Followers of Jesus* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 38.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 187.

¹⁶ Ibid., 186.

¹⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 9.

¹⁸ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 20.

Expository Preaching – “Preaching which adopts the point of a particular passage of Scripture as the main point of a sermon.”¹⁹ “Expository preaching endeavors to discover and convey the precise meaning of the Word. Scripture determines what expositors preach because they unfold what it says.”²⁰

Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) – “The mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires grace of the passage for God’s people to glorify and enjoy him.”²¹

Preaching – A “divine event by which God makes himself known in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, according to the witness of the Bible. Preaching is God himself at work, confronting mankind anew.”²² “Preaching is teaching, but it is more than teaching. Preaching is motivation, but it is more than motivation. It is, when genuine, God addressing us through his Word, the Bible, to show us the beauty of Jesus.”²³

Sermon – A “tool that prepares the way for the spirit of God and [serves] as a medium for the transmission of this spirit. When the Spirit of God joins with the words of the sermon it takes up residence, according to John 14:23,²⁴ in the hearts of the listeners, and then the sermon has fulfilled its purpose.”²⁵ So a sermon is “the Word of God (Jesus Christ) who has been revealed in the pages of the written Word (the Bible) coming to the hearing of people by the proclamation of the Word (preaching).”²⁶

Social Media – Consists of the various websites and software (known as applications or “apps”) that enable users to engage in “ongoing conversations on the Internet. People share content (status updates, video uploads, photos, and so on), and the social interaction begins.” Social media has permanently changed the way people participate in almost everything.²⁷

¹⁹ Anyabwile, 19.

²⁰ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²² William D. Thompson, *A Listeners Guide to Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 25.

²³ Josh Moody, *How Churches Can Change Your Life: Answers to the Ten Most Common Questions About Church* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publication, 2015), 41.

²⁴ John 14:23 reads, “Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’”

²⁵ Alexander Bitzel, “Theology of the Sermon in the 18th Century,” in *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long 18th Century*, ed. Joris Van Eijnatten (Leiden, South Holland, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 63.

²⁶ Thompson, 25.

²⁷ Nils Smith, *Social Media Guide For Ministry: What It Is And How To Use It* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2013), 7.

Worship Experience – The “grace of the gospel” that “God’s people experience” as they “represent his redemptive ministry through the liturgy.” It “is about renewing relationship with the present Christ.” “From these blessings flow all the responses of honor and obedience that are true of love for Christ (John 14:23).”²⁸ “If God’s people gather to worship without evident gladness, awe, and security in God’s redemptive provision and providential care, then their worship is defective.”²⁹

Worship/Service – A “response to God’s grace, not an infusion or conjuring of it. We are blessed by the reality of his presence, but we do not create it. The responses we offer in worship are only enabled by the power of the Spirit and are further evidence of God’s grace, not the cause of it.”³⁰ Worship “ascribes to God his worth.”³¹ “The structure of a Christian worship service is the story of Christ’s ministry. Just as the content of the sermon, the words of the hymns, and the administration of the sacraments should reflect gospel truth, so also should the pattern of the liturgy that includes them.”³²

Summary

This section has discussed the lack of training about the role of adult congregants during Sunday morning preaching in local churches. The purpose statement and research questions were also presented to describe the direction of this study. In the next section the relevant literature concerning the role of adult congregants during Sunday morning preaching will be reviewed.

²⁸ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 124.

²⁹ Ibid., 132.

³⁰ Ibid., 143.

³¹ Ibid., 88.

³² Ibid., 123.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the engagement of adult congregants of a local church in the Sunday morning preaching event. Four areas of literature were reviewed. The literature review begins with a focused study on passages from the Bible that address the significance and aim of listening to sermons. Then, three particularly relevant areas of literature were reviewed to provide a foundation for the qualitative research: 1) sermon listening skills and the challenges of proper engagement in the Sunday preaching event before the advent of the smartphone, 2) the challenges of corporate worship in general and proper sermon listening skills in particular after the advent of the smartphone, and 3) necessary adjustments for churches when listeners are untrained for proper engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event.

A Biblical Framework for Listening to Sermons

What does the Bible have to say about the significance and aim of listening to sermons, especially regarding the audience's engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event? How can the inspired word of God be applied to adult congregants' sermon listening skills?

Hearing as the Mission of the Church

Quoting Romans 10:13-17, Van Harn explains the central role of hearing in the mission of the church:

To use these words to direct our attention to the pulpit where the preaching happens misses the central message of Saint Paul's mission order. He draws our attention to the purpose of preaching—namely, the *hearing* of Christ. Because faith comes by hearing, he gives a mission order for the church in which *hearing* has the central place ... The church order is comprised of sending, preaching, and hearing. The salvation order is comprised of hearing, believing, and calling on the name of the Lord. The mission order joins the church order and the salvation order in the event of *hearing*. Hearing stands at the center between preaching and believing. It fulfills the purpose of the sending and makes possible the calling on the name of the Lord.³³

According to Van Harn, hearing stands between preaching and believing, between the purpose of the church and the order of salvation. He declares that hearers reside at the center of the mission of the church as they listen to a sermon. Yet, Van Harn does not mean to express that hearing is the whole mission of the church. Nor does he argue that other elements—sending, preaching, believing, and calling—are inferior to hearing. For Van Harn, hearing “the word of faith” (Romans 10:8)³⁴ or “the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17)³⁵ stands at the center of the mission between preaching and believing.³⁶

J. M. Boice shows how hearing links preaching to believing. When preachers preach, Christ himself preaches. According to Boice, the “word of Christ” may be a subjective genitive, which indicates Christ is not only the content of the gospel, but that He himself speaks when preachers preach.³⁷ Augustine, the fifth century bishop of Hippo in North Africa, proclaimed, “The gospel is the mouth of Christ. He is in heaven, but

³³ Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 2.

³⁴ Romans 10:8.

³⁵ Romans 10:17.

³⁶ Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 3.

³⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 3:1263-1264.

never ceases speaking on earth. Let us not be deaf, for He calls. Let us not be dead, for He thunders.”³⁸ Boice paraphrases Romans 10:17 as “Faith comes from hearing the gospel preached, and the reason faith comes from hearing the gospel preached is that Jesus himself, the object of the gospel as well as its subject, speaks through the messengers to call the listening one to faith.”³⁹ Neither preacher nor believer takes credit. Christ does it all. He preaches himself and gives the necessary faith as a gift.

Two Different Kinds of Hearing

As for the apostle Paul, there are two different kinds of hearing in its context. The first kind is evident in Romans 10:18 when Paul asks, “Have they not *heard*? Indeed they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.’”⁴⁰ This “hearing” refers to God’s general revelation based on the first chapter of the epistle. The righteousness of God has been revealed to everyone through nature (cf. Psalm 19). Therefore people have no excuse. Their conscience knows the righteousness of God as they see God in nature. So they have “heard” of God’s righteousness. In Greek, the word “heard” is *akouo*. It means “hearing in general.” You do not necessarily believe what you hear.

The second kind of hearing Paul references is apparent in Romans 10:16: “But they have not all *obeyed* the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has

³⁸ A. D. R. Polman, *The Word of God According to St. Augustine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 127.

³⁹ Boice, 3:1263-1264.

⁴⁰ Romans 10:18 (*italics added*).

heard from us?”⁴¹ The word “obeyed” shares the same Greek root *akouo*. However, this usage describes the kind of hearing that makes someone obey the gospel. They hear and truly believe it, which implies obedience to it. This kind of hearing is not only *akouo* but *hupoakouo*. A more literal translation might be “hyper-hearing.”⁴² So when it comes to missions and evangelism, we want hyper-hearing. We want people to really hear, so that the message is “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”⁴³

Nevertheless, according to verse 16, the recipients of the gospel have not all practiced hyper-hearing. Why not? According to John Calvin,

We now see why this exception was by the way introduced; it was, that no one might suppose that faith necessarily follows where there is preaching. He however does afterwards point out the reason, by saying, “To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” by which he intimates that there is no benefit from the word, except when God shines in us by the light of his Spirit; and thus the inward calling, which alone is efficacious and peculiar to the elect, is distinguished from the outward voice of men ... the peculiar revelation, mentioned by the Prophet, confines it to the elect.⁴⁴

According to Calvin, hyper-hearing is not something that humans can generate. The Holy Spirit has to shine the light upon those who belong to the elect. For example, some listening to a sermon might think, “I don’t know what he is trying to say with such a serious look. I just don’t get it.” But those who practice hyper-hearing would instead think, “He is preaching the word of Christ. His appearance, his ethnic background, his degrees—none of those things matter to me. Oh, keep speaking to me, I’m listening!” Do

⁴¹ Romans 10:16 (italics added).

⁴² R.C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: Romans* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2011), 227.

⁴³ Hebrews 4:12.

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Christopher Fetherstone, ed. Henry Beveridge, 500th Anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 2:400-401.

preachers make them hear? No, they are incapable of doing such a thing. Of course, some preachers can be manipulative as they deliver sermons. They might crack some jokes and say things the audience wants to hear in order to entertain.⁴⁵ Still, preachers cannot help people hear the word of Christ with the kind of hearing that chapter ten of Romans describes. No preacher could make people practice hyper-hearing; humans cannot produce the kind of hearing that obeys the gospel.⁴⁶

God's Sovereign Grace and Hearing

If hearing is essential to missions and evangelism, church leaders may again ask how they can make sure people exercise the kind of hearing that obeys the gospel. This may be the wrong question. Nowhere in the Bible does it say preachers of the gospel are to ensure hyper-hearing. There is no such command. What does the Bible say about the kind of hearing that leads to obedience? In Romans 10:16 Paul tells us that the Israelites “have not all *obeyed* the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has *believed* what he has heard from us?’”⁴⁷ The apostle John quotes the same passage in John 12:37-40, which reads,

Though he had done so many signs before them, they *still did not believe* in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” *Therefore* they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has *blinded* their eyes and *hardened* their heart, lest they

⁴⁵ Bryan Chapell differentiates true preaching from mere entertainment. If the preacher takes an illustration for the main point of a sermon instead of faithfully unpacking the scripture text, he may be nothing but a showman, and what he delivers may not be preaching. Chapell states, “A preacher who constructs sermons to serve illustrations rather than solid biblical exposition inevitably drifts from pulpit to stage, from pastor to showman. Any trained public speaker can select a theme and gather a bundle of stories that will touch an audience emotionally, but this is not preaching.” See Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 200.

⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 29:4.

⁴⁷ Paul is quoting Isaiah 53:1 in Romans 10:16 (italics added).

see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”⁴⁸

Chapter twelve of the Gospel of John states that Christ performed many signs with his preaching ministry. But many hearers still did not believe in Him. Why not? Because God “blinded” their eyes and “hardened” their hearts.

These responses to Christ were prophesied in the book of Isaiah. The people’s unbelief is the fulfillment of God’s divine election. He chooses whom He wants to choose; He has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy. At the same time, He also decides whom He will not save unconditionally.⁴⁹ Therefore, the word of Christ has not failed even when some people refuse to hear and obey the gospel. Those who do not believe fail to believe because God divinely keeps them from hyper-hearing. For example, 1 Thessalonians 2:13 reads, “And we also *thank God* constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you *heard from us*, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is *at work in you believers*.”⁵⁰ The word of God is at work inside the believers. This verse refers to hyper-hearing because they are obeying the gospel they heard from the apostles. But the striking thing is that the apostles would “thank God” for the hyper-hearing these believers practice. The apostles recognize that kind of response is God’s doing, not the result of human efforts or family background.

The Apostle Paul’s main argument as summarized in Romans 9:6 still stands: “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from

⁴⁸ John 12:37-40 (italics added).

⁴⁹ Romans 9:15-20.

⁵⁰ 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (italics added).

Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.”⁵¹ The word of God has not failed. So it is with preaching and hearing inside the church! When preachers preach the gospel, some audiences cannot believe what they hear. Even if preachers clearly communicate the gospel to their hearers, some cannot receive it as the word of God. Preachers, therefore, should not become frustrated or discouraged. It is not that the gospel message failed to convert the hearers. But the God who keeps them from hyper-hearing has magnified himself even in their unbelief.

The Church Can Cultivate Good Listening Skills

Some preachers may be devastated because they cannot make people biblically hear their preaching. The same truth may not be so encouraging to hearers either, because it seems they may not be able to obtain the biblical hearing that gives faith regardless of their enthusiasm for listening to sermons. Still, this truth is simultaneously liberating since God is the one who grants hyper-hearing to His own. Rather than being discouraged, the church should pray for hearers of the gospel. John 8:47 reads, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”⁵² You do not hear the word of God because you are not of God from the first place. John 10:26 adds, “but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.”⁵³ Some do not practice hyper-hearing or obey the gospel because they are not among Christ’s sheep. The elect will hear, which also means preachers do not make people hear. In other words, hyper-hearing is God’s act of grace. The church, must first prayerfully

⁵¹ Romans 9:6.

⁵² John 8:47.

⁵³ John 10:26.

preach and listen, relying on the universal sovereignty of Christ, especially regarding His gift of faith.⁵⁴

Yet, the church may wonder why believers should preach the gospel if Christ already chose His own. In chapter ten of Romans, the order of evangelism is as follows: sending, preaching, hearing, believing, and calling. Hearing is at the center, but there is preaching between sending and hearing. It indicates that even hyper-hearing comes through the means of preaching. Therefore, the church should pray not only for their hearers but also for their preachers. In the same passage, verses 14 and 15 read, "... And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"⁵⁵ If nobody tells you who Christ is and/or what He is capable of, you cannot hear of Christ. No preaching equals no hearing.

Paul's exclamation "how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" has a military connotation. Because there was no Internet, telephone or Morse code, people spread the good news when their army won a victory. R.C. Sproul says, "If the news was good news the feet were flying, the dust was being kicked up and there was an enthusiasm in the stride of the runner as he approached. The most beautiful sight for the lookout was to see feet that were flying in joy and excitement because that meant good news."⁵⁶ This is the biblical stance that preachers are supposed to have. If Christ really is risen from the dead, He has the victory. Then preachers are to be joyful because

⁵⁴ Ephesians 2:8.

⁵⁵ Romans 10:14-15.

⁵⁶ Sproul, 225.

His victory is their victory. But how do preachers know this? Because they just heard the gospel as well! Therefore, what the passage assumes is that preachers heard the good news before they started preaching it to others. The gospel is also for the preacher himself; it is not only for someone else. The gospel has been internalized in the preacher, which means hyper-hearing took place inside of him and continues.⁵⁷ The preacher is full of joy, and out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.⁵⁸

If hyper-hearing is every preacher's personal reality, there seems to be no ground for hypocritical preaching. If the good news is not truly the good news to the preacher himself, he cannot have flying feet, meaning he is not going to be enthusiastic. He will be joyless. He may strive to perform as preacher, but still might not deliver true preaching. If he merely puts on a show, it is not beautiful in the eyes of God.

Earlier in Romans 10:1-3, the apostle declared, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a *zeal for God*, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did *not submit to God's righteousness*."⁵⁹ The apostle is distressed by the impending judgment on the Israelites. Why did he say this? Were people not trying hard? He said it because they lacked joy. People were probably endeavoring to obey God, but they were lacking the very joy of God's salvation,

⁵⁷ "The first heart God's Word needs to reach is that of the preacher. There will be no benefit to our people from expository preaching unless we ourselves are being impacted by the Scripture we are preparing to preach. It is imperative, when we are dealing with the biblical text, that we are personally changed by it." See Alistair Begg, *Preaching for God's Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 43.

⁵⁸ Luke 6:45-46.

⁵⁹ Romans 10:1-3 (italics added).

which is Christ. As Romans 10:4 explains, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”⁶⁰ Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness.

Because Christ took the elect’s place on the cross, they are not under the curse of the law anymore.⁶¹ Christ became the curse for the elect and gave them His victory over death. It is over. Once for all, the children of God have His righteousness, which is Christ. Then as preachers are sent by the church to preach, they do not do it out of compulsion. No nudging is necessary. Preachers will definitely choose to go with flying feet. They cannot help but get excited and lift their voices and tell people that Christ *is* the victor. This is beautiful according to the Apostle Paul. No wonder hearing is the ground of preaching.

Redemptive History and Listening Skills

As preachers hear the word of Christ and joyfully preach it to others, the dead will hear the voice of Christ and live.⁶² The church should pray for the kind of preaching that awakens irresistible hyper-hearing. When preachers who first hyper-hear the word of Christ preach, Christ himself preaches. Ultimately, it is Christ who gives hyper-hearing.

Van Harn points readers to redemptive history, starting from calling Adam and Eve out of their hiding place after they sinned (Genesis 3:8) to the new era of all nations hearing the gospel (Romans 10:12).⁶³ What happened to hearing according to chapter ten

⁶⁰ Romans 10:4.

⁶¹ Galatians 3:13.

⁶² John 5:25.

⁶³ Genesis 3:8, Romans 10:12. Van Harn seems to be doing what every preacher has to do in the midst of faithfully unpacking the sermon text. In order to retain Christ-centeredness in his exposition, Van Harn is basically demonstrating where chapter ten of Romans functions in God’s overall redemptive plan. Bryan Chapell describes the necessity of redemptive history as part of the faithful exegesis that magnifies Christ

of Romans and also in the overall redemptive plan of Christ as depicted in scripture as a whole? When Christ read the Isaiah passage in the Temple, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ... Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,”⁶⁴ he definitely shocked the Jews.

Because they were told that the Scripture was fulfilled the moment they heard him read it, the arrival of the Messiah was effectively announced to the public. Van Harn describes how that announcement ushered in a new era:

... hearing God’s word entered a new age. No longer would Israel’s hope of salvation be sustained only by memories kept alive by the scriptures in the synagogue. Their hopes could rest in the person of this Jesus of Nazareth, who fulfilled the scriptures in their hearing and ushered them into a new age... Hearing the preaching of Christ brought about a crisis of faith.⁶⁵

Van Harn seems to demonstrate that the Pauline order of salvation in chapter ten of Romans is traced to hearing the word of God throughout redemptive history. Then he affirms that hearing not only makes faith possible, but also fulfills a crisis of faith between the claims and promises of God.⁶⁶ In and through Christ, hyper-hearing has been fulfilled. Thus, the church sends preachers, knowing that hearing the word of God has entered a new age once for all.

There are other passages that describe the significance of listening to sermons and what the church should do in light of it. A careful analysis of the role and responsibilities

in every Scripture passage. He states, “Proper exposition does not discover its Christ focus by disposing of a passage or by imposing Jesus on a text, but by discerning the place and the role of a text in the entire revelation of God’s redemptive plan, which is ultimately fulfilled in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20, Rev. 22:13).” See Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 300.

⁶⁴ Luke 4:18-21.

⁶⁵ Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 6.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

of listeners during Sunday morning preaching according to the Bible may help the church cultivate good listening skills.

Sermon Listening Skills and Challenges of Proper Engagement in the Sunday Morning Preaching Event Before the Advent of the Smartphone

In the previous section, the significance and aim of listening to sermons in the Sunday morning preaching event were reviewed within the biblical framework. With this review in mind, the current research area focuses on the literature concerning sermon listening skills and the challenges of proper participation in the Sunday preaching event.

Listening Skills May Be Unnatural

William D. Thompson, a professor of homiletics and speech, highlights the significance of this topic in *A Listeners Guide to Preaching*.

If you go to church with some regularity, you hear a good deal of preaching. Whether you enjoy it or just endure it, you may not have given it a great deal of thought—how it came to be a part of public worship, for example, or precisely what it is supposed to accomplish.⁶⁷

Thompson is addressing adult congregants who sit under their pastor's preaching regularly. He believes they may never have considered what their preacher's sermons are designed to accomplish. In other words, people do not usually know what preaching is supposed to do and how to sit under it in order to get much out of it—unless somebody teaches them.

In his book *What is a Healthy Church Member?*, Anyabwile encourages church members to cultivate the habit of expository listening by providing a few practical

⁶⁷ Thompson, 7.

suggestions.⁶⁸ In addition to attending weekly services, he suggests church members can also do the following to listen well: 1) Meditate on the sermon passage during your quiet time; 2) Invest in a good set of commentaries; 3) Talk and pray with friends about the sermon after church; 4) Listen to and act on the sermon throughout the week; 5) Develop the habit of addressing any questions about the text itself; 6) Cultivate humility.⁶⁹

Anyabwile also encourages people to pray for their preachers before the weekly preaching. By asking the preacher what passage of Scripture he plans to preach the following Sunday, congregants can specifically let the preacher know that they are praying for his preaching.⁷⁰ As they outline the passage in their own daily quiet time, congregants can pray for their pastor's sermon preparation.

Christopher Ash seems to be in agreement with Anyabwile. He also encourages hearers to pray for the Sunday morning preaching event, but recommends an additional aspect. In *Listen Up!: A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons*, he suggests congregants ask the Holy Spirit to help them listen well, and with the proper attitude.

Remember, we will not instinctively hear preaching as the voice of God. Our natural reaction is to take it simply as the voice of people. One of the wonderful things the Spirit of God does is to open our ears so that we receive it not just as the voice of people, but as the voice of God. We need to pray for Him to do this in us.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Anyabwile introduces churchgoers to an “important corollary for every member of a local church.” Instead of simply asking them to look for a healthy church in which the expository preaching is actively practiced, he points hearers to a significant task as a member of a local congregation—expository listening. See Anyabwile, 19.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 22-25.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁷¹ Ash, 5.

Because hearers may not automatically regard a sermon as the very voice of God, and because the process and effect of listening to a sermon depends on the Holy Spirit, Ash believes that hearers should pray to God for more grace. He encourages them to believe that God knows better than they do.⁷² Asking people to humble themselves before they start listening to their pastor's preaching, Ash reminds people that they should be ready to bow before the teaching of God.⁷³

In his book entitled *Speaking God's Words*, Peter Adam seems to concur with Ash. In comparing how hearers should listen to a sermon and what preachers are to accomplish during their preaching, he points hearers to the following summary in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*:

Question: What is required of those who hear the word preached?
 Answer: It is required of those that hear the word preached that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation and prayer; examine what they hear by the scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the word of God; meditate, and confer on it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.⁷⁴

Discussing the catechism, Adam argues that “preaching is demanding for hearers” as well as for preachers.⁷⁵ Congregants are to prepare their hearts in prayer. They should also

⁷² Scotty Smith illustrates that people cannot surprise God even as they confess their sins to Him in their prayers because He knows them far better than they think. According to Smith, as people confess their sins to God, they are “simply agreeing with what God already knows.” See Scotty Smith, *Every Season Prayers: Gospel-Centered Prayers for the Whole of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 254-255. Agreeing with what God already knows is also how Stephen Smallman describes the meaning of “amen” in his discipleship training curriculum. He explains, “Listen to the public prayers during worship services and the prayer time in smaller groups. Pray along in your heart. When you say ‘Amen’ at the end of others’ prayers, you are saying to the Lord, ‘I agree—that is my prayer, too.’” See Smallman, 58.

⁷³ Ash, 6.

⁷⁴ See *The Confession of Faith and Other Documents* (London: Wickliffe Press, 1962), 253.

⁷⁵ Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 171-172.

evaluate what they hear to test whether it agrees with the biblical text.⁷⁶ Hearers must actively engage during preaching. In other words, hearers are to know how to listen to their preacher's Sunday morning preaching. According to the catechism, they should put their sermon listening skills into practice to attain active sermon listening. They are to work on active engagement before, during and after the preaching event. Thus, listening to sermons appears to be "demanding for hearers." One may wonder who wants to do this hard work as a hearer and where could they learn how even if they have the desire.⁷⁷

Adult Congregants Are Not Interested in Learning

Unlike children, according to Raymond J. Wlodkowski, most adults are not easily impressed when they sit under someone's instruction:

Many adults will have had experiences that far surpass those of their instructor. As a group, they have out-traveled, out-parented, out-worked, and out-lived any of us as individual instructors. Collectively, they have had more lovers, changed more jobs, survived more accidents, moved more households, faced more debts, achieved more success, and overcome more failures. It is unlikely that we simply impress them with our title whether it is trainer or professor.⁷⁸

What Wlodkowski's statement implies is that most adults might not voluntarily sit under anyone's preaching just because preacher is an ordained minister. They are experienced

⁷⁶ Ash also expects congregants to listen actively lest their preachers say whatever they want in the name of the authority of the Bible. So he encourages hearers to ask, "Where did he get that from?" while they listen to a sermon. The purpose is simply to confirm "whether the message of the sermon was unpacking and pressing home to us the message of the passage. It's worth saying that it's not only academic people who can listen actively like this." See Ash, 10, and Appendix 1 of this paper.

⁷⁷ Ash transparently concedes, saying, "We must come humbly to the preaching of God's Word. But we don't want to do that. We come to the Bible with all kinds of prejudices. We don't come to the sermon as blank sheets, like a new page in a notebook. On the contrary, we come to the sermon with our lives already scribbled over." See Ash, 6.

⁷⁸ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 51.

in life. So they have their own insights and findings even in the area of spirituality. Even if they have to sit under someone's preaching on special occasions (e.g., baptism, funeral, wedding, etc.), they will not necessarily be eager to listen and learn something from the preacher.⁷⁹

Wlodkowski may not be the only one who believes that the adult learners are passive in their default stance because Adam says the following:

Our style of preaching means that the listeners are essentially passive and unable to object. They get accustomed to giving the appearance of passive and docile acceptance of what we say, though their hearts and minds may be very far away from the words we are saying.⁸⁰

The striking thing is that many preachers deliver and even prepare their sermons with the same assumptions. Their Sunday morning preaching may nurture passivity in hearers who have no choice but to pretend, because they do not want to learn anything or they simply do not understand the point of the preaching under which they sit regularly. After describing a few ways to respond to a preacher during his Sunday morning preaching, Thompson says, "You may, of course, fool him completely by faking attention while you wander mentally."⁸¹ Most hearers could be passive even while pretending that they are actively listening.

⁷⁹ In *The New Yorker*, one cartoon shows a couple with earphones in their ears. The woman is using a laptop, whereas the man is using a tablet. Pulling an earphone from her right ear, the woman declares, "I feel like everybody's podcasting and nobody's podlistening." See Nicholas Schmidle, "General Chaos," *The New Yorker*, February 27, 2017, 45.

⁸⁰ Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 167.

⁸¹ Thompson, 99.

Hearers Need to Be Heard

According to Wlodkowski, most adults tend to learn better when their instructors listen to them. “Of the skills necessary for empathy,” says Wlodkowski, “listening is most important.”⁸² Instructors should ask questions to see how their adult learners are doing in class. They are to consider how the students feel about themselves or their performance in the midst of learning from their instructor. If learners realize their instructors accept their humanity through the means of listening, it creates the most powerful connection between them and their instructors, says Wlodkowski, adding:

Listening for understanding is valuable in teaching because it avoids judging people according to a conceptual framework of our own devising and allows us to become fascinated with how things look to learners. We can be genuinely intrigued by how learners make meaning out of ideas and experience. Such respectful interest can elicit deeper dialogue and mutual understanding.⁸³

Wlodkowski expects those who teach to be genuinely intrigued by listening to their learners. He does not seem to encourage preachers to be manipulative just to enhance the learning experience. His premise is that the conversation is mutual. Learners may truly sense that their instructor is present in order to help them learn better.

Adam seems to agree with Wlodkowski’s methods to create mutual understanding between the students and their instructors because he encourages question and answer sessions for adult hearers. He says,

We can of course supplement our monologue with some dialogue, since the monologue form is not God-given. One option would be to preach for twenty minutes and then discuss or answer questions for twenty minutes. Both would be “the explanation and application of the Word.”⁸⁴

⁸² Wlodkowski, 67.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 169.

This option may seem sensational to many congregations. Yet a sermon discussion can help hearers hone their sermon listening skills if their church leadership knows how to lead it effectively. Adam seems to assume that a discussion should not occur while preachers explain the sermon text, just as some traditional classroom instructors might not invite student-teacher dialogue during their lectures. Traditionally, with “our style of preaching,”⁸⁵ preachers will not start a conversation with their hearers during Sunday morning preaching in order to help them become active listeners, especially when congregants do not seem to understand what is being preached.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, vocal dialogue between preacher and hearers during the preaching event does not seem impossible according to Frank A. Thomas, author of *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*. Thomas is a homiletics professor and the CEO of Hope For Life International, Inc., which also published *The African American Pulpit*. He suggests that preachers can have a vocal dialogue, at least in the African-American style of preaching. The book introduces some characteristics of African-American preaching,⁸⁷ including the “call and response nature of the sermon,” which values the expression of emotion and understanding.⁸⁸ As he describes it,

⁸⁵ Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 167.

⁸⁶ Many contemporary listeners and preachers seem to encourage preachers to shorten their delivery in order to have a Q&A during worship service. However, Adam says, “our need to present a sermon within a certain length of time means that we are always summarizing, and in danger of trivializing, serious matters. Many of our congregation may feel that life is more complex than can be covered in a sermon of twenty to forty minutes.” Unfortunately, in their pursuit of concise preaching, listeners and even preachers seem to forget that the Sunday morning preaching event already is only a summary of the grace of Christ. See Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 167.

⁸⁷ Henry H. Mitchell describes what the call and response characteristic of African-American preaching looks like in *Black Preaching*. It seems that how loudly hearers shout during the preaching event can be used as a measure of good preaching. He says, “the Black worshipper does not merely acknowledge the Word delivered by the preacher; he talks back! Sometimes he may shout. The day is not far past, if indeed

... call and response refers to the interaction between preachers and congregations all over Black America that allows the audience to partner in shaping and directing the sermon ... The preacher often makes a sermon plan in the study, but feedback from the audience often leads to improvisations initially unforeseen by the preacher.”⁸⁹

In African-American preaching style, the hearers’ role in Sunday morning preaching seems to be more active than in Peter Adam’s church tradition. Hearers verbally respond to preaching to let their preacher know that they are in agreement with the content, to share their emotions, and also to influence the sermon content as hearers. In other words, preachers listen and respond to feedback from the hearers to the point that both parties engage in live sermon writing and delivery as one body.

Thus, it appears that in certain church traditions, worshippers believe that they do verbally discuss both the explanation and application of the sermon text during the preaching event.⁹⁰ Yet John Stott, in *Between Two Words*, would recommend something other than vocal dialogue. Discussing the strength of the call and response aspect of African-American preaching, Stott would still insist on the “silent dialogue” between preacher and hearers during the preaching event. He explains,

it has passed at all, when the Black worshipper would consider a worship service a failure if there were no shouting.” See Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1970), 44.

⁸⁸ Thomas says that the call and response tradition is “based on oral traditions in west and central Africa,” and consists of a format in which “the preacher says something and the congregation says something back.” See Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 88.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹⁰ Speaking of his own church tradition, Sangyil Park links the call and response characteristic of African-American preaching to the narrative style of Korean-American preaching. After discussing Henry Mitchell’s theory of the call and response style, Park acknowledges that both African-American preaching and Korean preaching share the same “celebration” aspect of preaching during which hearers and preachers emotionally engage and celebrate the fact that problems are being resolved in their hearing of the sermon. He says, “People want a healing or resolution of their problems through the event of preaching.” See Sangyil Park, *Korean Preaching, Han, and Narrative* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 120.

For what he says provokes questions in their minds which he then proceeds to answer. His answer raises future questions, to which again he replies. One of the greatest gifts a preacher needs is such a sensitive understanding of people and their problems that he can anticipate their reactions to each part of his sermon and respond to them.⁹¹

Preachers are to be gifted in understanding where his hearers are coming from, according to Stott. When a preacher preaches, he is not simply addressing problems and providing solutions. He should be able to anticipate the reaction of his people, knowing how they will respond to what has been communicated behind the pulpit. Even if there is no verbal communication between the pulpit and the pew, hearers might realize their preacher understands them because he addresses their unspoken questions and objections to the main point or application of the sermon.⁹² This silent dialogue might hone adult congregants' listening skills during the Sunday morning preaching event. Hence, even with traditionally non-interactive styles of preaching, Stott seems to assert that hearers must be heard by their preachers. And if they are, it would encourage hearers to better engage not only in the delivery, but also in the content of preaching.

Haddon W. Robinson, homiletics expert, seems to agree with Stott. Yet he appears to combine Stott's recommendation with the flexibility of the call and response characteristic of African-American preaching. Insisting on clear communication between preachers and hearers during the preaching event, Robinson says that preachers should be able to add or subtract from the content of their preaching during the sermon. He says

⁹¹ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Words: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 61.

⁹² No wonder Stott compares preaching with playing chess. He declares, "Preaching is rather like playing chess, in that the expert chess player keeps several moves ahead of his opponent, and is always ready to respond, whatever piece he decides to move next." See *ibid.*

preachers should be skilled in interpreting how hearers are receiving their preaching, and change the content as they speak behind the pulpit. He exhorts preachers,

When you look directly at your hearers, you pick up cues that tell you whether they understand what you are saying, whether they are interested, and whether they enjoy the sermon enough to continue listening. As an alert speaker, you will adjust what you say—for example, adding explanation or illustrations—as you interpret those responses.⁹³

Robinson is basically calling preachers to be alert speakers who are not inflexibly tied to their notes. They cannot afford to keep reading a manuscript or gazing over their hearers' heads as some preachers do. But they are to maintain eye contact, letting hearers know they are attuned to their responses. Preachers should “pick up cues” to discern how hearers are doing in order to edit and deliver the sermon accordingly.⁹⁴

This kind of responsiveness may seem impossible unless preachers are able to think a few steps ahead of their hearers. Preachers should be ready to respond to whatever facial expressions or body language hearers display during the preaching event. As Stott mentions, it is as if preaching is equivalent to playing chess.⁹⁵ A preacher must keep several moves ahead of his hearers, so that he may respond to whatever they communicate. If a preacher is equipped to listen to his hearers even when no one is talking back out loud, hearers might realize that they are being heard by their preacher, and be encouraged to actively engage in their role as hearers. Even with traditionally non-

⁹³ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 158.

⁹⁴ Ellsworth seems to agree with Robinson's delivery method. Preachers are to be flexible to adapt their delivery to their audience: “Any speaker who has faced a small, scattered audience in a large room has experienced the power and impact that the presence and nature of an audience has upon oral communication. The communal nature of orality requires the speaker's sensitivity and the skill to adjust to the existential quality of the audience in ways not demanded of the writer.” See Wilbur Ellsworth, *The Power of Speaking God's Word: How to Preach Memorable Sermons* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 22.

⁹⁵ Stott, 61.

interactive styles of preaching, the silent dialogue may take place effectively if preachers are willing to learn to hear from their hearers and help them actively engage in the preaching event.

Hearers Are from Media-Saturated Culture

On top of “our style of preaching,”⁹⁶ Peter Adam also illustrates that it is generally not easy for most adult congregants to benefit from their preacher’s preaching for several reasons. He notes that in our media-saturated culture, people may be accustomed to watching something and responding emotionally instead of listening to think.⁹⁷ Adam states,

There are many factors which make it difficult for people to engage in the task of listening to sermons. The communication patterns of our age do not make room for listening to sermons. If people’s major way of receiving information is through television or a computer—through visual images—they will find it difficult to listen to sermons.⁹⁸

Many young adults find it challenging to sit through their pastor’s Sunday morning preaching and get something out of it because sermons predominately consist of audible rather than visual communication. Although they can see their preacher standing before

⁹⁶ Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 167.

⁹⁷ Unpacking what Christ means when He says, “hear and understand” in Matthew 15:10, Jay Adams links the challenge that hearers face in a media-saturated culture to a lack of thinking: “Understanding requires thinking, and thinking means work. This process is summed up in the English word *attend*, the etymology of which says it all. The word comes from two Latin terms *ad* (“to”), and *tendo* (“stretch” or “bend”). To attend, therefore, is “to stretch” (or “bend”) the mind to what another is saying. It is to reach out with all your mental and spiritual powers to grasp the meaning of the message. The word describes strong, mental effort expended to understand. The words *viewer* or *spectator* describe the opposite. Yet, possibly because they have developed TV habits, many today drift into church with their minds turned off, slouch in the pew, and expect the preacher to do the rest. Examine yourself, brother or sister: have you been guilty of becoming a Sunday morning version of the couch potato?” See Adams, 50-51.

⁹⁸ Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 167.

them and using gestures to preach, the content must be consumed by listening more than watching.⁹⁹

John Stott appears to be in agreement with Adam. *Between Two Words* has a chapter entitled “Contemporary Objections to Preaching.” In it, Stott discusses the “three chief objections to preaching” of his day.¹⁰⁰ And one of them is the “addiction of television.”¹⁰¹ He asserts that even in his generation, hearers were unable to listen to Sunday morning preaching properly and understand what their preacher was trying to convey behind the pulpit due to their TV addiction. He says, “The anti-authority mood makes people unwilling to listen, addiction of television makes them unable to do so, and the contemporary atmosphere of doubt makes many preachers both unwilling and unable to speak.”¹⁰² Living in England’s media saturated culture, hearers were having issues with understanding Sunday morning preaching.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Nevertheless, in the seventh to the twelfth centuries, the church endeavored to convey the gospel message through visual communication instead of preaching audibly. But they failed miserably. The church should learn from her own mistake. Adam reminds the church of the mistake, saying, “the church decided that while educated people could understand words and theology, uneducated people could best be taught through statues, stained-glass windows and pictures. In many European church buildings we see evidence of this attempt at teaching the uneducated. As the Reformers discovered, it failed; it produced people who knew the gospel stories, but did not know the gospel; people who knew what had happened, but who did not know the meaning of it. A picture is not ‘worth a thousand words,’ because it cannot teach theology.” See Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 168.

¹⁰⁰ Stott, 89.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Timothy A. Turner says, “Here is the crux of the problem. TV creates new and artificial needs in us by altering our attitudes as believers in key areas of Christian concern: the need for moral resolve, the structure of the family, the definition of manhood, the use of possessions and wealth, and even the nature of God Himself.” See Timothy A. Turner, *Preaching to Programmed People: Effective Communication in a Media-Saturated Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 1995), 115.

For most adult learners, being able to understand matters to them. The scary thing is that many adult learners will check out emotionally when they think they are not learning anything. As Wlodkowski states,

... most adults come to learning activities for specific reasons. These reasons are based on what they think they need or want ... These goals may be more knowledge, new skills, certification of some type, social interaction, or simply relief from boredom. However, if the content or process of instruction does not in some way meet these goals, the learning will have very little meaning for adults. If the learning process does not seem to fulfill any of their personal goals, adults will eventually and inevitably conclude: "This is a waste of time."¹⁰⁴

If adults sense that they are not getting what they are pursuing during the Sunday morning preaching event, most conclude that listening to a sermon is a waste of time, according to Wlodkowski. They may not continue to sit under someone's preaching because they are religious. They are also practical. They want to learn; they want to grow. They want to get something out of preaching, even if it is only a bite-sized insight. If a preacher cannot fulfill their goals, they would rather find something else from which they could benefit. According to Wlodkowski,

Most adults come to learn for a definite reason. They are pragmatic learners. They want their learning to help them solve problems, build new skills, advance in their jobs, make more friends—in general, to do, produce, or decide something that is of real value to them. The dominant question adult learners have for any instructor is, Can you really help me?¹⁰⁵

Congregants' expectations may not be low; they want to get what they want or need here and now.¹⁰⁶ Many experienced preachers seem to realize how vital it is that they provide

¹⁰⁴ Wlodkowski, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁶ Van Harn declares, "Most of the members, if polled, would vaguely regard listening to sermons as somehow self-serving. Hiring a preacher falls into the category of 'business expense,' the cost of staying afloat." See Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 7.

at least one takeaway during Sunday morning preaching.¹⁰⁷ Yet, most adult hearers do not seem to get a chance to express how they feel about their pastor's Sunday morning preaching, especially while he delivers it. Most adult congregants have little choice but to stay passive during the Sunday morning preaching event with no way to let their preacher hold them accountable.¹⁰⁸

Teach Hearers to Cultivate Good Listening Skills

When it comes to teaching someone, many experienced instructors look for a good curriculum for their students. If they cannot find one, they may create their own curriculum. Indeed, one could design a course entitled "How to Listen to Your Pastor's Sunday Morning Preaching." Experienced preachers could use their small groups and/or lunch meetings to discuss sermons, which would be an informal, more relational way to teach people how to listen to a sermon. Thompson suggests,

One of the most helpful sermons your minister can ever preach is a sermon on the people's responsibility for good listening. The Bible is filled with texts which might open up this subject (an especially good one is the parable of the sower—Mark 4:1-20). If you request such a sermon in a spirit of helpful concern, he may find an opening in his preaching schedule for it. Certainly he will give your suggestion honest consideration.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Ellsworth illustrates how he was hoping his hearers would remember the content of his preaching better. He testifies, "A letter from a knowledgeable professional person in the congregation drove me to think again about my preaching. She wrote that shortly after leaving church she often could not remember some 80% of my sermons. However, she also observed that the remaining 20% often deeply impacted her life in ways that changed her walk with God. I found myself asking if there were any possible way to understand what the difference was." See Ellsworth, 9-10.

¹⁰⁸ Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 167.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, 73.

It may not be so uncommon for preachers to preach on how to listen to a sermon after all, if the biblical texts addressing the topic are heeded.¹¹⁰ Chapter four of the Gospel of Mark unpacks the responsibility of the soil, namely the hearts of hearers. It seems fitting for preachers to use this text and teach people how to listen to a sermon not only during Sunday morning preaching but also in a classroom setting. In this way, preachers may train themselves to motivate hearers to listen better during Sunday morning preaching through the means of teaching them on the same subject persistently (see Appendix 1).

Introducing the five pillars through which those who teach could motivate students to learn, Wlodkowski seems to encourage preachers to train themselves to teach and motivate their hearers to listen better. He states, “These five pillars are expertise, empathy, enthusiasm, clarity, and cultural responsiveness. Our most advantageous approach as instructors is to see these pillars as skills and not as abstractions or personality traits. They can be learned, and they can be improved upon through practice and effort.”¹¹¹ One of the five pillars is enthusiasm. The church should be able to benefit from the preachers’ passion if he teaches enthusiastically. If preachers preach with genuine enthusiasm, adult congregants may listen attentively and with motivation to learn and worship through the means of listening. Then they might learn to engage in the Sunday morning preaching more actively than before.

¹¹⁰ Preachers may indirectly cultivate good listening skills by preaching on the topic of the importance of preaching as well. Adam says, “Educate your people about the importance of preaching (Calvin preached on 1 and 2 Timothy to do this), so that they will understand what you are doing.” See Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 166.

¹¹¹ Wlodkowski, 50.

Motivate Hearers

Mary Alice Mulligan and three of her colleagues individually interviewed 128 typical congregants representing twenty-eight congregations. The interviewees came from various denominations, ethnicities, church sizes, and worship styles. One of the most significant findings of the study was the diverse ways in which they listened to Sunday morning preaching. Another significant finding was that people responded positively to their preachers' expression of emotion while delivering sermons:

Persons who are touched by feeling indicate that the presence of emotion when they hear a sermon can empower them to deeper theological apprehensions and to more faithful life and witness. The sermon speaks to them in depths of self and community that cannot always be satisfactorily explained in informational speech. As one of our interviewees indicates, many listeners are moved by materials that have the character of poetry, image, and even body movement and dance. The preacher should recognize that using such material is not merely fancy window dressing, but is speaking to the congregation at a significant, albeit transversal level. Preachers, indeed, should regularly include such material in sermons.¹¹²

Hearers know the difference between dull informational speech and lively preaching according to the research. They also believed that they were empowered by their preachers' affection.¹¹³ It follows that preachers who display a passion for Christ during Sunday morning preaching can indirectly teach people how to listen to a sermon by allowing their passion for the gospel to show. They teach their hearers not to regard

¹¹² Mary Alice Mulligan et al., *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 125.

¹¹³ Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis promote inductive preaching because they believe the Bible uses many right-brain appeals: "Traditional homiletics for centuries has emphasized a left-brained pattern of verbal, analytical, sequential appeals. And it has downplayed appeals that would involve right-brain functions such as memory, imagination, emotions, relationships, divergent thinking, imagery, integration of personal experience. The Bible, in contrast, utilizes many right-brain appeals. The non-verbal, the metaphoric, the timeless, the prophetic, the exploratory—all shine out in Scripture. The inductive ingredients and the inductive process so prominently evidenced in God's Word are themselves right-brain appeals." See Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1983), 160.

the Sunday sermon as a mere intellectual learning opportunity, but to grasp that there is something beyond that, namely the unseen unction.¹¹⁴

Some congregants in the study expressed an awareness of the same spiritual reality:

Some persons' responses indicate they believe God is active inspiring the preacher, but these respondents also sense God's presence in the listening ... Clearly, quite a few persons believe God is at work not only in the pastor's study and in the pulpit but in the hearts and minds of those sitting in the pews. These persons span quite a range. Four are from Anglo congregations ranging from high liturgical to nondenominational, free church; two are from African American congregations—one mainline, one free church. Three persons are women; three are men. Clearly the belief that God is doing something in the congregation during preaching is present in diverse congregations.¹¹⁵

These interviewees realize that God is indeed active in assisting hearers during Sunday morning preaching. They were reported to sense this spiritual reality. So it may not be an exaggeration to claim that preachers can teach people how to listen to a sermon during the Sunday morning preaching event, especially when the Spirit of God helps hearers listen properly. Also, a preacher's expressions of affection may "empower people to deeper theological apprehensions and more faithful life and witness."¹¹⁶ A preacher's passion behind the pulpit seems to minister to hearers and encourage them to better engage in the preaching event. Hearers may even be consciously aware of this factor.

¹¹⁴ Clement Welsh asks an honest question after redefining the reality of preaching: "At the time of the sermon a person is asked to do an astonishing thing: begin making ultimate sense of everything. Yet most of us have trouble making partial sense of even a few things. When it comes to ultimates, we hope for a healthy tradition of prepared answers and of convenient symbolic shortcuts presented with authority and to which we can give thankful assent, joining in the chorus if someone else will sing the verses. How much of this is simply human?" See Clement Welsh, *Preaching in a New Key* (Philadelphia: A Pilgrim Press Book, 1974), 30.

¹¹⁵ Mulligan, 156.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

Practically speaking, according to Haddon W. Robinson, effective delivery originates in a desire to preach:

In public speaking the amateur says words; the professional, on the other hand, possesses a deep desire to communicate. Amateurs settle for getting their ideas out of their heads, while professionals strive to get ideas into our heads. In the preacher technical knowledge and training in the art of public address cannot take the place of conviction and responsibility. Having something to say to a congregation that you want it to understand and live by provides an essential stimulus for effective delivery. It produces the emotional “set” for speaking. We are not merely reciting a script. We are communicating ideas that matter to us. When we concentrate on ideas, with the desire to make listeners understand and accept them, strong delivery comes naturally.¹¹⁷

Robinson appears to believe that effective delivery does not take place mechanically, but springs from an organic longing. Because effective delivery is the outcome of an inner desire, all preachers have to do is to believe in the things that they preach to the point where they truly want it to be understood and practiced by their hearers. Yet the flipside is that those who do not truly desire to preach what they believe might not be able to practice effective delivery during Sunday morning preaching. Ironically, preachers could be both the means of grace or a hindrance to hearers when it comes to teaching proper sermon listening skills. Preachers can serve the purpose of preaching by displaying a passion for Christ, whereas if they lack passion, they could also keep hearers from being motivated to worship or sense the unction of the Holy Spirit. Dull informational preaching challenges the ability of hearers to actively listen to sermons. Preaching with no passion is unlikely to cultivate or motivate worship.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Robinson, 151.

¹¹⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones elaborates, “With the grand theme and message of the Bible dullness is impossible. This is the most interesting, the most thrilling, the most absorbing subject in the universe; and the idea that this can be presented in a dull manner makes me seriously doubt whether the men who are guilty of this dullness have ever really understood the doctrine they claim to believe, and which they advocate. We often

Hence, John Stott seems to concur with Robinson's assertion that preachers are to preach with conviction. Yet for Stott, preachers are to strive to practice expository preaching because the desire to preach is originated by exposition. In order to truly preach the "ideas that matter to us" with the "desire to make listeners understand" as Robinson states, preachers are to receive confidence from faithful exposition, according to Stott. "If we were expatiating upon our own views or those of some fallible fellow human being, we would be bound to do so diffidently," says Stott, "but if we are expounding God's Word with integrity and honesty, we can be very bold."¹¹⁹ Reminding preachers of the admonitions found in 1 Peter 4:11¹²⁰ and Romans 3:2,¹²¹ Stott declares that preachers are to preach "as one who speaks oracles of God," knowing that they have been "entrusted with the oracles of God," as were the Jews. Then Stott continues,

Because our overriding concern is to handle [the scriptural texts] with such scrupulous fidelity that they themselves are heard to speak, or rather that God speaks through them ... So pastors must expound it; it is to this they have been called. Whenever they do so with integrity, the voice of God is heard, and the Church is convicted and humbled, restored and reinvigorated, and transformed into an instrument for his use and glory.¹²²

Stott's premise is that God still speaks through His written word, and preachers have been entrusted with the word. All they have to do is to faithfully exegete and expound it, knowing that God still speaks through those who carefully hear His word and unpack it

betray ourselves by our manner." See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, ed. Kevin DeYoung (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 101.

¹¹⁹ Stott, 132.

¹²⁰ 1 Peter 4:11 reads, "Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

¹²¹ Romans 3:2 reads, "Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God."

¹²² Stott, 132-133.

with integrity. If a preacher's desire to preach the truth strengthens his delivery and motivates hearers, he must nurture the desire to preach, namely his conviction. No wonder Stott sounds like he is preaching to his readers; his own passion to see pastors preach the word of God preached is evident, and he is therefore preaching to preachers.¹²³ And they are most likely preachers who have been called to withstand the challenges of preaching, not least preaching to hearers who cannot stay engaged in their preachers' sermons well.¹²⁴

Now, if conviction is the overflow of faithful exposition, preachers must hear the word with care. Preachers seem to be required to exegetically receive the word daily.¹²⁵ A lack of careful exposition may be the ultimate challenge to motivating proper engagement with sermons. Hearers may not be motivated to hear if a preacher preaches with no conviction because he himself never heard the word exegetically. As a result, the literature seems to reveal that a preacher must first hear the word of God in order to motivate his hearers with conviction. Still, hearers are to work on their own hearing skills

¹²³ Stott seems to point his readers to redemptive history, that they may see Christ, who is the light. Stott proclaims, "God is light: God has acted; God has spoken; and God has caused his action and speech to be preserved in writing. Through this written word he continues to speak with a living voice powerfully ... Theses truths about God and Scripture, the Church, the pastorate and biblical exposition, need to reinforce our trembling convictions." See Stott, 133.

¹²⁴ Almost prophetically declaring that nothing will be able to distract preachers from preaching the word of God with integrity, Stott seems to assert that God will definitely use a hearer of the word of God who first puts faithful exegesis into practice for himself. He declares, "The current objections to preaching will not deter us. On the contrary, we will give ourselves to this ministry with fresh zeal and determination. Nothing will be able to deflect us from our priority task." See Stott, 133.

¹²⁵ Preachers' affections must be rooted in the truth, the solid truth of the text of scripture. No matter what they claim, their affections may not be holy affections unless they have the kind of affection that "rises from the mind's apprehension of truth," namely scripture. Gordon D. Fee says, "A great danger lurks here, you understand, especially for those who have been called of God to serve the church in pastoral and teaching roles. The danger is to become a professional (in the pejorative sense of that word): to analyze texts and to talk about God, but slowly to let the fire of passion for God run low, so that one does not spend much time talking with God ... If the biblical text does not grip or possess one's own soul, it will likely do very little for those who hear." See Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 7.

even while their preacher is to listen both vertically to the word of God and horizontally to his congregation.

The Challenges of Corporate Worship in General and Proper Sermon Listening Skills in Particular After the Advent of the Smartphone

The examination of what the literature offers regarding listening skills is now followed by a consideration of contemporary challenges to corporate worship and effective sermon listening skills. This examination begins with a clarification of the term “smartphone world.”

Online Engagement Impacts Offline Culture

The New York Times reporter Winnie Hu said in early 2017 that the “cellphone world” has changed New York because passengers “no longer stick their hands out” and “hail a yellow cab.”¹²⁶ Sharing candid details of the passenger experience, Hu says, “he has plenty of other options at his fingertips.” What does she imply? Almost everyone in the city has a smartphone, so a new reality has dawned: “With a couple of taps on his phone, he lines up rides with Via, a car-pooling service that shuttles him around Manhattan with strangers for a flat rate of \$5. When he wants to ride alone, he taps again, this time summoning a car through Uber.” This is different from surfing the Internet on his desktop. This is different from watching movies with his children on his smart TV. Smartphones change how people engage in city life through new communication technology. Culturally speaking, Hu reports,

¹²⁶ Winnie Hu, “An Endangered Call of the New York Wild: Taxi!,” *The New York Times*, January 16, 2017.

The yellow cab may be as synonymous with New York as pizza, Broadway and the Empire State Building, but more and more it is no longer the ride of choice. This fixture of city life—a touchstone of popular culture in movies like *Taxi Driver* and the hit television series *Taxi*—was once the main alternative to subways and buses, hailed by rich and poor alike. Cabdrivers were the ambassadors of the streets, welcoming newcomers, passing along city lore and dispensing advice even when no one asked. But yellow cabs—which now number just 13,587—have lost significant ground to a growing fleet of black cars summoned by ride-hailing apps with short, catchy names and loyal followings: Uber, Lyft, Via, Juno, Gett. The average number of daily taxi trips fell by more than 100,000 in November 2016 from the same month six years ago as these apps have taken off.¹²⁷

New Yorkers may or may not realize how their smartphones changed the way they communicate with almost everyone. However, whether they are fully aware of the change or not, the new way of communication impacts not only their individual lifestyle but also the culture of their city. They, as citizens, have learned how to engage with their city differently without taking any course. And those who were licensed to drive both visitors and New York residents have been replaced by university students, housewives, ex-military personnel, or anyone who needs extra income.¹²⁸ The smartphone world makes people engage in city life more actively than ever.

Jennifer Broadwater reports a similar offline environment change due to online communication. Northrop Grumman employees now have access to telemedicine services on their smartphones and computers. Telemedicine is “the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients using telecommunication technology.”¹²⁹ Following onscreen

¹²⁷ Hu, “An Endangered Call of the New York Wild: Taxi!”

¹²⁸ Owners of some late-model sedans were reported to say that confused Uber customers have been hopping into their back seats, engaging in some awkward exchanges. “It was a cocktail of emotions,” said one driver. See Chris Kirkham and Erica E. Philips, “Whoops! People Are Climbing Into Random Cars That Look Like Ubers,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 2017.

¹²⁹ Jennifer Broadwater, “What Is Telemedicine and How Does It Work?” *Circuit: Advanced Concepts and Technologies*, February 2017, 13.

prompts, patients answer a series of questions after signing in, such as “Why am I there: cold symptoms, headache, stomach ache, rash, fever, sleep issues, flu-like symptoms, other.”¹³⁰ The telemedicine service is designed to “treat acute illnesses and injury. Those with emergencies or in need of immediate hands-on care are sent to the closest emergency room or directed to call 911.”¹³¹ Dr. Joshua Jacobs, who has practiced in multiple telemedicine platforms, says that many patients use the service “because they aren’t sure if their symptoms require an antibiotic—and most don’t.” According to Dr. Jacobs, “convenience is key” because his patients “didn’t have to miss work. They didn’t have to wait in line. And they got the answers they need.”¹³² Companies in six states are adopting kiosk systems to put in their office buildings so that their employees do not have to miss work to address minor health concerns. The smartphone world allows workers to see a physician without traveling to a doctor’s office or hospital. Many employers support the flexibility and efficiency in the offline work environment that the online technology of the smartphone world provides.

Online Engagement as a Measuring Stick

Liz Choi, an American living in Hong Kong, handles marketing and communication for a startup company based there. She seems to agree with Hu that smartphones change the way people engage the culture, though her observations concern the capability to engage in a social movement as a reflection of their political rights—namely freedom of speech. As she shares her eyewitness account of the Umbrella

¹³⁰ Broadwater, 13.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

Movement (Hong Kong's recent democracy movement) in 2015,¹³³ she also describes how her relatives from the United States measure true freedom. She states:

To my surprise, even close Chinese American relatives would often ask me, "How's China? Do they censor you from going on Facebook or Gmail?" Hong Kong is about as free as a Chinese society can be. In fact, referring to Hong Kong as "China" has always been a bit insulting, even to me, a very removed ABC girl who can barely speak elementary Cantonese. Yes, we can go on Facebook, Gmail, and Twitter without a Virtual Private Network (VPN).¹³⁴

To Choi and her relatives, whether people are allowed to engage in social media without censorship is one of the marks of a free society. To make her point, she describes how people could access social media platforms on their smartphones without VPN. The protesters and activists in Hong Kong were using their smartphones to let the world know what was happening in their ostensibly free county. The communication and connection enabled by smartphones allows people to rally and fight for the same cause, and to broadcast their activities nationally and internationally. And social media accessibility and engagement is one barometer of its users' political environment.

Yet social media engagement appears to do more than simply reflect the political environment of its users. The more people engage, the more social media displays what the society wants now and in the near future. In 2011, Stanford University students Evan

¹³³ Choi says that the movement was theistic. Wong, the founder of the movement, openly stated, "I believe in Christ. I believe everyone is born equal and loved by Jesus." But, Choi adds, "For Beijing, this perspective is fundamentally opposed to Communism ... In the humanistic lens of Communism, autonomy reigns supreme and people are a means to an end. God has no place because man needs no saving—man can save himself." Regardless of Beijing's views on man and the state, the movement powerfully impacted Hong Kong. Choi testifies, "By September, Hong Kong's landscape was upended. Protesters numbered 100,000 at any given moment, blocking major roads with tents, makeshift beds, lawn chairs, and supply stations stocked with crackers and donated food. Bus routes were immobilized due to the growing number of highway encampments, leaving the subway overwhelmed with an influx of daily commuters. The large highway outside my apartment was now ground zero for the Umbrella Movement." See Liz Choi, "Under the Umbrella: An ABC's Observations of Hong Kong's Democracy Movement," *Inheritance*, September 2015, 18-19.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

Spiegel and Bobby Murphy created Snapchat. It is a disappearing message application that allows users to “take a photo or video, write or draw on it, add filters and send the composite to someone else, who can see it for up to 10 seconds before it disappears (though the recipient can save it as a memory),” according to Joel Stein of TIME.¹³⁵ Users may also create stories, but the story will only last for twenty-four hours. The software, more commonly called an application or “app,” is used by about a half of eighteen to thirty-four-year-olds, which is about seven times greater patronage than any TV network. Snapchat says that adults are starting to join the surge of new users, and the app now has 158 million users daily. Snap, the parent company of the disappearing app, is valued at \$24 billion (shares were offered at \$17 in its IPO as of March 1, 2017).¹³⁶

Stein describes one of the distinctive characteristics of the app:

Snapchat gives users such tight control of their disappearing messages so that they feel safe taking an imperfect photo or video, and then laying information on top of it in the form of text, devil horns you can draw with your finger ... Snapchat is aware that most of our conversations are stupid. But we want to keep our dumb conversations private ... Political philosophers worry about private information being seen by the government, insurance companies and employers. Normal people worry about being made fun of by their friends. Or lectured by their parents. But because Snapchat communication is private, kids can give their parents their Snap codes as freely as they do their phone numbers. As Spiegel said at a conference last year, “We’ve made it very hard for parents to embarrass their children.”¹³⁷

The rise of Snapchat reveals what many people want: they want to be comfortable, and they want to be who they are in a safe environment where no one judges. Both Facebook and Instagram indirectly encourage their users to appear perfect because there is an

¹³⁵ Joel Stein, “Snapchat Faces the Public,” *Time*, March 13, 2017, 26-32.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-30.

inherent competition to get as much approval as possible in the form of “likes” from peers. But people seem to feel comfortable to be silly on Snapchat, according to New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, who “snapped” himself at President Trump’s address to Congress in February. “It creates a freedom to be silly in a way I just wouldn’t do on Facebook or Instagram,” he said. “I could show Hillary Clinton being fun and lighthearted ... as much as you want to criticize Donald Trump, as far as social media, he is being authentic on those platforms.” Searching for a platform that allows them to be authentic, a majority of teens and young adults utilize Snapchat (see Appendix 2). Social media usage preferences on smartphones are a measurable reflection of what people think and desire.¹³⁸

Nonetheless, while the smartphone world enables everyone’s engagement in socio-political causes and/or online entertainment and impacts culture offline, it does not always guarantee accuracy or edification.¹³⁹ According to Choi, there is a chasm between the young and old, between Hong Kong and Beijing, and between Hong Kong citizens and police officers. The country is divided. Though many citizens were engaging in the Umbrella Movement by sharing their opinions on social media, their comments and/or articles did not necessarily contribute to constructive, thoughtful dialogue about the

¹³⁸ Nicolas Carr criticizes how Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s CEO, views his users. He says, “That view, not surprisingly, dovetails with Facebook’s desire to package its members as neat and coherent sets of data for advertisers.” See Nicolas G. Carr, *The Glass Cage: Automation and Us* (New York: Norton & Company, 2014), 206.

¹³⁹ Facebook recently renewed its efforts to “stamp out fake news” because there has been a series of complaints against fake news in the “aftermath of the presidential election.” One of the fake news stories was dubbed “Pizzagate” and linked Hillary Clinton and her aides to a human trafficking ring that does not exist. The social media network has decided to change their news feed algorithm and work with a few news agencies to improve their fact-checking system. Yet many doubt if Facebook will succeed because fake news is not merely about technology, but it is about what the general public desires to hear. Simply put, it is a power struggle “between different views of reality,” says Phil Mobley. See Phil Mobley, “Post-Truth and Consequences,” *By Faith*, no.55 (Q1 2017): 38-43.

situation. In short, social media networks do not usually display what is lurking behind people's apparent sentiment. Choi recounts,

I felt deeply for what was going on and was scared. It was common to see cynical commenters on Facebook say things like “Hong Kong is just becoming another Chinese city.” But it didn't seem like anyone actually wanted that. I didn't want the vibrancy of Hong Kong's blended heritage to die out under the relentless weight of Communism. Of course, as an American, I wanted Hong Kongers to have a say in their future, to know their intrinsic worth and their value as individual human beings.¹⁴⁰

In the smartphone world, people are free to speak up. They can share their thoughts. They are allowed to say almost anything they want in accordance with a given social media platform's policy. Yet, what they share with the public is not always helpful. “All things are lawful but not all things build up.”¹⁴¹

An Age of Distraction: Maximizing Addictive Engagement

Now, what does the smartphone world have to do with hearer's engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event? How does it impact the way people corporately worship on Sundays? The church is dealing with a new generation that is constantly tempted to distraction at a whole new level. Anyone can get distracted by their smartphone, which is always with them. Differentiating the second decade of the twenty-first century from the world in which he preached to hearers with no smartphones, J. Ellsworth Kalas, veteran preacher and homiletics professor, proclaims, “We live in the Age of Distraction, and it seems to be accelerating.”¹⁴² Kalas recalls the kinds of distractions he endured behind the pulpit in prior years, including crying babies and

¹⁴⁰ Choi, 19.

¹⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 10:23.

¹⁴² J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Preaching in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 9.

banner-waving university students who stood up midway through a sermon. The current “age of distraction” is different not only in terms of the form of distractions, but also in terms of the very mindset of the congregation. Referring to the smartphone world, Kalas explains,

But it’s a different ball game today. I sense it when I stand up to preach, as I do fifty or sixty times a year, or as I listen to friends who are every-Sunday preachers. It’s not just the prospect of a cell phone ringing during a sermon. Most people have learned to turn off the sound before coming to church. Some even leave the cell phone in the car. But it’s not as easy to leave the cell phone mentality in the car. We’ve developed a kind of mental and emotional edginess that goes with us even when the materials of implementation are not there.¹⁴³

Kalas has conversed with his preacher friends about the new distraction. They agree that it is not about a few people who simply forget to turn the sound off on their phones. And the problem is not necessarily that congregants play with their phones during Sunday morning preaching. The deeper, more pervasive issue is that they seem restless in their hearts and minds.¹⁴⁴ They are still mentally “connected” even when they put their smartphones away. They seem unable to stay focused for half an hour even when their smartphones aren’t notifying them of text messages, emails, or news alerts. Because of their habit of frequently checking their smartphones, hearers are geared toward engaging in multiple activities at the same time. To Kalas and his veteran

¹⁴³ Kalas, 10.

¹⁴⁴ In his book about preaching, T. David Gordon describes how the media culture has impacted people. He says, “We become acclimated to distraction, to multitasking, to giving part of our attention to many things at once, while almost never devoting the entire attention of the entire soul to anything. See T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009), 50.

preacher friends, it seems almost impossible for their hearers to wholeheartedly stay engaged in the weekly corporate worship event without being distracted.¹⁴⁵

Justin Wise, a social media guru, agrees with Kalas. Wise points out that an unprecedented, rapid shift in communication patterns has occurred over the last ten years or so. According to Wise, “all the hard work” humans did to build things offline is worthless due to the speed of change online, so organizations have no choice but also learn to create things online in order to survive as they face the waves of change resulting from the rise of social media networks.¹⁴⁶ His diagnosis of the change is as follows:

As we’ll see, we’re facing one of the largest shifts in human communication in the history of the world. This is not hyperbole. Social media has caused literally every societal building block to adapt. Social media is a small, tip-of-the-iceberg, visible manifestation of the change we’re facing: the gatekeepers are gone.¹⁴⁷

What the church needs to know is that the “gatekeepers are gone,” which means there are no social boundaries because anyone can post anything they wish on the Internet and social media.¹⁴⁸ Change is occurring at a rapid pace, in accordance with the very nature of social media. So the church should not be idle, according to Wise. He argues that it is naïve to assume the church is exempt from these cultural shifts. The church cannot avoid

¹⁴⁵ Kalas elaborates on his concern about how hearers are entertained through the means of their data consumption in an age of distraction: “Many of the people who come to church on Sunday have just watched a sitcom the night before, with its changing scene every ten or fifteen seconds and its three or four commercials in the space of a minute. Can we expect people who experience life in such fashion all through the week to give undivided attention to a sermon or a prayer when they’re accustomed to living with several clamoring voices surrounding them at all times?” See Kalas, 10.

¹⁴⁶ Justin Wise, *The Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 13.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Wise differentiates social media from the Internet, saying, “If the Internet is the mother of digital communication, social media are her somewhat tempestuous children. FriendFeed, MySpace, Facebook, Google+, Pinterest, Friendster, Twitter, YouTube (and many, many more)—some of them are still with us, some of them are not.” See Wise, 46.

being impacted because the people who attend church are already impacted.¹⁴⁹ Thus, many hearers seem to consistently lose focus during Sunday morning preaching because they do not usually communicate with others in the way they were expected to communicate with one another prior to the smartphone world.¹⁵⁰ Plus, they do not usually have to focus on a monologue the way they are expected to during a sermon. Hearers are present in body, but they are not necessarily fully present mentally.

Are Kalas and Wise exaggerating? Do people outside the church sense the change in the way people communicate and engage with various events? Adam Alter, a professor of psychology and marketing at New York University, concurs with Kalas and Wise. In *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*, Alter reveals that what is lurking behind the change is an addiction business. National companies make devices and platforms for developers to sell their apps. In turn, the app developers compete to attract as many users as possible. The problem is the developers know what they are doing, according to Alter. They keep improving what they can offer to stimulate reward centers in the human brain, so that smartphone users may not be able

¹⁴⁹ Warning church leaders to wake up, Wise says, “It would be foolish to think that faith-based communities are immune from social’s reach. The local church is an organization. Organizations are filled with people. People communicate. When the way people communicate with each other changes, the organization will change. This process is happening in megachurches, house churches, and everything in between. It’s affecting young and old congregations, mainline and evangelical churches, emergent and conservative churches. No one is immune. When the gatekeepers disappear, everyone is affected. The church is no different.” See Wise, 47.

¹⁵⁰ According to a poll, “22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than 10 times a day, and more than half of adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day. Seventy-five percent of teenagers now own cell phones, and 25% use them for social media, 54% use them for texting, and 24% use them for instant messaging. Thus, a large part of this generation’s social and emotional development is occurring while on the Internet and on cell phones.” See Gwenn Schurgin O’Keeffe, Kathleen Clarke-Pearson and the Council on Communications and Media, “The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families,” *Pediatrics* 127, no. 4 (April 2011): 800.

to stop using the apps. The strategy goes beyond simply improving their marketing; these developers are doing everything they can to keep their users hooked. Alter says,

... it's hard not to perform the act over and over again, particularly when it strikes just the right neurological notes. A like on Facebook and Instagram strikes one of those notes as does the reward of completing a World of Warcraft mission, or seeing one of your tweets shared by hundreds of Twitter users. The people who create and refine tech, games, and interactive experiences are very good at what they do. They run thousands of tests with millions of users to learn which tweaks work and which ones don't—which background colors, fonts, and audio tones maximize engagement and minimize frustration. As an experience evolves, it becomes an irresistible, weaponized version of the experience it once was. In 2004, Facebook was fun; in 2016, it's addictive.¹⁵¹

The aim of those who work for the tech industry, according to Alter, is to “maximize engagement” by rigorously upgrading user interfaces. The way they upgrade is solely dependent on user experience metrics. The more developers improve user experience, the more user engagement is maximized. In order to provide the best experience, the user interface is tweaked to give additional doses of thrill and excitement. Users grow accustomed to having a certain level of brain stimuli. Thus, today's experience is a “weaponized version” of what users experienced yesterday. If Alter is right, smartphone users are research subjects used to determine how to “maximize engagement,” and their “experience” matters. The tech industry is running an addiction business.¹⁵²

Mari K. Swingle, an award-winning neurotherapist and behavioral specialist, seems to agree with Alter. Describing how online games impact users, Swingle says, “games

¹⁵¹ Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 5.

¹⁵² Nielson says that about a half of eighteen- to thirty-four-year-olds were reported to use Snapchat, “which is better than any TV network.” Those who use the software (more commonly called an “app,” which is an abbreviation for application) open it, on average, eighteen times a day, for a total of thirty minutes. See Stein, 28.

and the way they are designed are absolutely genius. Nothing out there stimulates at the perfect rate nor has the ability to maintain engagement to the same degree. Nothing else rewards us so systematically.”¹⁵³ Swingle argues that the way the app developers strive to reward the human brain is very systematic and can even make users “maintain engagement.” She continues, “Our games, or screens, have to be a little bit boring; otherwise the brain does not learn to learn, it learns to be entertained.”¹⁵⁴ Swingle says the human brain is vulnerable to addiction when stimulated regularly. She asserts, “The historical timing of the emergence of digital technology within the era of brain mapping provides us with concrete insights as to how the Internet, including all digital media, is actively changing brain function and processing.”¹⁵⁵ Ironically, technology also reveals how technology is negatively affecting the human brain. Just how vulnerable is the brain to digital technology?

An Age of Distraction: Nurtured to Disengage

Alter seems to concur with Swingle. He describes what happens to the human brain when stimulated by addictive behaviors:

The idea is quite new. For decades, neuroscientists believed that only drugs and alcohol could stimulate addiction, while people responded differently to behaviors ... But more recent research has shown that addictive behaviors produce the same brain responses that follow drug abuse. In both cases, several regions deep inside the brain release a chemical called dopamine, which attaches itself to receptors throughout the brain that in turn produce an intense flush of pleasure. Most of the time

¹⁵³ Mari K. Swingle, *i-Minds: How Cell Phones, Computers, Gaming, and Social Media Are Changing Our Brains, Our Behavior, and the Evolution of Our Species* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2016), 41.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

the brain releases only a small dose of dopamine, but certain substances and addictive experiences send dopamine production into overdrive.¹⁵⁶

Recent research uses brain mapping to show how addictive behaviors stimulate the brain.¹⁵⁷ Previously, experts believed that the addictive craving for pleasure the human brain receives from certain behaviors never matches the level of urgency associated with alcohol or drug abuse. Recent research reveals that addictive behaviors also release dopamine, which causes intense pleasure. Hence, the way the brain responds to addictive experiences seems to be identical to how it responds to certain substances. The new finding seems to prove that both substance abuse and addictive behaviors make the human brain produce an unhealthy amount of dopamine, so that addicts seek the source of addiction repeatedly.¹⁵⁸ Just as with certain substances, the “lows between each high dip lower” during the timeframe between the addictive experiences, so the brain “struggles to cope with the fact it’s now producing far less dopamine than it used to. So the cycle continues.” It appears that, as with substance abuse, the “only way to match the original high is to up the dosage” of the experience.¹⁵⁹ The research seems to confirm that the brain is vulnerable not only to certain substances but also to a “weaponized” version

¹⁵⁶ Alter, 71-72.

¹⁵⁷ Swingle, 21.

¹⁵⁸ How does dopamine impact the brain? According to Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey, the leading attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and attention deficit disorder (ADD) experts and psychiatrists, “Dopamine neurons run through the regions of the brain that regulate” many activities, such as “motor activity, emotion, attention, and impulse control.” They say, “dopamine forms a pathway between the motor center and the frontal regions of the brain, and another pathway from the limbic center to the frontal regions of the brain.” See Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey, *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder From Childhood Through Adulthood*, rev. ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 345.

¹⁵⁹ Alter, 72.

of certain experiences that never stops evolving. This is likely the reason why too many people seem to overuse technology, especially their smartphones (see Appendix 3).¹⁶⁰

According to Swingle, the destructive nature of addictive experiences can be permanent, especially to young children. She says, “I also have strong preliminary evidence that the medium (i-tech) is more than temporarily altering states that regulate behavior, such as social interaction and thinking. In the very young, it appears it may be changing brain development itself.”¹⁶¹ She continues, “By directing the child to a tablet, parents change the child’s orientation from observation of people ... to the extremely narrow focus on an object and its content ... The child will note the systematic rejection by his primary caretaker(s) and soon learn to auto-regulate (feel better) with technology, not people.”¹⁶² Parents rewire the child’s orientation by changing the environment; the child does not seek out technology unless parents introduce it to the child.¹⁶³ In short, circumstances cause the brain to rewire; no genetic orientation triggers rewiring.¹⁶⁴ So,

¹⁶⁰ Alter introduces Kevin Holesh’s app that tracks how much time users spend on their smartphones. The results are startling (see Appendix 3). He says, “Most people spend between one and four hours on their phones each day—and many far longer ... If, as guidelines suggest, we should spend less than an hour on our phone each day, 88 percent of Holesh’s users were overusing. They were spending an average of a quarter of their waking lives on their phones—more time than any other daily activity, except sleeping. Each month almost one hundred hours was lost to checking email, texting, playing games, surfing the web, reading articles, checking bank balances, and so on. Over the average lifetime, that amounts to a staggering *eleven years*. On average they were also picking up their phones about three times an hour. This sort of overuse is so prevalent that researchers have coined the term ‘nomophobia’ to describe the fear of being without mobile phone contact (an abbreviation of ‘no-mobile-phobia’).” See Alter, 13-15.

¹⁶¹ Swingle, 21.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁶³ “Kids aren’t born craving tech, but they come to see it as indispensable. By the time they enter middle school, their social lives migrate from the real world to the digital world.” See Alter, 40.

¹⁶⁴ Still, ADHD patients who daydream seem to have genetic orientation toward constant distraction. And women are more prone to daydream than men. Hallowell and Ratey describe, “Perhaps due to the manner in which the ADHD gene is expressed, or due to the absence of the Y chromosome, girls seems to have ADHD without hyperactivity more often than boys do. It can occur in both sexes, but it is more common in girls or women. Usually in these people the core symptom is distractibility. It is a quiet phenomenon, their

Swingle asserts, “any unchecked overconsumption of any substance, including digital or i-media, can become problematic, regardless of protective or vulnerable genetic inheritance.”¹⁶⁵

Again, Alter seems to agree with Swingle when he states,

In truth, addiction is produced largely by environment and circumstance. Steve Jobs knew this. He kept the iPad from his kids because, for all the advantages that made them unlikely substance addicts, he knew they were susceptible to the iPad’s charms. These entrepreneurs recognize that the tools they promote—engineered to be irresistible—will ensure users indiscriminately. There isn’t a bright line between addicts and the rest of us. We’re all one product or experience away from developing our own addictions.¹⁶⁶

The late Steve Jobs, creator of the iPhone and iPad, seemed to realize that children are vulnerable to certain devices that his company promotes.¹⁶⁷ His own children were never allowed to use the handheld devices, according to Walter Isaacson, who ate dinner with the Jobs family while he was researching his biography on Steve Jobs.¹⁶⁸ In fact, Alter decided to publish a book on the dangers of smartphone usage when he found out that there is a private school in the Bay area that does not allow its students to use any technology. The even more surprising fact about this school is that 75 percent of the parents are tech executives.¹⁶⁹ “It seemed as if the people producing tech products were

shifting of attention. It happens as silently, but as definitely, as a cut in a film sequence.” See Hallowell and Ratey, 189-190.

¹⁶⁵ Swingle, 26.

¹⁶⁶ Alter, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Steve Jobs said, “We limit how much technology our kids use in the home.” See Alter, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ *The New York Times* reporter Claudia Dreifus interviewed Adam Alter about his book *Irresistible*. Alter disclosed what inspired him to write the book and discussed other key health concerns that smartphone

following the cardinal rule of drug dealing: never get high on your own supply,” said Alter.¹⁷⁰

A surprising number of Silicon Valley tech titans prohibit their children from using certain devices. In addition to Jobs, Evan Williams, a founder of Twitter, Blogger and Medium, kept iPads away from his two young sons, according to Alter. Instead, he bought them hundreds of printed books. The former editor of *Wired* told Alter he enforces strict time limits on every device in his home because he has “seen the dangers of technology first hand.”¹⁷¹ The tech titans of Silicon Valley, smartphone makers, social media designers and app developers seem to have been aware of the circumstantial dangers of technology even before they started selling to the public. So Steve Jobs made sure his children didn’t use the devices he created, for example. He was probably protecting his children from an environment that nurtures addictive experiences. Industry leaders seem to have understood that technology can nurture behavioral addictions.¹⁷²

users do not seem to be aware of. See Claudia Dreifus, “Why We Can’t Look Away From Screens: A Social Psychologist Warns That Our Affinity for Social Media Can Turn Into Addiction,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 2017.

¹⁷⁰ Alter, 2.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² The addictive environment affects not only young children but also those who have a mental liability. Electroencephalography (EEG), a branch of brain mapping that displays how an individual’s brain is functioning, can electrically display the three brain causes of ADHD, such as brain states. Unlike other brain mapping technologies like MRI or PET, the EEG reading can also show the locations of brain deregulation, which is also associated with a set of symptoms of learning disability. Positively, it can display potential for enormous innovation or creativity. At the same time, it can show how severe the symptoms of preexisting brain conditions are. According to Swingle, though an EEG reading shows that an individual’s brain is found to be “insufficient in processing stress,” it does not mean that the individual has a disorder. Displaying a liability on the mapping does not automatically mean that this individual has, or will definitely have, a disorder. Rather, this individual has a liability if things go wrong. One of the findings in her studies shows that “77 percent of individuals diagnosed with an Internet addiction had a significant EEG deregulation,” indicating that “if any part of brain function, whatsoever, is significantly ‘off,’ an individual is susceptible to developing a problem.” Thus, those who have ADHD more easily succumb to the negative impact of smartphone usage. If their environment does not encourage them to use a smartphone and/or other digital devices, they would not necessarily get addicted. See Swingle, 22-25.

Swingle laments that “By entertaining constantly (in gaming, learning, and other activities), we may be creating a generation of bored thrill seekers who can no longer entertain themselves with self-initiated play and no longer learn under standard circumstances.”¹⁷³ Young children may be wired to be excitement-driven if their parents or school teachers persistently try to educate them by providing a fun learning environment using certain digital devices. Swingle makes two important points: First, young children may never learn how to play without the use of digital devices. For example, they would not be able to interact with the physical environment and learn from nature. Second, they may not be able to learn under traditional learning experiences such as reading, class lectures, labs and other activities that many schools and organizations still practice. Basically, these children are at risk of developing learning disabilities.¹⁷⁴ Adolescents are likely not immune from the addictive perils of technology because their brains are still developing.¹⁷⁵ Thus, those who have been exposed to digital devices since

¹⁷³ Swingle, 98.

¹⁷⁴ The younger generations seem to be rewired to learn from visual communication instead of literary forms, which implies that many of them have a learning disability, namely comprehension issues. Professor Thomas Patterson and his colleagues at Harvard University conducted a study and reported that from “1982, literary reading has declined by 28 percent in eighteen- to thirty-four-year olds ... only 16 percent of adults age eighteen to thirty read a daily newspaper, compared with 35 percent of those thirty-six and older ... the future of news will be in the electronic digital media rather than the traditional print or television forms.” See Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan, “Your Brain Is Evolving Right Now,” in *Digital Divide: Arguments For And Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking*, ed. Mark Bauerlein (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 79.

¹⁷⁵ In *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, Caitlin R. Costello, MD, Dale E. McNeil, PhD, and Renee L. Binder, MD describe how adolescents get affected by the environment in the midst of their brain development. They say, “Although adolescents have generally reached analytic maturity by their mid-teens, their still-developing experiential systems are particularly susceptible to social and emotional factors (e.g., peer pressure, romantic attachment), and their capacity for behavioral self-regulation is incomplete. Neuroscience research has shown adolescent brains to be in a continuous state of maturation, demonstrating changes in myelination, synaptic pruning, and development of the prefrontal cortex that occur into the mid-20s. In addition, a documented increased susceptibility to the effects of the neurotransmitter dopamine that occurs during the hormonal changes of puberty lends further scientific support to the increased risk-taking and reward-seeking behaviors that are typical of adolescence.” See

they were young may not know how to enjoy self-initiated learning experiences or learn in standard face-to-face environments.¹⁷⁶

Kalas seems to agree with Alter and Swingle. The scary thing, according to Kalas, is not only how the current generation inside the church, from baby boomers through millennials, is being distracted, but also how their children are being nurtured to be distracted. Although Kalas is neither a psychologist nor a psychiatrist, he has noted the generational differences by watching how young people engage during sermons and have conversations with their parents. For instance, he says parents tell him how instead of being glued to their smartphones while riding in the car, they recall “the fun they themselves experienced collecting the names of states via license plates on other automobiles or alphabet games they manufactured from billboards. And it was before one carried a television set, game board and camera in what is disguised as a telephone.”¹⁷⁷

Kalas is keenly aware of these generational differences as he stands behind the pulpit. He finds himself preaching to hearers who reside in the new world saturated by new phrases. “We belong to the ‘always-on, always-connected digital world,’ and we find it gratifying to see ourselves that way,” he said.¹⁷⁸ Due to their new lifestyle in the smartphone world, hearers’ attention spans have shortened considerably as they have

Caitlin R. Costello, Dale E. McNiel, and Renee L. Binder, “Adolescents and Social Media,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 44, no. 3 (November 3, 2016): 318-319.

¹⁷⁶ Swingle concedes that they use games in her clinic to “facilitate the learning state of attention.” Many neurotherapy clinics seem to use online games as “therapeutic tools in neurotherapy.” Still, she warns, “Seeking to continuously entertain children can backfire. When entertainment as opposed to learning becomes a primary or codependent goal of education, educators and parents will need to raise the bar over and over again.” See Swingle, 97.

¹⁷⁷ Kalas, 29.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

grown accustomed to moving on from one activity to another frequently.¹⁷⁹ The smartphone world seems to have submerged itself in multitasking, such that users are being groomed to keep switching from one task to another.¹⁸⁰ To preachers like Kalas, hearers are distracted during Sunday morning preaching not so much by consuming something other than their pastor's preaching—reading through the service bulletin or using a smartphone—but because they are unable to focus on one thing for any length of time. In other words, now distraction is from within. Hearers are being nurtured to be distracted.¹⁸¹ They seem to be addicted to being distracted.¹⁸² And their distraction during Sunday morning preaching event often affects preachers as they deliver their sermons.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Adam Gazzaley and Larry D. Rosen, a neuroscientist and a psychologist, use the marginal value theorem (MVT). The MVT has been used for decades to observe and understand animal behaviors, especially the reasons and methods they use to move from one place to another in order to find food without gathering more food in the current location. They declare, "There is evidence that the rate of both our boredom and our anxiety accumulation while engaged in information foraging is actually increasing in recent times, seemingly in direct response to modern technology: we are getting bored with what we are doing and anxious to move on more quickly than ever before. This contributes to a pervasive pattern of shallower resource intake curves, and thus more frequent media multitasking behavior." See Adam Gazzaley and Larry D. Rosen, *The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 160-165.

¹⁸⁰ Larry D. Rosen, education expert, appears to concur with Swingle. He seems to be concerned with one of the characteristics of "computer-based learning environment," which is classroom multitasking. He states, "part of the problem with learning in a multiple-task environment might be that some tasks interrupt the flow of learning. It's true that research on interruptions that occur at the office show those interruptions can lead to irritation, annoyance, and a low-quality experience. Certainly these would be bad conditions for learning ... The trick is to develop educational models that allow for appropriate multitasking." See Larry D. Rosen, *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 93-94.

¹⁸¹ In *The Distraction Addiction*, Alex S. Pang describes how multitasking can be counter-productive in the midst of being distracted on the inside repeatedly. He states, "Each little thing you respond to feels urgent and gives you that sense of being busy, although you have the sneaking suspicion that all the interference and overlaps make you less productive ... Multitasking makes you feel like you're working even when it's counterproductive." See Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, *The Distraction Addiction: Getting the Information You Need and the Communication You Want Without Enraging Your Family, Annoying Your Colleagues, and Destroying Your Soul* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2013), 11.

¹⁸² Sherry Turkle, a psychologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, describes what could be happening in hearers' minds when they seem distracted continuously. They are unable to stop multitasking regardless of their efficiency level. In other words, they are addicted to being distracted. She states, "People who chronically multitask train their brains to crave multitasking. Those who multitask most frequently don't get better at it; they just want more of it. This means that conversation, the kind that demands focus

An Age of Distraction: Engaged in Degradation

Other experts disagree with Alter. Their research indicates that digital devices can positively impact the brain and lifestyle. Average IQ scores are rising due to advancing digital technology and culture.¹⁸⁴ Neuroscientist Paul Kearney at Unitec has discovered that playing certain computer games improves multitasking skills and cognitive ability.¹⁸⁵ Researcher Dana Wong concludes that smartphone usage can improve independence following traumatic brain injury.¹⁸⁶ Smartphone reminder promptings also improve everyday task completion following prospective memory difficulties, which are common after brain injuries.¹⁸⁷ On social media, adolescents can raise money for charity, develop or share artistic creativity, expand ideas by making blogs or videos, learn to respect diverse cultural backgrounds, foster their identity, and develop social skills.¹⁸⁸

Yet Alter does not seem to disregard the positive research outcomes. He clarifies,

becomes more and more difficult.” See Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 43.

¹⁸³ Tony Payne argues that the way adult congregants listen to Sunday morning preaching can affect preachers while they deliver their sermons. Anyabwile also states, “Those men who serve faithfully in the ministry of the Word are worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17). Few things are more discouraging or dishonoring to such men than a congregation inattentive to the Word of God.” See Tony Payne, *How to Walk Into Church* (Waterloo, New South Wales: Matthias Media, 2015), 47; Anyabwile, 21.

¹⁸⁴ Small and Vorgan, 96.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Dana Wong, “Smartphones As Assistive Technology Following Traumatic Brain Injury: A Preliminary Study of What Helps and What Hinders,” *Disability and Rehabilitation* 38, October 17, 2016): 8, accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09638288.2016.1226434>.

¹⁸⁷ Scott, Ferguson, Daniel Friedland and Emma Woodberry, “Smartphone Technology: Gentle Reminders of Everyday Tasks For Those With Prospective Memory Difficulties Post-Brain Injury,” *Brain Injury* 29, no.5 (January 27, 2015): 583 -591, accessed February 15, 2017 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3109/02699052.2014.1002109?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

¹⁸⁸ O’Keeffe, 801.

Tech isn't morally good or bad until it's wielded by the corporations that fashion it for mass consumption. Apps and platforms can be designed to promote rich social connections; or, like cigarettes, they can be designed to addict. Today, unfortunately, many tech developments do promote addiction ... Immersive tech like virtual reality inspires such rich emotions that it's ripe for abuse. It's still in its infancy, though, so it's too soon to know whether it will be used responsibly ... Millions of recovering alcoholics manage to avoid bars altogether, but recovering Internet addicts are forced to use email. You can't apply for a travel visa or a job, or begin working, without an email address. Fewer and fewer modern jobs allow you to avoid using computers and smartphones. Addictive tech is part of the mainstream in a way that addictive substances never will be.¹⁸⁹

Alter does concede that apps and platforms can be good if they are used with moderation.

He says he wants to raise awareness to contribute to everyone's wellness.¹⁹⁰ Still, there seem to be a few pressing issues according to Alter.¹⁹¹ First off, it is uncertain whether humans can put moderation into practice, especially with some new technologies such as virtual reality that are highly immersive. Second, there is evidence that the new technologies provide a "weaponized version" of previous user experiences. Third, research indicates that those who have a mental liability are more likely to succumb to smartphone addiction than those who are not genetically prone to addiction. Fourth, the general public is being nurtured to overuse technology because the entire society evolves around it.

¹⁸⁹ Alter, 8-9.

¹⁹⁰ Alter says the following in his prologue: "The key is to understand why behavioral addictions are so rampant, how they capitalize on human psychology, and how to defeat the addictions that hurt us, and harness the ones that help us." See Alter, 10. Swingle also says the purpose of her book is make people aware of the impact of smartphones and other technology on humans. She states, "The whole purpose of this book is to raise awareness, to be conscious of the choices we make and their global socio-emotional effect on an entire culture: on human culture not just on self ... I think we can not quite yet abdicate our role vis-à-vis social responsibility in this era of mass shifting." See Swingle, 209.

¹⁹¹ Burk Parsons concedes that the church does not know much about digital addictions. The church may need to raise awareness ecumenically. He states, "We are most familiar with addictions to illegal substances, medicines, gambling, and pornography. Yet we are less familiar with addictions involving sex, screens (video games, TV, smartphones, and so on), and self-injury." See Burk Parsons, "Ministering to Addicts," *Table Talk*, August 2016, 2.

Both China and South Korea have rehabilitation programs for Internet addicts. China has determined Internet addiction to be “the number one public health threat” and has established more than 400 treatment centers.¹⁹² The Chinese seem to be aware of the challenge and that the environment and social structures nurture addictions. Nonetheless, the Western world, according to Alter, seems to be relatively vulnerable to the corporations that run this addiction business because these products are part of mainstream society.

Nicolas Carr, an executive editor of *Harvard Business Review*, sets forth his concerns over one mainstream automation technology, namely GPS. He notes that the Federal Aviation Administration discourages pilots from using the autopilot system too often, and that Inuit hunters are losing a singular talent that has distinguished them for thousands of years due to their newly developed dependence upon GPS devices. Carr argues that the hippocampus, “a part of the brain that plays a central role in memory formation,” not only enables the brain to remember events, but also responds to present events and plans for the future appropriately.¹⁹³ He asserts,

With the GPS goddess whispering in our ear, or beaming her signals onto our retinas, we’ll rarely, if ever, have to exercise our mental mapping skills ... researchers emphasize that more research needs to be done before we’ll know for sure whether long-term use of GPS devices weakens memory and raises the risk of senility ... it is entirely plausible that avoiding the work of figuring out where we are and where we’re going may have unforeseen and less-than-salubrious consequences. Because memory is what enables us not only to recall past events but to respond intelligently to present events and plan for future ones, any degradation in its functioning would tend to diminish the quality of our lives.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Alter, 251-252.

¹⁹³ Carr, 133.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 137.

Carr seems to agree with Alter. He, too, says that the consequences of persistent use of new technologies are not yet known.¹⁹⁵ Yet the use of GPS for driving directions has become common. The same corporations that created GPS devices blame human error for motor vehicle accidents.¹⁹⁶ These companies seem to be committed to replacing human drivers with self-driving cars.¹⁹⁷

Still, what seems to concern Carr the most is the unforeseen consequences of automation. When long-term usage of automation is systematically encouraged in a particular culture, people have no choice but to get used to automation and experience potential degradation of their mental capacities, which threatens their abilities to live out their lives safely and appropriately. Swingle seems to concur with Carr. A study was conducted on sixth graders, and the findings concern her. Swingle states,

... children who were systematically on digital screens (as well as watching television) were compromised in reading human emotions. When compared to children who went on an i-tech and TV hiatus for only five days, children who continued to engage with digital devices, as per normal had decreased abilities to understand the emotions of others as well as decreased sensitivity to emotive cues. The conclusion drawn by this study and many others is that replacing person-to-person social interaction with i-tech and screen-mediated interaction reduces our social skills as well as our general well-being (happiness). I simply argue it reduces our observation skills, which affects all the above.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Alter, 8-9.

¹⁹⁶ Google's roboticist announced the company's successful invention of driverless cars that process "all the streams of incoming information instantaneously" in real time, which is unprecedented. According to Carr, Google blames accidents on human mistakes although their self-driving cars do not seem perfectly safe yet. He states, "Google's fleet of self-driving cars has now racked up close to a million miles, and the vehicles have caused just one serious accident. That was a five-car pileup near the company's Silicon Valley headquarters in 2011, and it doesn't really count. It happened, as Google was quick to announce, 'while a person was manually driving the car.'" See Carr, 6-7.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 153-155.

¹⁹⁸ Swingle, 180.

The founding may appear startling to Swingle because she asserts that degradation of observation skills affects the very “well-being” of humans. If the finding is accurate, humans may not be able to pursue happiness in general unless they use moderation. If they keep using their smartphones with no moderation, they will not be able to be well, either mentally or physically. Yet the striking thing is that the degradation of a key human social skill occurs when human interaction is being constantly replaced by digital devices.¹⁹⁹ In other words, humans can be nurtured to lose empathy, a capacity that differentiates them from machines. Humans are designed to exchange face-to-face social interaction.²⁰⁰

Alter seems to agree with Carr and Swingle. He illustrates the relationship between lack of empathy and the effects of ongoing smartphone usage:

By the time they enter middle school, their social lives migrate from the real world to the digital world ... They don't have the option of taking a break, because this is where they come for validation and friendship ... Humans learn empathy and understanding by watching how their actions affect other people. Empathy can't flourish without immediate feedback, and it's a very slow-developing skill. One analysis of seventy-two studies found that empathy has declined among college students between 1979 and 2009. They're less likely to take the perspective of other people, and

¹⁹⁹ The consequences of the lack of human interaction amongst the younger generations have been well illustrated by Small and Vorgan. They state, “As the brain evolves and shifts its focus toward new technological skills, it drifts away from fundamental social skills, such as reading facial expressions during conversation or grasping the emotional context of a subtle gesture ... With the weakening of the brain's neural circuitry controlling human contact, our social interactions may become awkward, and we tend to misinterpret, and even miss, subtle, non-verbal messages. Imagine how the continued slipping of social skills might affect an international summit meeting ten years from now when a misread facial cue or a misunderstood gesture could make the difference between escalating military conflict or peace.” See Small and Vorgan, 77-78.

²⁰⁰ Texting others by using smartphones does not seem to count. A study revealed, “With texting, teens cannot see the reaction of the person receiving the message, so their actions can be separated from the consequences.” In other words, teens could be nurtured to lose empathy even if they socialize with others using their smartphones. See J.A. Carroll and R.L. Kirkpatrick, *Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Behavioral Health* (Oakland, CA: California Adolescent Health Collaborative, 2001), 3, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.phi.org/uploads/application/files/g9g6xbfghdxoe3yytmc1rfvvm8lt1ly9sr3j369pstkojdly15.pdf>.

show less concern for others ... According to one study, one in three teenage girls say that people their age are mostly unkind to one another on social network sites.²⁰¹

According to Alter, it takes time for young people to learn empathy, which requires “immediate feedback.” Yet because social media networks on smartphones have become mainstream, a majority of adolescents may be unable to learn empathy (see Appendix 4).²⁰² They seem to miss the opportunity to grow into healthy young adults who know how to relate to others (see Appendix 5).²⁰³ Alter insists that the advancement of the digital culture creates a social environment that does not allow adolescents to develop empathy.²⁰⁴ Hence, as young people are being nurtured in this addictive environment, the more concerning problem seems to be a lack of empathy rather than being geared toward persistent multitasking.

What does the degradation of cognitive and social skills, not least the impairment of empathy, have to do with adult congregants’ engagement during Sunday morning sermons and corporate worship in general? Haddon W. Robinson, homiletics scholar, insists on empathy in the third edition of his preaching textbook. He uses the illustration of watching a football game, saying, “Gestures also help listeners experience what we

²⁰¹ Alter, 40.

²⁰² What do the younger generations do on their smartphones? Recent research revealed that they usually use social media. They still seem to text their friends a lot. But now they seem to text people on social media messenger apps (see Appendix 4).

²⁰³ So how many Americans own a smartphone? The Pew Research Center shows that over three-quarters of Americans own a smartphone. And nine-in-ten Americans are online. (See Appendix 5).

²⁰⁴ In the midst of losing or lacking empathy, Snapchat seems to provide what the younger generation wants from their online society—a safe environment with no gameification. Stein well describes how the younger generation wants to communicate, saying, “The technology successes of the Internet age have been about making information free and easy. But Snapchat is a tech reactionary, offering an escape from the gameified popularity contest measured in friends, followers, likes and comments. Snapchat is built by and for a generation that wants to use technology to improve its antisocial social life.” See Stein, 29.

feel as they identify with us ... fans cringe when their favorite runner falls victim to a crushing tackle; sometimes spectators will actually kick the seat in front of them while watching a crucial field goal. This projective behavior is called *empathy*.”²⁰⁵ He asserts that a preacher’s gestures can tap into congregants’ feelings, so that they feel what the preacher feels or even desires his hearers to feel. Preachers may put Robinson’s teaching into practice, hoping their hearers will identify with them. Yet the challenge for twenty-first century preachers may be that they are preaching to a generation that never learned empathy. These hearers might still relate to sports because they watch clips of it on their phones all the time, but they might not relate to someone’s speech unless he texts them behind the pulpit. This emotional barrier between preacher and hearers could impact the overall worship experience of the entire congregation.

Lenny Luchetti also exhorts preachers to relate to others in an age of distraction. “Since distraction is more accessible and affordable than ever, at the fingertip of our cell phone, iPad, or iPod,” he says, “the preacher can too easily avoid the challenge of long listening and deep reflection. Habitual avoidance by way of distraction creates a behavioral pattern in the preacher that is not easily overcome.”²⁰⁶ Kalas says that preachers first need to listen to the word of Christ as an act of worship while studying the biblical text as they prepare sermons in this age of distraction.²⁰⁷ If preachers do not first

²⁰⁵ Robinson, 156.

²⁰⁶ Kalas, 94.

²⁰⁷ John Piper, a Reformed Baptist preacher, says that preachers are to worship over the text of Scripture with both explanation and exultation. Introducing Jonathan Edward’s theology on the glory of God, Piper also states that true worship consists of seeing God and savoring God. Worship is neither mere intellectualism nor experientialism. Both our understanding and affection toward God are vital to worship. Therefore, the preacher cannot truly worship God unless he brings his whole person. Piper proclaims, “Preaching is worship, and it belongs in the regular worship life of the church no matter the size of the church ... Preaching is worshipping over the Word of God—the text of Scripture—with explanation and

give Christ undivided attention as they meditate on and study the sermon text, they too will get distracted, just like everyone else.²⁰⁸ On the other hand, preachers are to listen to hearers and relate to them. If preachers get distracted like everyone else in this day and age, they might not be able to preach to their hearers properly. The challenge is that preachers can also miss the opportunity to exercise empathy if they reside in an addictive environment. What if hearers begin to wonder if their preacher is equipped to relate to them as he preaches behind the pulpit? What if he has also been nurtured in an addictive environment? Empathy is typically not part of the curriculum in seminary.

An Age of Distraction: Engaged in Isolation

As Swingle discusses “sexual deviance,” she argues that definitions of normal sexuality vary by the cultural environment. Since the Internet has its own culture, says Swingle, “for many, and certainly the younger generations, the culture has crossed over: boundaries of online and offline behavior again are becoming completely blurred, or should I say, are merging.”²⁰⁹ When the younger generations are being nurtured in a digital culture, they may be confused between offline and online. If Swingle is right, to

exultation ... There are always two parts to true worship. There is seeing God and there is savoring God. You can't separate these. You must see him to savor him. And if you don't savor him when you see him, you insult him. In true worship, there is always understanding with the mind and there is always feeling in the heart.” See John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 7.

²⁰⁸ T. David Gordon has published a book on this very topic. He argues that the media culture impacted not only hearers but also preachers. The pulpit is in danger because preachers are distracted in an age of distraction, according to Gordon. He laments, “What kinds of ministers does such a culture produce? Ministers who are not at home with what is significant; ministers whose attention span is less than that of a four-year-old in the 1940s, who race around like the rest of us, constantly distracted by sounds and images of inconsequential trivialities, and are out of touch with what is weighty. It is not surprising that their sermons, and the alleged worship that surrounds them, are often trifling, thoughtless, uninspiring, and mundane. It is not surprising that their sermons are mindlessly practical, in the ‘how-to’ sense. It is also not surprising that their sermons tend to be moralistic, sentimentalistic, or slavishly drafted into the so-called culture wars.” See Gordon, 59.

²⁰⁹ Swingle, 167.

the next generation, there will scarcely be any barrier between offline and online. One may use a smartphone as if it is one of his or her limbs. The younger generation may be holding digital devices as if they themselves were created to have them always. You have a mouth, so you speak; you have a phone, so you text.²¹⁰

Plus, the younger generation does prefer texting to oral communication, according to Alter. He says, “Many teens refuse to communicate on the phone or face-to-face, and they conduct their fights by text ... They either latch onto the online world, or they choose not to “spend time” with their friends.²¹¹ On top of the lack of empathy, the younger generation may not know how to communicate with others unless it is online. An addictive digital environment snatches the opportunity to learn empathy away from young people, and also blurs the differences between online and offline behavior. Simply put, what the younger generation does offline, in reality, is the spillover of what they do online.

Swingle continues to describe how young people’s online experience and offline pursuits match. She states,

Boys are not learning about what it means to be a man, and within this a sexual being, a lover, and potentially a partner, from their elders, including role modeling from fathers, uncles, or older brothers. They are learning from porn ... There has to be some sort of drive fueling sexual process, and what we are seeing, at least in males, is the drive to pursue real-life sexual experience, unless dramatically explicit, is lessening and in many aspects absent.²¹²

²¹⁰ Introducing Rosen’s statistics, Swingle says, “49 percent and 56 percent of the last two generations check their text messages ‘all the time.’ My generation (Gen X) and the one before (the Baby Boomers) check 34 percent and 17 percent respectively. And, at the time this research, this was only text, not social media, news feeds, alarms, nor work email and all the other information streams now accessed by cell phones. This is a peculiar dependence on micro contact.” See Swingle, 186.

²¹¹ Alter, 41.

²¹² Swingle, 171.

As a therapist, Swingle acknowledges that viewing of porn rewires many young male's sexuality completely. Their offline sexual expression, expectations and desire are governed by what they experienced online while watching porn. The addictive online experience impacts what many young males do offline. And their online sexual doctrine seems to affect how young females pursue explicit sex as well. "For adolescents and youth, the joy of sex may be gone, replaced by the performance of sex," says Swingle. "Quite reactively I believe, females are now increasingly the sexual pursuers, offering more and more to be accepted or desired."²¹³ What young males learn, believe and experience online impacts both what they themselves want to do offline and what females choose to do offline. They allow themselves to be limited to what addiction businesses offer online whether the content is truthful or not. Since the younger generations are digital natives who were born into the merger of online experience and offline behavior, they blindly believe the doctrine the addiction businesses teach. If something is on Facebook, it must be true.

Henceforth, hearers' short attention span and lack of empathy may not be the core of the challenge they face during Sunday morning preaching. There seems to be a deeper issue when it comes to proper sermon listening. As mentioned above, hearers are from a media-saturated culture. They would rather watch and feel instead of listening to think.²¹⁴ On the other hand, in the age of distraction, people are distracted not only by the ways they communicate online but also by the content of digital culture and the messages of

²¹³ Swingle, 171.

²¹⁴ Adams, 51-52.

the smartphone world. Tim Keller describes the “background beliefs that our culture presses on us about Christianity” in the age of distraction, saying:

These assumptions are not presented to us explicitly by argument. Rather, they are absorbed through the stories and themes of entertainment and social media. They are assumed to be simply “the way things are.” They are so strong that even many Christian believers, perhaps secretly at first, find their faith becoming less and less real in their minds and hearts. Much or most of what we believe at this level is, therefore, invisible to us *as* belief.²¹⁵

Therefore, in the smartphone world, one of the most lethal distractions is doctrinal, not merely visual and/or emotional.²¹⁶ Hearers are being distracted in their theology, so it may be challenging for them to receive the whole counsel of God with thanksgiving when it is being declared during Sunday morning preaching.²¹⁷ And the striking thing is that our culture presses these beliefs on people through social media because everyone uses social media (see Appendix 4). If something is on social media, it is assumed to be true—that is, doctrine.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ The “background beliefs that our culture presses on us” through social media are as follows: “You don’t need to believe in God to have a full life of meaning, hope, and satisfaction;” “You should be free to live as you see fit, as long as you don’t harm others;” “You become yourself when you are true to your deepest desires and dreams;” “You don’t need to believe in God to have a basis for moral values and human rights;” and “There’s little or no evidence for the existence of God or the truth of Christianity.” See Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (New York: Viking, 2016), 5.

²¹⁶ Ash says, “We don’t get these prior beliefs and assumptions from the Bible; we get them from our culture, from the places where our culture tells us what is normal, believable and acceptable ... from our favorite blog, radio station, Facebook friendship group.” See Ash, 6-7.

²¹⁷ Ken Ramey mourns over bad theology from the 1980s that has affected hearers: “The church growth movement that boomed during the eighties and nineties concluded that preaching is an outdated form of communication in our technologically advanced, media-savvy society. Surveys found that most listeners were interested only in hearing amusing and inspiring messages that addressed the practical problems they face in life (relating to your spouse, raising kids, surviving the rat race, battling addictions, etc.).” See Ramey, 6.

²¹⁸ Chap Bettis well illustrates what is at stake. He states that the issue is bad theology “choking” spiritual life, saying, “In this day of media distractions, experts estimate we come in contact with more than one hundred thousand words a day. Christians are in a fight for their spiritual lives to receive proper supernatural nourishment amidst the life-choking, trivial, junk food that’s constantly offered to us.” See

Carr appears to be in agreement with Keller. Although he may not be religious, he still criticizes how social media networks impose their own views onto their users. He also contends with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, whose personal views affect the way Facebook treats its users.²¹⁹ Carr says,

Social networks push us to present ourselves in ways that conform to the interests and prejudices of the companies that run them. Facebook, through its Timeline and other documentary features, encourages its members to think of their public image as indistinguishable from their identity. It wants to lock them into a single, uniform “self” that persists throughout their lives, unfolding in a coherent narrative beginning in childhood and ending, one presumes, with death. This fits with its founder’s narrow conception of the self and its possibilities.²²⁰

Social media networks spread their own agendas, making them sound like relevant doctrine. The views of Facebook’s CEO may be shallow and unbiblical, but it would not seem to matter in the eyes of his members.²²¹ Indeed, Facebook may be the only doctrinal authority they trust. If the CEO of Facebook can broadcast his views and encourage his members to think as he does, other networks can do the same.²²² According to Carr, that

Chap Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ* (Middletown, DE: Diamond Hill Publishing, 2016), 151.

²¹⁹ Mark Zuckerberg said of human identity, “The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly ...having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity.” In response, Carr says, “That view, not surprisingly, dovetails with Facebook’s desire to package its members as neat and coherent sets of data for advertisers.” See Carr, 206.

²²⁰ Carr, 205-206.

²²¹ The content of preaching should be different from that of social media doctrine. John Piper declares, “It is not the job of the Christian preacher to give people moral or psychological pep talks about how to get along in the world. When that is needed, someone else can do it. But most of our people have no one, no one in the world, to tell them, week in and week out, about the supreme beauty and majesty of God.” See Piper, 12.

²²² Warning users of the imposition of the technology companies’ interests, Carr declares, “We should welcome the important contributions computer companies can make to society’s well-being, but we shouldn’t confuse those companies’ interests with our own. If we don’t understand the commercial, political, intellectual, and ethical motivations of the people writing our software, or the limitations inherent in automated data processing, we open ourselves to manipulation.” See Carr, 208.

is how social media networks attract advertising firms and other businesses to make a profit. In other words, social media networks can sell their doctrine and influence people to purchase certain products or support any particular socio-political movement.²²³

Social media users seem isolated. They are losing the interest and ability to talk to their families and friends.²²⁴ They do not know how to relate to others appropriately. Swingle wonders, “Are we really so connected due to our technology, or is it exactly the opposite: are we actually so disconnected that we need a device to ensure we are not alone, not left out?”²²⁵ The one and only means of communication the younger generations know is online, as Alter mentioned above. Social media networks have their own brand of religious doctrine that their leadership spreads shamelessly, regardless of the quality of the content.

Kalas seems to concur with Keller. Referring to the false doctrine of the current digital generation, he illustrates that people can be swayed by it. He says,

Can doctrine get a hearing in our time? The books in the New Age section of a bookstore indicate that it can. Perhaps you hadn’t thought of those books as doctrine, but primarily this is what they offer. To whatever measure they succeed, it is because of their ability to make their teachings interesting and relevant to the average person—the religious or semireligious seeker.²²⁶

Kalas seems to understand that it is about how you package your teaching instead of whether the teaching is true and edifying. Regardless of the quality of the content,

²²³ Alter also indirectly explains the reason some technology titans might want to control their users. In an interview, Sam Polk told him “that the key is to find something that brings you small doses of positive feedback. He also believes that wealth addiction is a relatively new phenomenon.” See Alter, 118-119.

²²⁴ A study conducted at Stanford University found that traditional one-on-one interaction time with others decreases by thirty minutes for every hour people spend on their computers. See Small and Vorgan, 78.

²²⁵ Swingle, 186.

²²⁶ Kalas, 140.

corporations are capable of weaponizing it and spreading it to be accepted as the relevant truth amongst the younger generations. If anything is in the hands of the addiction businesses, it can become the truth in the eyes of isolated generations who only talk to their friends online and/or their online friends (i.e. people they have never met in person, only virtually). When the average person is still searching for relevant doctrine in an age of distraction, technology seems to empower the doctrine makers or reproducers, who are the creators of technology itself.

The challenge, then, seems to be twofold. First, the younger generations may refuse to receive the Bible or preaching that unpacks the Bible as the very word of God. They can blindly believe social media's rhetoric and doctrine even if they grew up in the church. Their values maybe divorced from the Bible. This issue may not seem new because the church has been preaching the gospel to skeptics always. Yet those who overuse social media may be different from traditional skeptics. The church may not be able to reason with the younger generations through its pulpit ministry or Bible studies because listening to oral speeches is not how they communicate in the smartphone world. Unless they hear something online first, they might not want to take what is preached behind the pulpit seriously. They may not be able to engage in offline preaching. In other words, to digital natives, whatever is not on social media networks may not seem authentic. The other challenge may be that the younger generations may not voluntarily worship through any offline corporate service. Their online experience and offline behaviors seem to have merged. Their offline behavior is the overflow of their online experience. Hence, they may not choose to attend any traditional church meeting unless it takes place on social media networks or by texting.

In this section, some contemporary challenges of corporate worship have been examined. A literature review revealed contemporary challenges of proper sermon listening skills in particular, including that hearers may be addicted to their handheld devices, particularly their smartphones. The first and foremost challenge was the corporations' commitment and ability to provide weaponized versions of previous online experiences. Hence, many contemporary hearers seemed to be systematically impacted by the smartphone world in which everyone can be acclimated to excessive smartphone usage. The literature also included recent studies that show that unchecked usage of certain digital devices may cause anxious urges to multitask, learning disabilities, a degradation of empathy, and isolation from the socio-emotional sphere due to an unhealthy merger of online experience and offline behavior. Thus, hearers from the smartphone world might not be able to give their undivided attention to preaching due to their enormously short attention span. They might also have difficulties relating to the preacher's emotions. Lastly, they might not choose to attend Sunday services unless they experience the preaching event online. In the following section, the following questions will be addressed:

What should the church do to adapt and improve their worship service experience? What else should the church consider in order to cultivate proper engagement in Sunday morning preaching? What can church leadership do to hone adult congregants' sermon listening skills and their engagement in Sunday morning preaching?

Necessary Adjustments for Churches When Listeners Are Untrained for Proper Engagement in the Sunday Morning Preaching Event

In the previous section, contemporary literature was reviewed regarding challenges in sermon listening skills and corporate worship. With this review in mind, the following research area focuses on literature concerning respective adjustments for the church when hearers are untrained for proper engagement in Sunday morning preaching.

Know Where Distractions Come From

Acknowledging that hearers are distracted doctrinally in the smartphone world, Kalas captures the origin of all distractions doctrinally. The way hearers are distracted in the age of distraction is traced to the original distraction, according to Kalas. His diagnosis is as follows:

The wonder was to know God, to sense the pleasure that God finds in us. Nothing could compare with this. So it seems that Adam and Eve didn't really need anything. Nevertheless, they got distracted. An intruder got them thinking about other things. As it happened, this thinking led to an act of disobedience, but it began with a diversion of attention. And as the rule of learning reminds us, what gets our attention gets us.²²⁷

If this interpretation of the fall is correct, distractions impact worshippers' theology and the way they view God. Although Adam and Eve were satisfied in the presence of God and did not need anything else, all Satan had to do was to steer their thinking away from knowing God. Once they got distracted, their thinking about other things led them to the point of no return, i.e. to eating the forbidden fruit. When their theology was short-circuited, the fall took place. Those who disobeyed God could not worship properly anymore. The original distraction ruined worship by twisting theology.

²²⁷ Kalas, 12.

Paul Miller, author of *A Praying Life: Connecting With God In A Distracting World*, seems to concur with Kalas. He points out that the challenge of proper listening is not technical but is about the listener's heart. He states,

The problem isn't the activity of listening, but my listening heart. Am I attentive to God? Is my heart soft and teachable? Am I remembering his ways, his commands? Psalm 25:15 says, "My eyes are ever toward the Lord." The means of communication is secondary to a surrendered heart. Our responsibility is to cultivate a listening heart in the midst of the noise from our own hearts and from the world, not to mention the Devil.²²⁸

There are distractions both from within and from outside, the things of Satan.

Nevertheless, Miller points hearers to a heart issue instead of listening techniques.²²⁹

Hearers are responsible to cultivate a heart that listens in the midst of distractions. Not necessarily by getting rid of distractions, but by gazing on God and staying focused on Him. Social media is full of bad theology, and it never stops getting updated.²³⁰ And hearers are tempted to keep themselves busy, never stopping, as if they are God.²³¹ Still,

²²⁸ Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting With God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 247.

²²⁹ The heart issue is not just about having no desire to listen attentively. Hearers of the smartphone world may come from an anti-preaching, anti-religion cultural context. The fallen condition that needs to be addressed may be believing bad doctrine. Tim Keller says there is now "an unprecedented move toward individualism, the idea that each person had within him or herself the capability of discovering truth without the aid of ancient wisdom or divine revelation. In earlier times it had still been thought that there were moral absolutes and natural laws that had to be followed, but now, it was said, we could discover them on our own through our individual purpose of exhaustive surveillance ... In earlier modern times, religion was still seen as a good thing—or at least a benign one. There was still a general understanding that society should be built upon shared moral norms that people should submit to, and religion was one of the things that helped people live by those moral norms. That has changed." For more on this cultural shift, see Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Redeemer/Viking, 2016), 122-123.

²³⁰ Speaking of the new late-modern narrative, not least what expressive individualism looks like, Tim Keller says, "Its essence is captured by the words of the song 'Let It Go' in the Disney movie *Frozen*. The song is sung by a character determined to no longer 'be the good girl' that her family and society had wanted her to be. Instead she would 'let go' and express what she had been holding back inside." See Keller, *Preaching*, 134.

²³¹ "But even when we have another 112 or so waking hours each to do and discuss and dialogue and debate, it's still easy to be restless for these thirty minutes. We love the idea of equality, and we're

what they first need to do is to see and savor God the Son. They are to listen to the word of Christ and know that He is God. Then there is dying to sin and living to Christ, who has risen from the dead.²³² Finally, a hearer's heart is transformed into a listening heart—again. In short, hearers receive a listening heart as they listen to the word of Christ. Only God can solve the heart issue, reforming the heart with good theology.²³³

Know Where Distractions Go

Kalas appeals to God's sovereignty as he encourages preachers not to give up in the midst of living in the forest named Distraction.²³⁴ He declares:

It is not acceptable to complain about the times or bemoan the problem. If distraction is a fact of our era, then we are called as faith-communicators to contend with it. If, further, distraction is a dominant factor in our times, we should waste no time in knowing how to use it rather than allowing it to make us irrelevant. Fortunately, we're not alone in this battle. God, who has chosen to "discern my thought from far away" and who is "acquainted with all my ways" (Ps 139:2-3 NRSV) is not undone by our world of distractions.²³⁵

Kalas may sound like he is simply voicing the battle cry of a veteran preacher in the field, facing a giant. He does not seem to discuss tactics or strategy. Rather, he points preachers

accustomed to listening on our own terms." See David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 166.

²³² As Miller explains, "Listening is just one of the things that happens in the course of my soul connecting with God. You can't listen to God if you are isolated from a life of surrender that draws you into his story for your life. And it must be a gospel story. By that I mean your dying, your weakness is what you bring to the table. God brings to the table his grace, his resurrection." See Miller, 247.

²³³ Dennis E. Johnson asserts that the "only remedy" for bad doctrine is good doctrine. He says, "Solid doctrinal teaching is the only remedy for 'the scandal of the Evangelical mind.' The evangelical's mind needs to be renovated with biblical truth—the system of truth revealed in Scripture and summarized in Reformation confession—if it is to be a truly Christian mind, able to withstand error's onslaughts." See Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ From All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), 45.

²³⁴ Kalas, 18.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

to their God, who is sovereign over all. God is still omniscient to Kalas, even in an age of distraction. Urging preachers to put their trust in Him who is all-knowing, Kalas reminds them of their call “as faith-communicators.” He appeals to their faith in Christ, which is a gift from God in the first place. Because God is almighty, preachers, by faith, ought to use distraction instead of being conquered by it. Thus, discussing God’s sovereignty, Kalas seems to interpret the current culture, an age of distraction, as a vessel that exists to magnify the power of God.

Reminding church leaders of the apostle Paul who strengthened the church “on the back of technology,”²³⁶ which was his written letters, and of the reformers who used another “cutting-edge” technology called the printing press,²³⁷ Wise also points the church to God’s sovereignty when he disagrees with those who dismiss online worship services:

But is our God not mighty to save? If the one who cannot be bound by space, time, the Red Sea, or our religion, if the one who speaks through deceivers, donkeys, and dead men, if God is the one who confounds death, surely he can find a way to speak through an Internet connection. Can he not? ... Today, online campuses serve a similar purpose as the mediums of days gone by. Same with social networks, blogs, and websites. Each of these forums, together called an *online presence*, extends the reach of the church. They allow us to extend our reach into the lives of people we know, love and care about. Because we are ambassadors of Jesus, his presence accompanies us into the nooks and crannies of the web.²³⁸

Wise taps on the shoulders of church leaders in order to convince them that the Internet is more than just a tool. He is making a theological point in claiming that Christ is actually present on the Internet. Social media is not the Devil’s turf. The smartphone world is not

²³⁶ Wise, 111.

²³⁷ Ibid., 23.

²³⁸ Ibid., 111-112.

necessarily of Satan. Although Satan may use smartphones and the Internet to tempt hearers—if possible, even the elect—Christ is present online just as the apostle Paul was spiritually present in the house churches as his letters were read. Christ is not only mighty to use social media, but He is also the God who is there in and through social media. Christ is present when people listen to His word using their smartphones. “Never underestimate the power of presence—online or off,” says Wise.²³⁹ Distractions ought to magnify the Christ whose presence cannot be bound. Distractions exist to the glory of God.

God the Son is the aim of preaching as well.²⁴⁰ In *Christ-Centered Preaching*, Bryan Chapell proclaims,

Theocentric preaching is Christ-centered preaching because to proclaim God as he has revealed himself is to make known the providing nature and character that are eternally manifested in Christ (Heb. 13:8). A focus on God’s redemptive activity sets the stage for Christ’s work, alerts the human heart to its necessity, and/or exposes the divine character as Deliverer. When we see God at work, Christ’s ministry inevitably comes into view ... Thus, the sermon’s purpose remains faithful to the text’s original aim of enabling the people to understand his redemptive activity—predicting it, preparing to understand its nature, reflecting its need, and/or detailing the results of Christ’s work in our lives.²⁴¹

During the Sunday morning preaching event, worshippers are to see Christ and celebrate both His attributes and His work of grace. Thus, preachers are to point hearers to Him

²³⁹ Wise, 112.

²⁴⁰ Mathis, a former assistant to John Piper, also declares, “Jesus didn’t just display the importance of preaching in his life, but he is the focal point of all faithful preaching in the church. Just as our focus together in the whole of corporate worship is the crucified and risen Christ and the incomparable excellencies of his person and work, so also is the focus of our preaching.” See Mathis, 167.

²⁴¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 304.

alone.²⁴² This also means hearers are to see God's redemptive activity through which Christ is being magnified. Christ may not be biblically magnified in the sermon text unless God's redemptive history sets the stage for Christ.²⁴³ When God's redemptive activity is faithfully presented, hearers may be reminded of the truth that even the current age of distraction is in God's sovereign plan. They may also realize what Christ has done and will do in and through the age of distraction. God is at work.

Thus, hearers may see both the cross and their fallen condition.²⁴⁴ When Christ is being proclaimed through "detailing the results of Christ's work in our lives" as Chapell encourages preachers to do, hearers may realize that Christ has died for all sins, including their addictions. For example, someone's fallen condition may be their desire to be perceived as someone who is busy all the time.²⁴⁵ They might desire to be defined by

²⁴² Although preachers point hearers to Christ during their preaching, it may not necessarily mean that their preaching is perfect. By the grace of Christ, God may use a preacher's Christ-centered hermeneutics (methods of biblical interpretation) as a means of sanctification for hearers. The gospel is perfect; but the preacher's endeavor cannot be perfect. Hence, Goldsworthy seems to encourage preachers to rely on Christ's righteousness, namely His perfect hermeneutics, "According to the gospel, everything he is in his perfect humanity, he is on our behalf as our representative and substitute. He justifies us as receivers and responders to the word of God. Our hermeneutical endeavour is ideally the sanctification process that is the fruit of our Saviour's perfect hermeneutics and response to the word of God. It will be this only if our hermeneutics is gospel-centered." See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 57.

²⁴³ Steven C. Chapman and Scotty Smith well describe the significance of redemptive history. They say, "*Redemption is not a metaphorical theme, but an historical event in the Bible. Redemption centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. All 'redemptive stories' in the Bible are meant to be understood and experienced in relationship to Jesus' life, death and resurrection.*" See Steven C. Chapman and Scotty Smith, *Restoring Broken Things: What Happens When We Catch a Vision for the New World Jesus is Creating*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 44.

²⁴⁴ Discussing the significance of Christ-centered preaching, T. David Gordon illustrates how hearers are to see their sins and ask Christ to rescue them. He says, "Even when the faithful exposition of particular texts requires some explanation of aspects of our behavior, it is always to be done in a manner that the hearer perceives such commended behavior to be itself a matter of being rescued from the power of sin through the grace of Christ. When properly done, the hearer longs to be rescued from that depravity from which no sinner can rescue himself; and the hearer rejoices to know that a kind and gracious God is both willing and able to begin that rescue, which will be completed in glorification." See Gordon, 71.

²⁴⁵ *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* provides many examples of the ways in which the gospel pierces the smartphone addicts' fallen condition. Charles A. Anderson says, "The

what they do or how they do things, namely their busyness.²⁴⁶ Some of them desire to be perceived as someone who is always needed by others—as someone who is very important. This desire may be what drives them to constantly multitask on their smartphones. Addictions are heart matters.²⁴⁷

Now, because Christ has died for all the sins of the elect, hearers will realize that their addictions are forgiven once for all.²⁴⁸ They no longer need to be perceived as someone who is always needed because they are justified in Christ. They don't need to define themselves by what they do or how they do things anymore because Christ has already accepted them. The gospel motivates them to find satisfaction in Christ, not in other things. At the same time, Christ has set them free from their slavery to sin,²⁴⁹ so they may repent and strive to live as those who have been set free.²⁵⁰ In other words, the gospel also provides the ability to follow Christ daily. Christ not only motivates hearers;

new standard response to the question 'How are you?' is 'Busy!' As we complain about the spreadsheet to prepare for tomorrow's meeting ... we may fall prey to the trap of actually making a kind of boast: 'I'm so busy, I must be important.' One's busyness is worn like a badge of honor, a measure of one's status. It is possible to become a people defined by what we do." See Charles A. Anderson, "The Business of Busyness: Or, What Should We Make of Martha?" in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 161.

²⁴⁶ Though Pang may not be a believer, he accurately describes part of the smartphone addicts' fallen condition. He says, "When everyone looks perpetually busy, being overloaded is a badge of honor; working too hard is the new normal." See Pang, 11.

²⁴⁷ Burk Parsons persuasively links digital addictions to "matters of the heart." He says, "There are numerous people who struggle with addictions that many of us mistakenly deem as 'harmless,' such as ... social media, and Internet addictions. Whether public or private, big or little, outward or inward, addictions are real and are ultimately matters of the heart in the lives of image bearers of God." See Parsons, 2.

²⁴⁸ Romans 6:10, Hebrews 9:12.

²⁴⁹ The word "addiction" is derived from ancient Roman culture. Alter explains, "In ancient Rome, being addicted meant you had just been sentenced to slavery. If you owed someone money and couldn't repay the debt, a judge would sentence you to addiction. You'd be forced to work as a slave until you'd repaid your debt. This was the first use of the word *addiction*, but it evolved to describe any bond that was difficult to break." See Alter, 29.

²⁵⁰ Romans 6:7-14.

He also empowers them. Therefore, Christ-centered preaching invites hearers to repent of their addictions and turn to God.²⁵¹ Smartphone addiction does not exist apart from Christ's sovereign redemptive plans. He is the Lord of the smartphone world. All this time, God is at work.

If a preacher practices Christ-centered preaching as God's redemptive work behind the pulpit, hearers, too, ought to worship Christ by listening appropriately as the preacher magnifies Christ through the text of his preaching.²⁵² Augustine of Hippo concurs, saying, when the "preacher speaks the truth," it is from Christ Himself, and "it is our duty to listen, but with the ears of our hearts."²⁵³ Preachers can address hearers' very hearts when Christ is preached behind the pulpit. Zack Eswine, in *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect*, separates Christ-centered preaching from devilish sermons, saying,

²⁵¹ Other than recommending "making amends," the contemporary addiction experts do not seem to encourage addicts to repent of their addictions. Turkle implies that her colleague is basically worshipping her fake self-image on social media in a chapter entitled "My Tiny God." Still, she does not recommend repentance. Neither Alter nor Swinger seems to recognize that addictions are sinful although they understand that addicts put their hope and trust in the wrong source of pleasure. Only the gospel can bring addicts to the cross and allow them to realize they are in need of the grace of Christ—because Christ is more beautiful than the wrong source of pleasure. Ed Welch, director of the School of Biblical Counseling at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, says, "Though it is common for addiction discussions to turn toward spirituality, such discussion do not usually talk about trust in the one, true God, and they do not often reflect the fact that addictive decisions are about God. Though the popular literature on addictions identifies making amends, it never identifies repentance before the Lord." See Ed Welch, "Addictions and Idolatry," *Table Talk*, August 2016, 7.

²⁵² Jonathan Edwards describes how God uses preaching to magnify Christ and sanctify His people. Edwards asserts, "The preaching of the gospel by faithful ministers is the principal means that God uses for exhibiting Christ, his love and benefits to his elect people, and the chief means of their being sanctified, and so fitted to enjoy their spiritual bridegroom." See Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon 2: The Church's Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 23.

²⁵³ Augustine, the fifth century bishop of Hippo in North Africa, declared the following during his preaching: "If He kept silent now, the Sacred Scriptures would keep silent. His Word is preached, and inasmuch as the preacher speaks the truth, Christ speaks through him. He does not keep silent, and it is our duty to listen, but with the ears of our hearts." See Polman, 127.

Sermons that start with Christ for unbelievers but offer something other than Christ for a believer's hope and growth are growing devilish. The Christian depends upon the gospel now as much as when he or she first believed ... Devilry offers no third way. Christless religion or Christless irreligion form the only goals of devilish sermons.²⁵⁴

The only difference is displaying the beauty of Christ over the text of preaching.²⁵⁵ The church should preach the gospel to the younger generations who never come out of their online closet. At the same time, the church still needs to hear the gospel herself. The Christian is in need of hearing Christ preached behind the pulpit without ceasing. According to Eswine, the church never graduates from needing the gospel. Christ must be preached as the hope of the church as much as He is to the smartphone world. Christ is the aim of preaching regardless of the means, whether online or offline.²⁵⁶

For the reasons outlined above, Wise does not consider the smartphone world a real distraction. He argues that church leadership must humbly reform their local congregations to be more "social" than ever.²⁵⁷ With a wide variety of social media

²⁵⁴ Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 240-241.

²⁵⁵ Steven J. Lawson, a teaching fellow at Ligonier Ministries, says that Christ-centered preaching is not optional. He declares, "Because Christ is preeminent throughout Scripture, He must be foremost in biblical preaching. To preach the Bible rightly necessitates proclaiming Christ faithfully. To faithfully proclaim the written Word demands that we preach the living Word. All biblical preaching must declare Christ as its dominant theme. Because the Bible is Christ-centered, true preaching must likewise be Christ-centered." See Steven J. Lawson, *The Kind of Preaching God Blesses* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 58.

²⁵⁶ Still, the church should not begin witch-hunting her preachers prematurely. If she does, no preacher could stand. Eswine continues, "What is most sobering, however, is the remembrance that even the most genuine preachers, even those who have no other desire but to forsake all for Christ, can in some degree imitate Satan's preaching. We too can hear the words, 'Get behind me, Satan!' (Matt. 16:23). We can willingly and even unwittingly act as coconspirators with the flesh and the world as they co-opt the rebel sermons of the devil." See Eswine, 242.

²⁵⁷ In summary, Wise's plea has been restated in a somewhat prophetic tone: "The point is simple: churches need leaders who will take a risk and break the stranglehold of 'this is how it's always been.' There is too

networks to choose from, Wise's point is that "each one of these networks represents the idea that people have a voice and this voice can be shared with the world—for better or worse."²⁵⁸ Thus, being "social" through social media as a local church implies that church leadership should strive to help hearers actively engage in their corporate worship. For example, a local church, according to Wise, might broadcast their live Sunday service on Facebook and have a live chat room available during the Sunday morning sermon. Wise asserts that social media networks of the smartphone world are through Christ and for Christ.²⁵⁹

Online Interaction to Cultivate Engagement

Nils Smith, the social media pastor at Community Bible Church in San Antonio, Texas, agrees with Wise. He states:

In the past, people might discuss a sermon over lunch, but today it's tweeted about as it's happening. The impact of this interaction is more powerful than we can imagine. So why should you use social media? ... We are called to share the love of Christ with all the world. Throughout history, I don't know if there has ever been a greater tool to do this than the Internet and, specifically, social media. We cannot take this opportunity lightly.²⁶⁰

Smith regards social media not only as a "great tool" but also as an "opportunity." He quotes a passage from Matthew 28 to remind readers of the Great Commission.²⁶¹ Then

much at stake. Local congregations who don't make the transition, those who refuse to turn the corner, will most likely see their influence fade and, eventually, disappear." See Wise, 34.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 46.

²⁵⁹ Colossians 1:16.

²⁶⁰ Smith, *Social Media Guide For Ministry*, 8.

²⁶¹ "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

he links the mission of the church to the opportunity offered by social media. He claims that the impact of live engagement with people on social media is unprecedented. Simply put, he says that Christ sent the disciples to the end of the earth, so they ought to use social media to reach the end of the earth.²⁶²

Smith offers much practical advice for the church, which seems to be the very purpose of publishing his book. Somewhat ironically, he is reaching out to church leaders using offline resources—such as the printing press—to convince them to adapt to the smartphone world. “I love seeing cell phones in church! In fact, I highly encourage you to make sure that you have Wi-Fi available, as you are likely also seeing more iPads and tablets in church, as well,” says Smith. “They are great reading devices for the Bible and taking notes.”²⁶³ He asks pastors, “Why would you not want your congregation posting comments about your church with their friends on social networks? For many young adults, this level of interaction helps them have a higher level of focus on the message while in church.”²⁶⁴ This advice, if put into practice appropriately, might allow hearers to actively respond to their preacher’s Sunday morning preaching while it is being delivered. It may cultivate a “higher level of focus,” enabling hearers to stay focused on their preacher’s preaching and listen attentively. Of course, many new people may visit

the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

²⁶² “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

²⁶³ Smith, *Social Media Guide For Ministry*, 67.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

the online church campus because hearers and preachers are allowed to leave comments or chat at any time, including asking “How can we pray for you?”²⁶⁵

Wise presents Omaha-based Christ Community Church as an example of a church that shares Smith’s philosophy that churches should strive to be social in an age of distraction to support his argument. Robert Murphy, the online pastor of Christ Community, shepherds their online campus ministry. This particular local church has positioned a gatekeeper to keep the faith community safe in the era of “no gatekeepers.”²⁶⁶ Hearers are encouraged to actively engage in their respective worship services using social media, especially during the preaching event. Wise explains how this church seeks to engage people online:

The church streams two weekly services live through the online campus ... a chat room is moderated every week during the service, allowing participants to interact with Robert, his online team, and other visitors. For the folks who visit the online campus site, church isn’t something you passively sit and watch. Church becomes something you actively participate in—asking questions, encouraging others from around the world, and responding to God’s Word—all online.²⁶⁷

For Wise, social media in the age of distraction is not a distraction; it is an opportunity.

Hearers are provided a platform from which to actively engage during Sunday morning

²⁶⁵ Visitors of the online church campus may be allowed to leave various comments, including their emotions. Or they could start chatting as the service is in session. For example, “Amen,” “That is so me,” “I must repent of this,” “Is he still preaching from the same series?” “Honey, somebody has your number,” “lol,” or “How can we pray for you?” For ministry tips on starting a good thread to connect with hearers online, see Smith, *Social Media Guide For Ministry*, 52-53.

²⁶⁶ Wise humorously describes how pastors are concerned about their church being “social” through social media: “I see it in the concerned look on the face of pastors when I speak at conferences or work with churches. They seemed dazed, like after taking a right-cross from Manny Pacquiao. They ask questions like, ‘How do we control the conversation on our Facebook page?’ and ‘How do we make sure no one on staff says something inappropriate on social media?’ The answer to both questions is, of course, you can’t. You cannot control the online conversation surrounding your church, business, or organization. You can only take steps to influence it.” See Wise, 47.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 69-70.

preaching. They are allowed to interact with the pastor, his ministry team and the other hearers. They may be able to minister to one another by asking questions about the content of preaching and by saying something encouraging to preachers and other hearers, according to Wise. In other words, social media can be flooded with good doctrine and its followers instead of bad doctrine from corporations. An online campus site and social media opportunities, if properly structured, seem to cultivate visitor engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event.

All of this is possible because almost everyone has a smartphone, especially young people (see Appendix 6). Yet Smith argues that the church has to stay awake and maneuver just as Wise insisted earlier. Smith asserts, “If something else (such as Google+) becomes better than Facebook ... know that the tools you have at your fingertips will be that much better, as well. Don’t get too comfortable; change is coming, and we must constantly adapt!”²⁶⁸ No one social media network is the answer. While social media giants like Facebook are unlikely to fall apart, church leaders should not latch on to it as if it is irreplaceable. Another social media platform could take over sometime in the future. All consumers have to do is to keep a smartphone at their fingertips (or whatever device may come along in the future). The same rule applies for church leaders. They should be fine as long as they continue to adapt. Social media networks keep themselves busy trying to influence more users or at least survive, and the smartphone world sustains social media. Smith asserts that the church should never stop adapting its use of technology to be social in the age of distraction.

²⁶⁸ Smith, *Social Media Guide For Ministry*, 388.

Meaningful Interaction

How to Walk Into Church was published in the smartphone world. Yet, author Tony Payne still interprets Hebrews 10:24-25 as literally as the early church did.²⁶⁹ He applies the passage to a local church setting, paraphrasing, “Don’t make a habit of staying away ... but instead consider how you might stimulate one another to love and to good deeds, and encourage one another to keep going.”²⁷⁰ Published in 2015, Payne’s book actively encourages readers to physically show up instead of passively assuming consistency in attendance. He continues,

But what we’re talking about, and what we see in the New Testament, is the ministry of the *pew*—a ministry that *we all do*, each Sunday, as we all seek to build one another in love. Is that how you think of church—as a chance to encourage, build up, love and spur on your brothers and sisters? Or, like the recipients of Hebrews, have you been neglecting this wonderful duty and opportunity?²⁷¹

Payne encourages believers to be present for the Sunday morning preaching event and fellowship. He links his application with the original recipients of the letter, who were inconsistent in their physical engagement level.²⁷² He argues that hearers are doing their ministry inside the church through the means of physically engaging in the weekly service, including the sermon. Hearers are invited to actively join the ministry. For

²⁶⁹ “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

²⁷⁰ Payne, 28.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

²⁷² Steven Smallman defines the disciples of Christ as Christians who follow Him according to Acts 11:26. Yet he insists on joining a physical gathering of disciples. So it is not only a personal call to follow Jesus; it is communal, too. Smallman asserts, “Being a disciple of Jesus is a *personal* response to the call of Jesus, but we are also called to become part of a *community*, a *fellowship*, of disciples. This is the essence of the church that Jesus came to build.” See Smallman, 36-38.

Payne, physical presence and engagement are ministry opportunities in an age of distraction.²⁷³

Smith does not necessarily disagree with Payne as he still values hearers' physical presence on Sundays. He claims many pastors come to him in fear of becoming irrelevant to the smartphone world due to their offline-only ministries. Smith responds to them by saying, "The reality is that if you are not relevant in your local context, it is doubtful that you will be relevant online. The technology does not make you relevant, but it can make relevant messages more effective in reaching a greater potential audience."²⁷⁴ While promoting the online church's effectiveness, he also values the traditional offline local ministry context. Smith may use many online resources for his own ministry, but he does not say the local context should be discontinued. Instead, he emphasizes the fact that effective online interactions must be built on the foundation of healthy offline engagement.²⁷⁵

Nancy Jo Sales, award-winning *Vanity Fair* author, interviewed more than 200 girls about their experiences online and offline. These girls, who were between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, are coming of age in an online culture that normalizes extreme

²⁷³ Wise, 69-70.

²⁷⁴ Smith, *Social Media Guide For Ministry*, 10.

²⁷⁵ Wise adds his preference to the argument as well. As for him, "Online community is definitely preferable to no community whatsoever. Lives have been changed, saved, and redeemed all because gospel-centered online communities exist." Nonetheless, he acknowledges the limitations and/or shortcomings of online communities. His position is as follows: "We needed to see his face, hear his heartbeat, touch the hem of his garment, and watch the blood flow from his veins. There is an inherent *carnality* to the gospel message, one that cannot be fully translated online. We are indeed the body of Christ. Again, we can get close, but we can't get all the way ... I suppose the inherent danger of online communities is when there is a mistaken belief they can serve as a one-for-one replacement for in-person communities. They can't (and shouldn't). Offline trumps online." See Wise, 155.

behavior, from the casual exchange of nude photos to sexual harassment.²⁷⁶ The girls answered Sale's questions in the context of this hypersexualized culture. One of the eighteen-year-old girls testified,

Social media is this weird, kind of half reality, half fantasy world. It's almost like you know people's secrets, and they never know how much you know. There's something sort of sinister about it. It's like you're spying ... I think that making a conscious effort to not be on my phone all the time and enjoy life as it's happening has really helped me stay sane. Gradually being able to separate from social media has helped me in just realizing that the world *isn't* social media. Social media is so present, it feels like it's *there*—but it's not. You may think that that is what reality is, but it isn't. And so to separate from it just keeps me seeing the world as it is, if that makes sense.”²⁷⁷

Most of the interviewees were exposed to social media at a very young age. Some were exposed to extreme sexual activities and/or behaviors as early as age eleven. Many of these girls struggled with developing basic communication skills due to excessive time spent on smartphones and social media. It may not be uncommon for them to confuse actual reality with what they think is real on social media.²⁷⁸ Many of them struggle with a new phenomenon called “Facebook depression” as a result of the psychological pressure often present in social media interactions.²⁷⁹ Social media outlets of the church may prove difficult venues for them to build genuine relationships or have meaningful

²⁷⁶ The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) protects the privacy of children. Still, “Minors between the ages of 13 and 17 have little legal protection from the hazards of communicating online” because COPPA only applies to children under the age of 13. See Costello, 313.

²⁷⁷ Nancy Jo Sales, *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers* (New York: Vintage, 2017), 290.

²⁷⁸ Swingle, 167.

²⁷⁹ *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, reports that researchers have defined Facebook depression as “depression that develops when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression.” The authors continue, “Acceptance by and contact with peers is an important element of adolescent life. The intensity of the online world is thought to be a factor that may trigger depression in some adolescents.” See O'Keeffe, 802.

worship experiences because many end up developing trust issues because of experiences they have online.²⁸⁰ And according to recent research, some cannot even trust themselves.²⁸¹

In Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age, Sherry Turkle seems to agree with Sales concerning the need for meaningful interactions. Turkle asserts,

The moment is right. We had a love affair with a technology that seemed magical. But like great magic, it worked by commanding our attention and not letting us see anything but what the magician wanted us to see. Now we are ready to reclaim our attention—for solitude, for friendship, for society.²⁸²

Turkle seems to bemoan the fact that corporations have been wielding their doctrinal tools with the result that people have been distracted from one another. People seem to forget how to physically interact with others in the midst of being obsessed with technology. They have been busy engaging in the doctrine promulgated by the social media networks to the point of hurting themselves by disengaging from one another. Yet Turkle seems to believe all is not lost yet. She contends that now is the time to have meaningful interactions offline. For Turkle, this is an opportunity to improve offline human interactions as balm to heal the hurts and wounds of social media addicts.

²⁸⁰ One of the other young girls describes her online relationship experience like this: “Some kids talk online. But some boys are talking to like twenty other girls. That’s happened to me before. It sucks. It’s so gross, just grimy. You go on Facebook and you see that a guy is flirting with another girl like she’s his girlfriend. I know a lot of people who have gone through that. I don’t know if it’s considered ‘cheating,’ ‘cause it’s just online, but you’re leading the other person on; you’re being mean ... It totally affects me ... I have trust issues. I don’t trust people very easily.” See Sales, 245.

²⁸¹ Disclosing her thirty-four-year-old colleague’s story, Turkle states, “But online, she feels involved in her performances to the point that she has lost track of what is performance and what is not ... Research shows that those who use social media the most have difficulty reading human emotions, including their own.” See Turkle, 24-25.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 361.

If Turkle is right, the church has a similar opportunity in the current age of distraction. Chap Bettis, a discipleship expert, seems to agree with Turkle. He proclaims, “Electronics and media merely reveal and amplify heart issues. Since sin is in our hearts, we will have problems. We will expect mistakes. These are learning opportunities.”²⁸³ He maintains that the church can learn to minister to the younger generations concerning their sins through its offline presence. The smartphone world may be an opportunity not only for an online presence of the church but also for what the church has been practicing throughout its history, which is face-to-face fellowship. Kalas, in *Preaching in An Age of Distraction*, seems to concur with Turkle. He declares,

I don’t know how much more this system of faux friendship and intimacy will grow; at this moment the market seems insatiable. I do know, however, that the Internet and the cell phone tell us how much we humans want to know that somebody cares about us. No one is in a better position to fill that need than the pastor-preacher. Indeed, this is the name of our calling. We are pastors; we watch over our sheep. And if our heart is as God ordained it to be, we see all individuals as potentially part of our fold—not necessarily in the sense of their uniting formally with our religious body, but in the sense that we are ready to care about them and if possible to minister to them.²⁸⁴

Kalas believes that online interactions cannot replace meaningful face-to-face interaction.²⁸⁵ Further, he declares that the smartphone world is begging for meaningful interactions because people long for what relationships ought to be: caring for one another tangibly. This particular chapter in human history may be a small—but

²⁸³ Bettis, 245.

²⁸⁴ Kalas, 150.

²⁸⁵ Turkle seems to be sarcastic about caring machines and apps that claim to help humans to be fully human, saying, “Caring machines challenge our most basic notions of what it means to commit to each other. Empathy apps claim they will tutor us back to being fully human.” See Turkle, 361.

powerful—window of opportunity for the church to minister to people, especially those who have trust issues online.²⁸⁶

Yet Kalas' premise is that only those whose hearts have been transformed can truly care for others, regardless of their religious agenda. Thus, this “opportunity” should be the overflow of genuine care rather than using ministry as a means of gain.²⁸⁷ Why does Kalas believe the pastor-preacher is in a better position than anyone to provide such care when the world seems to be in need of meaningful interaction?

Meaningful Conversation

Christ-centered preaching proponent Bryan Chapell speaks of the critical role preachers play in helping congregants apply biblical truth to their lives. He asserts, “Applications of biblical truth are not complete until the preacher explains how to plug in to the power that God provides. Since Christ-centered preaching teaches people that they cannot be the instrument of their own spiritual healing, preachers must also explain how to obey God.”²⁸⁸ Preachers are to make biblical truth plain not only by faithful exegesis but also by telling hearers how to live out what Christ requires of them.²⁸⁹ Christ-centered preaching submits that the right means with the right motives should not be neglected behind the pulpit in the midst of insisting on right motives that justify the right means.

²⁸⁶ Sales, 245.

²⁸⁷ Alter, 118-119.

²⁸⁸ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 323.

²⁸⁹ Chapell adds, “Preachers make a fundamental mistake when they assume that by providing parishioners with biblical information the people will automatically make the connection between scriptural truth and their everyday lives.” See Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 210.

Preachers are called to unpack both the meaning and detailed applications of the sermon text.²⁹⁰

According to Chapell, the reason it is so important for preachers to provide specific applications from the sermon text is that preachers are to help hearers obey God. A preacher is to tell his hearers to obey, lest they displease God. But his responsibility does not end there, according to Chapell. A preacher cares for his hearers and desires to help them obey as much as he can—through the means of preaching.²⁹¹ As a result, the preacher is called not only to preach, but also to be a pastor-preacher. His pastoral heart empowers him to speak to his hearers about how they can obey God.²⁹²

In *The Family At Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings*, Joel Beeke urges readers to listen to the word of God carefully and provides practical tips to hone their sermon listening skills. He also stresses the importance of obeying God's word by properly applying biblical precepts. "How can we put into practice what God's

²⁹⁰ Still, Dennis E. Johnson, another Christ-centered preaching expert, reminds readers of those who disagree with Chapell even within the redemptive-history circles. They believe that it is the Holy Spirit's job to provide applications, whereas preachers are to faithfully exegete the sermon text without providing any specific application points. He says, "In some redemptive-historical circles, the reaction against perceived moralism is carried further, with a motto, 'The indicative implies or entails the imperative,' understood to mean that the preacher need not and should not make specific applications, calling for changed attitudes or behavior, lest he trespass into the Holy Spirit's territory or distract his listeners from Scripture's primary summons to adore the Redeemer." See Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 51.

²⁹¹ In his discipleship training curriculum, Stephen Smallman insists on putting the word of Christ into practice. Every chapter is followed by assignments to help readers to put the word into practice. Christ-centered discipleship includes providing specific application points. Smallman says, "And because the Bible warns about being a hearer of the Word but not a doer, you will be given assignments to help you start along with path of following Jesus. These assignments will point you in the right direction, and they are steps *you* must take. You are the one who must walk one step at a time." See Smallman, 16.

²⁹² Josh Moody reminds relatively new hearers of the responsibility they bear as they listen to Christ-centered preaching. He seems to value application as much as faithful exegesis. He explains, "There's no point being shown Jesus in all his beauty and being moved to embrace him anew as the Lord of your life, and then doing absolutely zilch about it. You might as well have not listened at all. In fact, eternally speaking, you would have been better off without the opportunity to hear and to reject what you heard." See Moody, 42.

Word commands us to do? Here are some guidelines for practicing the Christian life,” says Beeke.²⁹³ The first application he specifies is “Listen carefully to sermons that teach us how to live,” which may be assumed to be Christ-centered sermons.

Then the second application point that Beeke provides is as follows: “Ask older, more experienced Christians for advice. Talk to people who are spiritually mature about how to live as a Christian. For example, ask such a wise person: What does it mean to love your enemies? Let him explain what that means to him.”²⁹⁴ For Beeke, one of the means to obey the word of Christ is talking to other Christians, not least those who are “older, more experienced Christians.” Beeke assumes that younger Christians are to have face-to-face conversations with mature Christian brothers and sisters who are modeling the means of obedience themselves.²⁹⁵ This approach is different from chatting with a random person who claims to be a mature believer on social media. It is also different from emailing a celebrity pastor whose lifestyle is not transparent to the average believer. The younger generations are encouraged to talk to older believers whom they actually know very well.

Turkle seems to be in agreement with Beeke. She points her readers to one of the lost traditions, especially in an age of distraction. She explains,

Over the past decades, when the idea of older people and robots has come up, the emphasis has been on whether the older person will talk to the

²⁹³ See Joel R. Beeke, *The Family At Church: Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 31.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

²⁹⁵ Timothy Z. Witmer well describes the qualifications of “more experienced Christians.” He says, “It should be someone who is grounded in the Word, someone who has knowledge of you and your situation, and someone you can trust. It is crucial to communicate to your children the importance of seeking wise counsel in the decisions they make.” See Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader At Home: Knowing, Leading, Protecting, and Providing for Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 92.

robot ... But when you think about moment of life we are considering, it is not just that older people are supposed to be talking. *Younger people are supposed to be listening.* This is the compact between generations. I was once told that some older cultures have a saying: When a young person misbehaves, it means that “they had no one to tell them the old stories.” When we celebrate robot listeners that cannot listen, we show too little interest in what our elders have to say. We build machines that guarantee that human stories will fall upon deaf years.²⁹⁶

The scary thing to Turkle may be that automation and robotics have been advancing to the point that they replace everything, including human conversation. Drivers use GPS devices to provide directions.²⁹⁷ GPS devices are transitioning to self-driving cars because they will take care of safe driving.²⁹⁸ Now, automation is proposed as a means of listening to older people talk. Turkle argues that we should not try to automate everything that humans are supposed to do, especially engage in conversation.²⁹⁹ The younger generations miss out on weighty matters in life when they do not listen to older people who are more mature and experienced in life. The younger generations need to listen as much as older generations need to pass their wisdom down, according to Turkle.

Kalas encourages preachers to be pastor-preachers by having conversations with their hearers. He asserts,

²⁹⁶ Turkle, 359.

²⁹⁷ Carr seems to be concerned about how automation affects what it means to be human. He says, “Automation severs ends from means. It makes getting what we want easier, but it distances from the work of knowing ... Does our essence still lie in what we know, or are we now content to be defined by what we want?” See Carr, 232.

²⁹⁸ Matt Vella and Katy Steinmetz report that self-driving cars are better than humans. They say, “The computer is simply a better driver than a human. Better at keeping its eyes on other drivers; better at maintaining a steady cruising speed and thereby maximizing fuel efficiency; better at parsing GPS data, weather data, traffic data—any and all kinds of data, really—and better at making rapid-fire adjustments.” See Matt Vella and Katy Steinmetz, “Look, Ma, No Hands!” *Time: The Year in Review* 2016, December 9, 2016, 65.

²⁹⁹ Turkle clearly states her argument is “not anti-technology. It’s pro-conversation.” See Turkle, 25.

Preaching is a relationship: it is one person talking with another. This is one of the most personal relationships in which we humans can engage. This is especially true if the preacher is a good listener—and remember, there can't be good conversation without good listening. This relationship begins in day-by-day connections with the people.³⁰⁰

Kalas insists on pastoral care. He defines preaching as a “relationship,” the result of the overflow of daily pastoral care. In order to faithfully unpack the sermon text in the hearers' cultural context, the pastor-preacher must know where his people are coming from. He should visit them; he should spend time with them. He should talk to them. And more than anything, he should listen to them.

What does Kalas mean by listening to hearers? He seems to answer the question by saying that empathy is the spillover of meaningful physical belonging. He continues,

Sometimes these hours feed directly into the sermon-making process in that they show the preacher the joys, sorrows, hopes, despairs, laughter and tears with which people are living. This comes in hospital calls and periods of counseling, but also in the simple stuff of daily conversation, including the chitchat that is of little obvious significance but that often holds more substantial discourse together. That is, “quality time” requires time if there is to be quality time.³⁰¹

It seems as if Kalas is illustrating a scenario in which the “older, more experienced Christian” that Beeke describes is actively seeking out the younger generations.³⁰² A preacher may be regarded as one of the most mature brothers in the local church community. Though he is a leader, he should get out of his office and meet up with his members consistently. Kalas promotes informal gatherings rather than appointment-only counseling sessions or visitations. He encourages preachers to be a pastor-preacher who shares his life with his members, spending quality and quantity time during which he

³⁰⁰ Kalas, 151.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 152.

³⁰² Beeke, 31.

relates to the “joys, sorrows, hopes, despairs, laughter and tears with which people are living”—that is, showing empathy for them.³⁰³

Thus, Kalas’ understanding of meaningful conversation appears to involve quality time that is the overflow of consistent physical presence, which leads to empathizing with one another. This empathy ought to be genuine and mutual.³⁰⁴ Although Kalas mentions his sermon preparation, he does not seem to ask the pastor-preacher to use his hearers as his sermon preparation fodder.³⁰⁵ His aim does not seem to propose certain preaching techniques through which preacher could have a live dialogue with hearers behind the pulpit, such as “call and response” characteristic of African-American preaching.³⁰⁶ If that is Kalas’ aim, it may require him to know his congregants well for the sake of being able to instantaneously change the sermon content while he is yet preaching.³⁰⁷ Or he might want to come to know his congregants so well that he is able to play chess with them in his mind behind the pulpit as John Stott suggested.³⁰⁸ Yet he seems to insist on caring for one another based on the mutual empathy that the congregation should enjoy if

³⁰³ Quoting Louis C. K., Alter points out the significance of face-to-face communication in order to nurture empathy. C.K. asserts that “Face-to-face communication is essential, because it’s the only way for kids to appreciate how their words affect other people.” See Alter, 243.

³⁰⁴ Witmer humorously illustrates the dynamic present in both the pulpit and the pew. Quoting his friend Steve Brown, Witmer points out that Christ still loves His people even though both preacher and hearers may be afraid to be known too well: ““If you knew me the way I know me, you wouldn’t want to listen to me preach.” He quickly added, “If I knew you the way *you* know you, I wouldn’t want to preach to you!” Remarkably, the Lord knows *everything* about you and he loves you.” See Witmer, 18.

³⁰⁵ The following statement helps readers know Kalas’ heart better: “A generous soul not only gives a dollar to the panhandler, he also chats with him for a moment, making him a human being rather than an object of charity.” Kalas, 152.

³⁰⁶ Thomas, 88.

³⁰⁷ Robinson, 158.

³⁰⁸ Stott, 61.

their hearts are “as God ordained them to be.”³⁰⁹ This focus on caring for one another might imply that the pastor-preacher will benefit from quantity time with the younger generations as well.³¹⁰

Turkle seems to agree with Kalas. She states that human listening is irreplaceable, not only because robots cannot really listen and learn from older humans, but also because sociable robots do not minister to older people. She continues, “Robots can help to lower an unsteady body onto a bed. Robots can help locate a mislaid pair of glasses. All of these things seem so much for the good. Some argue that a robot chatting with an older person is also unequivocally for the good. But here, I think we need to carefully consider the human specificity of conversation and emotional care.”³¹¹ The older person and the robot must be able to talk to each other; they should be able to have some good conversations. That is what automation technology seems to push forward, according to Turkle. But she appears to doubt its efficacy, along with other experts.³¹² Robots would not be able to provide “conversation and emotional care” the way humans can.³¹³ Older people are in need of emotional care through the means of conversing with young people as much as the younger generations need to learn wisdom from older people.

³⁰⁹ Kalas, 150.

³¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

³¹¹ Turkle, 359.

³¹² Speaking of addictive online social platforms, Alter remarks, “The addictive online friendships that attract young gamers are dangerous, not for what they provide, but for what they can’t provide: a chance to learn what it means to sit, face-to-face, as you maintain a conversation with another person.” See Alter, 229.

³¹³ Hilarie Cash, a clinical psychologist and cofounder of an online game addiction rehab called reSTART, explains the importance of face-to-face interaction: “If we’re good friends, and we’re sitting together, that interaction, that energetic exchange releases a whole bouquet of neurochemicals that keeps us each regulated emotionally and physiologically ... We’re not meant to be isolated islands ... Even the smell of another person, the consistent eye contact that comes from being in the same room, is important.” See *ibid.*

Kalas also insists on making time for emotional care, saying, “Don’t try to make every conversation into big business; to do so is to make an object out of the other person. But don’t be surprised when big things happen in the midst of little business, and be ready for it. I confess with regret that I sometimes missed it.”³¹⁴ He seems to find the grace of Christ when he shares mundane things in life with his members. He promotes a mutual emotional care for one another that smartphones and apps cannot provide. Mutual care is possible when “older, experienced Christians,” consistently converse with the younger generations, and those relationships minister to the mature Christians as well.³¹⁵ The pastor-preacher can spread empathy as he interacts with his members in everyday life and allows himself to be a conduit for Christ’s healing.³¹⁶ The younger generations also have an opportunity to learn empathy from their pastor-preacher and put it into practice.

Payne seems to support Kalas’ philosophy of ministry. He encourages readers to casually grab a cup of coffee with other hearers. Then he continues, “It is ‘after church,’ but in another sense it’s not really after church at all. And it’s often during this informal church time that we are presented with prime opportunities to encourage and love and build up other people.”³¹⁷ He seems to believe in the power of mundane conversations

³¹⁴ Kalas, 152.

³¹⁵ Beeke, 31.

³¹⁶ Turkle argues that conversations can nurture empathy because they facilitate a healing mechanism. She says, “Research shows that those who use social media the most have difficulty reading human emotions, including their own. But the same research gives cause for optimism: We are resilient. Face-to-face conversation leads to greater self-esteem and an improved ability to deal with others. Again, *conversation cures*.” See Turkle, 25.

³¹⁷ Payne, 52.

just as Kalas does. In the spirit of Colossians 3:16,³¹⁸ he also encourages hearers to have sermon discussions with others because the “key thing is to speak of the word God.”³¹⁹ He asserts, “This is why our church gatherings are centered on hearing God’s word and responding to what we hear.”³²⁰ He also teaches hearers how to cultivate a mutually encouraging sermon discussion. He says, “Bounce off the sermon that you’ve all just heard. Over coffee, you might ask your friend, ‘What did you get out of the sermon today?’... As you’re listening to the sermon, jot down a question that you have or a key point that really challenged you, and then share that with someone after church.”³²¹

Moreover, Payne encourages hearers to care for newcomers, saying, “Another obvious way to love and serve over coffee is to be on the lookout for newcomers.”³²² He believes that encouraging sermon discussion inside the church body should minister to those who are visiting from the outside because it is a form of evangelism.³²³ Although some hearers may be afraid they are not knowledgeable or “good at starting these sorts of conversations,” Payne says that they should “pray—pray before church that God would use” them. He also encourages hearers to ask for one another’s prayer requests.³²⁴ He

³¹⁸ Colossians 3:16 reads, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

³¹⁹ Payne, 52.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid., 53-54.

³²² Ibid., 55.

³²³ Describing the contagious power of the gospel, Johnson declares, “The same gospel, faithfully preached, accomplishes both evangelism leading to conversion and edification leading to sanctification—both individual and corporate renewal together!” See Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 69.

³²⁴ Payne, 53.

believes that sermon discussions mutually encourage hearers to pray for others throughout the week. In other words, meaningful conversations cultivate a praying culture in the church community that ministers to newcomers as well.

Still, these conversations do not have to be amazing every time, according to Payne. He states that believers should be happy that they could at least emphasize the importance of proper listening to the word of God presented in the sermon. He notes that these conversations “will often lead to an interesting and mutually helpful chat over the Word. But even if it doesn’t, you’ve been an encouragement to your friend. You’ve shown them your enthusiasm for the word, and for listening to the sermon.”³²⁵ Thus, Payne seems to believe having even mundane discussions about the sermon with others is somehow meaningful to every Christian and newcomer.

Josh Moody suggests a few ways adult congregants can actively engage in Sunday morning preaching. On top of being eager to put Sunday morning preaching into practice and praying for the preacher, Moody exhorts hearers to practically support their preacher. In order to secure biblical, Spirit-filled preaching, hearers are to actually give their resources, time and skills. He exhorts,

We should advocate for and ensure that there is enough time, space and resources for the continued development of excellence in preaching. Churches are not meant to be led by administrative geniuses with fancily marketed programs for all ages; they are meant to be led by Christ through his Word, which means that preaching is centrally important.³²⁶

This provision of resources to the pastor by congregants is a means of proactive engagement in Sunday morning preaching. If preachers have no time and other means to

³²⁵ Payne, 54.

³²⁶ Moody, 42-43.

prepare for their preaching, preaching will not be effective.³²⁷ If a preacher cannot grow into a mature messenger of Christ, there will not be consistent biblical preaching. Hearers are to support the pulpit ministry, both financially and administratively, especially if they acknowledge that Christ builds His church through its members' commitment and wisdom.³²⁸

Payne seems to be in agreement with Moody. Yet he takes Moody's advice to the next level by encouraging hearers to emotionally minister to pastor while he is preaching. He says,

You might think the sermon is one occasion when we are definitely just focusing on God and not others; we are just in listening and receiving mode, not contributing and helping mode ... It makes an enormous difference to the preacher if the congregation is listening actively and with engaged attention, and if we show this by nodding, making eye contact, taking notes, and laughing at the jokes (even the old ones). This spurs on the preacher in his ministry and gives him heart.³²⁹

Payne insists on the importance of the hearers' role during the Sunday morning preaching event. He does not want hearers to assume they are to stay passive and simply consume the content of preaching. He insists that hearers can minister to their preacher while he is delivering his sermon. Because a preacher is called to worship God by interacting with the text of sermon as a preacher and a hearer, other hearers who are listening to the same

³²⁷ Gordon seems to make a similar suggestion from a pastor-scholar's perspective. He says, "Congregants should not overlook their responsibility in the matter. As long as the typical congregation runs its minister ragged with clerical, administrative, and other duties; and as long as such a congregation expects the minister to be out five or six nights a week visiting or at meetings, the minister will not have time in his schedule to read, write, or reflect. In short, those sensibilities essential to effective preaching will remain uncultivated." See Gordon, 106-107.

³²⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:6.

³²⁹ Payne, 47.

sermon should encourage him.³³⁰ Hence, hearers are to minister to their preacher, who is another hearer of the same preaching at the same time.

This kind of proactive engagement may be difficult to practice in an online church context because it might require meaningful conversation and empathy.³³¹ How will hearers know what their pastor needs in order to secure enough time and resources for his sermon preparation and personal growth as Moody suggests, unless they constantly talk to one another? How will they minister to their preacher by fulfilling his needs without knowing him well? The pew is not able to provide for the pulpit's needs unless they learn to empathize with one another. If the pulpit does not listen to the pew and constantly relate to them, the pew may not know how to empathize with others. Both hearers and preachers may be in need of meaningful conversations, that they may practice building one another up.³³²

³³⁰ Roger E. Van Harn, *Pew Rights: For People Who Listen to Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 157.

³³¹ Arguing that there is no such thing as an Internet church, Ash emphasizes the significance of listening together as a congregation. He believes the “church was defined by the call of the word of God to gather under the word of God.” He believes one of the benefits of listening together is the power of accountability. Believers can hold one another accountable during or after listening to a sermon. Ash believes that it is more difficult for people to “doodle” or “daydream” during the sermon since others might notice, especially when their pattern is to discuss the sermon after the service is over. Moreover, Ash thinks the fact that people listened to the same sermon raises the bar of mutual expectation. He states, “The normal place for preaching is the gathering of the local church. We are to hear sermons as a people gathered together; they are not preached so that we can listen to them solo later. The word ‘church’ means an ‘assembly’ of men and women who gather physically together. There is no such thing as ‘virtual church.’ The assembly of the people of Israel in the Sinai desert was called (literally) ‘the church in the wilderness’ (Acts 7:38).” See Ash, 12-13.

³³² Romans 14:19.

Meaningful Engagement

According to Bryan Chapell, the biblical standard for a worship experience is joy. In his book *Christ-Centered Worship*, Chapell sets the standard for a Christian worship experience. He says, “If God’s people gather to worship without evident gladness, awe, and security in God’s redemptive provision and providential care, then their worship is defective.”³³³ Therefore, church leadership should craft the structure and liturgy of worship to magnify Christ and minister to His elect effectively. It follows that church leadership is responsible to improve their order of service and liturgy to minister to worshippers, so that they may gladly worship on Sunday. Furthermore, he continues,

Worship designed to enable God’s people to rejoice in his goodness will also, of necessity, attract those who need to learn to rejoice and rest in him—and we cannot neglect them. Healthy worship is one of the church’s most effective evangelism tools; thus, we cannot forget the unbeliever even as we focus on enabling believers rightly to honor their God.³³⁴

Since the standard of a worship experience is letting believers be glad in Christ, the church could stay focused on helping believers engage in worship.³³⁵ But Chapell insists on remembering those who do not know how to engage in worship yet as well. Still, he does not seem to encourage the church to be seeker-sensitive; nor does he appear to argue that the church must strive to accommodate as many unchurched people as possible.

³³³ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 132.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Carr asserts that the highest and most noble purpose of humanity is joy. Thus the church should focus on cultivating joy during corporate worship in all ages, including this age of automation and human degradation. His insight may be applicable for believers who make their aim knowing Christ and rejoicing in Him alone. He states, “Does our essence still lie in what we know, or are we now content to be defined by what we want? That sounds very serious. But the aim is joy. The active soul is a light soul. By reclaiming our tools as parts of ourselves, as instruments of experience rather than just means of production, we can enjoy the freedom that congenial technology provides when it opens the world more fully to us.” See Carr, 232.

Rather, he seems to assert that healthy worship, which “enables God’s people to rejoice,” can be contagious. When believers genuinely worship and experience the joy of Christ, it may attract those who do not yet know how to engage in worship.³³⁶

Payne encourages hearers to be contagious hearers. He says,

Our active listening also infects others around us—just as our bored, disengaged listening discourages them. So think for a moment: what does your facial ‘screen saver’ during sermons say to the preacher and to those around you? What do they see when they look at you listening to the sermon? ... Have a think about your facial ‘screen saver,’ and whether the way you listen is an encouragement or discouragement to others.³³⁷

Payne insists on active sermon listening not only because it encourages preachers, but also because it impacts the other hearers in the pew. He believes that a person’s “screen saver,” that is their facial expression, and body posture impact other hearers. So he humorously—but transparently—lists the “four screen savers” in order to hone hearers’ facial expression skills as they listen to sermons.³³⁸ The striking thing is that a hearer’s negative facial expression or attitude toward preaching can impact others in the congregation. In other words, if a hearer seems distracted as he listens to the sermon, he may distract other hearers. Thus, Payne would rather hone hearers’ facial expression

³³⁶ Matthew B. Crawford, a senior fellow at the University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, explains how human experiences can be contagious in an age of distraction. He states, “My experience of the world includes experience of other people—the world I inhabit is a shared world, and this is a very basic feature of it ... Education requires a certain capacity for asceticism, but more fundamentally it is erotic. Only beautiful things lead us out to join the world beyond our heads.” See Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming An Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books, 2015), 143, 257.

³³⁷ Payne, 47-48.

³³⁸ Payne illustrates, “There’s the Shar Pei Dog, who presents a permanently grumpy, closed-off expression that makes clear to everyone that nothing and nobody is going to get through him. There’s the invisible Fairy Hunter, whose eyes flit everywhere, counting the bricks and checking out the ceiling, like Captain Hook in search of Tinker Bell. Then there’s the Stunned Mullet, who has on his face the expression of someone who has just been administered horse tranquilizer. And of course we have all seen (or been) the Dipping Duck, who is struggling mightily to remain awake, and whose head drops slowly into unconsciousness only to startle awake and begin the process all over again.” See *ibid.*, 48.

skills as they listen to sermons, lest they distract others. Hearers' engagement during the Sunday morning preaching event may be contagious, both positively and negatively.

Chapell seems to be in agreement with Payne. He insists on horizontal dialogue, and engagement of the heart in conversations with neighbors. Discussing Robert G. Rayburn's liturgy, Chapell says,

The people dialogue with God in biblical worship, and they also "speak with one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19)—and in the prayers, responsive readings, unison prayers, and congregational "Amens" that are encouraged ... Enthusiasm for worship is to be stimulated not simply by how well the music pleases one's sensibilities but by the awe-inspiring recognition that *my worship engages my heart in dialogue with the Creator of the Universe and the eternal soul of my neighbor*.³³⁹

Biblical worship focuses on glorifying God, but also encourages worshippers to dialogue with others. Although the preacher is to encourage hearers to worship God by engaging in dialogue with God via the sermon text, he is also to engage in dialogue with the assembled congregation. And hearers should also interact with one another. Their hearts must engage in dialogue with other hearers spiritually. The individual worship experience seems to hinge on a heart that engages in dialogue not only with God, but with the other worshippers as well. If distraction is a heart issue as Miller stated above, the church needs to craft their corporate worship service to cultivate a biblical worship experience, which is the fruit of an "awe-inspiring recognition" that the hearer's "heart is in dialogue," both vertically and horizontally.³⁴⁰ Believers in the current age of distraction need to have

³³⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 76.

³⁴⁰ According to Tim Keller, Lloyd-Jones discouraged hearers from taking sermon notes because preaching is to make an awe-inspiring "impression." During a 1976 lecture on Jonathan Edwards, Lloyd-Jones "argued that the primary object of preaching is not only to give information to be used later, but to make an impression on the heart on the spot ... The point of preaching is not just to expound doctrine, but to make the doctrine real to the heart and therefore permanently life-changing." See Tim Keller, "A 'Tract For the Times,'" in *Preaching and Preachers*, ed. Kevin DeYoung (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 94.

biblical worship experience, which consists of spiritually maximized engagement in dialogue with God and other people.³⁴¹

From a psychological perspective, Alter states that people cannot engage in a conversation while they have a smartphone near them. He cites a recent study finding that people who conversed “while a smartphone sat idle nearby” noticeably “struggled” to engage in dialogue compare to those who conversed with a notepad nearby. The researchers concluded the only solution to the distraction is to remove the smartphones “completely.”³⁴² “Phones are disruptive by their mere existence, even when they aren’t in active use,” says Alter.³⁴³ Turkle seems to agree with Alter. Describing how digital devices affected romantic relationships, she says, “Online, with an archive of messages on hand, we feel we know more than we really do about our partners. Online, we are more likely to say cruel things. Digital exchanges disinhibit when love might be better served by tact.”³⁴⁴ Thus, how lovers communicate with each other has been impacted by the smartphone world.³⁴⁵ With texts, email and social media, people seem to assume that they know more about each other than they do. And they could be mistreating each other

³⁴¹ Augustine of Hippo’s preaching “was marked by the vitality of his personal engagement with God, with the Bible and with the congregation.” See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 1:368.

³⁴² Research subjects “described the relationships that formed as lower in quality, and their partners as less empathetic and trustworthy.” See Alter, 16.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Turkle, 206.

³⁴⁵ Even a wellness magazine prone to promote certain body shapes appears to encourage young couples to have meaningful conversations in order to maintain healthy lifestyle. Lindsey Murray has interviewed health experts on the first thing they do in the morning. One expert said, “I’m recently married, and my husband and I make it a point to chat every morning—especially when I’m traveling. It grounds me and ensures that I start my day on a positive note.” See Lindsey Murray, “Live Healthy: Start Your Day Strong,” *Health*, March 2017, 70.

unintentionally. They do not fully engage in communication and therefore do not truly understand each other. One may think that it is time to put digital devices away for good.

Still, both Adam and Turkle concede that people cannot completely put their smartphones and other digital devices away in the modern digital environment. Turkle declares, “It is not a moment to reject technology but to find ourselves.”³⁴⁶ Alter states, “How do we coexist with addictive experiences that play such a central role in our lives? ... Abstinence isn’t an option, but there are other alternatives. You can confine addictive experiences to one corner of your life, while courting good habits that promote healthy behaviors.”³⁴⁷ Even though many experts wish everyone could simply put their smartphones and other digital devices away permanently, they admit that it is almost impossible to make a living in an age of distraction without using any digital device. Hence, the church might have to find a way to “confine addictive experiences” because abstinence may not be an option. Even if the church wants to get rid of digital devices that distract from biblical worship and spiritual dialogue, the church is a community of believers who live, work, study, and build relationships in the smartphone world.

Alex Pang seems to agree with Turkle and Alter. In *Distraction Addiction*, he encourages the means to limit addictive technology. Acknowledging that society does not allow people to completely abstain from their smartphones and other devices, he suggests a digital Sabbath during which people put away their devices and learn to meditate on the meaning of life. He says,

Be open to the spiritual qualities of the Sabbath. For many of us, this is a bit of a challenge. But stepping away from the normal frantic whirl of

³⁴⁶ Turkle, 362.

³⁴⁷ Alter, 9.

work and the Web offers you a real chance to reflect on how life ought to be lived, or at least for you to concentrate more intently on its good parts. Take it. And don't worry about discovering that you actually want to give it all up, move off the grid, and raise goats. That doesn't really happen.³⁴⁸

He believes that a digital Sabbath would allow people to take a break from the addictive environment and engage in some of the good parts of life. As a supporter of Buddhist meditation, he recommends the Sabbath because he thinks it might create an environment for the spiritual discipline of quality meditation.

The church does not share the same definition of spirituality with other religions.³⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Bettis, a Christian leader, also encourages a digital Sabbath. He states,

Even good followers of Christ can be tempted by the cotton candy of the Internet. To prevent addiction, we can put limits on the amount of time electronics are used (1 Corinthians 6:12). Consider putting all electronics down in a common room at night or establish an electronics-free Sabbath. Turn the Wi-Fi off for the day. Put the phones in a basket. Limit electronics use until a certain amount of reading has occurred. Consider requiring your children to bring a paper Bible and a paper journal to church. Science is proving we absorb ideas better from paper than a screen.³⁵⁰

Bettis encourages disciple-making parents to maximize family engagement in dialogue. He repeatedly links limiting or confining digital devices with “self-denial,” which is the very core of Christian discipleship.³⁵¹ And he encourages parents to regularly confine

³⁴⁸ Pang, 239.

³⁴⁹ Gordon D. Fee defines Christian “spirituality” as “the state of a person who lives in and walks by the Spirit of God (or Christ). When Paul says that ‘the Law is spiritual,’ he means that the Law belongs to the sphere of the Spirit (inspired of the Spirit as it is), not to the sphere of flesh.” See Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 5.

³⁵⁰ Bettis, 244.

³⁵¹ Matthew 16:24-25.

digital devices³⁵² and remind their children of the fact that digital devices are privileges, not rights. He also encourages parents to have their children use a printed Bible, which facilitates better understanding than screens.³⁵³ In addition to the regular or daily confinement, he also proposes a digital Sabbath in order to maximize interpersonal engagement via face-to-face dialogue. Thus, the digital Sabbath can be a Christian discipline that enables believers to biblically follow Christ and enhance engagement in spiritual dialogue.

Turkle seems to be in agreement with Pang and Bettis. Yet she suggests the best way to take a digital Sabbath and have meaningful dialogue is to travel with peers without any digital devices. One of the chapters of her book is entitled “Friendship.” She presents a fifteen-year-old and his bunkmates who choose to connect at a six-day summer camp with no technology. Reflecting on their previous wilderness hike, a three-day trek with no smartphones or other devices, one boy said he realized something important in the wilderness: how much he speaks with his peers about what is on their smartphones. Another boy remarked, “When I am at home, I don’t really get to sit down next to someone ... and just talk with them. There are always other things going on, their phone

³⁵² David Pogue, *Yahoo Finance* tech critic, shows parents how to limit usage of the iPhone using Guided Access. He says, “You can lock the phone into one app; the victim cannot switch out of it. You can even specify which *features* of that app are permitted ... Guided Access is great for helping out people with motor-control difficulties—or teenagers with self-control difficulties. To turn on Guided Access, open Settings→General→Accessibility→Guided Access; turn the switch On. Now a Passcode Settings button appears. Here’s where you protect Guided Access so the little scamp can’t shut it off—at least not without a six-digit passcode (Set Guided Access Passcode) or your fingerprint. You can also set a time limit for your kid’s Guided Access. Tap Time Limit to set up an alarm or a spoken warning when time is running out.” See David Pogue, *iPhone: The Missing Manual*, 10th ed. (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2017), 226-228.

³⁵³ Swingle says that writing by hand is more effective than taking notes by keyboard for the brain to learn something. She states, “In the keyboarding versus scribing debate, a few studies clearly indicate that we (all of us young and old) remember more, and significantly more, by writing than by keyboarding. Again it is all about the processing. When we take notes by keyboard, apparently we process at a much shallower level. Many of us don’t even process at all. We type verbatim as opposed to selecting key concepts or words for later recall. We record as opposed to learn.” See Swingle, 104.

is always out, they're talking to other people."³⁵⁴ And because "conversation itself seemed a revelation—a large, new space" to this young man, he declared, "It was a stream, very ongoing. It wouldn't break apart."³⁵⁵ The boys apparently enjoyed their engagement in meaningful dialogue while they were traveling with no smartphones.³⁵⁶ The environment seems to matter, especially to digital natives.

Miller appears to support Turkle's views on changing the environment in order to maximize engagement in meaningful dialogue. Miller says,

Jesus' example teaches us that prayer is about relationship. When he prays, he is not performing a duty; he is getting close to his Father. Any relationship, if it is going to grow, needs private space, time together without an agenda, where you can get to know each other. This creates an environment where closeness can happen, where we can begin to understand each other's hearts.³⁵⁷

Even a relationship with God requires Christians to spend time alone with Him in a private space, according to Miller. If someone desires to build a relationship with God, they should get away and engage in meaningful dialogue with no specific docket. In that way, hearers may truly listen to God and get to know Him better. Cultivating a biblically spiritual environment matters to Christians because it impacts their spiritual walk.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Turkle, 176.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Travelers are encouraged to put their smartphones away while traveling in order to maximize their engagement in conversations even with strangers. Kio Stark says, "You need to be an open person, with open body language and open eyes—and without a shield. The world through my phone has its own pleasures, including (sometimes) a sense of community. But my phone often gets between me and the surroundings, ruining my chances to make eye contact with the people I see. It's the antithesis of being present." See Kio Stark, "Talk to Strangers!" *Reader's Digest*, March 2017, 53.

³⁵⁷ Miller, 47.

³⁵⁸ Chapman and Smith bemoan how broken worshippers evaluate their religious environment. They can be completely blind, being unable to recognize their own fallen condition to use their environment and/or circumstances as a measuring stick of their spirituality. They say, "Huge numbers and large offerings have a way of sending a deceiving message that's hard not to translate as, 'We must be doing something right.'"

Still, the reason many churchgoers do not put the relational aspect of prayer into practice is because they believe in the false promise of the smartphone world. This reliance on all that the smartphone provides is their fallen condition. As Miller explains,

You don't create intimacy; you make room for it. This is true whether you are talking about your spouse, your friend, or God. You need space to be together. Efficiency, multitasking, and busyness all kill intimacy. In short, you can't get to know God on the fly. If Jesus has to pull away from people and noise in order to pray, then it makes sense that we need to as well.³⁵⁹

For some, their fallen condition may be buying into the false promises of technology. People want to be efficient, quick and to feel needed. Out of the three, “efficiency” may be the most common false promise that technology industries make. Thus, hearers may also want to get things done effortlessly,³⁶⁰ including enjoying a good worship experience without being committed to engaging in dialogue with God and other people. They might also be tempted to get something out of the preacher’s sermon without putting forth any effort. On a deeper level, the false promise of efficiency convinces people to believe computers are better than humans to the point that they turn to their smartphones instead of interacting with humans.³⁶¹ Hence, the most insidious belief in the age of distraction

And as they say, ‘If ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ Unfortunately, that’s a common, but dangerous, conclusion that many churches reach. The truth is, the church is ‘broke’—comprehensively broken—just like all pastors. And the clearest evidence of our brokenness is that we seldom realize it.” See Chapman and Smith, 193.

³⁵⁹ Miller, 47.

³⁶⁰ Carr well summarizes the typical mindset in our age of distraction. Preachers may be able to use the mindset as one of the FCFs. He states, “We pick the program or gadget that lightens our load and frees up our time, not the one that makes us work harder and longer. Technology companies naturally cater to such desires when they design their wares. They compete fiercely to offer the product that requires the least effort and thought to use. ‘At Google and all these places,’ says Google executive Alan Eagle, explaining the guiding philosophy of many software and Internet businesses, ‘we make technology as brain-dead easy to use as possible.’” See Carr, 176.

³⁶¹ Praising the ability of self-driving cars, Vella and Steinmetz illustrate the underlying belief (or doctrine) that technology is superior to humans that makes the younger generations seek out their smartphones and

may be the doctrine of efficiency, which involves using technology to replace humans.³⁶² This belief can be used as one of the FCFs for preachers as they prepare for their sermons. Nevertheless, Miller insists that true discipleship is following Christ and learning from Him. Christ regarded private prayer time as the means to build an intimate relationship with God. His disciples, too, are in need of time alone with God in a desolate place instead of making efficiency and trying to get things done here and now their aim.

Meaningful Discipleship

In *The Shepherd Leader At Home*, Timothy Z. Witmer argues that a disciple-making father ought to carve out quality time and “quantity time” with his wife and children.³⁶³ In addition to the day-to-day time fathers should be spending with their children, Witmer insists that fathers spend “longer periods of concentrated time” together with the family. He adds, “Don’t give me the ‘I spend quality time, not quantity time’ argument. It doesn’t work with your wife, and it doesn’t work with the family as a whole either!”³⁶⁴ He coaches fathers to secure quantity time by being intentional. He says dads should plan ahead and take advantage of their vacation time to get away with their families. Speaking of his own family’s go-to campsite that has “no hot water or shower,”

social media while avoiding people. They state, “They’re superior drivers ... The computer doesn’t get distracted by a spouse, kids, a cellphone or the jerk who just made an illegal lane change. And unless ordered to, the computer never falls asleep.” See Vella and Steinmetz, 65.

³⁶² Turkle describes how people’s pursuit of efficiency creeps into their religious doctrine and may be the most insidious belief that preachers can recognize as FCF in the age of distraction. She illustrates, “It’s part of a general progression that I’ve called “from better than nothing to better than anything.” We begin with resignation, with the idea that machine companionship is better than nothing, as in ‘there are no people for these jobs.’ From there, we exalt the possibilities of what simulation can offer until, in time, we start to talk as though what we will get from the artificial may actually be better than what life could ever provide.” See Turkle, 356.

³⁶³ Kalas encourages preachers to spend quantity time with their hearers. See Kalas, 152.

³⁶⁴ Witmer, 51.

he says that consistent family vacations provide “the ideal opportunity to plan concentrated time together as a family. You don’t have to spend a lot of money to do this.”³⁶⁵ He argues that fathers must be intentional about finding a place to get away with their families, “not just because it is a place where we observe the beauty of God’s creation, but also because it is where generations of family memories have been formed.”³⁶⁶ If fathers are committed, they can find an affordable place regardless of their financial status, according to Witmer.

Now, what is the point of spending “quantity time” with the family? Witmer says, “We get to know people by doing things with them ... Your knowledge of a child’s aptitudes will also help you know his or her strengths and weaknesses when it comes time to provide guidance in other important decisions ... If you are unapproachable when they are at home, don’t expect them to be eager to approach you as adults.”³⁶⁷ Disciple-making fathers are to know their flock. For Witmer, this is an urgent matter because the opportunity to forge deep relationships with one’s children is fleeting. Witmer also argues that disciple-making fathers must be determined to preach the gospel as they spend quantity time with their kids.³⁶⁸ No smartphones should be allowed during the

³⁶⁵ Witmer, 51-52.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 52.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 53-57.

³⁶⁸ Intentional discipleship must fix its eyes upon God’s zeal to love and save His children. He was determined to send His son to die and be exalted. Edmund P. Clowney puts disciple-making in gospel perspective for parents: “The translation from the New International Version, ‘until he comes to whom it belongs,’ assumes that the Hebrew is to be read with different vowels from those inserted in the traditional text. Another interpretation, using the traditional vowels, would be, ‘until the Peacemaker comes.’ It may be best to leave the word untranslated as a proper name: ‘until Shiloh comes.’ Whatever the difficulty of understanding that word, the thrust of the whole text is clear. The God of Israel had determined to raise up the Ruler who could bring blessing and peace to the nations.” Therefore, disciple-makers must feel more comfortable to preach and teach from Revelation 5:5. The Lion of Judah is also the Lamb who was slain. God’s suffering servant is the chosen ruler. It is both paradoxical and beautiful to those who see God’s

trip.³⁶⁹ Fathers are to be intentional about making themselves available to the flock in order to maximize opportunities to teach and disciple their children.

Bettis insists that parents should be intentional about making disciples at home as well. He encourages disciple-making parents to take heart and “pull the plug” on their kids’ electronic devices if they misbehave. He states, “In the moment, you will be unpopular. But you are parenting before God, not them. They will not die. Do it with understanding, patience, and kindness. But do it. You are teaching them about the self-denial that Jesus requires of his disciples (Matthew 5:29).”³⁷⁰ He does not encourage dictatorship or so-called “tough love.” Yet he argues that parents must learn to put their trust in Christ, the master shepherd, and start making disciples who also learn to trust in Christ.³⁷¹

In order to nurture their children to be disciples of Christ who put their trust in Him instead of digital devices or any earthly thing, disciple-making parents must be intentional about the ways they disciple their children.³⁷² If parents seek the approval of

determination. See Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ In the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1988), 84.

³⁶⁹ Turkle, 174-176.

³⁷⁰ Bettis, 245.

³⁷¹ Campbell Morgan insists on trusting Christ in order to follow Him as a disciple. Morgan preaches from Matthew 16:24, saying, “Two very simple things are included; to follow is, first, to trust, and, secondly, it is to obey. I cannot follow unless I trust; but I can trust in a general sense and never follow. There are many who believe Him to be the one and only King and Savior of men, who never take His name in vain, and would not allow anyone to speak disrespectfully of Him; but they are not following Him.” In other words, one cannot follow Christ unless he radically trusts Him. See G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit: The Preaching of G. Campbell Morgan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2006), 1:43.

³⁷² Unpacking John 21:15-17, Gordon illustrates what shepherding the heart looks like. He says that both “feed” and “tend” refer to “pastoral care that ensures their flock is fed.” He argues, “Such nourishment and spiritual sustenance, I would argue, comes from proclaiming the fitness and competence of Christ in his mediatorial work. When we ‘feed’ God’s flock, we feed their *faith*. We nourish the part of them that has the need and capacity to rest on Christ and have confidence in his work of redemption.” See Gordon, 74.

men, they would not be able to pull the plug and have their children put their digital devices away even when it is much needed spiritually. Yet if parents start seeking the approval of Christ, they can be intentional about shepherding their children's hearts to put their trust in Christ alone, according to Bettis. Disciple-making parenthood is not merely about spending quantity time, but also about preaching the gospel to the heart, something about which many parents are not intentional.³⁷³

Kalas seems to agree with Witmer and Bettis. He argues that parents must be intentional about spending “quantity time” with their children by talking to them about small things in the “basic setting in which life is unfolding—and thus the setting where faith is paramount.”³⁷⁴ For Kalas, disciple-making parents can help their children learn to trust in Christ as they spend quantity time and talk about mundane things in life, including “matters of indifference.”³⁷⁵ He bemoans the current culture of parenthood, which does not prioritize disciple-making:

Our culture doesn't help. Some of the most earnest parents are on a constant run (“We're the family chauffeurs,” a father and mother told me, with a laugh of resignation) to take their children to the variety of sports events and enrichment opportunities, but unfortunately they spend little time in conversation, sharing or listening. Activity has crowded out relationship. Particularly, activity has crowded out eating together as a

³⁷³ Tedd Tripp well describes how parents can effectively minister to the hearts of their children. He says, “Communication must be multi-faceted and richly textured. It must include encouragement, correction, rebuke, entreaty, instruction, warning, understanding, teaching and prayer. All these must be part of your interaction with your children.” See Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 1995), 104.

³⁷⁴ Kalas, 58.

³⁷⁵ Commenting on 1 Corinthians 8:7-13 based on 10:31-11:1 and Romans 14, Gordon D. Fee says, “What would seem to be an illegitimate use of the principle, even in the broader terms of v.13, is for those who feel “offended” to try to force all others to conform to their own idiosyncrasies of behavior. Paul makes it quite clear in Rom. 14 that on matters of indifference people within any given community should learn to live together in harmony, with no group demanding their own behavior of the others.” See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 392.

family, saying grace together and having time to talk about the small stuff of the day ... The world around us seeks to shape us into its form, and families need great insight, patience and courage to dare an ultimate course.³⁷⁶

Kalas is concerned that many parents and children do not even make time in their schedules to eat together. They cannot even pray together and discuss minor matters in the midst of being distracted by too many events and commitments. Kalas acknowledges that the contemporary expectations for parenting has influenced even believers and their families. Still, he reminds disciple-making parents of the truth that they still need to be intentional about talking to their children and spending quantity time with them.³⁷⁷ Strong parent-child relationships consist of mundane everyday conversations over dinner or coffee.³⁷⁸ In an age of distraction, disciple-making parents must intentionally reclaim quantity conversations with their disciples and trust that Christ may grow their children's faith by empowering the parents.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ Kalas, 58.

³⁷⁷ Caroll and Kirkpatrick urge parents to put two things into practice: awareness and engagement. Engagement consists of talking to children by spending quantity time with them. They say, "Parents and caregivers need to educate themselves about social media and the ways their teens may use it, as well as the common risks, to help them understand and navigate the technologies ... Family discussions are positive for teens and can result in less risky online behaviors—more of those teens who said their parents have talked to them 'a lot' reported: greater concerns about online safety and sharing of personal information and photos, more limited sharing of information/pictures via the Internet, lower incidence of public online profiles, and lower incidence of talking or meeting people they only know from online." Caroll and Kirkpatrick, 5.

³⁷⁸ Disciple-making parents who spend quantity time with their children may be able to discuss how to be a good citizen and/or disciple online as well. Recent research revealed that children's discernment is dependent upon the circumstances. Disciple-making parents may be able to create an environment for their children to discuss online activity in detail. The study suggests, "To help prevent teens from posting regrettable material in the first place, parents can play an important role by monitoring their teenagers' online activities and engaging them in discussion of their posting habits and decisions ... the ability of adolescents to demonstrate mature decision-making skills is dependent on the setting and circumstances." See Costello, 319.

³⁷⁹ Stephen Smallman illustrates that Christ has sent men and women to their spouses and children when he said, "go" in Matthew 28:18-20. He argues that parents must be intentional about making disciples at home because they are called to do so. They are called to make their children disciples who make disciples. He states, "Discipleship must begin at home. If you have children, your first mission is to point them to Jesus.

Witmer also believes in the importance of everyday conversations as much as getting away for extended periods of family fellowship. He, too, insists on conversations over food, especially dinner. Sharing information reported by the Child Trends Databank, he asserts,

You have a lot of work to do if you are to be the primary influence in the lives of your children. It doesn't just happen. You have to make it happen ... it starts with *daily* time. A good place to start is to commit the family to gather together for dinner everyday. This should be an "all hands on deck" rallying point to which everyone is committed. Research has shown how beneficial this daily time together is to our children. They were also more motivated at school and did better at relating to other people.³⁸⁰

Disciple-making parents should recognize how significant it is to share their lives with their children over food fellowship. Witmer argues that families should strive to have dinner together not only because it is biblical but also because recent research revealed that it has important benefits.³⁸¹ Having this regular family time together seems to impact children's overarching quality of life, not least spiritually. Therefore Witmer wants every disciple-making parent to be intentional about putting daily meal fellowship into practice.

Do you pray as a family? Do you pray with your spouse? Because you are with your family constantly, discipleship in the home will be 'caught' more than 'taught,' but you need to understand that the 'go' of the Great Commission isn't necessarily sending you far away." See Smallman, 196.

³⁸⁰ Witmer, 49.

³⁸¹ The research conducted by Child Trends Databank revealed: "Teens who regularly have meals with their families are less likely to get into fights, think about suicide, smoke, drink, and use drugs; and are more likely to have later initiation of sexual activity, and better academic performance, than teens who do not. Even after controlling for other forms of family connectedness, frequent family meals are associated with less substance use, fewer depressive symptoms, fewer suicidal ideations, and better grades. Children under 13 have fewer problem behaviors overall, as well as fewer externalizing ('acting out') problems when they have more frequent family meals ... Harvard researchers looked at which activities most fostered healthy child development: play, story time, events with family members and other factors. Family dinners won out." See Witmer, 163 and John Ligan, "Connected at the Table: The Importance of Family Meals," *Child TRENDS*, April 7, 2016, accessed June 17, 2016, <https://www.childtrends.org/connected-at-the-table-the-importance-of-family-meals/>.

Disciple-making parents must be intentional about the ways they train their children. They are to make time, make conversation, and make tough calls in order to preach the gospel to the heart. Yet according to Turkle, parents might not be able to be consistent about these things and succeed in everyday discipleship unless they are ready to be intentional daily. Discussing the kind of conversation that “links to the capacity for empathy and for self-reflection,” Turkle states,

In solitude we find ourselves; we prepare ourselves to come to conversation with something to say that is authentic, ours. When we are secure in ourselves we are able to listen to other people and really hear what they have to say. And then in conversation with other people we become better at inner dialogue.³⁸²

It seems vital that people are authentic when they have conversations with others. They should not be hypocritical; they should be true to themselves. In other words, they should not put on a show as if they are on social media.³⁸³ Even if they intentionally schedule a meeting to talk with others, they should not try to perform well. If they are willing to be authentic, they can genuinely listen and understand each other better. Thus, Turkle states that authenticity enables the emotional security to listen to others. And by listening well, people grow into better communicators who know how to empathize with one another. The results can affect listeners who have prepared themselves to be authentic and strive to listen. Overall, those who prepare for authentic conversations by spending time in solitude, basking in the love of Christ, and finding their own voice may eventually benefit from their own ministry.

³⁸² Turkle, 10.

³⁸³ Ibid., 24-25.

In other words, disciple-makers should be intentional about preparing themselves to be authentic and benefiting from the very training they provide. They are to let the gospel be preached to their own hearts as they share the gospel with others. Indeed, they grow as they prepare for authentic conversations, but also as they disciple others. They should be intentional about these things as they preach the gospel to their children through the mundane moments of life.

Before they can disciple and teach their children, parents are to learn to listen to Christ, put their trust in Him, and follow Him.³⁸⁴ They should set an example by putting their digital devices away and giving undivided attention to Christ and their family.³⁸⁵ They first need to learn how to stay tuned and communicate even when it seems emotionally challenging to do so.³⁸⁶ Children see through pretense and will likely resist discipleship training from parents who don't live out what they teach their children. Bettis seems to agree, because he insists on modeling authentic discipleship.³⁸⁷ He says,

³⁸⁴ If disciple-making parents fail to give full attention to their spouses, they will not be able to train their children to maximize their engagement in worship, preaching and conversations. Disciple-makers must be ready to listen daily; they must be authentic listeners. Witmer describes a common mistake disciple-makers make at home: "While she is talking, are you thinking about what *you* are going to say or how you are going to respond rather than about what she is saying to you? ... Another mark of a lousy listener is failing to give your *full* attention." See Witmer, 43.

³⁸⁵ Swingle encourages parents to model putting away their digital devices to connect with their children better. If parents fail to shepherd their children early, the children might be wired to crave entertainment, which is one of the most common tendencies people have in the smartphone world. She says, "If we are playing on our tablets, texting away on our phones and working on computers, they want to as well. It will become part of their play and then their reality. Last, by introducing the medium far too early, we train little brains to need entertainment as opposed to seeking it or making it themselves." See Swingle, 139.

³⁸⁶ Turkle insists that parents model respectful conversation as they strive to train their children. She declares, "We can do better. We can teach our children to talk to people who disagree with them by modeling these conversations ourselves. We can show them that it helps to begin by talking about how you see causes, reasons, values. Even a small amount of common ground can nurture a conversation." See Turkle, 322.

³⁸⁷ C. S. Lewis, in comparing those who "use" literature and those who "receive" it, speaks of "change." Those who are truly transformed by the Word of God receive it daily instead of merely using it to teach others. He says, "Their whole conscience is changed. They have become what they were not before. But

“Model how to master media yourself. Your example is always the most powerful teacher. What does your media and entertainment use look like? Are you always on your smartphone? Are weekends a gluttonous excess of sports? Do you have accountability software on your computer? Your children are watching you.”³⁸⁸ Disciple-making parents are to remember that their children are watching them and learning from their examples.³⁸⁹ As parents strive to set their children a good example, parents themselves benefit from practicing moderation in their use of technology.

On the other hand, disciple-making parents can benefit from discipleship while they are engaged in conversations and/or teaching, as Turkle mentions above.³⁹⁰ If biological parents and/or legal guardians can benefit from disciple making through the means of having meaningful conversations, older members of a local church may also be able to benefit from teaching their spiritual children in the same congregation. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, adult education experts, describe how mentoring others can benefit mentors. They state,

The mentor can *tell* the student stories in an effort to promote development. It is through this mutual storying of lives that development can occur. Stories also assist mentors in doing three things for students: providing support, challenging students, and providing a vision ... dialogue is important to the transformative learning process.³⁹¹

there is no sign of anything like this among the other sort of readers. When they have finished the story or the novel, nothing much, or nothing at all, seems to have happened to them.” See C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 3.

³⁸⁸ Bettis, 243.

³⁸⁹ Titus 2:7-8.

³⁹⁰ Turkle, 10.

³⁹¹ Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 138-139.

Teachers stay sharp as they sharpen others through having dialogues with each other. Teaching is not just for the sake of the students because it also benefits teachers. The church has been aging enormously, especially because baby boomers and their children live longer than the previous generation. She still has many veteran followers of Christ who already know how to engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. They may not be very savvy with social media, but they know how to receive the word of God actively.³⁹² The church could use their help. They could share their gospel stories with the younger generations, not least covenant children inside the church. Simultaneously, it helps the older generation stay engaged and keep their minds active.³⁹³

In *The Family At Church*, Joel R. Beeke seems to agree with Merriam and her colleagues. Quoting Proverbs 27:17, Beeke encourages hearers to recognize that they are also being equipped as they help others improve their listening skills. He says,

Share some of the lessons you're learning from the Word. As you talk with others, these lessons will help others as well as become more embedded in your own mind. Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."³⁹⁴

³⁹² This may be the wrong assumption according to Wise. A growing number of older people use social media and smartphones. Perhaps they want to use them to communicate with their grandchildren. Wise describes, "There is a 91 percent adoption rate of social networking amongst American adults ages eighteen to thirty-four. The average Internet user is spending 4.6 hours on social networks per week, more than any other category. And do you know the fastest growing Facebook user segment? Retirees over 65. Grandma has got to see her grandkids!" See Wise, 48.

³⁹³ Historically, the church has welcomed congregants to bring their children with them, and adult congregants without children were encouraged to disciple the little ones inside the church as well. Perhaps children's baptism has impacted the way childless congregants still engage in discipling children. At any rate, the fact that those who teach others can benefit from disciple-making may not be limited to those who disciple their own children. Every disciple is called to make disciples regardless of his or her parental status. Discipleship builds everyone up, including members who have no children. Smallman states, "From the first day of its existence, the church has welcomed people to bring their children along (Acts 2:38-41). In fact, for most of its history the church has baptized the children of believers to symbolize that truth (although not all churches agree with the practice). It is also in the church that those who are single will have the opportunity to love and be part of the discipleship of children, and single parents will be supported in their struggle." Smallman, 45.

³⁹⁴ Beeke, 27.

This statement may be mindboggling because Beeke says it in the context of his parenting. In the preceding paragraphs, he taught readers how to nurture their children to have effective sermon discussions.³⁹⁵ He asked hearers to encourage their children to take notes during Sunday morning sermons. The children were assigned to read their notes to one another so they could discuss the sermons after the last service each Sunday. He also encouraged readers by testifying that this practice has worked for his children since they were seven years old.³⁹⁶

Yet, Beeke does not appear to be unrealistic. According to him, hearers are to keep encouraging their children to have the weekly sermon discussions even though the discussions may not always be satisfactory. “It is better to fall short than not to attempt at all,” says Beeke.³⁹⁷ In other words, disciple-making parents must be intentional about having sermon discussions with their children whether everyone seems to benefit from it every time or not. As Smallman states, both parents and singles should strive to make disciples of the younger generations because Christ has sent them to the little ones as well.³⁹⁸ Parents and singles are to be intentional.

Smallman notes that “Making disciples happens in a church as people take an interest in one another and sincerely want to be part of other’s spiritual growth. Find a ministry through your church or in the community through which you can learn to serve

³⁹⁵ Beeke encourages parents to ready their children not only spiritually but also physically. He says, “If you know the passage that will be preached on the Sabbath, spend time studying it on Saturday night. Make sure that you and your children get enough sleep on Saturday night, then get up early on Sunday morning to prepare for worship without rushing.” See Beeke, 11.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 26-28.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 27.

³⁹⁸ Smallman, 45.

others.”³⁹⁹ As he insists on making disciples who make more disciples, he seems to imply that disciple-makers make disciples not only to serve others sacrificially but also to “learn to serve others.” Every disciple is to learn by serving others, which is the very definition of a disciple.⁴⁰⁰ Therefore, every disciple is to grow through the means of making other disciples. Disciples of Christ are called to “go,” offer themselves to others, and make disciples.⁴⁰¹ Yet, at the same time, they are being sent to grow into mature disciples by teaching others.

In his short book for newcomers and visitors to a local church, Payne states, “Perhaps you do agree that church should be a place where we all pitch in and encourage one another in love—but you aren’t really sure exactly what to do or where to start.”⁴⁰² He argues that the church has to keep equipping one another through the means of discipleship because everyone needs to grow without ceasing. Nobody is perfect; no one knows everything. Those who learn from someone grow through imitating a leader; and

³⁹⁹ Smallman, 196.

⁴⁰⁰ Smallman opens the first chapter of his discipleship curriculum by defining what being a disciple means. He says, “A disciple is one who is devoted to learning the ways and following the example of a teacher or master.” See *ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁰¹ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne encourage the church to offer themselves to their disciples instead of striving to mass-produce them, which may be the fallen condition of many institutional churches (FCF for preachers). They say, “The temptation with training is always to start a new program—to run a multitude of training courses, and whack as many members of the congregation through them as possible. We bring our structural, event-based, managerial mindset to the task of training, and try to work out how to do it in bulk and efficiently. But you can’t really train people this way any more than you can parent this way. Training is personal and relational, and it takes time. It involves sharing not just skills, but also knowledge and character. It involves imitation and modeling.” See Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Challenges Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Press, 2009), 156-157.

⁴⁰² Payne, 33.

those who teach grow by imitating Christ.⁴⁰³ Discipleship must enable everyone to grow as they make disciples who make disciples.⁴⁰⁴

The church should be intentional about letting visitors and/or newcomers know they need to grow by learning and even by teaching others at some point in the future.⁴⁰⁵ The church might need to show them how to actively listen to the sermon in a small group setting. The church does not have to have a formal discipleship training course; a membership course is also an appropriate setting for this discussion. Even better, congregants would hear this message in an ongoing small group where anyone can join with no commitment whatsoever.⁴⁰⁶ Then even visitors and/or newcomers will learn how to engage during the sermon and come to know what it means to worship along with others. In other words, they get a glimpse of what it means to be a member of a local church body by learning how to engage in the Sunday morning preaching event.

⁴⁰³ 1 Corinthians 11:1.

⁴⁰⁴ Toward the end of his discipleship curriculum, Stephen Smallman reminds the disciples of Christ that they are to learn through the means of prayerfully teaching others without ceasing. He states, “And finally, why not pray that you can find someone or several others who will study this book with you? ... Even if you have read the book by yourself, its lessons will mean more when talking and praying with others. You don’t have to present yourself as the expert, but be honest and say that you need to relearn the same basic lessons yourself.” See Smallman, 197.

⁴⁰⁵ Discussing what it means to make disciples who make more disciples in a local church community based on Matthew 28:18-20, Marshall and Payne describe how disciple-making leadership grows without ceasing. They say, “If we want to start training disciples to be disciple-makers, we need to build a network of personal ministry in which people train people. And this can only begin if we choose a bunch of likely candidates and begin to train them as co-workers. This group will work alongside you, and in time will themselves become trainers of other co-workers.” See Marshall and Payne, 157.

⁴⁰⁶ Marshall and Payne assert that the goal of a local church ministry ought to be discipleship to the point that the church leadership would trim unfruitful programs and/or ministries down. They declare, “If the goal of all our ministry is disciple-making, then many churches (and their pastors) will need to do some re-thinking about what they are seeking to achieve in their regular Sunday gatherings, and how that relates to other ministry activities during the rest of the week. This may mean starting new things, but very often it will mean closing down structures or programs that no longer effectively serve the goal of disciple-making.” See Marshall and Payne, 156.

As discussed above, preachers can teach people how to engage in the Sunday morning preaching event through the means of preaching.⁴⁰⁷ They can preach from chapter four of the Gospel of Mark and unpack the biblical ways of engaging and listening.⁴⁰⁸ Preachers could also teach a seminar session on the same topic to provide a venue for practical discussions. Yet, even if preachers do not teach from chapter four of Mark, they may still be able to teach their hearers the same message—apart from the pulpit and/or classroom settings—more consistently than ever, according to Van Harn, who authored the book entitled *Pew Rights* in order to help people listen to a sermon better:

The heart of the plan is a daily diary prepared for use by a small number of sermon listeners each week. It divides the week between concerns specific to Sunday and concerns for the rest of the week. On each of the six weekdays, the sermon listener is asked to respond to two statements: 1. The following event, experience, thought, fear, question, doubt, or need was important in my life today. 2. The following words of faith or hope were important in my life today. (The words can be from the Bible, a hymn, a creed, a book, another person, or anywhere at all.) On the page given over to Sunday, the listener is asked to complete four statements that relate to the sermon: 1. The sermon was about... 2. The sermon enabled me to believe that... 3. The sermon asked that I... 4. The sermon made me feel...⁴⁰⁹

Van Harn also suggests a few ways to make the diary plan most effective. Still, a small group setting allows the preacher to teach people how to listen to a sermon.

Although it may be challenging for some congregants to spontaneously discuss what they got out of a sermon in the presence of their pastor or other people in a small group setting, the diary plan can create a more comfortable environment because they have an

⁴⁰⁷ Thompson, 73.

⁴⁰⁸ Mark 4:1-20.

⁴⁰⁹ Van Harn, *Pew Rights*, 155-156.

opportunity to reflect and respond on their own before discussing in a group setting.

Individuals may freely share what they wrote, knowing that everyone else in the small group will do the same:

Ideally, four persons would agree to meet with the preacher for one or two hours per week for four weeks, during which time they keep the diaries. During the meeting, the four participants would read their entries for the others following the sequence of the days. The group would take time to discuss the entries and whatever responses they evoke. The role of the preacher would be that of *listening to* so that he or she could be a *listener with*. At the close, the preacher would collect the diaries and distribute another set for use the next week.⁴¹⁰

In this way, a preacher hears about the life experience of his own congregants. He is able to connect with them and prepare more relevant sermon application points in the future.

Moreover, parents could encourage one another by sharing their success and failure stories in the midst of being disciple-making parents at home.⁴¹¹ Those with no children who are making disciples can also share their experiences with others and discuss how to hone their disciples' sermon listening skills. Also, using the diary plan in a small group setting enables a preacher to determine what his hearers heard during a sermon. Having that information would help the preacher and other church leaders improve the way they help hone hearers' sermon listening skills as well.⁴¹² The aim of the small group model is

⁴¹⁰ Van Harn, *Pew Rights*, 157.

⁴¹¹ Swingle laments that many parents have no support groups even though they need a community in which they learn to support one another. She states, "In our frantic pace of life, digital media is perceived as the most efficient and perhaps most cost-effective babysitter since grandma. Why? Because parents are too darned busy and no longer have social or functional support." See Swingle, 123.

⁴¹² The diary plan might also improve people's listening skills in general. Those who do not know how to listen may practice a certain discipline to technically develop their listening skills. Ronald W. Johnson says, "Second, listen to a speech or a sermon or someone reading poetry. Take a pencil and a piece of paper and make a mark for each time you hear a certain word. For example, decide to record the number of times you hear the word 'the;' in the process of listening for a particular word, you will train yourself to hear and analyze each word that is spoken." See Ronald W. Johnson, *How Will They Hear If We Don't Listen?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 81.

to teach people that they should listen to Sunday morning preaching *with* others because everyone is becoming a “listener with,” including the preacher himself.

Bettis seems to agree that the church should lay a good foundation by teaching each hearer to be a “listener with.” He declares,

Even more than that, we pray to inculcate the habit of gathering with other believers to hear the Word taught (Hebrews 10:25). I believe this habit alone saved my faith even during times of college questioning. Solomon observes, “Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge” (Proverbs 19:27). Let’s make sure we pass on how much we value the habit of placing ourselves with other Christians to hear God’s Word skillfully taught.⁴¹³

For Bettis, corporate hearing of the word of Christ is a life-giving foundation for his relationship with Christ. While insisting on teaching the significance of corporate hearing of the word, he points out how vital it is to make attending corporate worship the habit of every believer.⁴¹⁴ The church may show hearers how to grow spiritually by teaching them how to listen to Sunday morning sermons. But Bettis seems to emphasize that the church should lay a foundation of habitual hearing, which may be possible only by constant disciple-making.

In other words, Bettis states that the church has to faithfully make disciples to the point that people get spiritually wired to crave the corporate hearing of the word.

Desiring to hear God’s word preached may be a heart issue.⁴¹⁵ As Miller declares, “The

⁴¹³ Bettis, 150.

⁴¹⁴ Peter Adam reminds readers of true Christian spirituality, which some may assume to be an individual endeavor due to their cultural background. He states, “While some view the Bible as the book of the individual, or spirituality as a matter for the individual, this focus is unhelpful. The important issue is that of the corporate spirituality of the Word in a congregation or church, or ‘How are the people of God responding to the Word of God?’” Peter Adam, *Hearing God’s Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, ed. D. A. Carson (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 176.

⁴¹⁵ Bettis insists that the discussion about disciple-making in the digital age hinges on heart issues, saying, “Focus on the heart. The most important principle to flow from this whole outward discussion is to aim at the heart ... If we don’t get to the heart level, we will control with legalism or lose with licentiousness.

problem isn't the activity of listening, but my listening heart."⁴¹⁶ Bettis seems to understand that the church can only do so much if Christ does not transform the hearts of hearers to crave the corporate hearing of the word.⁴¹⁷ So he insists on prayer, saying, "Even more than that, we pray to inculcate the habit of gathering with other believers to hear the Word taught." Bettis encourages disciple-making parents to expose their children to skilled preachers and teachers. Yet he says, "even more than that" to indicate that praying for the habit of corporate listening is more important than pointing the younger generation to gifted men who preach good sermons. If preachers could create the desire to hear God's word preached, then Christians would not need to pray to Christ.⁴¹⁸

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Jesus summons men to follow him, not as a teacher or a pattern of the good life, but as the Christ, the Son of God."⁴¹⁹ Only Christ can summon

Instead, we want to please Christ. Similarly, we want to have open communication to confess sin and seek help. Parents who don't have their children's heart will never control the electronics. (Think about this: a whole new set of apps will be available before I even finish this chapter!) But a parent who has his or her child's heart, can walk through anything. Regularly, look them in the eye and ask about their Internet usage." See Bettis, 245-246.

⁴¹⁶ Miller, 247.

⁴¹⁷ Chapell well illustrates how true obedience is dependent on grace, a relationship with Christ and focus on His attributes and works. He reminds disciple-making parents and singles of the gospel stance they ought to maintain—always. He states, "We made sure that the imperative (the command) rested on the indicative (the relationship), and that the order was not reversible. As we have attempted to reflect the truth of the gospel in our home, we have assured our children that their relationship with us hinges on the fact that they are our children, not on their conduct (cf. Rom. 8:12-15; 1 Thess. 5:5-8). Such assurance does not annul the need for discipline, but it keeps correction from damaging a child's heart or creating doubt about his security in his family (cf. Heb. 12:5-11)." See Bryan Chapell, *Holiness By Grace: Delighting in the Joy That Is Our Strength* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 129.

⁴¹⁸ Speaking of neuroscience, Gazzaley and Rosen share the ideal approach, which seems humanly impossible. They say, "While cognitive control is essential for all higher-level interactions, there is no one-to-one mapping between cognition and real-world behavior. Environmental factors may dominate that do not allow the benefits of enhanced cognitive control to have an optimal impact on daily life. For example, technology-induced anxiety may mask benefits of having superior attention abilities. The ideal approach, it would seem is to change both your brain and your behavior." See Gazzaley and Rosen, 210-211.

⁴¹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 58.

human hearts to be consistently thirsty for hearing of His own word in the presence of fellow worshippers.

Could the church prayerfully equip people to listen to preaching and to one another better? Could the church boldly tell congregants how to start growing spiritually and walk with them? Moreover, if the church determines to equip its hearers to equip more hearers, why wait until hearers are older? What if the church could effectively cultivate proper listening skills through good parenting? Beeke exhorts, “Speak with fellow believers about the sermons. God’s blessing rests upon such fellowship (Malachi 3:16).”⁴²⁰ “That sort of thing is an infectious example to set,” says Payne.⁴²¹ Hearers are to equip their covenant children, that the children may equip others.⁴²² Of course, this cycle would benefit hearers as well as their disciples, along with the rest of the congregants. May God’s blessing rest upon such discipleship.

In this chapter, a biblical and theological analysis revealed that hearing is at the center of the mission of the church. A review of relevant literature disclosed that hearers are prone to remain passive during the Sunday morning preaching event, and that the church has to teach them to hone their sermon hearing skills to help them engage in preaching and corporate worship. In the next section, an examination of contemporary literature argued that overuse of digital technology can cause both neurological issues and

⁴²⁰ Beeke, 27.

⁴²¹ Payne, 54.

⁴²² Unpacking 1 Corinthians 15:36 and 2 Corinthians 5:4 and 4:16, Michael Horton puts the “already” and “not yet” theology in community perspective. He states, “The same Scriptures that tell us we are simultaneously justified and sinful also tell us that we’re regenerated and are being sanctified so that we should ‘work out our own salvation with fear and trembling’ (Phil. 2:12-13). If sanctification is an objective gift as well as a subjective ‘more and more’ reality, then how can we restrict our sanctified living to the private sphere?” See Michael S. Horton, “The ‘Already’ and ‘Not Yet,’” *Modern Reformation*, March-April 2017, 72.

psychological challenges (including behavioral addiction, enormously short attention span, anxiety, depression, learning disability, degradation, and lack of empathy) that keep hearers from engaging in Sunday morning preaching and corporate worship. Despite the many challenges that result from overuse of digital technology, numerous experts deemed hearers' acceptance of false doctrine to be the most deleterious influence in this age of distraction (FCF for preachers). The last section of the literature review discussed necessary changes the church can make in order to minister to those who live in an age of distraction. The literature suggested both a greater online presence of the church and intentional face-to-face human conversations that lead to biblical discipleship. The next chapter presents the interview protocol and responses.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to explore the engagement of adult congregants of a local church in the Sunday morning preaching event. The assumption of this study was that adult congregants have learned important principles regarding engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event through their own experience. The research identifies four main areas of focus that are central to engaging adult congregants in the Sunday morning preaching event. These four areas consist of a review of Bible passages that address the significance and aim of listening to sermons, literature concerning sermon listening skills and challenges to properly engaging in the Sunday preaching event prior to the advent of the smartphone, the challenges of corporate worship and proper sermon listening skills since smartphone use became commonplace, and necessary adjustments for churches when listeners are untrained for proper engagement with sermons. To examine these areas more closely, the following questions served as the intended focus of the qualitative research:

1. How do adult congregants describe what their pastor is trying to accomplish during Sunday morning preaching?
2. How do adult congregants describe their engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event?
3. How do adult congregants describe how their engagement during Sunday morning preaching impacts their worship experience?

4. How do adult congregants describe the role of other congregants in their engagement during Sunday morning preaching?

Design of the Study

This study was designed using qualitative research methodology as described by Sharon Merriam, author of *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. The qualitative research method allows the researcher to be the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” with a focus on “understanding the meaning of experience” using an inductive process that results in an end product full of “rich description.”⁴²³ This methodology provides an opportunity to understand how adult congregants participate in Sunday morning sermons in the midst of facing individual and corporate challenges.

Since he or she is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the researcher will adapt to the varied responses of interviewees in order to explore unusual and/or unanticipated responses. Qualitative research will enable the researcher to explore what is still unnoticeable in the experiences of the adult congregants interviewed. Then the researcher will analyze common themes and inductively draw conclusions rather than deductively testing a predetermined hypothesis. This will result in a descriptive end product, which gives richer meaning to the findings by means of noting the narratives and phrases used by the interviewees. The researcher will be able to understand listeners’ experiences on a deeper level because the purpose of this study is to understand a

⁴²³ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 19.

process, including how listeners are determined to sit under their preacher's Sunday morning preaching week-by-week amidst challenges, and how listeners evaluate their worship experience. Since this study is aimed at understanding the point of view of congregants, a qualitative research method may fulfill this study's objectives by providing "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a ... program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit."⁴²⁴ Adult congregants who regularly participate in the Sunday morning preaching event have experiences that can help other participants who sit under their pastor's preaching regularly, even though each adult congregant is unique. Their experiences can also greatly inform pastors.

Participant Sample Selection

Participants were chosen for a non-probability type of sample in order to provide purposeful sampling in the data collected. Merriam explains, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned."⁴²⁵ This research required participants who are able to communicate in depth about their engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consists of a selection from the population of adult congregants within the same congregation who consistently sit under the same preacher's preaching. This approach ensures a consistent context among the participants, and thus minimizes variables that are not a focus of this study.

⁴²⁴ Merriam, x.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 77.

Participants were also selected to provide variation in their completion of a discipleship training (DT) course at the church. Because individuals who take the course have been taught sermon listening skills, they are better equipped to participate in the Sunday morning preaching event. But those who have not completed the course have probably not been part of a discussion about proper sermon listening skills. Participants varied in gender, and regularly sit under preaching delivered by a male preacher. The researcher selected six male and eight female interviewees to gain a broader perspective and investigate whether or not a listener's gender impacts their engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event.

Moreover, participants also varied in age and education, providing a dynamic spectrum of cultural identity for the study. Most millennials, for example, are exposed to more social media than those who are in their thirties. As mentioned previously, social media affects the way listeners view themselves and their surroundings. In other words, millennials may be more easily distracted than adult congregants whose exposure to social media came at later time in their lives. Education level may also impact how people listen to sermons. According to authors Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, participants who are relatively less educated assume that they are not smart. Although the kind of hobbies or leisure they persistently enjoy prove otherwise, “unschooled adults” may have a view that prevents them from listening attentively,⁴²⁶ especially when a sermon unpacks some deeper theological “meat” instead of more rudimentary “milk.”⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 387.

⁴²⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:2, Hebrews 5:12.

The final part of the study was conducted through personal interviews with fourteen members of a local congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The initial selection of participants represented adults in their twenties and thirties with some exposure to Reformed theology. Since the church predominantly consists of young adults, the researcher had no choice but to interview relatively young people as compared to the other congregations in the area. Additionally, all participants had regularly attended Sunday morning service at their church for at least six months. Even though some have not completed a DT course, it is safe to assume they are in the agreement with the basic elements of Reformed theology (e.g., total depravity, unconditional election, etc.) since they attend a church in the PCA denomination.

Each participant was invited to participate via an introductory email, followed by a personal phone call and/or text message. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate in the study. Each participant was asked to complete a one-page demographic questionnaire that asked for information concerning the selection criteria mentioned above. The questionnaire also asked whether the participants were interested in the following goals related to this study: (1) Improve various ministries in the church, (2) Learn how to better participate in the Sunday morning preaching event, (3) Learn how to equip others to better participate in the Sunday morning preaching event, (4) Help the preacher preach more effectively, (5) Encourage a friend who does not attend the church.

Data Collection

It is appropriate to use a semi-structured interview protocol because a “mix of more and less structured questions” versus a highly structured or unstructured interview provides the flexibility needed for the inductive nature of this research project.⁴²⁸ The semi-structured interview format allows the researcher to respond to interviewees according to “the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”⁴²⁹ This is so because the “largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time.”⁴³⁰

Interview questions and waiver forms were emailed to participants approximately three days prior to the actual interview date so that they could prepare themselves. The list of interviewees was not disclosed to anyone in order to prevent the participants from discussing the interview questions with any of the co-participants beforehand, lest they exchange their thoughts and influence one another. Each interview took place privately in a quiet facility, and each participant spent about sixty to ninety minutes answering questions. Participants brought their manuscripts with them even though it was neither required nor encouraged when the interview questions were emailed. All fourteen interviews were recorded using an iPhone and later transcribed.

⁴²⁸ Merriam, 90.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the interviews using iTunes and Quicktime Player software to play back the digital recording on a computer and typed out each transcript within a week of each meeting. 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 resulting data categories. As Merriam describes, “the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences.”⁴³¹ Using constant comparison, the researcher was able to compare each interviewee’s experiences to other adult congregants, analyze those experiences, and use that data to make suggestions about how adult congregants participate in the Sunday morning preaching event.

When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using Evernote. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes, patterns, and key phrases across the variation of participants; and any (2) congruence or discrepancy between the different groups of participants.

The interview protocol included the following questions:

1. What do you think your pastor is trying to accomplish during his Sunday morning preaching?

⁴³¹ Merriam continues, “Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationships to each other in the building of a grounded theory.” See Merriam, 30-31.

- a. How did you draw this conclusion? Or how do you know this?
What things do you observe or hear from him that leads you to think this way?
 - b. How does this understanding impact the way you engage in your pastor's preaching on Sundays?
 - c. How would you define good and/or bad preaching?
 - d. How did you learn how to discern or evaluate preaching?
 - e. Do your expectations impact the way you engage in your pastor's preaching on Sundays?
2. How are you engaging in your pastor's preaching on Sundays?
- a. Is there anything you are doing or thinking in order to listen better?
 - b. What motivates you to do or think these things in order to listen attentively?
 - c. Is there anything you do or think before you start listening?
 - d. Is there anything you do or think after the Sunday morning preaching event to further your engagement with the sermon?
3. How would you describe your worship experience when you have listened well?
- a. How would you describe your worship experience when you could not listen very well for some reason?
 - b. What types of things do you do to engage in the preaching event more actively in order to make it more worshipful?

- c. What might you do differently before and after the preaching event to engage in the Sunday morning preaching event better?
 - d. Do you use social media to improve your engagement level in any way? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?
- 4. What distracts you from engaging well during Sunday morning preaching?
 - a. Can you tell me more about the distraction(s)?
 - b. What do you do about these distractions?
 - c. Does the way other people listen to your pastor's preaching affect how you listen? If so, can you describe how?
 - d. If other members distract you during Sunday morning preaching, what do you tend to do about it?
- 5. Many contemporary churchgoers tend to believe that it is their pastor's job to make people listen well during the Sunday morning preaching event. How would you respond to this idea?
 - a. What would you suggest your preacher do to enhance congregant engagement during Sunday morning preaching?
 - b. What would you suggest other congregants do to enhance their engagement during Sunday morning preaching?

Researcher Position

This section reveals three areas or biases that affect this researcher's stance. These three areas include the consideration of the pastoral office, local congregational bias, and some personal biases of the researcher. First off, the researcher is an ordained minister of

the Presbyterian Church in America, in which the practice of women serving as pastors is not supported. In other words, there are no female preachers, and the researcher is in the agreement with his denomination's theological position. Therefore, in this study, "preacher(s)" always refers to male preachers.

Moreover, the researcher desires to help local churches equip their members to participate in the Sunday morning preaching event better. In order to do that, the researcher chose to focus on one specific congregation first. Thus, for this study, the researcher is analyzing data from one specific congregation. Since every local church is unique, the researcher's position may be biased toward the respective demographic and/or culture of this one local congregation.

The researcher has been preaching in Presbyterian churches for the last twenty-tree years. Preaching is important to the researcher not only because his career involves preaching, but also because of his personal convictions as a believer. The researcher decided to serve the church as an ordained minister because he believes in the significance of preaching. In his experience, many churchgoers stumbled in their faith because they did not know how to evaluate preachers and their preaching. Many simply expected their preachers to get things done and grow their local congregation in number through the means of preaching. False expectations are still prevalent in many local churches and denominations. It is vital that listeners understand their own role as well as their preacher's role.

Study Limitations

Due to limited resources and time, interviews were limited to fourteen individuals. The interview findings may not be universally applicable to all times and situations. As stated in the previous section, adult congregants interviewed for this study were limited to those attending the same congregation in North America. Therefore, the researcher has not analyzed any interview data from outside this local congregation. Also, the adult congregants interviewed regularly sit under the preaching of a pastor who was trained in North America. Some of the study's findings may be generalized to other similar congregations in Reformed denominations in North America. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of the conclusions presented should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results of this study may also have implications for adult audiences in other disciplines or religious traditions.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how adult congregants of a local church engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. To that end, this chapter utilizes the findings of fourteen congregational interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions for this study.

Introduction of Participants

Fourteen adult congregants were selected to participate in this study. All of these congregants were attending the same local church affiliated with the PCA (Presbyterian Church in America). Their age, gender, education, profession, and/or completion of the discipleship training (DT) course offered by the church were used as selection criteria. Participants were selected to represent the demographic of the church, which consists of students and working professionals in their twenties and thirties with slightly more female members than male. Therefore, eight females and six males divided into two age groups (late teens to mid twenties and late twenties to thirties) were chosen to participate, with half from the younger group and half from the more mature group. The younger participants were chosen from among those who are not as highly educated or experienced in their career, although almost all participants had either graduated from college or are currently attending college. Since the church's congregants also consist of numerous small group leaders and team leaders, the younger participants were chosen from the group of leaders and the older participants were selected from those who are not

trained to be leaders. In order to join the church's leadership group, people are required to take a 25-week DT course in which their senior pastor (or his disciples) teaches them biblical theology, Christian doctrine, and spiritual disciplines, including the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching event. In the following section, each participant will briefly be introduced. Their names and identifiable information have been changed to protect their identity.

Albert is a university student who is attending Johns Hopkins University. He grew up in a Christian home. He used to be a member of a charismatic church until he moved to Baltimore for school. He became aware of the current congregation because it sends a shuttle to his campus on Sundays to transport students to and from church. Albert is in his early twenties, and he actively participates in every mercy ministry event at church. Yet, Albert could not join the church leadership team because he chose not to take the DT due to his studies.

Amy is in her early twenties, and she studies at Johns Hopkins University. She grew up in the church because her parents are believers. There are many things Amy enjoys in life because she is gifted in music, writing, cooking, and social skills. She happily serves as a small group leader on campus. She completed the DT course, which was taught by one of her pastor's second-generation disciples.

Anna is a healthcare technician who is married with a child. She did not grow up in the church, but Christ revealed himself to her a few years ago. Soon after her conversion, her church leadership discovered that Anna is amazingly gifted in welcoming newcomers and ministering to the poor. Now, Anna is serving as one of the small group leaders in her first church community. The college group students love to hang out with

her. Anna is in her early thirties, but she relates to the students well. Anna took the DT course from her pastor when the first-generation disciples (about fifty people) were taking the course alongside with her.

Brian was brought up in a Christian home. While he was attending a Christian college, he took a few required courses in biblical studies. Brian met his wife in college, and they used to attend North Point Community Church in Georgia where Andy Stanley preaches. Brian is in his late twenties and is finishing up his residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He wants to be a gospel-centered physician, so he is eager to finish taking DT, which is taught by a second-generation disciple.

Daniel was born and raised in Parkville, Maryland, a northern suburb of Baltimore. He went to one of the area state colleges and became an engineer at Motorola. As a faithful supporter of the Baltimore Ravens, he loves sports, especially football. He grew up in a Christian home and regularly attends church on Sundays. Daniel met his wife at his current church and married her three years ago. Although he has completed DT, which was taught by a first-generation disciple of the pastor, Daniel has not joined the church leadership yet. He is in his early thirties.

Deborah is an educator in the field of special education. She is currently pursuing her graduate school degree. Deborah attended her mother church until she moved to Baltimore while she was still single. Her husband now attends the current church with her. Deborah is in her late twenties and began serving as the hospitality team leader after completing the DT course. She took the first semester of DT with the pastor and completed the remaining training with one of the second-generation disciples (instead of

completing the entire course while the pastor was still teaching the first-generation disciples).

Helen is a college student in her late teens. She is studying at the Maryland Institute College of Art. She was brought up in a Christian home. Her father has served as the choir director in a few different churches. Helen grew up in her father's churches until she started attending another church during her freshman year in college. She recently signed up to take the DT course, so she is not serving as a leader yet. Helen faithfully attends a small group that meets on campus every week.

John is in his early twenties. He is finishing up his college education at Johns Hopkins University. John was brought up in a Christian home, and he grew up in a megachurch where the youth group ministry was well-organized with many activities. John started attending his current congregation during his freshman year in college. Due to his studies, he has yet to take the DT course.

Martha is a housewife who is married with two children. She was born and raised in South America. She migrated to the United States when she was a high school student. Martha is fluent in both Spanish and English. She was not brought up in a Christian home. Relating to Christianity was difficult until she was converted about four years ago. Soon after she made a commitment to follow Christ, Martha joined her current church with her husband and children. Then, she took the DT course from the pastor along with the other first-generation disciples. Martha is currently teaching a children's Sunday school class. She is in her mid-thirties.

Melissa is a working professional at one of the private universities in her area. She grew up in the church and is a people person, so she enjoys having fellowship with

many members. Soon after Melissa married, she joined her current church with her husband. Yet, she has postponed her involvement in DT because she has been focused on graduate school studies. Melissa is in her late twenties.

Rick works for a financial institution downtown. He was brought up in a Christian home. His parents are Christians who faithfully practice family worship. Rick's wife attended the same university with him. They found their current church online and decided to commit to it on their first visit. Rick is in his late twenties. He wants to take the DT course after he finishes his MBA program.

Sarah is a former missionary who used to spread the gospel in India. Although she was not brought up in a Christian family, she learned to serve Christ through a missions organization in college. She is currently pursuing her graduate school program at the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing. Sarah joined her new church when she moved to Baltimore for school last year. Due to her studies, she has yet to take DT. She is single, in her mid-twenties.

Susie is a high school teacher who was born and raised in Maryland. She was brought up in the church, and regularly attended youth group. She has visited a few countries in Asia in order to work and spread the gospel. After Susie returned to the United States, she became an educator in the Baltimore County Public School system where she has taught for seven years. Susie has completed all required leadership certification courses in order to join the senior leadership. She is married, with a son, in her early thirties. Susie took the first semester of DT with the pastor and completed the remaining training with one of the first-generation disciples.

Walter is a worship leader who grew up in the church. He completed the first semester of DT with the pastor while attending one of the area state universities and later finished the second semester with one of the deacons. Walter is currently applying for dental school while working at a local carryout food restaurant. He is single, in his mid-twenties.

The Purpose of Sunday Morning Preaching

The first research question sought to explore, “How do adult congregants describe the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching event?” Participants were asked to answer a few interview questions to describe the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching event and how it affects the way they engage in Sunday morning preaching. The relationship between their expectations of preaching and how they engage in Sunday morning preaching was also discussed.

Preaching as Discipleship

The participants all shared the same answer in their own words. They believe their pastor preaches to the glory of God by unpacking the Bible and making it applicable while explicitly preaching the gospel. Yet only a few participants asserted that their preacher aimed to preach the “gospel.” For instance, Martha replied, “My pastor wants to preach the word of God ... to unpack it and worship Christ through it.” Walter believes his preacher is “breaking down the intended message” based on “history, culture, and original language.” As for Melissa, preaching means helping listeners “interpret and apply the Bible.” Daniel testified that his preacher’s sermons consist of “exegesis and application.” On top of preaching to “explain the scripture” and help hearers “apply it in a

real world,” Deborah said that her preacher points people to “God’s sovereignty” as he preaches.

Others said their pastor aims to make disciples by helping people better understand the gospel. Her pastor “leads us closer to Christ,” said Susie; “He preaches to deepen the understanding of the gospel.” She added that her preacher is focused on “equipping” the congregation through the means of preaching. Helen expressed that her preacher is trying to tell hearers how to “follow Christ” and what to “practice daily.” She also said that he is preaching to “make disciples.” Brian stated that his preacher preaches, so “that Christians could be equipped and be disciples.” John said, “He preaches for saving grace,” so hearers may “understand and choose to believe [the gospel] or not.” John believes that his pastor’s preaching is exclusive because it makes believers repent, whereas the non-elect may find it offensive. Preaching is for the disciples of Christ, according to the participants.

Preaching as Teaching

All respondents claimed that they understand the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching event by listening to their pastor’s preaching and learning from it in different settings. Helen insisted that her understanding of the purpose of preaching is her “opinion.” Then she admitted that she knows the purpose because the “main points stay with” her. Martha said she “just feels” she knows the purpose of preaching and added, “I know it by reading the Bible on my own.” Still, Martha conceded that she had come to know the purpose of her pastor’s preaching by seeing that the content is “always backed by the Bible.” Martha’s learning is connected to what her preacher says behind the pulpit.

Anna concurred with Martha's views, noting that her personal growth came from a combination of both "personal Bible reading" and her pastor's preaching. Melissa made the purpose of preaching sound obvious, saying, "My preacher would break down the Bible, explain it, and show the plot."

To Walter, the way his preacher always "tries to unpack the meaning of the text" behind the pulpit helped him understand the aim of his pastor's pulpit ministry. Further, Walter explained that his "personal relationship with the preacher" has an important influence on him. Sarah seemed to agree with Walter. She realized what her preacher is trying to accomplish during his Sunday morning preaching by "talking to him" in person. "His gospel-centered heart" and "his character away from the pulpit" helped her realize what her preacher is trying to do behind the pulpit, according to Sarah.

As for Susie and John, their pastor's "application points" let them know what he is trying to accomplish behind the pulpit "clearly." Daniel seemed to concur with their views. He said, "His sermon outline on the bulletin and application points" help him understand the preacher's aim. He added that "The DT course and the Bible studies" were also very helpful.

Preaching as Motivation

Both Deborah and Walter said they "know" their pastor's preaching "is the word of God" because he is unpacking the Bible. "Everything is from the passage ... so it works for me and makes me stay focused," said Brian, adding, "all things [the pastor] says matter." Melissa said, "I know I should not zone out" because "small details of the original language" can change the interpretation. As for Rick, his understanding of what

his pastor is trying to accomplish behind the pulpit motivates him to pray with his wife before they drive to church “because the Bible is hard to understand.” Albert said that his understanding of the purpose of preaching makes him “listen better in order to learn something new.”

On top of listening attentively, Anna, John, and Martha also take notes during the preaching event, knowing that their pastor is trying to preach the word of God. According to Anna, her understanding of the purpose of preaching “seriously motivates” her, so she listens “as a form of worship.”

Preaching as Bible-Centered and Christ-Centered

Many participants said that good sermons are both Bible-centered and Christ-centered. Brian said that the “meaning of the text” has to be communicated, not what preachers think the meaning is. Helen proclaimed, “It has to end with what Christ did and what the Bible says.” Anna said that good preaching would “stay true to the text ... [based on] exegesis and context.” Walter stated that good preaching is “delivering the word faithfully with professional skills” according to its “intended meaning.” Martha concurred with the others, saying that good preaching “has to have exegesis and the gospel.”

Martha added “good organization” and “eye contact” to the list of elements that make for a good sermon. Deborah said, “Good preaching is defined by how the congregation is able to engage in the midst of preaching the truth.” Susie also said that the congregants should be able to “relate to” the message. John agreed, saying, “good preaching communicates how to put [the message of the text] into practice daily.” Sarah

believes that good preaching makes the sermon “relatable” while also being “Bible-centered.” Daniel and Melissa seemed to agree with each other, asserting that the preacher has to “make the Bible understandable.” Making the truth of scriptures plain behind the pulpit matters to hearers. Albert emphasized that a good sermon depends on the “relationship with preacher” away from the pulpit. For him, good preaching requires shepherding, namely making disciples.

Bad preaching is the opposite of the shepherding heart, according to Melissa. She said, “I’ve sat under another pastor’s preaching. He preached with much showmanship. That’s bad preaching to me.” Daniel said that “manipulation” is a sign of bad preaching. Anna stated that “communicating the preacher’s own agenda” by taking the Bible “out of context” is the last thing she wants to hear from the pulpit. Martha agreed with Anna that poor sermons are those that “preach [the pastor’s] own opinion” and don’t “point hearers to Christ.” Helen said, “It’s pointless” if preaching is “not Christ-centered.” Deborah asserted that “If it’s all over the place without preaching Christ, it’s bad preaching.” “At the end of the day,” according to Rick, what matters “is preaching what Jesus is happy about.”

Bad Sermons and Discerning Preaching

Where did the participants learn how to distinguish good preaching from bad preaching? Those who grew up in the church said they learned how to evaluate sermons by listening to many preachers ever since they were young. Albert said, “I know because I’m experienced as a hearer for many years.” Melissa said, “Nobody taught me. I know by experiencing different preachers.” Both Brian and Rick learned from listening to bad

preaching for many years. Brian testified that he used to listen to Andy Stanley's sermons almost everyday. But he eventually realized that Stanley "lacks relevancy to the Bible." So he stopped listening to Stanley and other celebrity pastors permanently. Rick also said that he learned how to discern preaching by "listening to many preachers, especially those who preach on the wrong values." He said that "their god" is different from the "God of the Bible."

Discipleship Training and Discerning Preaching

Participants who were converted in their youth group remember that they learned discernment from discipleship training. Sarah stated that she learned from her good friends who had sermon discussions with her. Susie learned how to evaluate preaching from a short-term missions preparation course that she took when she was a student. Both Walter and John said that their youth group taught them how to listen critically.

However, those who were converted after they became adults seemed to concur with each other's views. Deborah said, "Honestly ... I learned through my preacher. He emphasizes Christ as he preaches." She also said that her preacher's style is different from that of those who preach contemporary sermons. According to Deborah, other pastors she has heard use a style based in storytelling, which she finds shallow. However, her preacher "distinguishes his own preaching with in-depth teaching" that comes "straight from the Bible." Martha and Anna said that they learned how to evaluate sermons from their preacher as he was preaching on Sundays and from the DT course. Daniel also insisted that he learned from the DT course and Bible studies.

Expectations and Engagement in Preaching

When asked whether their understanding of the purpose of preaching impacted the way they engage in the sermon, the participants unanimously said yes it did, in a positive way. They stressed that they take their pastor's preaching as the very word of God. For instance, Deborah replied, "It does [affect my engagement] in a positive way. I walk away knowing that Christ has spoken to me." Martha responded, "Yes, it makes me trust that it is the word of God." Yet Anna said that her understanding of the purpose of sermons impacted the way she engages not only during the preaching event but also before she walks into the church building on Sundays. "It makes me listen well," testified Anna, and "pray more even the night before if possible."

Walter alluded to the fact that he enjoys sharing his feedback after hearing the word of God. He stated, "Yes, I'm always listening because the pastor is preaching the word of God. And I'm able to share feedback with the pastor." Brian and Rick insisted that their expectations of the sermon "subconsciously" impacted them, especially as they listen to bad preaching. Rick said that his expectations impact him "if the preacher preaches something other than what God of the Bible wants." They seemed to realize that their expectations affect the way they engage in their pastor's Sunday morning preaching but come into play even more strongly as they listen to bad preaching, which appears to be prevalent outside their church home. Nevertheless, Melissa is a bit different. She noted that her expectations have been changing over time, whereas her main preacher does not change on Sundays. She recognizes that her expectations have been changing positively because she has been sitting under the same pastor's preaching ever since she joined her current congregation. Melissa is relatively new to the congregation compared to the other

respondents. “It does [impact the way I engage in his preaching],” asserted Melissa, “but it depends [more] on my [psychological and spiritual] state since he is my main preacher.” Her expectation of preaching appears to be impacted by her new primary preacher’s sermons. At any rate, as Table 1 displays, many participants believed their expectations of preaching impacted the way they engage in the Sunday morning preaching event.

Table 1. Results

Yes, they do	No, they don’t	Etc.
11	1	2 (see below)

The Purpose of Preaching Impacts Engagement

When asked, “Does this expectation impact the way you engage in your pastor’s preaching on Sundays?” Helen replied, “It connects to the first question,” which was about the purpose of preaching. She believes that her pastor’s preaching is “from Christ to now and the future.” In other words, what Helen’s pastor is trying to accomplish during his Sunday morning preaching coincides with her definition of good preaching. Therefore, when asked how does this understanding impact the way you engage in your pastor’s preaching on Sundays, Helen responded, “When the pastor is preaching, you just listen naturally.” Because she clearly understands his aim, which is in agreement with her definition of good preaching, it seems “natural” for her to engage in his preaching, both actively and attentively. Ultimately, how Helen understands what her pastor is trying to accomplish behind the pulpit impacts the way she engages during the Sunday morning

preaching event. She seemed to take her pastor's preaching as "what it really is, the word of God."⁴³²

Albert's expectations are affirmed during his preacher's pre-sermon prayer. He replied, "The pastor's prayer before sermon helps" when asked whether his expectations impact the way he engages in his pastor's preaching on Sundays. His pastor's prayers indirectly communicated and reminded Albert of the purpose of preaching. According to Albert, his pastor usually prays for the hearts of hearers and for himself. The prayer helped Albert engage in the preaching event better because his expectations of preaching were aligned with his pastor's purpose of preaching. Their understanding of the purpose of preaching impacts the way both Helen and Albert engage in their pastor's preaching on Sundays.

How Do Adult Congregants Engage in the Sunday Morning Preaching Event?

The second research question sought to determine how adult congregants engage during Sunday morning preaching. In the literature review, the concept of congregational engagement was not limited to listening attentively during the actual preaching event. Adult congregants' engagement in Sunday morning preaching includes what they do or think prior to the preaching event and the things they do or think after the preaching event. Also, Sunday morning preaching, by definition, is delivered in a corporate setting. Thus, many participants answered the interview questions in light of the engagement-related activities they do individually as well as the things they do or think with a partner and/or as a group.

⁴³² 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Taking Notes

About a half of the respondents said that they take notes as they engage in their pastor's preaching on Sundays. Rick humorously illustrated, "I take notes. And my wife will look at it and comment on it, saying, 'He didn't say that!'" Both Deborah and Helen said that they take notes using the sermon outline on the bulletin. But Albert and Martha go beyond that. They "keep" their notes, that they may go back to them and review them when needed. "It's a good reminder," said Martha. Still, John takes it to the next level when it comes to taking notes. He takes some notes using his phone, which is linked to his Gmail account. That way, it enables him to send his notes to his sister and friends. John's aim appeared to cultivate sermon discussion online with those who do not sit through the same preaching on Sundays. Rick, too, mentioned that he discusses the sermon with his wife later using notes he writes on the paper bulletin. Note-taking seems to enable hearers remember the content of preaching in order to discuss it with their loved ones.

Listen Attentively

The other half of the respondents testified that they would rather listen without doing anything else simultaneously. "My husband takes notes, whereas I just listen and watch to be present," said Melissa. Susie stated that she just listens, making it "relevant" to her although she knows that taking notes helps her stay focused. Also, Daniel and Walter said they just listen. Yet, being able to match what they hear with the sermon outline on the bulletin helps them engage effectively. Sarah said that she constantly compares the preacher's interpretation of the passage with how she reads the same

passage. Brian explained, “I’m not a multi-tasker; I engage by listening, not doing other things” such as “using my phone” to take notes.

Listen Prayerfully

Anna said that she engages in her pastor’s preaching through the means of prayer. “Prayer: I pray for my heart, others’ hearts, and preaching,” stated Anna, because “we need the Holy Spirit’s help.” She seemed to understand that hearers are to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit by asking His help for the preacher and also by praying for hearers, including herself. Again, she insisted, “I pray harder if I’m distracted while I’m listening.” Sarah also confessed, “Knowing that I have tendency to be distracted, [I pray] during worship for attentive ears.” Martha also mentioned that she prays while listening to her pastor’s preaching. Therefore, Anna was not the only one who understood that worshippers all need help whether they preach or listen.

Nudge Myself

In response to the question, “Is there anything you’re doing or thinking in order to listen better?” Brian confessed that he, in the middle of preaching, reminds himself, saying, “We’re talking about this passage!” Daniel answered that he constantly makes himself “stay focused.” Susie testified that she draws concept pictures in order to engage effectively, depending on her mood. She usually tries not to take notes, so that she can just stay focused on listening. In the midst of taking notes, Rick constantly compares and contrasts different translations. He even reads a few translations in his native language, using his phone. Because English is not his heart language, he compares his church’s

official English translation with other translations (including his native language) in order to better engage in the preaching event. Ironically, he admitted that he often ends-up getting “distracted” by comparing a few translations because his pastor moves on to the next point while he is still busy with the previous passage or argument.

Preparation for My Heart

John said that preview of the sermon text helps him listen effectively. Rick said he finds it helpful to read the word and pray in the morning. A majority of respondents stated that they pray to prepare their hearts so that they may listen better. John also said, “I pray for the heart, both desire and discipline.” Albert concurred with John, saying, “I pray in the van” because his church sends out a shuttle to the area universities, including Johns Hopkins University. Anna confessed, “I repent if there’s anything heavy on my heart.” Both Brian and Melissa insisted that worship songs help them prepare their hearts. Brian said, “I’m not a music person, but I try to listen to some worship songs before church.” Melissa said singing before listening to the sermon helps her. She also tries to arrive early to the Sunday morning service. When she reflected upon her engagement with her husband, they realized that it is challenging for them to prepare their hearts if they are rushing to the church campus on Sundays. Deborah seemed to be in agreement with Melissa, as she insisted that it is important to take enough time to get to church “without being rushed.” She continued, “How I spend my time before church matters.” Walter said that how he conducts himself throughout the week affects the way he engages during the Sunday morning preaching event. “I prepare [my] heart, loving Christ

throughout the week,” said Walter, and “I limit my phone usage [throughout the week to avoid developing the habit of being distracted by it].”

Preparation for Physical Strength

Martha said she makes sure she is well rested. Since she sees the “difference between being tired or not,” she would even “drink coffee and [eat] a good meal” in order to listen well. Brian stated, “I try to relax in the morning.” Deborah noted, “I drink coffee while I’m listening.” Walter also asserted that his physical condition affects the way he listens and that he drinks coffee to help stay engaged. Anna testified that she brings snack or drinks to stay awake. Then she insisted, “The DT course helped me [make sure] I sleep well the night before.”

Ponder and Discuss

Susie, in response to the question, “Is there anything you do/think after the Sunday morning preaching event?” answered that she thinks about whether preaching was confusing or relevant. Albert said, “I think how to implement it; God answers during preaching.” “I think about it throughout the week,” said Helen, “if I don’t talk about it.” Brian said, “Depending on the passage, I think and reflect on the sermon and discuss with my wife.” Rick explained that he discusses with his wife by asking specific questions of each other, such as “Did you like it?” or making comments such as “It would’ve been better...” Sarah stated, “I’d let it stick with me and talked about it with friends.” John asserted, “I point people to the sermon” during fellowship. Daniel said, “I discuss it with my wife and in my small group.”

How Adult Congregants' Engagement During Sunday Morning Preaching Impacts Their Worship Experience

The third research question addressed congregants' worship experience when engaging in the Sunday morning preaching event. The relationship between the quality of worship experience and engagement level was also discussed.

Correlation Between Listening and Worshipping

Martha described her worship experience when she listened well, saying, "It's amazing. Sanctifying. It's just amazing. I can't explain." Deborah answered, "I'm satisfied" to the point where "I feel better about starting a new week and become less anxious." Walter said, "It's life-giving and refreshing when I listen well." He continued by saying that he feels "alive" in his worship experience. "Emotionally, I feel like I'm moved by the Spirit," answered Susie. "It's not just understanding by head-knowledge," she added. Anna also stated, "I feel emotional and intimate." Albert testified, "It feels joyful," and makes him sing.

Others mentioned different aspects than emotional satisfaction. "When I listen well," said Amy, "I remember [the] preaching better, so I worship better." Brian recalled, "It brings encouragement in the midst of being busy. Then it reminds me of who we are in Christ." As for Daniel, worship is both liberating and devastating. He confessed, "I feel better," but at the same time, "it's discouraging because I realize how little time I spend with God." Melissa agreed with Daniel, saying, "Happiness comes with guilt, so I apply" preaching, and it leads to "repentance." Over all, hearers have a more ideal worship experience when they listen well.

Conversely, participants explained that when they do not listen well, they have a diminished worship experience. When Albert could not listen very well for some reason, he felt like he “missed out.” He does not feel like he received “all the blessings” that must have been available. Daniel confessed, “I feel guilty,” which does not necessarily lead to repentance. So it does not seem to be “good guilt,” according to Daniel. Helen said, “You blame yourself, asking questions.” Thus, she would have guilt that leads to self-interrogation. Anna seemed to agree with Helen. She testified, “I feel distracted, detached, and it makes me wonder why.” She then added, “I know it is probably hardness of heart.” Martha also testified, “It’s not as powerful, not convicting.” Then she said, “It’s just a busy mind; I’m distracted on the inside.” Deborah seemed to concur, saying, “I feel distracted because I’m caught up in my worries.” She said distraction negatively affects her overall worship experience, including other components, such as singing and reading. Many seem to regret their worship experience and blame themselves, believing they have a heart issue.

Others gave the impression that worship becomes a mere intellectual and/or ceremonial activity when they do not listen to the preaching well. As a high school English teacher, Susie said, “It becomes head knowledge when I can’t listen well.” She confessed that she “ends up nitpicking by counting the preacher’s grammatical mistakes,” including those of the guest speakers who regularly preach to her congregation. Melissa admitted to sometimes “listening to the words but not the message. It feels empty.” She continued, “It’s the difference between actively listening and passively listening.” Brian also said that he does not “feel spiritual” when he cannot listen to the preaching well. Sarah noted that when the sermon feels “dry,” she tries “to combat [that feeling] with

prayer.” Overall, when hearers could not listen very well, the whole worship service may not seem sanctifying to them spiritually.

Personal Engagement in Worship

About a quarter of the respondents said that they take notes to engage in the Sunday morning preaching event more actively in order to worship better. John said, “I try to take notes in order to listen.” Amy said she takes notes so she can engage more effectively. Both said writing notes increases their engagement level.

Another quarter testified that they pray in order to make their engagement worshipful. Deborah said that she pays attention to the lyrics of the worship songs and prays for her heart. Martha said she prays to prepare her heart, whereas Anna stated that she prays as she listens. They believe their prayerful heart can be transformed into a heart of worship.

Anna added, “I readjust my posture.” She recognizes that her engagement level is linked to her body posture, and that changing it may improve her worship experience. She reminds herself to stay active throughout the Sunday morning preaching event, both physically and psychologically. Rick tries to “be open-minded” and “avoid thinking about how others might think of” him as he uses his mobile phone to pull up Bible translations in his native language. Melissa said, “I clear my mind to be more vulnerable, laying it all down to listen better.” The others, including Daniel, said, “I just try to listen.” In these ways, a few respondents seek to discipline their minds in order to strengthen their engagement and improve their worship experience.

Albert seemed to stay focused on the content of preaching, especially its application. He asserted, “I listen carefully, finding the connection between then and now.” Albert waits to hear what the preacher says about how the sermon text, which was intended for the original recipients, should be applied to him. The variations from the sermon text to the twenty-first-century church may stimulate Albert’s engagement to the point where it positively contributes to his worship experience.

Brian takes steps to prevent his mobile phone from distracting him during the Sunday morning preaching event because for him doing so is an obvious necessity to be truly present and listen well during the sermon. Brian explained that since he is not in his office treating patients, he does not make himself available to receive messages or calls from the hospital. He has set aside this time to worship with his church body, so it seems appropriate for him to silence his handheld device. Overall, the participants were active in their engagement of worship. Everyone is doing something to enhance their attention and focus.

Discussion with Others

When asked what they might do differently before/after the preaching event to better engage, their answers included everything stated previously, from praying and reading the Bible to arriving at church early and drinking coffee. Daniel also said he might discuss his pastor’s sermons with others, especially those who are not in his small group. Since his small group has been having sermon discussions when they gather, Daniel wanted to have a similar discussion outside the small group. Helen stated, “During fellowship in the narthex area, I wish I could reach out and greet others.” As a student,

she would rather reach out to those who are not in her circle or age group—such as young adults and families—inside the church, and start discussing the sermon text and preaching with them. Others wanted to discuss the sermon with their family members or small group, not necessarily with anyone whom they do not know well. Only Martha answered that she would do “nothing” differently, as she is confident in the way she currently engages in the Sunday morning preaching event.

Social Media and Engagement

Albert said he has snap-chatted, posting both photos and videos of the preaching event both before and during church twice. Albert continued, “I got good feedback; it draws people.” Then he gave an example of a time when he used social media to promote a mercy ministry to serve victims of human trafficking. “We posted some pictures on Facebook, and they reached many people. So that’s one of the pros of using social media for church. It draws people.” Albert said that he notices that “others take notes on their phones” during preaching. But he seemed to believe that their phones could do much more than taking notes during the Sunday morning preaching event, such as broadcast preaching or upload pictures of the worship service. Social media applications enable people to engage in real time, according to Albert.

Sarah said that she listens to sermons on podcast, especially when she “feels distant from God.” She learned how to access sermons through technology that is available both on her computer and her handheld devices. Helen took social media interactions to the next level. She uses social media before, during and after the Sunday morning preaching event to discuss sermons with her friends. Helen said she has used

video chat with friends on Facebook to discuss sermons. She continued, “We want to keep each other accountable; it’s Christ-centered friendship.” Helen has to stay focused on the Sunday morning preaching event to discuss it with her friends on social media later. Her friends are expected to engage actively during the Sunday morning preaching event as well because they want to discuss it with others on social media. Also, using social media on their phones, Helen and her friends can listen to their pastor’s preaching after it has been delivered, regardless of their location, distance, or environment. They can help each other better engage corporately as well as individually. The accountability group on social media is called “Christ-centered,” according to Helen.

Avoiding Social Media and Phones

Alternatively, a majority of the participants use social media differently than Albert and Helen. Many participants, both young and old, said they do not use social media to improve their engagement level during the Sunday morning preaching. Martha said, “I don’t post anything on social media and I don’t use my phone” at church. John said, “I don’t use social media at church.” A few married couples asserted that they do not use social media often anyway, so they do not use it to improve their engagement level at church. Brian said, “I do not use social media anyway.” Rick testified, “I’m not a big social media person. I do use my phone to look up passages and words” during the Sunday morning preaching event.

Other families and young adults purposely abstain from social media during the Sunday morning preaching event. “I don’t use social media while I listen to sermons on Sundays. I think it doesn’t help people engage,” said Melissa. She asserted that she

doesn't even leave comments on people's posts on social media saying she is praying for them. She said, "Social media is for the show [to have others see that] 'I'm a person of God.' I'd rather have a [face-to-face] conversation with people." Then she mentioned that she watched a TED Talk on being on the phone always. "It does impact how we engage in the preaching events. I just can't be present when I'm using my phone," she explained. Walter agreed with Melissa, saying, "I stopped using social media for expressing my spirituality although I still send people sermon links using social media." Then Walter proclaimed, "One hundred percent, my phone affects me; it distracts me. When I see people use their phones during Sunday morning preaching, they are missing it." Anna also said that she does not use social media during the preaching because it is "distracting" to her. She continued by saying that social media makes her waste her time, so she tries not to use her phone, and always sets it on vibrate. For Anna, her phone is the venue for social media to the point where they cannot be separated as she talks about them. Then she insisted, "Phone usage affects ... my mind during the preaching event ... I believe it affects others [too]." She sounded assertive. "I used to struggle with a short attention span. My to-do list was distracting me while I was listening to preaching on Sundays," recalled Anna. She suggested that "people can fast from social media" in order to overcome a short attention span. She had pity on those who struggle with their phone addiction.

Many families and young adults seemed to believe that social media might not be the right venue for spiritual discussions. They also suggested that mobile phone usage negatively affects the way worshippers engage in the Sunday morning preaching event, although they cannot prove it. Moreover, those who completed DT with the pastor (Anna,

Deborah, Martha, Susie and Walter) seemed to abstain from using their phones during Sunday morning preaching more than those who either have not taken the course or took the course when it was taught by the second or third-generation disciples.

Self-Control and Phones

Amy contended with those who avoid social media purposefully. She stated, “I don’t use social media to engage. I just use it for notification.” She said that she uses Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and others. Using every major social media network, Amy did not seem to believe that social media is an inappropriate way to express her spirituality. For her, social media networks are simply for something other than improving her engagement during the Sunday morning preaching event. Because Amy uses social media for notifications as many young people usually do, there is no reason for her to use social media during church. Still, Amy said that she keeps her phone next to her as she listens to her pastor’s preaching. “Sometimes, I check my phone when people call me,” said Amy. “Then I text them. I don’t call them back or anything because I’m unavailable to talk just for an hour. What can happen in an hour?” Yet speaking of distraction, Amy continued, “The digital age can impact how people engage” in the Sunday morning preaching event because they are “always checking their phones.” Amy did not seem to believe she fits the category of those who “always” use their phones. Although she keeps her phone close throughout the Sunday morning preaching event and even texts people back occasionally, she seemed to be in control of her phone usage.

When it comes to using her mobile phone with no guilt during Sunday morning preaching, Amy is in agreement with Albert. But the reason Amy does not use social

media to improve her engagement for preaching was that she does not feel the need to use notifications for the Sunday morning preaching event. Therefore, she refuted both Albert and Melissa because Melissa and her age group seemed to doubt people's authenticity as they express their spirituality on social media. Amy does not feel the need to use social media and her phone for her engagement, whereas Melissa believes people should not use social media and their phones for their engagement.

On the other end of the spectrum, some participants felt out of control with their phone use. Daniel confessed, "I look at the phone to check sports scores. This is habitual." Although he said that he is not into social media, his phone sucks him into whatever is happening online. When Daniel receives "promptings," he checks his work emails or texts people during the Sunday morning preaching event. He seemed to believe that it is wrong. He even testified that he does not want to check his phone during the Sunday morning preaching event, but could not help it until recently. Since joining the video team and serving at the video booth, Daniel is forced to flip the slides for his pastor's preaching. The task requires his undivided attention. Daniel called it a "happy duty" because it keeps him from checking his phone habitually during the Sunday morning preaching event. Had not he taken the new responsibility at the video booth, Daniel could not have stayed away from his phone while his pastor is preaching behind the pulpit, according to his own testimony.

Susie seemed to agree with Daniel. She stated,

I don't use social media for engagement. But I use my phone as a Bible. Then I look up some hard vocabulary words the pastor uses sometimes. But as I Google to look up some words or events that are mentioned during his preaching, it leads to checking my emails and doing other things on my phone.

Susie habitually uses her phone to check her emails throughout the week just as many users do. If she chooses to look up some theological words or facts on her phone during the Sunday morning preaching event, she often ends up checking her emails and a list of things to do later.

Deborah shared that she has the same struggle as Susie. “I don’t use social media for engagement. But I used my phone to look up some theological words and to text people. Then I wound up using social media habitually,” regretted Deborah. “I try not to use my phone because it doesn’t help me engage,” she added. Unlike the student respondents who regularly use their phones during Sunday morning preaching with no guilt, many married couples seemed to struggle with their habitual phone usage and/or addiction during the sermon and feel guilty about it.

The Role of Other Congregants in Engagement During Sunday Morning Preaching

The fourth research question addressed how other people’s listening habits affect how the participants listen to the sermon. In other words, the question dealt with how distractions impact the worship experience. The interview questions probed what distracts the respondents from engaging well during Sunday morning preaching, what they do about the distraction(s), whether the way other members engage in their pastor’s preaching distracts or helps the respondents, and what both preachers and hearers should do to enhance congregational engagement during Sunday morning preaching. Overall, the question about distractions received the largest and most extensive answers of all four research questions.

Physical and/or Mental State of Being

When asked what distracts her from engaging well during Sunday morning preaching, Helen said being tired is her one and only distraction, because when she is physically tired she “can’t concentrate, can’t comprehend.” So she would take notes and eat mints to deal with the distraction. Walter also said, “When I’m physically tired, it’s difficult to stay awake.” Then he would “command himself to stay awake” instead of doing anything practical about the distraction. Amy mentioned being tired or stressed due to the “lack of sleep, or work, or bad things that happened” during the previous week. In those instances, she would pray, saying, “Help me stay focused and have peace.”

Deborah confessed, “My previous week distracts me.” She said that if her week has been “busy,” she tends to be distracted by it because she and her husband “stay up late on Saturday” to be entertained. “We are tired physically and mentally for Sunday morning preaching,” said Deborah. She noted that their “physical and mental state of being matters.” Then she answered the question about how she handles these distractions by saying, “I ignore them and try to come back to the preaching. I also try not to stay up late on Saturday.”

Martha agreed with Deborah. “When I’m tired, I feel sleepy,” answered Martha. “Random thoughts and food preparation for kids distract me.” On top of her kids sometimes distracting her with their behavior during the service, Martha appeared to be bothered by many parenting responsibilities. To deal with the distractions, she said, “I block the thoughts when I realize I need to stop.” She also said that she would physically prepare herself better in order not to be distracted by her lack of physical stamina.

Enemy Within

The participants said they tend to get distracted by their own minds. As Anna mentioned previously, many seemed to struggle with a short attention span. It is not necessarily something external that distracts them, but rather their own thoughts. Susie confessed, “It’s my own mind, thinking about my to-do list.” Then she asserted that her short attention span has nothing to do with the mobile phone era. Her mind seemed to keep moving along to the point where she would tell herself “not to think of these things.” Sarah also confessed, “Personal worries such as family, diet, sins and many other things” tend to distract her. “It’s usually day-to-day worries. But I daydream a lot,” she added. When she realizes that she is distracted with her own thoughts and fears, she said she would pray as a “reminder of God’s promises.”

Brian differed from the other respondents when he testified, “I get distracted by the gigantic glass on the wall behind my preacher, how small he is compared to how big the building is. I get distracted by marriage issues if I argued with my wife before church in the morning. I get distracted by reading the bulletin.” He seemed to be triggered by external events or the environment. Still, Brian was not slow to get to the bottom of the issue as a medical doctor, admitting that he is ultimately distracted in his own mind. No wonder he continued, “Listening to a sermon itself is dealing with distraction. I need the Holy Spirit’s help.”

Daniel’s urge to use his phone during Sunday morning preaching distracts him. Again, if it was not for his new responsibility to change the sermon slides in the video booth, Daniel said he could not have stopped himself from using his phone without ceasing. At the end of the day, he may not be so different from Brian. Neither Brian nor

Daniel appeared to be distracted by their lack of physical stamina or by someone persistently tapping on their shoulders. A majority of respondents, including Susie, Brian, and Daniel, seemed addicted to distraction because they constantly choose to be distracted with or without recognizing it.

External Distractions: Almost Always Human

Rick said that he tends to get distracted by various things from a “rough week at work” to family or marriage issues to “what others think or say” of him. He seemed to relate to a majority of respondents, including Anna, Brian, Daniel, because internal or mental things distract him. Also, Rick pointed out that technical things, such as sound system issues and someone dropping a pen on the floor distract him. Then he continued, “For these internal distractions, I just try to stop” being distracted by them. But another distraction that almost always gets Rick is crying babies. “I know I can’t do anything about” this particular distraction, said Rick. Yet it appeared not to be something that he could simply try to ignore or just stop thinking about.

Melissa also noted that other people’s kids often distract her, and that there is nothing she can do about it. Melissa continued, “It distracts me when [other congregants] are all over [their] spouse,” especially “when [they] sit right in front of me. I can’t see my pastor.” As for Melissa, it was not about any cultural issue as in people “should not be so intimate during Sunday morning preaching.” The issue for Melissa is people blocking her view or eye contact with the preacher, which she said is very important to her engagement.

Deborah mentioned she is distracted when people talk during Sunday morning preaching. Again, she is not so bothered that they actually allow themselves to talk while their pastor is preaching. Yet it is psychologically difficult for her to stay focused because it makes her wonder what they are talking about, especially when it is not about the sermon.

Preacher's Skills Distract Me

Deborah stated that her pastor's gestures distracted her "not because it was not good," but because it was "good." She explained, "When my preacher preaches with so much passion, he sometimes uses too much hand gesturing. And I end up focusing on his gestures instead of the content of his preaching." His hand gestures, although part of good preaching skills, can distract a hearer. Melissa agreed with Deborah. "I got stuck on his sermon illustration," recalled Melissa. "It was so good that I could not stop thinking about it. Then he moved on to the next main point. And I missed a big chunk of it because I was still thinking about the illustration." Melissa knows that illustrations help hearers better understand and/or apply the sermon text and that it is a good thing that her preacher delivered an effective illustration. Yet, it distracted her because she continued to think about it after the pastor had moved on to another point.

Melissa also mentioned that she was distracted by a guest speaker when he was taking too long to get his manuscript ready. The guest speaker stood behind the pulpit soon after he was introduced to the congregants and they were anticipating that he would say something soon. Yet, it took him several minutes to get his manuscript ready and to start greeting the congregants. "I could not understand what took him so long, but it was too long," said Melissa. Amy mentioned another distraction related to time. She said,

“Many people might not be able to stay focused if he preaches longer than forty-five minutes. It would help people remember the main points if he shortened his sermons.” It seems that preachers can distract hearers with both positive and negative skills.

My Phone Distracts Me

Albert said, “My phone distracts me. [For example, when I get a] reminder text to do homework.” Then he added that he also gets texts and calls from people. In order to deal with the phone-related distractions, Albert said, “Sometimes, I wait, but usually I just reply right away” to get it out of the way. At first John replied, “I don’t get distracted; I’m usually zoned in.” Then John conceded that his phone distracts him. “When someone messages me during preaching,” recalled John, “I either ignore or think how to reply.” Then he ends up getting distracted because he might not be able to “fully engage” in his pastor’s preaching for a few minutes. Melissa admitted she is distracted by her phone as well. She stated, “The anticipation [of an email or text] distracts me.” When she is waiting for an email or message from work, she keeps thinking about it because her phone is in her purse. “I put my phone on vibrate. Then it distracts me when it vibrates,” she explained. Having her phone nearby seemed to trigger anticipation and/or curiosity.

As mentioned previously, Albert said that he is pro social media for church. John mentioned that he uses his phone to take sermon notes and send them to his sister and friends because his phone is linked to his email account. Both Albert and John seemed to believe they are in total control of phone-related distractions. Yet, they did not appear to be completely free from the usual distractions that others experience if they keep their phones near them or if they use their phones during Sunday morning preaching.

Unlike Albert and John, Melissa is not a college student. She is a working professional who seemed to be disciplined to put her phone away in public meetings. Still, she gets distracted even though her phone is in her purse. No one seems to be completely sober-minded during the Sunday morning preaching event as long as they carry a smartphone.

Other People's Phones

Even if hearers no longer carry their smartphones, they are distracted by other people's phones. Anna said that she gets distracted when she looks around and "sees how others worship." She almost always sees others using their phones. "I keep looking at them for a few minutes until I have to stop," said Anna, "I enjoy his preaching so much, so I automatically look at others." Anna is no longer struggling with her short attention span, but seeing other people use their phones distracts her. She continued, "I end up wondering why they would use their phones during preaching and judge them." In order to deal with the distraction, Anna said she would "pray against it" and refocus her eyes on her preacher. Anna also said that she tends to pray for others when they distract her by using their phones during her pastor's sermons.

Anna was not the only one who disapproved of the way others use their smartphones during Sunday morning preaching. A majority of respondents said yes when asked, "Does the way other people listen to your pastor's preaching affect how you listen to your pastor's preaching? If so, can you describe how?" (see Table 2). The most commonly mentioned negative influence was how other people use their smartphones during Sunday morning preaching. Deborah said that when people use their phones, it

“discourages” her. She continued, “If they’re close friends or family members, I would nudge them to make them stop using their phones.” But she said that she could not keep the others from using their phones. Both Helen and Walter insisted they “get offended” when people use their phones. Walter continued, “They should limit their cellphone usage; they’re just playing Fantasy Football,” which is an online game that many members play against each other on their smartphones.

Even Martha, who does not appear to be as affected by the way others listen to the sermon, appeared to be distracted by those who use their phones during the preaching event. She stated, “It just makes me acknowledge them when they use their phones; I get back on track right away.” Martha continued, “Sometimes I judge them, wondering why would they do that. But I feel bad. So I try not to keep judging and decide to give them the benefit of a doubt,” as if they really need to use their phones to contact someone urgently. Many participants knew what other people were doing with their phones, whether they were taking sermon notes or doing inappropriate things, such as playing games. Sarah said the way others listen to the sermon does not affect her, rather her distractions are more internal than external.

Table 2. Results

Yes, they do	No, they don’t	Yes and No
11	2	1 (see Martha’s comments above)

The Way Others Listen Affects How I Engage

The other negative influence factors varied. Rick said crying babies distract him. Melissa said, “When the parents are juggling their babies, it makes me wonder if they can listen.” Helen added, “The sound of making origami with the bulletin.” The second most

popular answer was people talking. Amy said, “When others are talking.” Many factors discouraged participants from engaging well.

Only two respondents, including Sarah, said that the way other hearers listen to Sunday morning preaching does not affect them negatively. The two belonged to the relatively more educated group.

Still, almost all participants conceded that the way other people listen to their pastor’s preaching does positively affect how they engage during the same preaching event. Deborah insisted that when others take notes or pay attention, it motivates her to engage better. Walter asserted, “If others are engaged, it helps me stay engaged.”

Hence, participants seemed to know how to discern whether other hearers are engaged well or not. Albert pointed out that his friend’s posture influenced him to engage better. Susie recalled, “This one sermon was positive to me when everyone seemed engaged, verbally agreeing with what preacher was saying.” Nevertheless, in Rick’s experience, his engagement may not only depend on how other people listen during the preaching event. According to Rick, sermon discussion in a small group helps positively, especially when a particular deacon leads it. The way one individual member listens to and discusses the Sunday morning sermon appeared to encourage Rick. Overall, Daniel’s statement seemed to summarize the answers of most of the participants: “If others get distracted, I get distracted. If others listen well, I get to listen better.”

My Expectation of Preaching Has Changed

When asked if it is the pastor’s job to make people listen to the preaching, Susie answered, “He can help people listen” by using good illustrations and even jokes. Even

those who answered, “It is a mutual responsibility,” indicated that the listener has a greater responsibility than the pastor. Martha asserted, “The pastor has to engage or relate to listeners, but ultimately listeners are to be determined to listen.” Walter pointed out that preachers have to prepare well, “but listeners have to work to be present and try to listen. They should not depend on social media” for sermon listening. “It’s both the preacher and listeners,” said Helen. “If listeners have no heart, there’s no point except the pastor not preaching Christ-centered preaching.” Helen insisted that listeners’ “wrong expectations about the style” need to change. She finished by saying, “I appreciate how my preacher uses other passages and shows what the Bible says, rather than just telling stories.”

Deborah agreed with Helen. She said that it is the listener’s responsibility to listen to the sermon. She confessed, “I got used to contemporary preaching before I joined” my current church, “so it wasn’t easy at first” to listen to expository sermons. Deborah explained, “But I changed over time. And it wasn’t my preacher who changed me.” Although it was not easy to adjust to expository preaching, Deborah’s expectation of preaching has changed over time. She insisted that the power of the Holy Spirit changed her view.

John, a student at Johns Hopkins University, also asserted that it is “important” to listen well. John continued, “It is the vibe you get. Back at my home church, I didn’t listen well. The preaching had more illustrations than Bible [text]. But I got used to Bible-centered preaching. It’s been obvious my preacher loves Christ. That’s why I stayed at my new church.” John’s expectation of preaching has changed over time as well. He has learned to appreciate his new preacher’s expository preaching. The

preacher's apparent affection toward Christ has helped John engage in expository preaching.

Table 3. Results

Pastor	Listener	Mutual
1	5	8

Suggestions for Preachers

What can preachers do to enhance congregational engagement during Sunday morning preaching? A majority of participants insisted on cultivating relationships inside the church. There were two aspects. First, preachers have to know their flock in order to relate to them from the pulpit. Second, preachers should help their congregants feel that they are known, so they may listen as to their shepherd. Susie said, "Preachers should know what's going on, keeping in touch [with the congregation]." Martha agreed with Susie, but added, "One-on-one fellowship is important. Listeners know more on a personal level, so they relate to the preacher." Martha experienced this phenomenon herself. Once she felt that her preacher really knew her, she was able to better engage in his preaching.

John appeared to agree with both aspects of effective preaching. "Call people out more," said John. He recalled a few sermons when his pastor mentioned some names of the congregants and used real-life illustrations. John believed that it helped many hearers realize that their preacher knows them. As a result, the preacher encouraged hearers to engage in the preaching better. Helen also seemed to cover both aspects, saying the pastor should "greet people." She asserted that she feels more comfortable listening when she gets a chance to speak with her preacher before he begins preaching, even if the conversation is very brief. She did not deny that extensive one-on-one fellowship impacts

her engagement level, so that her preacher may get to know her, and vice versa. Still, she seemed to believe that the church should not overlook the power of regular brief greetings in Christ to help worshippers soften their hearts.

Other participants made various suggestions, including that the preacher pray for the hearers, keep the sermon concise, encourage people to move closer to the pulpit, vary his tone of voice, and ask questions. Anna suggested the pastor “use the audience’s language and everyday examples.” Some of the directives seemed almost impossible to practice unless the preacher knows his hearers well. Anna insisted on an intimate relationship between the preacher and congregants. Preachers must be culturally sensitive, knowing the flock as a good shepherd would.⁴³³ Newcomers could better hear the gospel during a sermon if preachers build a relationship with them and speak their language. Evangelistically speaking, preachers are to be all things to all people for the recipients of the gospel message, understanding their context and culture.⁴³⁴

Suggestions for Other Hearers

In response to the question, “What would you suggest other congregants do to enhance their engagement during Sunday morning preaching?” a majority of respondents said that hearers should not use their smartphones. Susie insisted, “Put the phone away.” But Deborah asserted that people should spend “less time on their phones” not only during Sunday morning preaching, but even “during the week.” She worried that her church friends are being conditioned to use their smartphones to the point where they get

⁴³³ John 10:14-15.

⁴³⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:22.

addicted. No wonder Sarah suggested, “Keep a real Bible open in your hands, searching the passages” with the preacher. She seemed to believe that there is joy in using a paper Bible and turning to passages with her preacher during Sunday morning preaching.

The second most common answer was to pray before congregants start listening to preaching. Anna said, “Be prayerful before.” Daniel also suggested, “Pray before the service for your heart to discern the sermon.” Sarah insisted on prayer if people were to change one thing to better engage in Sunday morning preaching. Yet many respondents still insisted on praying and reading the Bible not only immediately before they start listening but also on praying and meditating on the word throughout the week. Martha said, “Read the Bible, because the more you’re being sanctified on a personal level, the more you see God’s glory corporately.” Martha continued, “I wish everyone will taste it.” Walter also asserted, “Stay faithful both physically and relationally.” He pointed out that the way hearers conduct themselves throughout the week affects how they engage in Sunday morning preaching.

The others insisted upon building a good relationship with their preacher and the other members for the sake of their engagement level. Helen again said that greetings are important. Susie stated, “Work on your relationship with other people and the preacher.” Participants indicated that hearers are to engage in Sunday morning preaching not only individually but also corporately. Still, a few members suggested that hearers are to remind themselves of the purpose of preaching consistently. Martha said worshippers should “Remind themselves of the purpose of corporate meeting.” Albert insisted, “They should know that it’s up to them [to listen and actively engage].”

A couple of participants suggested taking notes in order to enhance their engagement level during the preaching event. Amy said, “Taking notes would enhance attention span and the ability to understand.” However, Melissa seemed to disagree with note taking whether with a pen and paper or using a smartphone. She asserted that listeners should “Put their phones down and look up ... Visual things say more than just the tone. The preacher’s gestures, facial expression and other things matter.” She agreed with Susie who avoids taking notes and just listens so as to be present during the preaching event. Martha also said that having eye contact with her preacher enhances her engagement during the Sunday morning preaching event. According to a few respondents, hearing means being “present” during the sermon and standing in awe of Christ, the word of God.

Interestingly, many student respondents choose not to use social media to improve their engagement level during the preaching event, even though they use various social media networks often.

Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how adult congregants of a local church engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. It began by examining whether adult congregants understand the purpose of Sunday morning preaching. The topics explored included how hearers discern their pastor’s preaching and how their expectations of preaching impacted the way they engage in the preaching event. Then, participants were asked to describe how they currently engage in Sunday morning preaching. They also answered a few probing questions on what they currently do before and after the preaching event to increase their engagement level during the Sunday morning sermon. Participants then

described their worship experience in relationship to their engagement level in Sunday morning preaching and were asked how they might improve their engagement in order to make it more worshipful. Lastly, participants described the relationship between the way other people listen to Sunday morning preaching and their own engagement level. They were also given an opportunity to make suggestions to preachers and hearers in order to improve adult congregants' engagement during Sunday morning preaching. Almost all respondents chose to make some suggestions.

Participants seemed to understand the purpose of preaching and how to biblically discern good preaching. Yet, those who had completed DT with the pastor asserted that every sermon must be Christ-centered and/or gospel-centered, which is how their pastor preaches. In contrast, those who had not taken the DT course seemed to appreciate their pastor's expository preaching in general. In other words, participants seemed skilled in expository listening because they regularly sat under their pastor's expository preaching. More participants who completed DT with the pastor than those who did not listed Christ-centeredness and/or the gospel as a requirement of good preaching.

Also, those who completed the DT course with the pastor understood how to discern quality preaching compared with those who had not taken the course. Participants who grew up in the church claimed that they learned how to evaluate preaching by listening to bad preaching. Still, they admitted that their expectation of preaching has been affected by their current, biblical preacher. Many confessed that their expectations for sermons have changed over time. The preacher's affection for Christ behind the pulpit has helped hearers engage in his expository preaching. Moreover, they reported that their

understanding of the purpose of preaching impacts the way they engage in their pastor's preaching on Sundays.

Hearers were found to have an unpleasant worship experience if they could not listen to the sermon well, even if they were able to worship during the other parts of Sunday worship service. But if they listened well, they said worship was encouraging and fulfilling. Hence, their worship experience was reported to depend on how well they engaged in the preaching, if not entirely, at least in great measure. Many respondents commented on the significance of preparing their hearts through the means of prayer and meditation to improve their engagement in Sunday morning preaching. A preview of the sermon text also improved their engagement. A few participants also emphasized physical preparations such as being well-rested, snacking, and arriving early.

Social media and smartphones cannot be separated because people use social media on their smartphones much more than on other digital devices. A few of the younger respondents use their phones to take sermon notes. Those who are relatively older used their phones to look up theological words when necessary, but they usually ended up being distracted by checking emails and/or texting people. Many young respondents do not use social media during Sunday morning preaching because it is out of context, whereas the older respondents appeared to believe that social media is not spiritual, because posting their worship experience was akin to putting on a show to make others view them as devout. Younger respondents almost never put their phones away after silencing them. However, many older respondents typically set their phones on vibrate and put them away, unless they use the phone to look up Bible passages or struggle with a strong urge to continually check their phones. Those who keep their

phones with them during the sermon would text others only if they first received calls or text messages. A minority did not seem to think responding to texts or calls is seriously distracting, whereas a majority admitted that it distracted them. A few members habitually check work emails and sports scores on their phones during the Sunday morning preaching event. They know it is distracting, but they also stated they could not stop. Still, those who took the DT course taught by the pastor did not seem to be tempted to use their phones during Sunday morning preaching at all.

The most lethal distraction seemed to be smartphone usage by hearers during preaching—whether using the phone themselves or when other hearers are using one near them. Even the students who constantly use smartphones during preaching confessed that they were distracted. A majority of respondents got distracted when others were using their phones during the sermon, both psychologically (wondering what they are looking up) and spiritually (judging them for using their phones). Those who had completed DT with the pastor found themselves to be distracted all the more by others who use their phones during the sermon. They said that they take offense at the users and end up needing to repent of judging them.

Anxiety about what to do next seemed to be an internal distraction faced by more female hearers than male hearers. Yet male hearers were not utterly immune to various cognitive distractions. Both men and women daydream, which appeared to be the second most lethal distraction. Many respondents, whether male or female, seemed to be internally addicted to distraction, especially those who always keep their smartphones with them.

Nevertheless, almost every external distraction during the preaching event seemed to be caused by humans. One of the most common uncontrollable distractions is a crying baby, which is unlike most of the other human distractions that can be eliminated or prevented. A vast majority of respondents asserted that the way other people listen to Sunday morning preaching affects how they listen to the sermon.

A healthy relationship with the pastor helps hearers not only with understanding the purpose of preaching over time but also with engagement, according to many respondents. A few suggested that their preacher should call people out more (in a positive way) during his preaching because it helped hearers engage better. One respondent suggested that preachers should strive to be culturally sensitive in order to be more evangelistic in their preaching.

A majority of respondents reported that they take sermon notes in order to engage in preaching well. One of the participants even draws concept pictures to understand her pastor's preaching better. Most respondents would encourage other hearers to take sermon notes to enhance their engagement in preaching. Yet, others found note taking to be distracting. They would rather listen attentively and try to be present during the preaching event. More educated and/or professional respondents seemed to stay focused on preaching regardless of external distractions compared with those who are less advanced in their studies and/or career.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how adult congregants of a local church engage during the Sunday morning preaching event. The literature review in Chapter Two shed insight on the challenges encountered in the areas of the lack of instruction on sermon listening, various distractions that contemporary hearers encounter in the smartphone age, and various solutions church leadership could provide.

Summary of the Study and Findings

This study provided insights into worship challenges encountered when engaging in the Sunday morning preaching event at a local church. Both the literature and fieldwork revealed the need to teach adult congregants in a local church to engage properly in Sunday morning sermons. Those who learned how to listen to preaching appeared to have biblical expectations of Sunday morning preaching, which led to a fulfilling worship experience. They tend to work on their hearts prayerfully before and during the preaching event without neglecting the importance of physical readiness and environment.

Nonetheless, according to the fieldwork, those who could not listen to Sunday morning preaching well reported having an unpleasant worship experience in which they felt distracted. Their persistent smartphone usage was found to be the number one cause of distraction during the Sunday morning preaching event, both internally and externally. Many seemed to struggle with a short attention span, a common complaint amongst those

who always keep their phones with them. The literature revealed that social media usage on smartphones is as addictive as drug abuse, to the point where it damages people's brains, especially those in the adolescent stage of life. Fieldwork also revealed that daydreaming was the second most common distraction with which hearers internally struggle. The literature disclosed that unchecked, overuse of digital devices seemed to be related to daydreaming.

The literature and fieldwork revealed how hearers get distracted by the way other hearers engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. Simply put, both concentration and distraction are contagious. Those who have completed a DT course in the same local congregation seemed to engage in preaching better than others who have not learned how to properly worship through engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event.

The literature disclosed the ways in which preachers, lay leaders, and parents can equip hearers to actively engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. The fieldwork also suggested the urgency of raising awareness of excessive smartphone usage, and of encouraging hearers to regularly and voluntarily limit their smartphone usage. Faithful habits of grace, namely daily devotions and prayer, were also recommended to prepare one's heart for the following Sunday morning sermon and to learn to follow Christ by engaging in his word without being distracted.

Discussion of Findings

Overall, the literature and interviews revealed that the quality of adult worship experience depends on both the way hearers engage in the sermon and the way other hearers who sit close by engage. Adult congregants of a local church can find joy and fulfillment when they listen to Sunday morning preaching well. When they could not

listen well due to various distractions, they left the church campus with no sense of fulfillment.

It Is a Heart Issue

As stated previously, respondents' smartphone usage was the number one cause of distraction, according to the interviews. The literature agreed with respondents' experiences. Many young congregants are learning habits of distraction from using smartphones and other digital devices. Everywhere they go, they carry around "a television set, game board and camera in what is disguised as a telephone."⁴³⁵ Statistics revealed that the prevalence of smartphone addiction has been growing steadily (see Appendix 3).⁴³⁶

Interviewee Daniel said, "I can't help it," and said he feels guilty about using his smartphone to text, email, and check sports scores during the Sunday morning preaching event. Surprisingly, Daniel is not one of the younger congregants. The first-generation iPhone came out when he was finishing college, not kindergarten. He does not fit the profile to have the "digital native" brain.⁴³⁷ But he appeared to struggle with smartphone addiction to the point that he could not worship properly.

Miller asserts this kind of distraction is a heart issue. Hearers cannot listen to the word of God because they lack a "listening heart."⁴³⁸ Distracted hearers cannot gaze upon God. Indeed, many young people are nurtured to use smartphones and social media from

⁴³⁵ Kalas, 29.

⁴³⁶ Alter, 13-15.

⁴³⁷ Small and Vorgan, 79.

⁴³⁸ Miller, 247.

a very young age. Brain scans reveal their brains look similar to those of gambling addicts.⁴³⁹ Our culture encourages young people to delight in their smartphones, which is a form of idolatry.⁴⁴⁰ Kalas said, “We belong to the ‘always-on, always-connected digital world,’ and we find it gratifying to see ourselves that way.”⁴⁴¹ But the interviews and literature revealed that even adult congregants are not immune to the same addiction. The thought that “I’m busy, so I must be important,” is a common fallen condition in our modern world.⁴⁴² Busyness is perceived as a “badge of honor.”⁴⁴³ At the end of the day, it is a heart issue. Standing before Christ, addictions need to be repented of as much as they need to be treated.⁴⁴⁴ Addiction is traced to idolatry, delighting in something other than Christ.⁴⁴⁵

It Is a Heart Issue All the Way Up

Alter and other experts revealed that those who work in the tech industry seemed to know the consequence of smartphone usage, especially as it pertains to young children.⁴⁴⁶ These tech industry workers make their living creating apps and chips for smartphones. Some manufacture smartphones or work for social media networks. They encourage customers to use their products, yet many choose to send their children to

⁴³⁹ Alter, 71; Swingle, 21.

⁴⁴⁰ Turkle, 24-25.

⁴⁴¹ Kalas, 10.

⁴⁴² Anderson, 161.

⁴⁴³ Pang, 11.

⁴⁴⁴ Welch, 7.

⁴⁴⁵ Kalas, 12.

⁴⁴⁶ Alter, 122.

private schools that strictly prohibit the use of smartphones and other devices. Even Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple, reportedly kept his children from using iPhones or iPads at home.⁴⁴⁷ Why would these tech titans do this? Many have questioned the disparity between what tech industry leaders promote to the public versus how they raise their own children. This contrast has led many experts, including psychologists and neuroscientists, to research the consequences of overusing smartphones and other handheld digital devices.⁴⁴⁸ Were the tech industry titans simply money hungry to the point that they have covered up the consequences of using the devices and apps they created?

Anna and Deborah said they felt distracted during worship when they could not listen to sermon well. The interviewees disclosed that the second most lethal distraction was daydreaming. The fieldwork revealed that both male and female participants were distracted by thinking about various life issues during the sermon.⁴⁴⁹ They said they were usually anxious about issues such as marriage, money management, and so on. They also stated that being distracted is a very unpleasant experience, especially during corporate worship. No one seemed to enjoy being distracted when they were trying to take in the word of Christ during the Sunday morning preaching event.

Yet they could not help it because they are addicted to distractions, both internal and external.⁴⁵⁰ Smartphone usage and persistent daydreaming are related.⁴⁵¹ Even when we choose to leave our digital devices in the car, “it is not as easy to leave the cell phone

⁴⁴⁷ Alter, 2.

⁴⁴⁸ Dreifus.

⁴⁴⁹ Hallowell and Rately, 189-190.

⁴⁵⁰ Turkle, 43.

⁴⁵¹ Swingle, 22-25.

mentality in the car. We've developed a kind of mental and emotional edginess that goes with us even when the materials of implementation are not there."⁴⁵² Many hearers have developed a consistent state of internal distraction that remains even if they put their phones away. This perpetual distraction must be a heart issue. Whether distracted by internal daydreaming or external smartphones, inattentive people cannot worship God properly.

According to the Bible, worship appears to be the opposite of being distracted. Eve was "distracted" when she was tempted in the Garden of Eden.⁴⁵³ She was supposed to find satisfaction in God by giving Him undivided attention. But when she got distracted in her thinking, she tried to find her ultimate pleasure in something other than God.⁴⁵⁴ Worship, by definition, is being satisfied in the midst of giving God an undivided heart and undivided attention.⁴⁵⁵ Eve could not obey God's command because she failed to give Him undivided attention—because she failed to worship. Her heart issue seems to have originated in a lack of worship.

Still, this may not be Eve's particular fallen condition because one cannot worship someone or something that one does not know. Christ says He is the ultimate satisfaction.⁴⁵⁶ And being satisfied in Christ is rooted in knowledge of Christ.⁴⁵⁷ If there is no relationship, there can be no fulfillment. In other words, those who know Christ will

⁴⁵² Kalas, 10.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁵⁴ Genesis 3:6.

⁴⁵⁵ Piper, 7.

⁴⁵⁶ John 4:14.

⁴⁵⁷ John 6:54-56.

find their ultimate satisfaction in Him. And no one can be satisfied in Christ unless they truly know Him. Thus, Eve's fallen condition may not have been a simple failure to worship because she was unable to give God her undivided heart. Instead, her fallen condition may have been her lack of knowledge of Christ. The problem is the lack of proper theology as the literature revealed.⁴⁵⁸ The FCF of the Genesis passage is that Eve did not have a relationship with or theology of Christ. So it is with hearers. Because people do not really know Christ, they keep trying to find satisfaction in other things. They cannot hear the word of Christ and get to know Him. This is a heart issue. If you know Christ, you become like Him. In other words, you love your neighbor as He did because you know Him. Since the tech industry titans do not truly know Christ, they would not pursue the common good of their society by letting the general public know about the danger of smartphone overuse. Unless people truly know Christ, they cannot be good neighbors.⁴⁵⁹

Some parents who work for the tech industry may not be money-hungry and/or hypocritical, but they may be neglecting common good. They probably want money or power because they are still searching for something that truly satisfies them. Because they do not know who Jesus Christ is, they keep digging broken cisterns.⁴⁶⁰ Because they do not know how soul-quenching Christ is, they cannot hear His command and be a good neighbor. Hence, those who make smartphones might share the same fallen condition

⁴⁵⁸ Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 5.

⁴⁵⁹ Luke 10:36-37.

⁴⁶⁰ Jeremiah 2:13.

with those who are addicted to smartphones. It is the same heart issue, and it needs to be repented of before Christ.

Distraction Spreads

Adam also got distracted because Eve got distracted first.⁴⁶¹ They were residing in the Garden of Eden. They were supposed to be satisfied in the presence of God without ceasing.⁴⁶² But they still got distracted. Distraction, namely discontent with God, is contagious. Adam was supposed to give God undivided attention and worship Him always, but he got distracted externally. It was the most spectacular failure of worship in human history because through Adam, one man, sin entered into the nature of every human being born thereafter.⁴⁶³ Consequently, external distraction caused the Fall. Eve got distracted by Satan, and Adam was distracted by Eve. Simply put, distraction spreads. People cannot give undivided attention to God and find ultimate satisfaction in Him alone because they get distracted by others who are distracted by someone else.⁴⁶⁴

The fieldwork revealed that hearers get distracted not only internally but also externally. Melissa said that she gets distracted when parents juggle their babies, wondering if the parents can listen properly. The parents were already distracted by their babies. When they get up and start juggling their babies, other hearers also get distracted. So it is with those who use smartphones. When someone's phone vibrates with a text message alert, the owner of the phone usually reads the text, just as a majority of the

⁴⁶¹ Genesis 3:6.

⁴⁶² Kalas, 19.

⁴⁶³ Romans 5:12.

⁴⁶⁴ Payne, 47-48.

students do. When he unlocks his phone and starts typing on it to reply to the text message, hearers near him often respond by checking their own phone, or they may get distracted emotionally because they take offense at his smartphone usage during the sermon. Others around them may be distracted by the first person who got distracted by someone who texted him, or by the second person who was prompted to check his phone after seeing his neighbor respond to a text message. External distraction is contagious.

When it comes the new era of distraction, preachers say they can “sense” the lack of attention and focus that accompanies the smartphone mentality of the congregation even if their hearers do not physically pull out their phones during the sermon. These are seasoned “every-Sunday preachers”⁴⁶⁵ who regularly preach behind the pulpit. They can sense the distraction of the congregation. This implies preachers can be distracted by distracted hearers.

Again, the literature revealed that these preachers are referring to hearers who have a smartphone mentality and get internally distracted even when smartphones aren’t alerting them to texts or phone calls. These preachers described their worship experience behind the pulpit while their hearers were not physically pulling out their phones. Still, they were concerned about a lack of engagement while they were preaching. How much more so is this a problem if hearers actually do use their phones during the sermon? What if they smile or giggle at something on their phone while their pastor is preaching weighty matters from the word of God? What if they seem depressed by something on their phone while the content of preaching is exceedingly joyful and encouraging? The literature revealed that preachers are affected by the way their hearers engage in their

⁴⁶⁵ Kalas, 10.

preaching.⁴⁶⁶ Even if hearers seem to respond to preaching appropriately while using their phones, preachers must be concerned because worship, by definition, is magnifying God through the means of giving Him undivided attention.⁴⁶⁷ If hearers are multitasking, and a preacher witnesses them unbiblically “worshipping” during the sermon, it will impact the way the preacher worships by being a “listener with” behind the pulpit.⁴⁶⁸

What if preachers are distracted by something people in the congregation are doing? Those who faithfully worship in the pew would understand if protesters barged in and bothered their preacher during the preaching event. But what if he gets distracted when a few members use their smartphones persistently? What if he gets distracted by nursing parents or those who keep talking during the sermon? The preacher, too, is a sinful human being. He could possibly think to himself, “I can’t do this anymore. They don’t deserve my preaching. I’m out of here!” Those who tend to spread distractions in the pew might have to keep in mind that their distraction is contagious, and no one is immune to it, including their preacher. He could seem untouchable when he preaches behind the pulpit, but he still sees and feels everything. He might not be able to worship properly if he faces persistent external distractions while he is behind the pulpit. Faithful hearers would do well to make sure their preacher gives his master shepherd undivided attention while he is preaching.

⁴⁶⁶ Payne, 47.

⁴⁶⁷ Piper, 7.

⁴⁶⁸ Van Harn, *Pew Rights*, 157.

The Heart of Worship Spreads

Both the literature and fieldwork revealed that how hearers listen to preaching is impacted by the way other hearers listen during the same preaching event.⁴⁶⁹ A majority of respondents conceded that they engage in their pastor's preaching well when other hearers near them seem to engage in the same preaching very well. In other words, when hearers give God undivided attention, listening to His word attentively, other hearers are encouraged to delight in giving God their undivided attention as well. A heart of worship is contagious due to "evident gladness, awe, and security in God's redemptive provision and providential care."⁴⁷⁰

Now, if the heart of worship is contagious, it affects not only other hearers who sit in the pew and worship but also the preacher who worships as a "listener with." Hearers can affect the way their preacher preaches, and they should. Their preacher may not be one of the Old Testament prophets who were called to preach to their audiences whether the audience engaged in their preaching or not. Those prophets were supposed to preach to hearers regardless of their attention span or attitude. They had to preach even if no one listened or cared. The Old Testament prophets were messengers or "sent ones." Their responsibility was to relay the LORD's message to people regardless of whether they listened or not.⁴⁷¹

Nevertheless, modern day preachers in local churches are to listen to the word of Christ with their hearers. They are to shepherd their hearers, pointing them to the master

⁴⁶⁹ Anyabwile, 21.

⁴⁷⁰ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 132.

⁴⁷¹ Jeremiah 7:27.

shepherd who ultimately feeds and protects His flock.⁴⁷² In other words, modern day preachers are both messengers and Christ-followers. They are called to know their hearers, to be affected by their hearers, and to follow Christ with their hearers. Hearers' engagement in preaching is a ministry to their preacher, who is a "listener with."

Many respondents insisted that daily prayer and reading helped them improve their engagement during Sunday morning preaching. The literature also revealed that daily meditation on the word prepares hearers' hearts well for worship.⁴⁷³ Humans are created to give God undivided attention. When they take time to focus their attention on God daily, they experience "satisfaction," which was one respondent's description of her good worship experience. So it is with preachers. They should be able to spend some alone time with Christ. They should be able to set aside their time and spend not only quality time but also "quantity time."⁴⁷⁴

The literature also revealed that hearers can support their preacher in practical ways. They can "advocate for and ensure that there is enough time, space and resources for the continued development of excellence in preaching."⁴⁷⁵ Moody seems to assert that hearers should help their preacher secure enough time and resources for his sermon preparation because "preaching is centrally important" to a believer's spiritual growth.⁴⁷⁶ Congregations should help their preachers pursue excellence in preaching, and that

⁴⁷² John 10:27-28.

⁴⁷³ Anyabwile, 22-25.

⁴⁷⁴ Miller, 47.

⁴⁷⁵ Moody, 42-43.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 43.

cannot be done unless the preacher is allowed to pursue Christ with sufficient time, focus, and study resources.

If preaching is important, and if the preacher is a “listener with,” he is to spend both quality and quantity time with Christ. And he is to have adequate space and resources to pursue Christ as well. What if the preacher of a local church is well aware of the fact that his hearers are taking these things seriously? What if he is sure his hearers are more than willing to provide these things? Then hearers would positively impact the way their preacher worships through preaching the sermon text behind the pulpit. He may be encouraged to preach Christ crucified more effectively than ever, knowing that his hearers desire to worship Christ with him. Hearers who support their preacher proactively can spread a passion for Christ all the way to the pulpit ministry. In other words, a heart of worship may be contagious not only during the Sunday morning preaching event, but also when people practically support their preacher while he is away from the pulpit.

Active Engagement in Preaching Supports the Preacher

Both Anyabwile and Ash insisted on prayer during and after listening to Sunday morning preaching.⁴⁷⁷ On top of striving to listen attentively, a majority of respondents acknowledged that they engage in their pastor’s Sunday morning preaching through the means of praying before and during preaching. They seemed to believe that prayer is necessary for effective preaching. If that is true, their preacher’s wife is not the only one who prays for his Sunday morning preaching; most of his congregants pray for his pulpit ministry as well. Strikingly, they pray for his preaching not only before the Sunday

⁴⁷⁷ Anyabwile, 22-25; Ash, 5.

service begins but also during the actual delivery of his preaching. According to a few respondents, including Anna, they actively engage in preaching by listening prayerfully.

Knowing that his members are prayerfully listening to his preaching may afford the preacher a certain psychological boldness. As a preacher, he might not feel lonely behind the pulpit. Even when he did not get a chance to pray enough for his own preaching, he might still expect much unction of the Holy Spirit for his sermon delivery because people are praying for him. Plus, those who pray for his preaching reported that they listen attentively during Sunday morning preaching.

Their intercession for their pastor's preaching is intended not only for his effective delivery, but also for their own sanctification.⁴⁷⁸ When respondents prayed for his preaching, they also interceded for themselves to stay engaged and understand the word preached. Ash declares that hearers should be ready to bow down before the teaching of God in prayer. He asks them to approach a sermon with humility.⁴⁷⁹ Nonetheless, humbling themselves does not mean that they are to blindly receive whatever their preacher says behind the pulpit. As both the literature and respondents revealed, those who humbly engage in preaching must listen critically.⁴⁸⁰ They are to discern preaching in order to be sanctified. So praying for their own engagement also means that they are praying for the ability to discern their pastor's preaching. And this may minister to their preacher as well.

⁴⁷⁸ John 17:17.

⁴⁷⁹ Ash, 6.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

Since many respondents listen to their pastor's preaching critically to make sure he is faithfully preaching the Bible instead of imposing his own agenda, he must be encouraged to humble himself and faithfully exegete the Bible. In other words, the fact that people listen to his sermons critically to the point that they pray for discernment may help to hold the preacher accountable. Listeners are not to respond in the affirmative just because he is their shepherd. Respondents appeared to make sure their preacher faithfully prepares their spiritual food with meaty ingredients. Even if he "preaches" the Bible, he must know that they need to eat solid food and grow spiritually instead of drinking milk until Christ comes.⁴⁸¹ As Deborah mentioned, her preacher has taught his hearers that it is important that they receive spiritual nourishment not only in a private setting but also in a corporate setting.⁴⁸² Remembering the fact that hearers have biblical expectations to be spiritually nourished through the preaching of God's word may help their preacher endeavor to dig out in-depth biblical insights in his sermon preparations.

The literature also revealed that the way his congregants listen to his sermons encourages a pastor to be a better expository preacher.⁴⁸³ If his hearers simply want him to entertain them, it might discourage the preacher. But the fact that his hearers are growing into expositional listeners helps him find the evidence that they are actively engaged in preaching even before he starts preaching. Because congregants specifically tell him they are praying for his preaching throughout the week, he is strengthened even before he feels he is ready to deliver another sermon.⁴⁸⁴ Their prayers sustain him,

⁴⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 3:2-3.

⁴⁸² Hebrews 5:12-14, cf. 10:25.

⁴⁸³ Ash, 10; Payne, 47; Van Harn, *Pew Rights*, 157.

⁴⁸⁴ Anyabwile, 22.

especially when he is dealing with a tough passage. As John mentioned above, congregants can preview the sermon text that their pastor will be preaching on, and can choose to gather weekly to pray for his sermon before the Sunday morning service. A few of them can gather, having already meditated on the passage and topic during the week, which means they are able to pray for his sermon specifically according to the content. Since he participates in their prayer meetings consistently, he might have no choice but to be encouraged as their preacher. He will strive to faithfully unpack the meaning of the sermon text through expository preaching.

This kind of encouragement goes beyond the fact that a group of people are praying for his preaching. The significant thing for him as a preacher may be that people already understand the content of his sermon and still crave to listen to the truth, Christ Himself.⁴⁸⁵ The literature argued that preachers must be sensitive and discern whether their congregants are listening or not.⁴⁸⁶ Yet it may be just as important to make sure that people are listening *before* the sermon is actually being delivered. If they were, this kind of engagement would encourage their preacher to grow into a better expository preacher.

The literature also asserted that hearers are to physically show up and listen to Sunday morning preaching together because they can hold each other accountable, while they sit next to each other and listen to the same preaching event.⁴⁸⁷ This may be a valid point, but respondents appeared to practice their own congregational accountability through prayers as well. A few respondents seemed to believe it is as effective to pray for

⁴⁸⁵ John 14:6.

⁴⁸⁶ Robinson, 158.

⁴⁸⁷ Ash, 12-13.

one another as listening together in a corporate setting. Of course, no one would deny that people need to show up consistently and listen to Sunday morning preaching together as one body. But praying together before the sermon could demonstrate a level of engagement in the pulpit ministry that exceeds simply being physically present and listening together during the preaching event. A few respondents appeared to already hold each other accountable while they pray as a group in the morning, asking the Holy Spirit to empower both preacher and hearers. Unlike many contemporary churchgoers, these praying hearers are not just playing the role of audience; they are one body praying for both preacher and hearers. Their preacher's sermons are upheld by his congregants' faithful intercession—a powerful form of actively engaging in preaching.

It All Goes Back to the Purpose

The literature reviewed for this study assumed that the purpose of preaching is entertainment for too many adult congregants. Preachers are to clearly differentiate the way people listen to sermons from the way they watch TV.⁴⁸⁸ Instead of carefully engaging in preaching, congregants could listen passively or even dully unless the preacher entertains them enough to keep them awake.⁴⁸⁹ The literature bemoaned the passive tendency of many hearers.⁴⁹⁰ To counter that tendency, Ash made a case for the

⁴⁸⁸ Adams, 50-51.

⁴⁸⁹ One of the respondents, Susie, insisted that preachers should be able to help hearers stay focused even by cracking some jokes during Sunday morning preaching.

⁴⁹⁰ Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 167.

biblical stance of hearing, which is receiving preaching “as what it really is, the word of God.”⁴⁹¹

The literature also revealed that many adult congregants listen to Sunday morning preaching because they want “inspiring messages” and/or relevant sermons that address the “practical problems they face in life.”⁴⁹² It posits that some hearers are interested in listening to preaching solely on the basis of stylish delivery or getting tips to make their lives better. The biblical content does not really matter as long as hearers are impressed by “a healing or resolution of their problems” during preaching.⁴⁹³ They may be “pragmatic learners.”⁴⁹⁴ These adult learners commonly listen to different things instead of the Bible. If polled, most local church members would regard listening to sermons as somehow “self-serving.”⁴⁹⁵ Over all, the literature revealed that people are self-centered when it comes to listening to a sermon.

Nevertheless, a majority of respondents surveyed seemed to disprove the assumptions of the literature. They were asked, “What do you think your pastor is trying to accomplish during Sunday morning preaching?” in order to find out what they think is the purpose of Sunday morning preaching. Walter said that his pastor tries to exegete the passage and help people apply what the text originally intended. Martha said that her pastor preaches the gospel by the Spirit of God, so that hearers may worship Christ. She also mentioned that her pastor’s sermons encourage and strengthen believers to be

⁴⁹¹ Ash, 5.

⁴⁹² Ramey, 6.

⁴⁹³ Park, 120.

⁴⁹⁴ Wlodkowski, 50.

⁴⁹⁵ Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 7.

satisfied in Christ through sanctification. Interestingly, the other respondents shared a similar response, as if they were influenced by the same source.

The fact of the matter is that many of the respondents were influenced by a DT course that specifically covered the topic of preaching from a listener's perspective. Most likely because they were required to read John Piper's book on preaching,⁴⁹⁶ they came to a similar understanding of the aim of Sunday morning preaching and what they should expect from a sermon. Many respondents were found to understand the truth that the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 consists of preaching the word of Christ, both privately and corporately. Moreover, a few of them were additionally reminded of the purpose of preaching during a five-week series their pastor preached on how to listen to a sermon a few years ago. For these respondents, preaching is not just another church activity in which they passively engage, but is a means to glorify God, awaken the dead, and help the saints persevere.

Even those who joined the same congregation after their preacher finished that sermon series have come to know the purpose of Sunday morning preaching over time. Some of them have not yet had a chance to take the DT course. As John recalled, "Back at my home church, I didn't listen well. The preaching there was more focused on illustrations than the Bible text. But I got used to Bible-centered preaching." John's expectation of preaching has changed over time. A few respondents also learned to appreciate their preacher's expository preaching although they did not yet seem to know the significance of Christ-centered sermons. At any rate, their preacher has been making

⁴⁹⁶ During the DT course, participants were required to read *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, which prepared them for in-class discussions on the topic of preaching from a listener's perspective.

disciples both by teaching a DT course and by preaching the gospel behind the pulpit—even when he was not specifically preaching on the topic of listening to sermons.

It seems vital that preacher teaches people the purpose of preaching through whatever means possible. He is a disciple-maker in a classroom setting; he is to make disciples behind the pulpit as well. How would the average churchgoer know that distraction is contagious if no one with authority raises awareness? How could hearers possibly understand that proper engagement in preaching is contagious, all the way to the pastor in the pulpit, if no one tells them? How could adult congregants learn to engage in Sunday morning preaching properly if no one teaches them the purpose of preaching? Again, hearers need to know who Jesus Christ is. Then they will be inspired to engage in His word and worship Him with their undivided attention. If a preacher continues to make disciples, hearers will pursue the common good of their congregation by being contagious hearers.

Recommendations for Practice

In light of the findings described above, the church is well advised to better equip her members to engage in Sunday morning preaching, which leads to a long-term sanctifying and fulfilling corporate worship experience. In this section, we will explore the connections between the literature and fieldwork to identify practical findings that church leadership should keep in mind when considering and/or preparing a membership process or leadership training.

Teach Them to Obey All That Christ Has Commanded Them

Respondents have revealed that their preacher has influenced their expectation of preaching over time behind the pulpit. Therefore, preachers are both deliverers of the word and a “listener with.”⁴⁹⁷ They are both messengers of the word of God and educators concerning hearing the word actively.⁴⁹⁸ Preachers have a vital role in the balance of corporate worship, facilitating hearers’ engagement in dialogue with God and their neighbors.⁴⁹⁹ If preachers do not teach hearers how to engage in Sunday morning preaching, many might listen to Sunday morning preaching with the wrong expectations.⁵⁰⁰ And the wrong expectations may not change unless hearers learn what their preacher is trying to accomplish during the Sunday morning preaching event.

A membership course may be one of the most appropriate opportunities to teach people how to listen to preaching (see Appendix 1). Congregants may gather to learn how to be a member of the church body or at least to find out what membership entails. Biblically speaking, the local church is not a mere organization. It is a community of worshippers. And if a quality worship experience is dependent upon the way people engage in the Sunday morning preaching event, those who are learning how to join the community of worshippers must understand the weight of listening to sermons. They need to learn the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching event. They should also learn

⁴⁹⁷ Van Harn, *Pew Rights*, 157.

⁴⁹⁸ Augustine of Hippo said, “Inasmuch as the preacher speaks the truth, Christ speaks through him. He does not keep silent, and it is our duty to listen, but with the ears of our hearts.” Thus, preachers both preach the very word of Christ and educate hearers about how to put their “duty” into practice biblically. See Polman, 127.

⁴⁹⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 76.

⁵⁰⁰ Ramey, 6.

how to discern good from bad preaching. If their expectation of preaching becomes more biblical through taking the course, they may be able to better worship corporately through hearing the word of Christ properly in addition to singing and praying during the weekly service. Simply put, they should be intentionally equipped to engage in a corporate dialogue between God and His people.

On the other hand, the church should also be intentional about making disciples. Those who take the membership and baptism courses must understand that their weekly engagement in corporate worship is just a beginning, not the entire aim of being a Christian. As Christ clearly taught His disciples, Christians are to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ.⁵⁰¹ Being a Christ-follower, namely a disciple, is not a weekly religious ritual. Rather, it is a daily lifestyle of grace that dies to sin and lives to Christ.⁵⁰² The disciples of Christ are to continue to deny themselves and obey His teaching to the point where they crucify themselves on the cross and imitate Christ, both in His character and works—daily. Thus, those who would like to join the church or at least find out what it means to be a real Christian must be intentionally trained to learn how to follow Christ daily.⁵⁰³

The DT course should also teach people how to cling to Christ in prayer and God's word daily, intentionally holding new congregants accountable for a period of time. Discipleship is different from taking a five-week membership course. Because being a disciple means living out the new lifestyle in Christ, the DT course must actually train

⁵⁰¹ Matthew 16:24.

⁵⁰² Romans 6:11-14.

⁵⁰³ Morgan, 1:43.

people to live out their faith offline, that they may develop habits of grace.⁵⁰⁴ Then they will always know how to submit to Christ and learn from Him, which is what it means to be a disciple.⁵⁰⁵ These disciples will be the opposite of those who are “always learning but never able to arrive at a knowledge the truth.”⁵⁰⁶ Therefore, DT should include both quality and quantity time.⁵⁰⁷ Quality time includes studying the Bible and learning sound theology to know Christ better than ever.⁵⁰⁸ Quantity time includes building habits of grace through reading, prayer, meditation, fasting, exhortation, hospitality, mercy ministry and other activities.⁵⁰⁹ Disciple-makers share with their disciples “not only the gospel of God but also” their “own selves” out of genuine affection.⁵¹⁰ When hearers are taught to spend not only quality time but also quantity time with Christ, the fieldwork revealed that hearers learn habits of grace that help them engage well during Sunday morning preaching automatically.⁵¹¹

Make Disciples in an Age of Distraction

Both DT and membership courses must be designed to raise awareness of smartphone and social media addiction. Although both the literature and fieldwork

⁵⁰⁴ Payne, 28.

⁵⁰⁵ Smallman, 21.

⁵⁰⁶ 2 Timothy 3:7.

⁵⁰⁷ Kalas, 152.

⁵⁰⁸ Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 45.

⁵⁰⁹ Marshall and Payne, 156-157.

⁵¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 2:8 reads, “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”

⁵¹¹ Bettis, 150.

revealed that social media may be unfit for corporate worship and/or spiritual dialogue for many users,⁵¹² many churchgoers do not seem to be aware of the fact that “unchecked” smartphone overuse can potentially lead the church to restless distractions,⁵¹³ which is the opposite of being wise.⁵¹⁴ The disciples are “in Christ,” who is the ultimate “wisdom from God.”⁵¹⁵ Church leadership cannot afford for disciples to be unwise, as though they do not have Christ. Congregants should not be unaware of the various distractions that digital devices cause. Pastors should help them learn how to “confine addictive experiences to one corner” of their lives, “while courting good habits that promote healthy behaviors.”⁵¹⁶ These lessons will protect them from an unhealthy merger of “online and offline behavior.”⁵¹⁷

These courses should also teach disciples practical ways to avoid smartphone-related distractions. In reality, disciples cannot completely stop using their phones because “abstinence isn’t an option.”⁵¹⁸ Students and working professionals rely on their phones to help them stay connected to people and meet personal and professional obligations. Even those who serve Christ by being a housewife seem to have no choice but to use a smartphone, especially since it is more difficult to keep a landline now than to carry a smartphone. Therefore, people need to know how to use their smartphones

⁵¹² Turkle, 24; Sales, 290.

⁵¹³ Swingle, 26.

⁵¹⁴ Proverbs 17:24.

⁵¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:30.

⁵¹⁶ Alter, 9.

⁵¹⁷ Swingle, 167.

⁵¹⁸ Alter, 9.

wisely. For instance, they could learn to put their phones on Airplane Mode or turn them off instead of setting them to vibrate during the Sunday morning service and other meetings. As the fieldwork revealed, those who set their smartphones to vibrate were more distracted than those who turned their phones off or left them in the car. Disciples should be encouraged to learn how to give God undivided attention during the weekly corporate worship service, that they may do the same as they spend some alone time with Christ privately.⁵¹⁹

How about those who would like to use their smartphones as a Bible, especially during the Sunday morning sermon? As Sarah mentioned, the church could encourage hearers to use a paper Bible. She said that there is joy in keeping her paper Bible open and following along with her preacher during his preaching. The literature also revealed that hearers “absorb ideas better from paper than a screen.”⁵²⁰ Many young members have never owned a printed Bible before because the first iPhone came out when they were in kindergarten. All this time, they have never carried a printed Bible with them. Church leadership could provide them with a printed Bible or encourage them to use the pew Bibles when they are at church. Leadership could teach their young disciples about the importance or effectiveness of using a paper Bible during the DT and membership courses.

What then shall church leadership say to those who like to take sermon notes on their phones, not only to improve their own attention span, but also to send notes to their loved ones? For example, John was one of the respondents who regularly takes sermon

⁵¹⁹ Miller, 47.

⁵²⁰ Bettis, 244.

notes for his sister as well as himself. In response, leadership could teach hearers the purpose of preaching, just as Lloyd-Jones argued. He said that the “primary object of preaching is not only to give information to be used later, but to make an impression on the heart on the spot.” So Lloyd-Jones discouraged his hearers from taking sermon notes, lest they miss out on a life-changing experience during preaching, according to Tim Keller.⁵²¹ In the midst of discussing the aim of preaching, church leadership could biblically redefine preaching and discourage hearers from taking sermon notes. Although the fieldwork revealed that a few respondents asserted they would rather “be present” instead of keeping themselves busy taking notes, not many seemed to understand the significance of being present during the preaching event. Rather, they should strive not to miss out on what Christ is doing in the moment through the voice of the human preacher. They should learn to refrain from taking sermon notes and just “taste and see”⁵²² or “see and savor”⁵²³ how beautiful Christ is and what He is doing in His church during the preaching event.

Of course, no church leadership should legalistically police and pick on the faults of their members, as if using a smartphone as a Bible or notepad is a blatant sin. Using a smartphone during the Sunday morning preaching event may be a “matter of indifference”⁵²⁴ as written in the New Testament,⁵²⁵ as long as it is not “unchecked.”⁵²⁶

⁵²¹ Keller, “A Tract For the Times,” 94.

⁵²² Psalm 34:8.

⁵²³ Piper, 7.

⁵²⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 392.

⁵²⁵ 1 Corinthians 8:7-13.

⁵²⁶ Swingle, 167.

These things do not determine the righteousness of Christians because their identity is in Christ, unless idolatry is involved.⁵²⁷ Still, the aim of church leadership is to equip hearers to enhance their engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event. Leadership can still teach what they believe with grace without pressuring their members to put their phones away or use a printed Bible instead.

In addition to discouraging hearers from taking sermon notes by teaching the definition and purpose of preaching, leadership can also provide a sermon blog. As the literature revealed, preachers are “always summarizing and in danger of trivializing.”⁵²⁸ Preaching is a summary of the grace of God whether preachers preach for twenty minutes or forty minutes. Those who are taking sermon notes are summarizing what is already summarized behind the pulpit! This dangerous reality must be discussed during the DT and membership courses. Leadership can help congregants by posting either a transcript of the sermon or a comprehensive exegetical survey of the sermon text with application points online. In other words, the website could provide access to exactly what people heard during the sermon or what the preacher would have said if he had two or three hours behind the pulpit, consisting of his pre-sermon manuscript with study notes. All the leadership has to do is just upload one of those options on their pastor’s preaching blog by Sunday afternoon, so that hearers may use them for sermon discussion. Then those who are tempted to take sermon notes could finally be present and fully receive the preaching instead of keeping themselves busy taking notes during the preaching event.

⁵²⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:14-30.

⁵²⁸ Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 167.

Listeners should not strive to summarize a sermon that is already summarizing the grand grace of Christ.

Another practical solution for those who use their phones as a Bible or notepad during Sunday morning preaching may be teaching them how to use their operating system better. For example, iPhone's operating system has Guided Access, which allows users to stay with one particular screen or application unless they willfully disable it.⁵²⁹ iPhone users can open their Bible application and simply press the home button three times in a row to enable guided access if they already have turned this feature on in Settings.⁵³⁰ Even if someone texts them or the calendar application reminds them of an upcoming event, they cannot move away from the Bible application. Unless they press the home button three times in a row and put in a six-digit passcode dedicated for guided access, they have to stay with the application they originally selected. Moreover, parents can enforce time limits on every Apple device in their home using guided access.⁵³¹

The interviews revealed that those who use their smartphones during the preaching event are prone to get distracted because their Bible note-taking application can lead them to other apps, such as social media, texting, emailing and so on. Even the college students who use their smartphones as naturally as if it is one of their limbs confessed that they often end up getting distracted because one quick text message or prompting leads them to other applications or thoughts. Surprisingly, not many smartphone users seemed to use guided access for themselves even if they use it to

⁵²⁹ Pogue, 226-228.

⁵³⁰ In order to turn guided access on, "open Settings→General→Accessibility→Guided Access; turn the switch On. Now a Passcode Settings button appears." See Pogue, 226.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 226-228.

restrict someone else's activities on their Apple devices. Church leadership can show their hearers how to use guided access (or something similar for the Android devices) to help them enhance their engagement in the Sunday morning preaching event with grace.

Meaningful Corporate Conversation

Reproduction remains the hallmark of disciple-making.⁵³² Christ commands disciples to go and make disciples, which indicates that the disciples are to make disciples who make more disciples. The literature revealed that various distractions of the smartphone world must be accepted as an opportunity through which the church shall make disciples.⁵³³ God is sovereign over all things, including “social networks, blogs, and websites. Each of these forums, together called an *online presence*, extends the reach of the church.”⁵³⁴ Hence, if “distraction is a dominant factor in our times, we should waste no time in knowing how to use it rather than allowing it to make us irrelevant.”⁵³⁵ Nevertheless, an online presence may not be the ultimate venue for the church according to the Bible and how God designed humans, as both the literature and fieldwork revealed.⁵³⁶ Simply put, the age of distraction is begging for meaningful offline conversations.⁵³⁷ Offline relationships are still irreplaceable, and are no doubt the most

⁵³² Marshall and Payne, 157.

⁵³³ Smith, *Social Media Guide For Ministry*, 8.

⁵³⁴ Wise, 111-112.

⁵³⁵ Kalas, 19.

⁵³⁶ Small and Vorgan, 77-78.

⁵³⁷ Kalas, 150.

effective way for the church to make disciples who make more disciples, as people love and empathize with one another.⁵³⁸

When everything was offline, and certain “gatekeepers” were still actively in control of human communication, offline conversations might not have seemed so meaningful in general.⁵³⁹ Now that everything seems to be dependent on online communications, humans are in need of meaningful offline interaction.⁵⁴⁰ Hence, in the midst of increasing an online presence for the sake of being evangelistic, the church should strive all the more to reach out to both churched and unchurched through meaningful offline interactions, not least with those who never learned how to converse with people offline, namely the digital natives.⁵⁴¹

First off, the church could corporately provide meaningful conversations and interactions through their offline presence. Both the literature and fieldwork reveal that worship consists of an experience the worshipper feels “engages my heart in dialogue with the Creator of the Universe and the eternal soul of my neighbor.”⁵⁴² Respondents were not only conversing with God during the Sunday morning preaching event; they were also having spiritual conversations with others by being a “listener with.”⁵⁴³ No wonder their engagement in Sunday morning preaching was impacted by both the way they give undivided attention to God and the way other hearers worship corporately. The

⁵³⁸ Kalas, 152.

⁵³⁹ Wise, 13.

⁵⁴⁰ Turkle, 361.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 176.

⁵⁴² Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 76.

⁵⁴³ Van Harn, *Pew Rights*, 157.

presence of the church in the smartphone world still consists of offline corporate dialogue.⁵⁴⁴

This dialogue may start from the pulpit. Preaching Christ-centered exegetical sermons can reflect a meaningful conversation, both vertically and horizontally.⁵⁴⁵ A few respondents said they chose the church because they consistently sensed their preacher's love for Christ during his preaching. They said this because they learned to appreciate exegetical preaching over time and because the preacher's affection toward Christ behind the pulpit helps them engage in Christ-centered preaching well.⁵⁴⁶ John stated, "I know my preacher loves Christ." The literature also asserted that a preacher's affection behind the pulpit can empower hearers to "deeper theological apprehensions and to more faithful life and witness."⁵⁴⁷ When a preacher has an intimate dialogue with Christ over the sermon text, his engagement with Christ becomes contagious by grace such that even newcomers and visitors are drawn to the offline presence of a local church.⁵⁴⁸ Deborah asserted that corporate worship experience becomes meaningful when God is at work in listening to a sermon. The literature also showed that preaching is different from "moral or psychological pep talks."⁵⁴⁹

If surrounded by those who receive Christ-centered sermons well during the preaching event, a newcomer or visitor who lives in the smartphone world may encounter

⁵⁴⁴ Adam, *Hearing God's Words*, 176.

⁵⁴⁵ Kalas, 150.

⁵⁴⁶ Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 7.

⁵⁴⁷ Mulligan, 125.

⁵⁴⁸ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 132.

⁵⁴⁹ Piper, 12.

a unique offline presence at church. Even if the newcomer's attention span is short, there may be something spiritual about being present during the preaching event that is full of passion and interaction. Even if the newcomer is not usually interested in sitting through a serious lecture in general, he or she may sense the difference between a traditional lecture and preaching, especially if the other hearers are well-equipped to engage in the preaching event.

What if people of the smartphone world do not come visit during the corporate preaching event? As the literature revealed, the disciple-makers of a local church could set an example of good engagement in preaching not only during the actual preaching event but also through good sermon discussions in small group settings. Rick, who was relatively new to the church community, testified how he was encouraged by one of the small group leaders. The leader was good at unpacking the passage the way his preacher did on Sunday and reminding hearers of the application points as well. He asked probing questions to encourage hearers to actively engage in the discussion. As a result, he helped hearers engage in the sermon again after the Sunday morning preaching event. In short, Rick was able to have a meaningful dialogue because the small group leader was pointing every hearer to Christ again. One layperson disciple-maker could lead a meaningful conversation in a corporate small group setting.⁵⁵⁰

Meaningful Individual Conversations

Meaningful conversations can take place individually as well. As the literature revealed, church leadership should build relationships instead of cultivating a culture of

⁵⁵⁰ Van Harn, *Pew Rights*, 155-156.

discipleship through program-based activities.⁵⁵¹ Pastors and congregants should spend quantity time together.⁵⁵² Martha asserted that a “one-on-one meeting” with the pastor helps hearers engage in preaching better. She said hearers would be able to understand the pastor and his pulpit ministry better if they have some private meetings with him. Helen seemed to agree with Martha. She said she was able to engage in Sunday morning preaching better if she had a chance to at least greet the pastor briefly. As they individually bond with their preacher, hearers appeared to soften their hearts and actively engage in the preaching event. In other words, they were empathizing with one another before Sunday morning preaching. Face-to-face interactions also enable the younger generations of the smartphone world to learn how to read human emotions and practice empathy.⁵⁵³ The fieldwork corroborated the literature. These kinds of interactions are not something that the smartphone world can provide.⁵⁵⁴ Thus, discipleship is about building meaningful relationships offline, where humans learn to relate to others and to love as they are loved by their disciple-makers. As a result, discipleship would resolve the most damaging effects of the smartphone world by providing irreplaceable offline relationships. Smartphones and other digital technologies are not better than humans.⁵⁵⁵ Christ sent human disciples to make more human disciples.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵¹ Marshall and Payne, 156-157.

⁵⁵² Kalas, 152.

⁵⁵³ Turkle, 359.

⁵⁵⁴ Alter, 229.

⁵⁵⁵ Turkle, 356.

⁵⁵⁶ Matthew 28:18-20.

Since the hallmark of discipleship is reproduction, a preacher could be tempted to build a system of discipleship instead of building relationships. As long as his disciples keep making disciples who make more disciples, the preacher could blindly believe he would not need to make disciples personally. Unfortunately, some church leaders might assume that the whole process of making disciples could be on autopilot as if all the pastor has to do is preach about fifty to sixty sermons per year and teach a few Bible study courses when he can. If his members are in need of pastoral care, he could point them to the visitation or counseling pastors although he might not get a chance to care for his flock due to his multi-staff structure. Each pastoral staff person has his or her own responsibilities for the sake of efficiency and/or effectiveness. For example, a counseling pastor is responsible for one-on-one care ministries, whereas the senior pastor is responsible for preaching. Just as the music pastor ought to serve his worship team or choir, the preaching pastor must preach and teach. In a multi-staff church, all the preacher has to do is manage those who care for his disciples and organize certain events. This could sound reasonable, especially in a large local church. But the fact of the matter is that a preacher cannot possibly build a healthy relationship with his disciples if someone else always cares for them.

Sadly, the multi-staff structure or managerial mindset seems to be a common tendency of church leadership, as the literature confirmed. Although it's tempting to "bring our structural, event-based, managerial mindset to the task of training," leaders cannot make disciples only by maintaining church structure or creating more programs.⁵⁵⁷ The preacher needs to "know what's going on" and make his preaching "relevant," said

⁵⁵⁷ Marshall and Payne, 156-157.

Susie. Anna also emphasized that preacher should “speak [the congregation’s] language,” knowing his hearers’ culture and life situations. Relevance is king. And the preacher cannot be relevant unless he knows his hearers, both members and visitors. He may not be able to know his flock if he does not spend time with them and understand their needs.⁵⁵⁸ A preacher may not be able to know his visitors unless he actively pursues them and strives to build a relationship with them.

Obviously, if there are too many members and visitors, it may be humanly impossible for a preacher to spend time with all of them. He might not be able to get to know them. If preacher is to make disciples by building relationships, his congregation should not be too large. Neither church leadership nor members should desire to grow their church into such a large congregation that their preacher can no longer remember people’s names, including their children’s. Growing in number should not be their aim; rather discipleship must be their aim.⁵⁵⁹ If the congregation grows in number by God’s grace, they should humbly find a way to split into two or three congregations, that each congregation may have a dedicated preacher who knows his hearers, both members and visitors.

Of course, in the midst of taking care of his flock relationally, a preacher should be able to point his congregants to professional counselors and/or therapists when needed. The literature showed that addicts need to be healed.⁵⁶⁰ For instance, if preacher finds out that one of his congregants is addicted to digital devices or online games, he should refer

⁵⁵⁸ Witmer, 53-57.

⁵⁵⁹ Marshall and Payne, 156.

⁵⁶⁰ Alter, 251-252.

them to someone else who is professionally equipped to help them. But the preacher will not be able to find help for those in need if he does not build a relationship with his congregants in the first place. He would not get a chance to know people's situations, much less their hurts and wounds. Even if he somehow learns that certain members need help, he would not be able to tell the "truth in love" and encourage his congregation to imitate Christ⁵⁶¹ unless he knows his flock well. For instance, raising awareness about pornography may not be enough. In fact, there are many articles and books on this particular addiction already. The church seems to be well aware of the dangers of immersion in the pornographic culture. But not many seem to be aware of smartphone or social media addictions, both inside⁵⁶² and outside⁵⁶³ the church. How then will a preacher help his congregants who suffer with addictions if he does not even remember their names? How will hearers realize they need help if their preacher is basically unavailable to meet with them because there are too many members to keep up with?

Indeed, a preacher could let other people care for his members and visitors. He could depend on his pastoral staff and come up with a system or culture of discipleship that almost automatically makes disciples. Yet, according to the fieldwork, adult congregants engage in Sunday morning preaching better when their preacher serves them not only as a preacher behind pulpit, but as a friend. They want to be known by their preacher, that they may better engage in Sunday morning preaching and worship Christ properly. Church leadership should support their preacher to intentionally build a

⁵⁶¹ Ephesians 4:15.

⁵⁶² Parsons, 2.

⁵⁶³ Alter, 10; Swingle, 209.

relationship with his hearers in order to make disciples. Perhaps they could help their preacher get involved in relational ministries more than administrative ministries. Perhaps they should update their preacher's job description, so he may freely strive to build relationships instead of building a system or structure inside the church. Maybe church leadership and congregants should change their expectations of their preacher, especially if they have been expecting him to grow their church in number and get things done as if he is a CEO. The church must make disciples not only through its online presence but also through its offline presence. The smartphone world is begging for meaningful conversations.

The Ideal Place for Meaningful Conversations

Moreover, church leadership should not overlook the fact that meaningful conversations start at home, as the literature revealed.⁵⁶⁴ Parents and children could have family worship regularly, which is one form of corporate dialogue. And one of the parents could have everyday, mundane discussions with a child, which is private dialogue.⁵⁶⁵ These conversations will nurture empathy,⁵⁶⁶ and even naturally teach how to use digital devices, including social media.⁵⁶⁷ Parents should also get away with their children and spend quantity time in order to maximize meaningful conversations.⁵⁶⁸ Camping trips with no digital devices should be highly recommended by local churches.

⁵⁶⁴ Witmer, 53-57.

⁵⁶⁵ Kalas, 58.

⁵⁶⁶ Swingle, 180.

⁵⁶⁷ Costello, 319.

⁵⁶⁸ Witmer, 51-52.

A digital Sabbath, when kept effectively, can create the right environment for meaningful conversations, whether in private or in a group.⁵⁶⁹ The offline presence of the church can be experienced at home—both individually and corporately—as parents strive to please Christ instead of their children.⁵⁷⁰ Therefore, a Christ-centered Christian home can be the most ideal place for meaningful conversations.

The literature suggested that parents should strive to have sermon discussions with their children.⁵⁷¹ In this way, the little ones can grow into adult congregants who actively engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. Again, in a Christian home, this can be done both corporately and individually. One of the parents could lead a group sermon discussion, whereas two siblings could imitate their parents and talk about their pastor's recent sermons one-on-one. Modeling matters both to keep the discussion going⁵⁷² and to steer the little ones away from digital devices towards seeking Christ, as the literature revealed.⁵⁷³

Although none of the respondents explicitly said that they would like to discuss Sunday morning preaching with their children, it should not be assumed that they were not thinking about it at all. Most of their children are so young that they cannot even describe what they have learned or played during Sunday nursery, much less take part in Bible-related discussions about the pastor's sermons. Still, many young parents said they wanted to take sermon notes and discuss the message with their family and friends.

⁵⁶⁹ Turkle, 174-176.

⁵⁷⁰ Bettis 245-246.

⁵⁷¹ Beeke, 27.

⁵⁷² Turkle, 322.

⁵⁷³ Swingle, 139.

Obviously, they were not excluding their covenant children who are growing into fellow congregants who can discuss their pastor's preaching one day.

At any rate, parents too must build a relationship with their children instead of simply cultivating a culture of discipleship through the means of trying a few programs and/or campaigns. In order to support parents to disciple their children biblically, the membership and baptism courses could lay the foundations of covenant theology, which values educating covenant children.⁵⁷⁴ Any infant baptism course must insist on the parent's role in discipling their covenant child at home and train the parents to minister to the child's heart.⁵⁷⁵ In DT, even single Christians must learn how to educate covenant children inside the church in their roles as spiritual fathers and mothers.⁵⁷⁶ Moreover, when the pastor trains the small group leaders, team leaders, deacons, and elders, he must train the future leaders and officers to set their children such a godly example that children desire to imitate of their parents. Of course, parents could still get both emotional and spiritual support from their small group members.⁵⁷⁷

Perhaps the church leadership could provide some resources and help, so parents may revive the kind of family worship the church traditionally promoted. By the time every family member gets used to worshipping together at home, sermon discussions could be added to their gatherings. It may not be easy to keep a consistent family worship time. Or it might feel very mundane, especially if the parents did not have sermon

⁵⁷⁴ Smallman, 45. R. C. Sproul's *What Is Reformed Theology?* and *What Is Baptism?* may be helpful foundational resources that the churches can use for both membership and baptism courses.

⁵⁷⁵ Tripp, 104; cf. Bettis, 245. Bryan Chapell's *Why We Baptize Infants?* may be a good start for parents to understand the significance of raising covenant children according to covenant theology.

⁵⁷⁶ Smallman, 45; 1 Corinthians 4:15-16.

⁵⁷⁷ Swingle, 123.

discussions with their own families when they were growing up. Many parents might not know where to start.⁵⁷⁸ Still, the church should not blame them or use guilt as a tool to pressure parents to raise their children biblically. As the literature revealed, “It is better to fall short than not to attempt at all.”⁵⁷⁹ Thus, the church leadership must teach covenant theology with grace and provide practical support to help both current and future parents grow into mature disciple-makers of a Christian home, so they may not feel alone in faithfully raising covenant children.

At the end of the day, parents need to stay focused on their relationships with their children. No pastor can teach and coach his members to follow Christ biblically if he does not know them. So it is with making disciples at home. Parents must know their children; the children must be known by their parents.⁵⁸⁰ Dr. K. Lawson Younger Jr., one of the Old Testament professors at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, mentioned during a lecture that his quality discussions took place when he played baseball with his son. His young son was good at asking weighty theological questions spontaneously when he was hitting a ball. Those questions turned into quality discussion and discipleship sessions. Quality discussions and discipleship sessions are the overflows of spending quantity time together.⁵⁸¹ Having regular sermon discussions or family worship is one thing, but

⁵⁷⁸ Payne, 33.

⁵⁷⁹ Beeke, 27.

⁵⁸⁰ Witmer, 53-57.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 51.

building a relationship is another.⁵⁸² Parents ought to disciple their children by having quality time that flows out of quantity time.⁵⁸³

How can parents living in the smartphone world possibly spend quantity time in the midst of being faithful in their marriages and serving the church? How can parents spend so much time with their children without idolizing them? According to God's command in the Book of Deuteronomy, parents shall "teach" the word of God "diligently" to their children, and shall "talk of them when they sit" in their house, and when they "walk by the way," and when they "lie down," and when they "rise."⁵⁸⁴ And parents were to display the word of God everywhere, including "the doorposts."⁵⁸⁵ The key word is "diligently." It is not just quality time, but also quantity time. It takes time to keep teaching the word of God so consistently. How can this be done? How can busy parents be consistent? And why would young children obey their parents in doing all these things?

Diligence in discipleship is the spillover of the preceding passage, which reads, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."⁵⁸⁶ Parents are to love their God with their entire being first, and then train their children to do the same or even better. As the literature revealed, disciplinarians should not approach discipleship in a "professional" manner.⁵⁸⁷ Authenticity may

⁵⁸² Gordon, 74.

⁵⁸³ Kalas, 152.

⁵⁸⁴ Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

⁵⁸⁵ Deuteronomy 6:9.

⁵⁸⁶ Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁵⁸⁷ Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 7.

be the most important key.⁵⁸⁸ Disciple-makers should not just “use” the Bible, but “receive” the word of God and be transformed by it daily.⁵⁸⁹ They first need to “worship over the text” of the Bible.⁵⁹⁰ There is no room for hypocrisy or pretension or legalism. Parents are to treasure Christ with their entire being. Then they will automatically magnify Christ in all that they do inside the house even when no one is watching. They will model putting their digital devices away to engage in disciple-making.⁵⁹¹ Children are amazingly good at watching their parents even when they seem like they are not paying attention.⁵⁹² They have hawk eyes. They pick up things and put them in their hearts. Again, the heart of worship is contagious.⁵⁹³ If the parents have good worship experiences, if they are joyfully engaging in the word of Christ, the children will be more than willing to engage in the same word of Christ as well. Then children will want to share the joy with others, including their friends who are not from a Christian home and their own children in the future. In short, parents are to cultivate a “listening heart.”⁵⁹⁴

Still, making discipling one’s children a priority does not mean that parents must pursue perfection. The Bible does not say that a good parent is to find a balance in the midst of trying to be excellent in all things. Rather, the Bible says a parent must be a genuine lover of Christ and delight in all that Christ has commanded the church. Then the

⁵⁸⁸ Turkle, 10.

⁵⁸⁹ Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 3.

⁵⁹⁰ Piper, 7.

⁵⁹¹ Bettis, 301.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 243.

⁵⁹³ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 76.

⁵⁹⁴ Miller, 247.

parent will automatically live out Christ's commands and spread the joy. Christ is not asking disciple-makers to be perfect spouses, employees, children, and parents at the same time. Hence, a Christian home can function as the ideal place for meaningful conversations when the parents are being transformed into contagious lovers of Christ.

Cling to the One Who Transforms All

The literature revealed that young people living in the smartphone world have trust issues because many of them have been hurt by others online.⁵⁹⁵ They seem to value authenticity and transparency more than those who have more offline interactions than online interactions. Thus, face-to-face interactions may seem more authentic than online interactions, especially to those who have been hurt by the limitations of online conversations. It may be almost impossible to perfectly fake genuine relationship offline for a long time. So the smartphone world is in need of meaningful offline conversations and relationships. This reality may be both liberating and devastating to the church. It is devastating because the church cannot generate authentic lovers of Christ who truly care for others. And it is liberating because Christ is the one who sanctifies His church into His perfect bride.⁵⁹⁶ This means that preachers, hearers, parents, children, and those who are yet to be church-ed, are all in Christ's hands. Therefore, it is appropriate and logical for the church to cling to Christ in prayers.

The research revealed that hearing is at the center of the faith and mission of the church.⁵⁹⁷ Despite the fact that some respondents believe in preaching and exercise it in

⁵⁹⁵ Sales, 290.

⁵⁹⁶ Revelation 21:2, 5.

⁵⁹⁷ Van Harn, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?*, 2.

their life circles just as Rick does in his small group, the means of preaching may not be effective without proper hearing. Hearing is at the center of the mission of a local congregation because preaching is dependent upon skilled hearing if it is to be effective. Yet humans cannot make themselves engage in their pastor's preaching better. They do not take preaching seriously either.⁵⁹⁸ They do not desire Christ, the Word of God.⁵⁹⁹ Their default spiritual state does not enjoy hearing the gospel unless Christ gives them a new heart, as promised in the new covenant: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."⁶⁰⁰ Since Christ Himself ratified the new heart at the cross, we have no one to turn to except Christ when it comes to listening.⁶⁰¹

Therefore, the church has to encourage one another to "Talk and pray with friends about the sermon after church."⁶⁰² Even those who are not skillful listeners may be able to hear if Christ awakens them to do so. Christ promised, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."⁶⁰³ Hence, the apostle Paul gives thanks to God constantly for the fact that the Thessalonians "heard" the apostle and his colleagues' preaching and

⁵⁹⁸ Thompson, 7.

⁵⁹⁹ John 3:19-20, cf. Proverbs 13:13.

⁶⁰⁰ Ezekiel 36:26-27.

⁶⁰¹ Luke 22:20.

⁶⁰² Anyabwile, 22-25.

⁶⁰³ John 5:25.

received it “as what it really is, the Word of God.”⁶⁰⁴ It seems more than appropriate to appeal to Christ to enable His people to have good hearts that desire to listen better.

No wonder Deborah, on top of praying before and during preaching, also wants to dedicate more time to pray for both the pastors and congregation throughout the week. She wants to pray that the congregants may grow into a group of skilled listeners and that her pastor too may listen to the word of God better as he wrestles with the text for the following sermon. The research asserted that preachers must first listen to the word of God before they try to preach anything.⁶⁰⁵ Being a listener matters not only to the congregants but also to the preachers.

Sarah also mentioned that she would pray more if she were to change one thing about her engagement in preaching. Martha mentioned that she would like to pray for preaching. Anna is already praying during the preaching event in order to engage in the sermon better. She wants both the preacher and hearers to cling to Christ in order to listen better even after the Sunday service is over. Anna, along with John and Rick, seemed to consider their prayerful efforts to be active rather than passive listening. Brian also asserted that the Holy Spirit is the one who changes his heart, saying, “Listening to a sermon itself is dealing with distraction. I need the Holy Spirit’s help.”

Therefore, all need to grow into a congregation that listens better because hearing is at the center of both the faith and mission of the church. Since hearing is ratified by

⁶⁰⁴ 1 Thessalonians 2:13 reads, “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” Also, the apostle Paul, in Romans 6:17, gives thanks to God for giving the heart that truly obeys the gospel, saying, “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.”

⁶⁰⁵ Stott, 132-133.

Christ, the church should pray—together—to receive ears to hear from Christ. As a result, additional endeavors to pray would be necessary inside the church. They shall prayerfully worship Christ, asking for undivided hearts.⁶⁰⁶ Both leadership and congregants must learn to cling to Christ, who is the “founder and perfecter of our faith.”⁶⁰⁷ Only Christ is able to make all things new, addressing all of the sinful tendencies that are matters of the heart.⁶⁰⁸ And his people shall come worship Christ with new hearts and give undivided attention to His word.⁶⁰⁹

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of this study, the researcher realized that a majority of respondents seemed to have a biblical understanding of the purpose of the Sunday morning preaching event and their role. It was not surprising to learn that they even share a similar philosophy when it comes to their own levels of engagement in their pastor’s preaching, for both current and future practices. The first reason the researcher was not surprised was that half of the respondents have taken a DT course, in which they learned how significant hearing is for the gospel to be preached completely. In spite of exposure to many theological topics in the DT course, many respondents seemed to recognize that the

⁶⁰⁶ In Psalm 86:11, the psalmist sings, “Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.” This undivided heart enables the psalmist to worship out of joy in the following verses until the end of this psalm.

⁶⁰⁷ Hebrews 12:2.

⁶⁰⁸ Revelation 21:5.

⁶⁰⁹ Jeremiah 24:7 provides vivid imagery of how people with new hearts respond to God. The Lord says, “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” The elect will humbly come with a heart of repentance, which cannot be distracted by worldly grief. In other words, they shall give undivided attention to the word of Christ; cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10, Deuteronomy 30:6, and Jeremiah 32:39.

topic of hearing is at the center of the entire training. Indeed their midterm paper assignment was on a preaching book that also covered how to listen to a sermon. The second reason the researcher was not surprised was that respondents have been sitting under the same pastor's preaching regularly for at least six months. Therefore, the other half of the respondents who have yet completed the DT course must have learned about sermon listening while their preacher was preaching behind the pulpit. Nonetheless, the researcher still has some pastoral concerns.

First, the fieldwork revealed that a majority of respondents seemed to understand the purpose of Sunday morning preaching regardless of whether they had completed DT. Still, those who took DT with the pastor were found to hold to a more Christ-centered purpose of preaching than those who took the same course with someone else. In other words, those who took DT with the pastor were able to discern preaching with a gospel-centered standard, whereas as those who completed the same course with someone else appeared to appreciate their preacher's expository style in general.

Also, those who took DT with the pastor reported being less distracted by their own urge to use smartphones than the others. A majority were good at putting their phones away during the Sunday morning sermon whether they took sermon notes or not. Those who took notes used pen and paper instead of their smartphones. Moreover, those who took the DT course with the pastor seemed to be offended by other hearers who use smartphones for the wrong purpose during the Sunday morning preaching event. They even mentioned repenting of judging the smartphone users at the same time. Yet, for some reason, those who took the same course with someone else reported not being so upset about people who use smartphones during the preaching event.

Therefore, one of the unexpected findings is that the same DT curriculum does not necessarily seem to nurture the gospel-centered expectation of preaching and proper engagement in preaching, especially in relationship to unchecked smartphone usage. What is missing? The curriculum of the DT has not changed—especially with regard to the topic of sermon listening—since the pastor taught his first-generation disciples soon after he came onboard years ago. Now that fifth-generation disciples are being made, there seems to be a chasm between the first-generation disciples who were taught by the pastor and the rest. To be specific, the fieldwork revealed that those who were trained by the pastor appeared to have more explicit gospel stance and a healthy fear of Christ while listening to sermons than the others. The researcher doubts this difference has to do with the pastor's seminary training or his role as their shepherd, especially because his disciples have been using the same curriculum and format when they were teaching their own disciples who will make more disciples.

While exploring the engagement of adult congregants of a local church with the Sunday morning preaching, the following area of study triggered additional concerns. How could the pastor raise up skilled listeners who equip more skilled listeners? The pastor will not be the only one who teaches people how to listen to a sermon better in his congregation. He has not even taught DT since he led the course for the first-generation disciples. Yet his disciples and those who learned from his disciples are still striving to equip others to grow into better listeners. Would it be possible for the pastor and/or the church to equip skilled listeners who equip more skilled listeners?

This study has explored how adult congregants engage in the Sunday morning preaching event. Both the literature and fieldwork revealed that the way hearers engage in

Sunday morning preaching impacts the other hearers near them, including the preacher. Hearers influence one another when it comes to engaging in the Sunday morning preaching event. Individual worship experience was dependent on how well hearers were able to listen to sermons. Disciple-making in small group settings at home and at church was found to be the most biblical and practical means to nurture proper engagement in Sunday morning sermons. Another area of research, then, could look into the church's responsibility to develop a curriculum on how to listen to sermons that anyone could use to lead a small group. First, it should be noted that the researcher has collected almost every book published on the topic of sermon listening. There were only a few as compared to countless books on how to preach well. Second, out of the few books, not all of them were promoting listening to Christ-centered sermons. Third, none of the books seemed fit for a small group setting. Preachers and their disciples could improvise using a few of these books for DT. Yet it would be edifying if the church or a denomination could research and develop a curriculum on the topic of listening to Christ-centered sermons. It would be helpful if the curriculum were designed to raise awareness of digital addictions and train hearers to effectively confine their smartphone use.

On the other hand, this study assumed preaching, hearing and DT in a local church context, including Christian homes. Another potential area of research could look into what DT looks like in a work environment. There is typically no corporate preaching and hearing at most workplaces. Yet Christ has sent disciples to their workplaces as well. How can they build meaningful relationships and have meaningful conversations at work? When everyone seems addicted to distractions at work, how can Christ's disciples point people to Him at work? Many employees work online from home. Can a local

church extend their online presence and reach out to those who never work offline? Can the church draw them to meaningful offline interactions and fellowship? Because the gatekeepers are gone at workplaces as well, disciple-makers would need guidance and wisdom to make disciples through their careers. The smartphone world is in need of skilled hearers who make more skilled hearers both inside the church and at work.

Appendix 1

7 suggestions for encouraging good preaching:⁶¹⁰

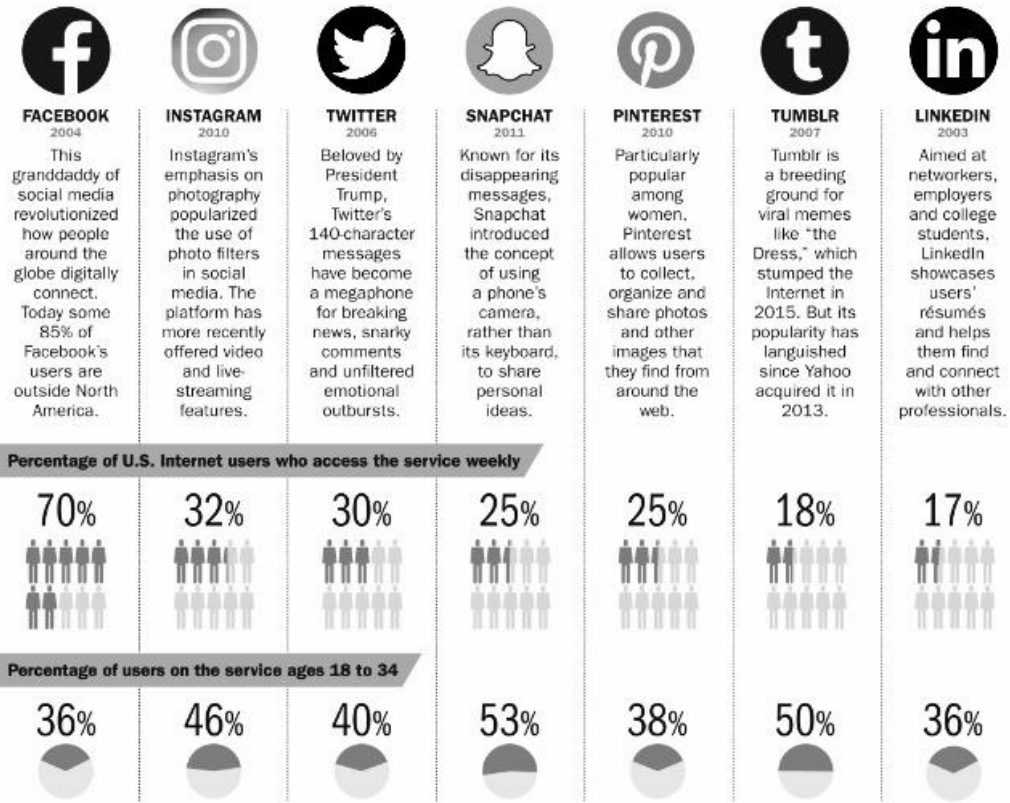
1. **Pray for the preachers.** Pray specifically that they will work hard at the Bible passages (1 Timothy 5 v 17) and preach them faithfully, passionately and in a way that engages with us.
2. From time to time, **tell the preachers you are praying for them** and looking forward with expectancy to the sermon. That will be a great encouragement and incentive to them to prepare well.
3. **Be there.** You may be surprised what an encouragement it is just to have you there, and what a discouragement to have you absent.
4. **Thank them** afterwards for things you learned. Don't flatter or just give them very vague comments about how good it was (if it was). Try to be specific and focus on the biblical content of the sermon rather than just stories, anecdotes or illustrations. Tell them if there was something in particular that you found helpful.
5. Be prepared to be **constructively and supportively critical**. Ask the preachers to help you see where they got a particular point from the passage; this will sharpen them up if, in fact, it didn't come from the passage, or indeed the Bible. It will encourage them to stick to the Bible more next time. Be humble and respectful in the way you do this; remember, it is much harder to preach than it is to criticise [sic] preaching.
6. **Relate to your preachers** as one human being to other human beings. Remember that the best sermon by a remote preaching hero, heard on an MP3 recording, is no substitute for the word of God preached by a human being face to face with other human beings in the context of trust and love.
7. Be on the lookout for **gifts of preaching** and teaching in the church, and be ready to tap someone on the shoulder and suggest they develop these gifts and get further training. Mention these ideas to the pastoral leadership team in your church.

⁶¹⁰ Christopher Ash, *Listen Up!: A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2009), 30.

Appendix 2

THE PLAYERS

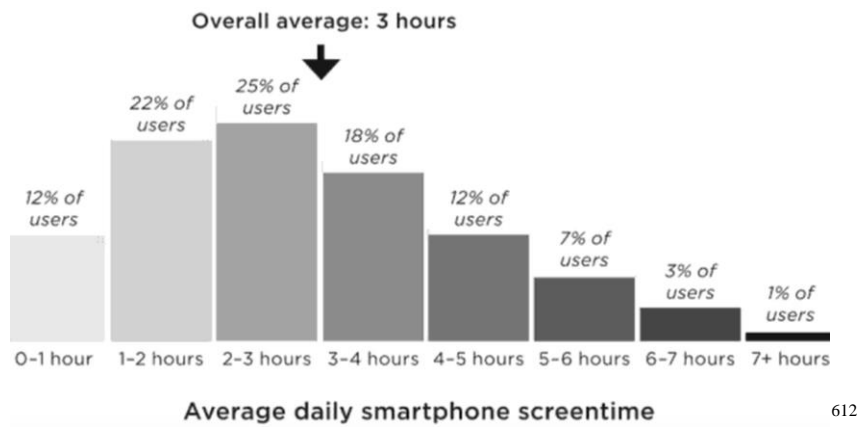
Snapchat is a relative newcomer to the crowded world of social media. Here's the field as it stands:



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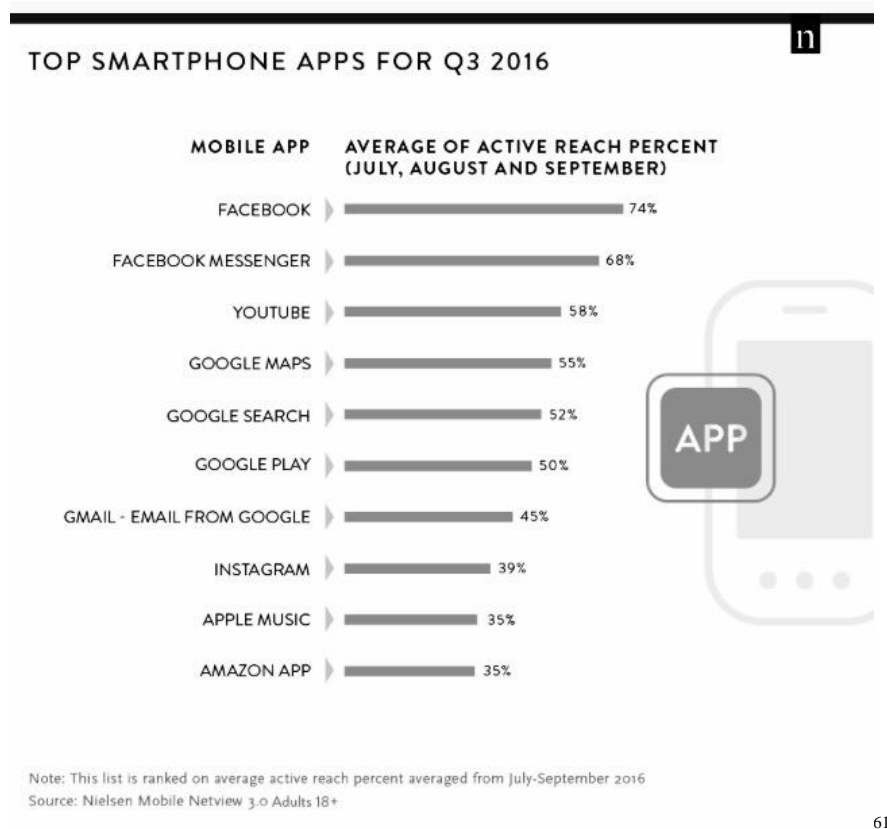
⁶¹¹ Joel Stein, "Snapchat Faces the Public," *Time*, March 13, 2017, 29.

Appendix 3



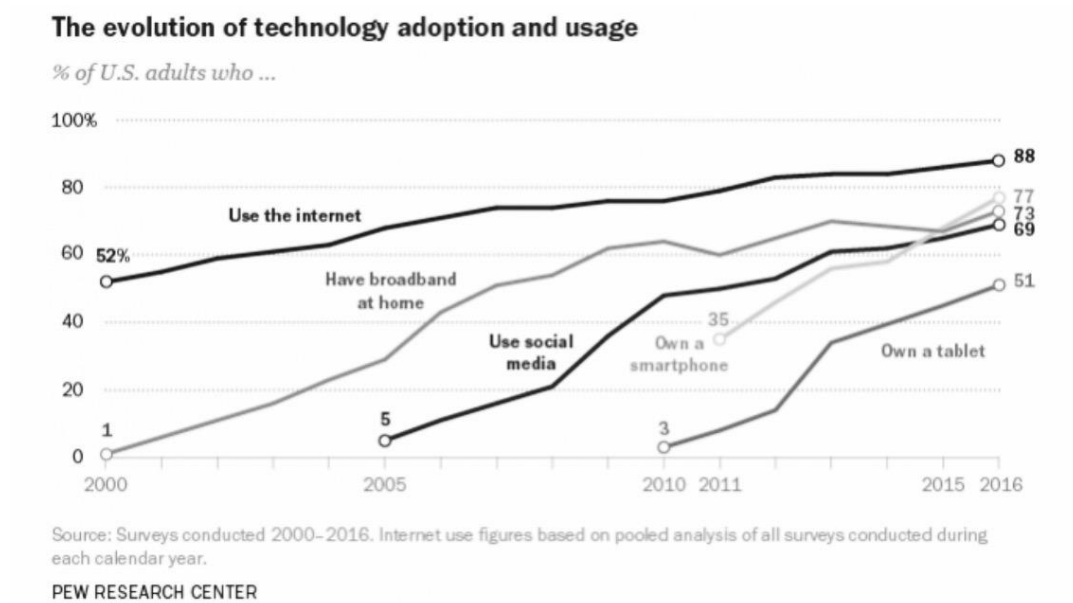
⁶¹² Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 15.

Appendix 4



⁶¹³ “Millennials Are Top Smartphone Users,” Nielsen, November 15, 2015, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2016/millennials-are-top-smartphone-users.html>.

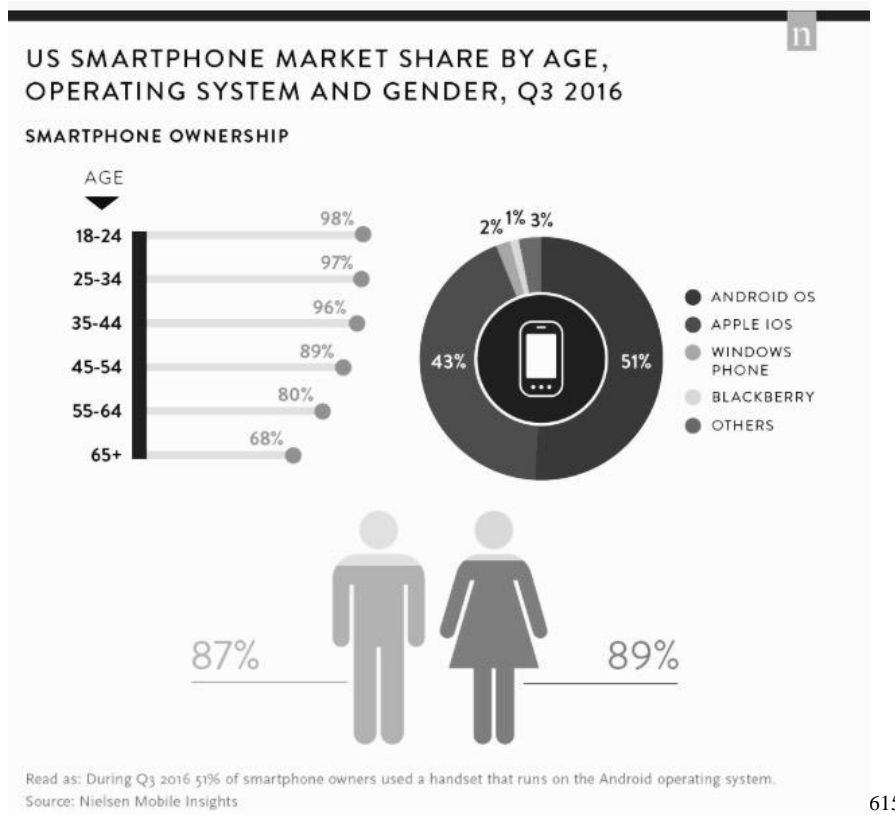
Appendix 5



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⁶¹⁴ “Record Shares of Americans Now Own Smartphones, Have Home Broadband,” Pew Research Center, January 11, 2017, accessed February 27, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/ft_17-01-10_internetfactsheets/.

Appendix 6



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⁶¹⁵ “Millennials Are Top Smartphone Users,” Nielsen, November 15, 2015, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2016/millennials-are-top-smartphone-users.html>.

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