COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library
12330 Conway Road
Saint Louis, MO 63141

www.covenantseminary.edu/library

Preaching With Feeling In Mind

How Cognitive Neuroscience Encourages a Preacher's Appeal to Emotions

By
Jay Joye

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

Saint Louis, Missouri

2021

Preaching With Feeling In Mind

How Cognitive Neuroscience Encourages a Preacher's Appeal to Emotions

By
Jay Joye

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

Graduation Date May 15, 2021

Dr. Mike Higgins
Faculty Advisor _____

Dr. Tasha Chapman
Second Reader _____

Dr. Joel Hathaway
Director of DMin Program _____

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how a preacher appeals to emotions to impact congregants as it correlates with cognitive neuroscience findings.

Countless Biblical texts highlight the importance of emotions in the life of a believer. Likewise, homiletics has long encouraged emotional preaching, calling communicators to wed together logos and pathos. Preachers today find themselves in a context where appeals to the emotions are more valued than ever before. Recent advancements in the field of cognitive neuroscience stress emotions' importance. Even the current postmodern context stresses an emphasis on emotion. Despite the Biblical, homiletical, neuroscientific, and cultural emphases, a lack of expression of emotion may be characteristic of homiletical methodology in the dominant American Protestant church culture. It is not a lack of awareness but a lack of application that prevents preachers from appealing to emotion.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six pastors of different races from reformed denominations. All six pastors were committed to emotional appeals in their preaching. The literature review and constant-comparative analysis of the six interviewees focused on four research questions: how does a preacher appeal to emotions, how is the impact of a sermon measured, what obstacles stand in the way of emotional preaching, and how do these appeals correlate to cognitive neuroscience?

The literature review focused on three key areas to understand a preacher's appeal to emotions: homiletics' emphasis on the use of emotions, cognitive neuroscience's support for appeals to emotions, and the doctrine of illumination.

This study concluded four things regarding appeals to emotion in preaching. 1. Consensus exists between homileticians, neuroscientists, and practitioners regarding the importance of appealing to emotions, 2. The effectiveness of emotional preaching outweighs the risks associated with it, 3. No appeals to emotion are likely apart from preachers identifying with the emotions of others, and 4. The mystery of the Holy Spirit in illumination does not mitigate the necessity of emotional appeals.

In light of the findings, four practices are recommended for preachers: 1. Know your emotional God. 2. Know your emotional self. 3. Know the emotion of your scripture text. 4. Know your emotional contexts. Through the application of these practices, preachers will appeal to the emotions of their congregation and preach with feeling in mind.

To my beloved wife, Erin, who has beautifully modeled healthy, human emotion and has encouraged me to trust, embrace, and communicate emotions.

Sermons can change brains, yet the purpose of the sermon is not to change brains but rather to change persons.

— Dan B. Glazer, Rewiring Your Preaching: How the Brain Processes Sermons.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Abbreviations

P.C.A.	Presbyterian Church in America

Chapter 1

Introduction

"Is there any place for preaching in the modern Church and in the modern world, or has preaching become outmoded?"[1] Nearly fifty years ago, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones posed this question before the advent of the brain-based learning associated with cognitive neuroscience. One surmises how cognitive neuroscientists would answer, as recent neuroscientific studies have highlighted forms of communication such as preaching, "often result in the lowest retention compared to other instructional methods."[2] Though cognitive neuroscientists highlight the low retention of these forms, they also highlight that certain homiletical methods correlating to cognitive neuroscience can impact sermon recall. Dan Glazer, Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University captures this in the preface of *Rewiring Your Preaching,* when he explains that a *"*growing understanding of how the brain works can be a means to uncovering the desired goal of those who deliver a sermon."[3] The very discipline of cognitive neuroscience which may cast doubt on the effectiveness of the sermon could also provide insight into how to make the sermon more effective; after all "sermons can change brains, yet the purpose of the sermon is…to change persons."[4] Cognitive neuroscientists note that one way to change the brain, and subsequently persons, is through the use of emotion.

---

[1] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 9.

[2] David A. Sousa, *How the Brain Learns* (London: Sage, 2017), 106.

[3] Richard H. Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 10.

[4] Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching,* 10.

Emphases on Emotion

The purpose of this study is to explore how preachers appeal to emotion to improve congregant sermon recall in a way that correlates with neuroscience findings. However, cognitive neuroscience is not alone in its emphasis on the use of emotion. Included with cognitive neuroscience's emphasis on emotions are homiletical, cultural, and Biblical emphases.

Neuroscientific Emphasis on Emotion

Neuroscientists explore the physiological workings of the brain in order to draw implications for how learning actually occurs.[5] They ask: how does one present information to others in a manner that is consistent with what is known about the brain? "How exactly is the brain best designed to learn?"[6] Though these questions asked within cognitive neuroscience generally reference education, the implications for preaching are similar. How exactly is the brain designed for recall of a sermon? How does the preacher deliver a sermon with the brain in mind?

Cognitive neuroscientists note that emotion makes recall much more likely, as David Sousa, an international consultant in educational neuroscience points out, "research on memory strongly suggests that students are much more likely to remember curriculum content in which they have made an emotional investment."[7] When the emotions of the hearers are engaged, there is an effect on recall. Despite the

---

[5] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 4.

[6] Eric Jensen, *Teaching With The Brain In Mind,* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005), ix.

[7] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 94.

neuroscientific studies on emotion, Sousa, specifically addressing the classroom, explains that "most teacher preparation classes have told prospective teachers to focus on reason, cover the curriculum, and *avoid* emotions in their lesson." He adds, "there is a need to enlighten educators about how emotions consistently affect attention and learning."[8] Though emotions actually enhance recall, educators avoid them.

Homiletical Emphasis on Emotion

The use of emotion is not due to a lack of homiletical emphasis of the impact of emotional preaching. Indeed, Samuel T. Logan contends that the very purpose of preaching **"**is not to stir people to action while bypassing their minds…nor is the purpose to stock people's minds with truth, no matter how vital and clear, which then lies fallow."[9] He would note that emotion without reason and reason without emotion bear little fruit. Doug Kelly, Professor Emeritus at Reformed Theological Seminary, has described this amalgamation of reason and emotion as "logic on fire."[10] This logic on fire has been encouraged throughout various theologians historically, as David L. Larsen notes:

> The fact remains as Karl Barth put it so powerfully, if there is no great agony in our hearts there will be no great words on our lips. Augustine insisted: rhetoricians require passion in one who pleads a case. Kierkegaard was right when he said, there is no lack of information in a Christian land-something else is lacking. We must do more than state the truth. Ours is a feeling age, and many feel affectively starved. [11]

---

[8] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 50.

[9] Samuel T. Logan, *The Preacher and Preaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1986), 9.

[10] Kelly, *Preachers With Power,* 59.

[11] David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1995), 132.

Numerous preachers have articulated the importance of emotion within preaching. As Allen Nauss notes that it is not a lack of awareness but a lack of application that prevents preachers from employing emotion: "it may be that some clergy have not been able to recognize and develop the inherent gift in their brain of displaying and using emotion appropriately in their sermons."[12]

Cultural Emphasis on Emotion

Despite the lack of emotion-laden preaching in the American Protestant church context, emotion is valued in the current postmodern context of Western culture. Indeed, the shift from modernism to postmodernism highlights the culture's emphasis on emotion to the exclusion of rationality at times. Underscoring Western society's deemphasizing of truth, Diego Han in "From Postmodernity to a Post-Truth Society," reveals "that nowadays it is not the truth that people seek, but rather an emotional connection, simple words that can assure an unsecure person of a better future."[13] The shift from modernism to postmodernism reveals not only a devaluing, but even a skepticism of rationalistic logic. Noting postmoderns' skepticism toward propositional truth, Jeffrey Arthurs records that they "are more likely to adopt an imaginative/feeling perspective that sees feeling and imagining as a more integrating key to the whole of reality than either knowing or

---

[12] Allen Nauss, "Preaching Sermons That Will Be Remembered: Unleashing the Spirit's Power in the Brain," *Concordia Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 2008): 274.

[13] Diego Han, "From Postmodernity to a Post-Truth Society," *Journal of Comparative Studies* 40, no. 11 (January 2018): 13.

willing. Postmoderns desire an experience of reality, not statements about it."[14] Given this devaluation and skepticism, how well are preachers doing at recognizing and adapting to the change, without compromising their commitment to truth?

Biblical Emphasis on Emotion

In addition to the homiletical and cultural emphasis of emotions, the Bible evidences the expression of emotion. John Calvin called the Psalms an "anatomy of all parts of the soul,"[15] and in so doing acknowledges the emotional reality of the psalmists. He explains, "the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated."[16] In the New Testament, one finds Jesus himself expressing a range of emotions. This "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief"[17] often expressed himself emotionally, as he raged against the money changers in the temple[18] and as he frustratedly confronted the pharisees and lawyers with woes.[19] Matthew 11:35-36 records how Jesus' compassion for the people manifested in not only his teaching in the synagogues, but also in his healing every disease and affliction. In addition, the

---

[14] Jeffrey Arthurs, "Preaching with Pathos," *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 1, no. 1 (December 2001): 15.

[15] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 4:xxxvii.

[16] Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 4:xxxvii.

[17] Isaiah 53:3.

[18] Matthew 21:12.

[19] Luke 11:42-52.

Apostle Paul values an engagement of emotions within the context of Biblical truth.[20] In fact, commentator Stephen Voorwinde notes that there are at least thirty-five specific references to Paul's emotions in the Pauline epistles.[21] Specifically, addressing 2 Corinthians, one commentator, R.H. Strachan, called it a "tumult of conflicting emotions."[22] Given the Biblical texts highlighting emotion, some like Arthurs would argue that the embracing of emotion and experience by Christians would lead them to be "closer to Biblical Christianity."[23]

Emphasis on the Holy Spirit

Though there is a neuroscientific, homiletical, cultural, and Biblical emphasis upon emotions, preachers affirm that the effectiveness of any sermon is due to the power of the Holy Spirit.[24] It is the work of the Spirit, as John Owen explains, "communicating spiritual wisdom, light and understanding unto them, necessary unto their discerning and apprehending aright the mind of God in his word and the understanding of the mysteries of heavenly truth contained therein."[25] Owen emphasizes that the sermon's effectiveness lies in the motion of the Spirit as opposed to the e-motion of the preacher or

---

[20] William Owen Carver, "An Outline of the First Chapter of Ephesians," *The Review and Expositor* 1, no. 2 (July 1904): 215.

[21] Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 2.

[22] R.H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians,* Moffat New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), xxix.

[23] Arthurs, *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society,* 14.

[24] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers,* 305.

[25] John Owen, "The Reason of Faith," *The Works of John Owen* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991), 4:124.

congregation. Emphasizing a technique like appeals to emotion cannot compare to the moving of the Spirit. Having articulated the numerous homiletical skills necessary for effective preaching, Rob Ventura heeds that the Spirit is the essential ingredient: "None of them compares to the preacher's great need of having the Holy Spirit's ministry resting upon him and all of his pulpit labors."[26]

How does one reconcile the role of the Spirit with the appeal to emotions in regards to effectiveness without doing damage to the Spirit? James Kay notes that the Holy Spirit's role is to do something with our words that we could not do on our own, but that there is a danger in trusting in technique or rhetorical persuasion: "seminary homiletics courses are susceptible to the charge of atheism by tempting students to substitute merely human rhetorical technique for empty-handed pneumatological dependence."[27] Kay warns that the insistence upon the use of emotion by appealing to cognitive neuroscience could be an indiscreet way of removing the Spirit's influence altogether. In fact, Kwang-Hyun Choi evidences that warning, as he demythologizes the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching stating that sermon effectiveness "is not derived from God's power but is derived from the inherent capacity of human language."[28]

---

[26] Rob Ventura, "The Holy Spirit and the Preacher of God," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 2017): 303.

[27] William H. Willimon, "Preaching: Acting Up With the Holy Spirit," *Journal for Preachers* 39, no. 4 (Pentecost 2016): 2.

[28] Kwang-Hyun Choi, "The Theological Background of the Demythologized Spirit in Preaching," *Review and Expositor* 115, no. 2 (2018): 279

Lack of Emotional Preaching

Despite the neuroscientific, homiletical, cultural, and Biblical emphases, a lack of the expression of emotion may be characteristic of homiletical methodology in the dominant American Protestant church culture. Henry Mitchell notes that "once the Enlightenment had set in, more positive emotions were widely accepted theologically, but their emotive expression in the pulpits of polite society was inhibited, or required to be respectfully subdued."[29] Sermons are to be properly preached, but their proper proclamation is to be devoid of emotion. Ervine and Visser trace the development of specifically Reformed preaching over the last several centuries, noting how the Puritans and subsequent Presbyterians tended to minimize emotion, instead focusing on the doctrine found within the text: "Very often, only one verse of Scripture was used, the doctrine of which would be taken up, expanded upon, proved and applied. Combined with lectio continua, this style of preaching… was thorough, indeed scholastic in its approach."[30] To be faithful to the scripture was to be academic, not affective. Even preachers of the 20th century like Martyn Lloyd-Jones would note how emotion was lacking in his preaching: "a special word must be given…to the element of pathos. If I had to plead guilty of one thing more than any other, I would have to confess that this perhaps is what has been most lacking in my own ministry."[31]

Not that all preachers failed to express emotions, as Doug Kelly describes the notable Presbyterian preacher, James Henley Thornwell: "the feature most remarkable in

---

[29] Henry H. Mitchell, "Emotion and Preaching," *The Living Pulpit* 15, no. 3 (July 2006): 27.

[30] Ervine & Visser, "True Preachers Preaching Truly: The Goal of Preaching in the Reformed Tradition," *Didaskalia* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 36

[31] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 92.

this prince of pulpit orators was the rare union of vigorous logic with strong emotions; He did not present truth in 'the dry light of the understanding.'"[32] However, the use of the word rare highlights that preaching with emotion was not common. Because of its lack of practice, Jeffrey Arthurs charges: "emotions deserve a central place in homiletical theorizing and practice, a higher place than it currently receives."[33]

Are emotions and the Holy Spirit at odds, or is it possible to emphasize the Holy Spirit and have the emotions be affected? Are the Holy Spirit and cognitive neuroscientists in conflict, or is there a way to emphasize the role of the Spirit and appeal to the emotions, given the effectiveness that cognitive neuroscience identifies in its incorporation?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore how a preacher appeals to emotions to impact congregants as it correlates with cognitive neuroscience findings. Preaching may be hindered because it fails to consider how the brain processes emotion and how that very emotion actually increases impact.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this exploration of emotional preaching correlating to cognitive neuroscience to improve sermon impact:

---

[32] Doug Kelly, *Preachers with Power* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 61.

[33] Jeffrey D. Arthurs, "The Place of Pathos in Preaching," *The Journal of Evangelical Homiletics Society* 1, no. 1 (December 2001): 15.

R.Q. 1: How do preachers appeal to emotion to impact congregants?

R.Q. 2: How do preachers evaluate the sermon's impact on congregants?

R.Q. 3: What obstacles hinder preachers from appealing to emotion as a homiletic method to impact congregants?

R.Q. 4: How does the use of emotion as a homiletical method to impact congregants correlate with neuroscience findings?

Significance of the Study

The study of emotional preaching as it correlates to cognitive neuroscience is significant for three groups. The first group is homiletics professors. Though parents may be indicted as hypocritical with a principle of "do as what is said, and not as what is done," homiletics professors may desire to avoid such hypocrisy. They, after all, are modeling for future preachers and for future generations the means of effective communication. If homiletics professors are unaware of the role of emotion in changed brains and consequently changed lives, then one would only expect their students to bear the effects- "as the father has eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."[34]

The study has potential impact for preachers themselves. Though most preachers may lament the lack of impact on their congregants, the reality is that many preachers may lack the knowledge or the desire to increase it. By appealing to cognitive

[34] Jeremiah 31:29.

neuroscience, while not doing damage to the role of the Holy Spirit, preachers may be encouraged to employ all manner of homiletical methods that correlate with cognitive neuroscience. Chief among those methods is the employment of emotion. For many pastors, emotion may very well be the scarlet "E" and this study may dispel any pejorative associations so that illumination can be enhanced.

Lastly, the study has significant bearing on current congregations and the future growth of the church. If Arthurs' comment regarding the importance of embracing emotion as "closer to Biblical Christianity" is accurate,[35] then congregations, as well as their pastors, may benefit from embracing a perspective on the relationship between emotion and reason in preaching. In essence, a Christianity without emotion is a dangerous substitute to Biblical Christianity. More than modeling sound Biblical exegesis, the pastor is modeling what being human entails, and emotions would be included in this. Likewise, as the Presbyterian Church in America and other denominations seek to have greater impact among various races and cultures, an understanding of the role of emotion may have bearing. For denominations that may emphasize reason over emotion, a proper balance might make stronger inroads to greater diversity within the church. Moreover, the church's understanding of emotions may enable her to more effectively minister to younger generations influenced by postmodernism.

---

[35] See footnote 14 on p. 5.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, terms are defined as follows:

Cognitive Neuroscience

Cognitive neuroscience is defined as the "area of neurobiology that aims to explain how the brain enables an animal to interact with its environment. The term cognition has come to refer to that level of description that links molecular science to behavior."[36]

Illumination

Illumination is the "opening of the heart and mind to receive and apprehend divinely revealed scriptural truth. Specifically, illumination relates to the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby he helps the child of God to understand the truths of God as contained within the Bible."[37]

Emotion

Emotion is "an irreducible quality of feeling or sensation."[38] These sensations come as a result of an appraisal or "evaluation about the goodness or badness of some perceived or imagined event."[39]

---

[36] *Oxford Dictionary of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology*, s.v. "cognitive neuroscience" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[37] Rob Ventura, "The Holy Spirit and the Preacher of God," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 2017): 306.

[38] Nancy Sherman, "Emotion," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics,* ed. Stephen G. Post (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 741.

[39] Nancy Sherman, *Encyclopedia of Bioethics,* 741.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore how preachers appeal to emotion to improve congregant sermon impact in a way that correlates with neuroscience findings.

The literature review begins with a study of homiletics' emphasis on the use of emotion. Given that the purpose of the study is to explore how preachers appeal to emotions, the research will provide evidence of homileticians' underscoring of emotions. The following particularly relevant areas of literature will also be reviewed to provide a foundation for the qualitative research. Cognitive neuroscience literature will be surveyed especially as it relates to the neuroscientific changes that occur in the brain as a result of emotion. Lastly, the theological doctrine of illumination will be researched.

Homiletics' Emphasis on Use of Emotion

Why should a preacher appeal to emotions during a sermon? Moreover, if preaching with appeals to the emotions are encouraged, then how does a preacher practically make that appeal? As one considers the logic behind the appeal to the emotions in sermons, the priority and role of emotions will be examined, followed by cautions for preachers seeking to appeal to them. In order to encourage the preacher practically, the logistics of preaching a sermon with emotion will be examined, as one considers the preparation, crafting, and delivery of sermons with emotion.

The Logic of Emotion in Sermons

Homileticians encourage the use of emotion in sermons. In this section, the reasoning behind emotional appeals in sermons will be reviewed. The importance of emotion in sermons will be surveyed, followed by the role that emotions play within the sermon. The section will conclude with cautions for preachers seeking to appeal to emotions.

The Importance of Emotion in Sermons

It is the duty of preachers to not only "instruct and prove but to rivet and delight, to stir and to move the people to action."[40] Preaching is not intended to only provide information to the hearer, but it is to stir the soul of the hearer so that they are compelled to action. Though preachers may oft seek to exclude emotion from logic, the reality, as Doug Blomberg, Professor Emeritus of Christian Education at the Institute for Christian Studies explains, is that logic and emotion are complementary to one another.[41] Logic and emotion should not be pitted against one another, rather as Jeffrey Arthurs, Preaching Chair at Gordon Conwell Seminary, illustrates the two should be linked like a rudder and a sail of a sailboat, "the first guides discourse, and the second powers it."[42] People do not reason or feel, "they reason because they feel, and they feel because they think that they have reason."[43] Both reason and emotion are integral to preaching.

---

[40] Tim Keller, *Preaching* (New York: Viking, 2015), 13.

[41] Doug Blomberg, "The Heart Has Reasons that Reason Cannot Know," *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 17, no.1 (2013): 62.

[42] Jeffrey Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," *Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching,* ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 591.

[43] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 592.

Some have contended that emotion may even be primary over reason. Jeffrey Arthurs actually argues that "all learning begins at the feeling level."[44] This counters many of the views of theologians today as Matthew Elliot, author of *Feel: The Power of Listening to Your Heart,* explains: "theologians have a worldview that assumes human feelings are dangerous or a lower function than reason."[45] In actuality, the emotions are a primary motivator in decision making, and in large part it is because "God made us to respond to emotional appeals."[46] One aspect of being made in the image of God is that appeals to emotion actually encourage us to action. Carson Reed, Professor of Preaching and Leadership at Abilene Christian University, adds that "the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it."[47] Given the priority of emotion in our decision making, Reed encourages preachers to appeal to the emotions more. In fact, Jerry Vines, author of *Passion in the Pulpit* and preacher for over sixty years, contends that preachers "simply cannot afford to ignore the emotive consequences of sermon pathos."[48] Because of the priority of emotions in decision making, the pathos of what one says is just as important as what one says.

---

[44] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 591.

[45] Matthew Elliot, "The Emotional Core of Love: The Centrality of Emotion in Christian Psychology and Ethics," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 110.

[46] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 591.

[47] Carson Reed, "Motive and Movement: Affective Leaderships Through the Work of Preaching," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 65.

[48] Jerry Vines and Adam B. Dooley, *Passion in the Pulpit* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2018), 24.

An appeal to emotions is also important as a mark of spiritual health. This may seem counter to the prevailing conventional assumption that "human emotions are a stumbling block for Christian faith to grow and mature,"[49] as Jung Sik Cha, Professor of Preaching at Hanil University reminds. Though the conventional assumptions may see emotions as a stumbling block for Christian growth, it may be because ultimately conventional assumptions see emotions as bad in themselves. Matthew Elliot corrects this by reminding that "God desires us to live feeling…and those emotions characterize lives transformed by Christ."[50] In a church culture that may downplay the priority of emotions, they should be seen as a mark of spiritual health. In fact, if believers are to be Christ-like, then emotions are a requisite part. Tamara Anderson and Shelly Skinner, professors at Biola University, note "becoming more Christ-like requires attending to all aspects of our lives, not the least of which is our capacity to emote…As we mature in Christ we move into a new relationship with our feelings."[51] Growing believers not only learn to curb certain emotional responses, but they also learn to embrace certain emotional responses as a mark of spiritual vitality.

In order for this type of spiritual health to be encouraged through emotion, the preacher will make the experience of the truth primary. Paul Wilson, Professor of Homiletics at Emmanuel College, encourages preachers to give congregants an

---

[49] Jung Sik Cha, "Some Aspects of Theological Anthropology in Jesus' Emotions," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 103, no. 1 (2017): 392.

[50] Elliot, "The Emotional Core of Love," 110.

[51] Tamara Anderson and Shelly A. Skinner, "Feelings: Discipleship That Understands the Affective Processes of a Disciple of Christ." *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (2019): 73.

experience of the text so as to "facilitate an encounter with God."[52] It is not enough for preachers just to give an objective understanding of the text, rather they must also encourage a subjective understanding- "to make the knowledge live."[53] The question then becomes how does one do that? Zach Eswine, Professor of Homiletics at Covenant Theological Seminary, reminds that the "goal is to glorify God and to take his good news to men. When this object is pursued and set before the preacher's mind, they cannot help but feel."[54] When God is central, indeed the result is emotion for both the pastor and the congregant. Preachers, therefore, must continue to make God the focus rather than focusing on humans or their responses.[55] Preaching that avoids an experience of truth will ultimately lead to a lack of emotion and will not produce the impact the preacher desires.[56]

Given the importance of emotions in preaching, it is imperative that a preacher appeal to emotions. Indeed, Michael Raiter, Director of the Center for Biblical Preaching, would argue that a preacher that does not appeal to emotions, his congregants or his own, "such a man or woman does not deserve to be called a preacher."[57] Likewise, Lloyd-Jones warns about those who would not have their emotions engaged, "can a man see himself as a damned sinner without emotion? Can a man look into hell without emotion?

---

[52] Paul Wilson, "The Source of Passion," *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 589.

[53] Keller, *Preaching,* 165.

[54] Zach Eswine, *Kindled Fire* (Glasgow: Mentor Imprint, 2006), 102.

[55] Wilson, "The Source of Passion," 589.

[56] Tim Keller, *Preaching,* 161.

[57] Michael Raiter, "On Sermons and Preaching: Evangelicals, Essentials, and Emotions," *St. Marks Review* 1, no. 219 (Feb 2012): 85.

Can a man listen to the thunderings of the law and feel nothing?...in the end, they are virtually denying the truth."[58] Matthew Elliot adds to the warning, "if we teach that God does not actually require that we are to feel… faith is stunted. Teaching that duty and commitment take us to a better place than true feeling is scandalous."[59] Preachers who avoid emotion are not worthy of the title because they deny the truth which they preach and stunt the faith of those to whom they are called to minister.

The Role of Emotion in Sermons

Having stressed the priority of emotions in sermons, the role of emotions in sermons will now be examined. Three specific roles will be examined: the spiritual role, the instructional role, and the motivational role.

The Spiritual Role of Emotions

Despite some preachers' reluctance to appeal to emotions, the spiritual role of emotions in congregants' lives is key. In fact, the presence of emotions actually provides input to the spiritual health of believers. Matthew Elliot explains, "could it be that we were meant to gauge our spiritual lives by how we feel…emotions can give us a real and true picture of who we are; they help show us what is actually in our hearts."[60] Discouraging emotion actually removes the indicator of spiritual health. Tim Keller expounds, "whatever captures the heart's trust and love also controls the feelings and

---

[58] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers,* 108.

[59] Elliot, "The Emotional Core of Love," 114.

[60] Elliot, "The Emotional Core of Love," 107.

behavior. What the heart most wants, the mind finds reasonable and the emotions find valuable."[61] The spiritual role of emotions is highlighted here as the emotions become an indicator of that which the heart most desires. Emotions help to reveal the heart's desire, so as to ultimately highlight an object of greater desire, God. In so doing, emotions become the vehicle to further embrace God's love. The emotions serve as a barometer to measure the spiritual health of the Christian's life, while also serving as a catalyst to spiritual health, through a fuller reception of God's love.

The Instructional Role of Emotions

Not only do emotions serve a spiritual role in the lives of congregants, but they also serve an instructional role. Preachers who appeal to emotions during a sermon actually are encouraging the congregant's recall of the sermon. Jeffrey Arthurs established that "all learning begins at the feeling level."[62] However, as Doug Blomberg expands: "learning, attention, memory, decision making and social functioning are all profoundly affected by and subsumed within the process of emotion."[63] The preacher who appeals to emotion will be encouraging the learning of content, as congregants are attentive to and able to recall the material, all the while leading them to make decisions and function socially.

Emotion's impact on learning begins with focus. Appeals to emotions help congregants determine what to focus on. Jason King, Theology Professor at St. Vincent's

---

[61] Keller, *Preaching,* 159.

[62] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 594.

[63] Blomberg, "The Heart Has Reasons that Reason Cannot Know," 64.

College, explains "when people have too little feelings, they struggle to determine what they should focus on."[64] When preachers appeal to emotions, the emotions help focus the congregants' attention, readying them to receive instruction. Having captured their focus, an emotional appeal leads the listener to really hear what is being said, as emotions "situate the listener in a place where the listener can really hear or engage in the message that is being presented."[65] Once a person is intently listening, emotion then encourages reasoning. "Emotion directs reason to the problems to be solved and to the puzzles in life to be sorted through."[66] Emotion captures the attention so that reasoning is engaged and decisions are made.

The Motivational Role of Emotions

In addition to the spiritual and instructional role, appeals to emotion in sermons also motivate the will of the listener. Arthurs reminds that "pathos influences the will more than logos."[67] What emotions motivate the will to do is vast and varied. On one hand, emotions motivate a desire for greater knowledge. "Feelings drive understanding. If people care about an idea or a task, they will be intrinsically motivated to seek greater knowledge about and mastery of it."[68] Arguing that a preacher actually has to teach a congregation what to feel, Charles L. Campbell, Homiletics Professor at Duke

---

[64] Jason King, "Feelings and Decision Making," *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1067 (Jan 2016): 43.

[65] Reed, "Motive and Movement," 75.

[66] King, "Feelings and Decision Making," 43.

[67] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 592.

[68] King, "Feelings and Decision Making," 45.

University, adds that the greater knowledge may actually be of their own emotion: emotional "sermons may in fact serve an emotion forming role and preachers would benefit from an awareness of the power of sermons in this regard."[69] On the other hand, the community is impacted by this developing knowledge of truth and self. As the preacher and the congregation become more comfortable with emotion, the church community is motivated to change. Appeals to emotion then become "a resource to foster something that underlies a community's willingness to consider change."[70] This change, motivated by emotions, often results in a greater faithfulness to the church's mission. Indeed, Reed would argue that this is the very purpose of the emotional preaching: "preaching is an act of pastoral leadership that requires the preacher to artfully engage in persuasion and the use of emotion for the sake of the congregational mission."[71]

The spiritual, instructional, and motivational roles of emotion in preaching highlight the priority of emotional appeals in preaching. Like many matters of importance, there are several cautions to consider as preachers maintain that priority.

The Cautions of Emotion in Sermons

Though emotions are stressed, preachers should be cautioned that emotions can be stressed wrongly. When a preacher makes their preaching about eliciting emotion rather than experiencing the text, the sermon's impact will be as fleeting as the feeling.[72] It is

---

[69] Charles L. Campbell, "Learning to Blush: The Emotional Formation of the Preacher," *Journal for Preachers* 24, no. 4 (2001): 49.

[70] Reed, "Motive and Movement," 71.

[71] Reed, "Motive and Movement," 64.

[72] Keller, *Preaching,* 161.

not just that the impact will be fleeting, but that a preacher appealing to emotion for the sake of emotion is simply "distasteful and distracting."[73] If the preacher's role is to mine the text, focus on God, and give an experience of the truth, then they will not avoid the focus on the text or its subject. Sermons that appeal to emotion cannot be merely about the emotion. Indeed, the preacher does not seek to appeal to emotions by any means necessary. It is not just any passion that the preacher seeks, but "Biblical passion."[74] In fact, "overwrought excitement in the pulpit can also be a cover up for a lack of understanding of the scripture passage. Lyman Beecher said, 'when I have nothing to say, I always holler.'"[75] Preaching with emotion is priority but must be done properly.

Two specific cautions are now considered in appealing to emotion in sermons. There are pitfalls to pay attention to as well as discouragements that will likely emerge with any emphasis on emotional appeals.

The Pitfalls of Emotion in Sermons

A variety of pitfalls emerge regarding the preacher's use of emotion. The first common pitfall is the lack of emotion associated with a flat affect. Keller has suggested that a flat affect is an alternative to preaching with emotion. The reason that a preacher has a flat affect is obvious: "your own heart isn't engaged."[76] If preachers are filled with the Holy Spirit as they are preparing a sermon, and his heart is engaged, one would

---

[73] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 55.

[74] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 17.

[75] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 33.

[76] Keller, *Preaching,* 167.

expect emotion to be displayed.[77] Instead, those preachers embodying a flat affect have a tendency to make emotions purely cognitive.[78] The preacher with flat affect minimizes the priority of emotion and forfeits the benefits that come from the use of emotion in sermons.

Preachers who avoid the pitfall of a flat affect may find themselves in an opposite pit, described as the emotions of a natural man. These emotions do not emerge as a result of any spiritual impact of the text, but rather occur as the normal process of the natural man. Describing the three kinds of emotion available to the preacher, Zach Eswine explains that "natural pathos refers to those emotions that are common to any human being."[79] How does one know if they are employing the emotions of the natural man? Michael Raiter describes the emotions of the natural man: "their feelings are often erratic, or they feel strongly about the things or the depth of their emotional display is not coordinated with that which has prompted it."[80] The emotion of the natural man seeks to appeal to the emotions of his hearers, yet misses the mark by employing emotions apart from truth.

Preachers may fall into the ditch of preaching with no emotion, or they may fall into the ditch of preaching with the emotion of the natural man. However, another pitfall emerges as preachers may pursue emotional appeals as a technique. In an effort to do this, they may resort to mere acting, rather than allowing the significance of the text to

---

[77] Cha, "Some Aspects of Theological Antropology in Jesus' Emotions," 392.

[78] Elliot, "The Emotional Core of Love," 110.

[79] Eswine, *Kindled Fire,* 109.

[80] Raiter, "On Sermons and Preaching," 76.

impact them. Keller warns that preachers falling into this pit are motivated by "excitement to be on stage and a desire to perform well…They consciously put on an act, to adopt a grand spiritual sounding tone and style."[81] Both "natural man" preaching and "on stage" preaching are attempts to project emotion, however, the emotion is not sincere. This insincere emotional preaching is to be despised as Zach Eswine captures: "nothing is more to be despised than a mere painted fire."[82]

The Discouragement of Emotions in Sermons

Though preachers may avoid the pitfalls described in the previous section, they do risk discouragement in the attempt to employ these means. Research does not discourage an appeal to emotions in sermons. Rather, preachers may become discouraged as they struggle to encourage the emotional dynamic. Preachers may become discouraged when they consider the delicate task of preaching with appeals to emotions: "The preaching cannot simply be accurate and sound. It must capture the listener's interest and imaginations. It must be compelling and penetrate to their hearts."[83] Though preachers desire truth to be real and not just clear, this may add undue pressure to the preacher. This pressure may only be compounded when a pastor considers that emotion can often be an outworking of one's own personality. As Arthurs notes, each pastor has their own regular emotional states. To add to the pressure, our emotional states can fluctuate which can

---

[81] Keller, *Preaching,* 167.

[82] Eswine, *Kindled Fire,* 110.

[83] Keller, *Preaching,* 157.

make emotional appeals difficult.[84] When pastors struggle to develop these emotional appeals because of the difficulty of the task, they may face discouragement.

In addition to the pressure that they feel to produce an emotional sermon, preachers may also become discouraged by the lack of emotion they observe in the congregants. Kevin Miller, Professor of Theology at Franciscan University, comments that often even if the preacher embodies emotion in his preaching, the congregant may be seemingly unmoved emotionally. To guard against discouragement over the lack of emotion in the congregants, he reminds that "people listening to me are hearing the sermon cold. What's become so meaningful to me has had no time to sink into them."[85] As a result, "the way that a preacher experiences a message and the way a listener experiences that exact same message are poles apart."[86] To offset that discouragement, preachers should avoid over-focusing on the emotional response and instead simply make the focus upon God. As Paul Wilson reminds, "most preachers who desire to be more passionate make a common mistake; they think of passion in preaching as primarily an emotional issue rather than a theological one."[87] This theological focus helps to safeguard against the discouragement.

---

[84] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 594.

[85] Kevin A. Miller, "Preaching with Intensity," *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching,* ed. Craig Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2005), 597.

[86] Miller, "Preaching with Intensity," 597.

[87] Wilson, "The Source of Passion," 589.

Having established the importance, role, and cautions of appealing to emotions in sermons, the logistics of sermons will now be examined. It is one thing to embrace the role that emotional appeals play. It is quite another to develop sermons that actually appeal to the emotions. In order for the preacher to appeal to emotions, preparation, crafting and delivery must be considered.

The Preparation for Sermons with Emotion

Preparation is necessary for proper execution. Before preachers can deliver an emotional sermon, they first prepare by performing self-examination for emotion, followed by a close examination of the emotion of the text.

Preacher's Self-Examination of Their Own Emotions

Preachers may struggle to deliver sermons that appeal to emotions if they fail to properly begin with an examination of themselves. Dan Baty, Pastor of Valley Brook Community Church, notes that when he struggles to appeal to the emotions of the congregation, it is because he has personally neglected to engage spiritually with the text. Commenting on a sermon that lacked emotion, he assesses: "the problem with that message…was not that I hadn't prepared enough; rather, I had neglected preparation in a vital area, the adequate preparation of my heart."[88] He continues by commenting that his failure to engage emotionally came from his failure to have the Holy Spirit engaged in

[88] Dan Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," *Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching,* ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 559.

the process, even suggesting that his struggle came as a result of his failure to "daily walk with the Lord."[89] Appeals to emotions come all the more readily when the preacher has been engaged spiritually throughout the week, even when not working on the sermon.

In order to encourage an interaction with the text on an emotional level, preachers are encouraged to prepare through prayer. Zach Eswine, pointing to Spurgeon informs: "Spurgeon would teach his students that authentic feeling begins as it did in their savior. The Savior's experience of the object set before him moved him in praying and living and gave a passionate context in which he preached."[90] The text set before him should move the preacher to prayer and that process may be the very means through which authentic feelings emerge. Supporting this idea, Tim Keller notes that preaching with emotion is encouraged through a "deep, rich, private prayer life. If your heart isn't regularly engaged in praise and repentance, if you aren't constantly astonished at God's grace in your solitude, there's no way it can happen in public."[91] Before preachers can engage the emotions of their listeners, they must engage their emotions through prayer. "You won't touch hearts because your own heart isn't touched."[92]

In order to engage the emotions of others, preachers are to develop an emotional intelligence. This emotional intelligence is "a subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's emotions, to discriminate among them, and

---

[89] Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," 559.

[90] Eswine, *Kindled Fire,* 104.

[91] Keller, *Preaching,* 168.

[92] Keller, *Preaching,* 168.

use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."[93] The problem with some preachers may be that they possess a low emotional intelligence. They may be impaired in their ability to monitor their own emotions. Dan Baty confesses, that even though he possesses knowledge that all people have emotions, "it is often much easier for me to report the facts of matter than to disclose how the matter affects my heart."[94] Even though he affirms "that hearts are most deeply affected when the speaker exposes his own,"[95] he admits that he often fails to do it. Ultimately, the most effective preachers are those who allow the text to engage their emotions: "effective leaders seek to be aware of not only the emotions of others, but also of their own emotions."[96]

The struggle for preachers to engage their own emotions is regrettable. Michael Raiter bewails: "when was the last time preaching moved us, that we could feel tears in our eyes, a lump in our throat, goosebumps on our arms- when we felt deep conviction of sin."[97] Preaching moves the listener. The desire that one has for the listener should also be embraced by the speaker. Moving past regret, he continues by voicing the tragedy of preachers communicating great doctrinal truths in the same manner as they would those things which are benign. "It's tragic to hear sermons on say the seriousness of sin, the majesty of Jesus, the assurance of salvation, the expectation of glory, delivered with all

---

[93] Carson Reed, "Motive and Movement: Affective Leadership Through the Work of Preaching," *Journal of Religious Leadership*, vol 13. No. 2 (Fall 2014): 71.

[94] Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," 561.

[95] Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," 559.

[96] Reed, "Motive and Movement," 69.

[97] Raiter, "On Sermons and Preaching," 77.

the passion one might show in giving street directions to a passing motorist."[98] In order to avoid the tragedy, the preacher need only allow the text to engage his own emotions.

Preacher's Examination of Emotions of the Text

Having affirmed the importance of the preacher understanding his own emotions, the importance of the text's emotions is now to be examined. Though it may seem unconventional to consider the emotions of the text, the reality is that "every passage has a mood."[99] The original author of the passage in fact communicates that mood, so the preacher needs to discern it. Preachers need only to become more comfortable in asking: "how does he want us to feel when we read his words?"[100] Preachers are generally trained to exegete and communicate the ideas of the text, as opposed to the emotion of it, yet the mood is to be understood. Before they begin writing the sermon, preachers should identify that emotional mood of the text, as the "text aims to create an experience, not just transmit an idea."[101] Highlighting the significant role that understanding the text's mood plays in avoiding emotional manipulation, Adam B. Dooley comments: "the singular pathos that dominates each unit of Scripture functions like a hermeneutical magnifying glass that exposes the various significances rolled into a Biblical author's design, acting

---

[98] Raiter, "On Sermons and Preaching," 77.

[99] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 593.

[100] Jerry Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 45.

[101] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 593.

as guardrails to keep us within the boundaries of valid interpretation."[102] As the preacher wields the magnifying glass, the mood is identified.

Identifying the Biblical mood of the text will aid the preacher in his appeals to appropriate emotion in the sermon. "The initial step toward locating divine pathos is as simple as looking for emotive language and vocabulary within your focal verses."[103] Just these words alone often provide clues to help the preacher discover the feeling driving the logic. Often a preacher understands the emotion of the text by looking for emotional reactions displayed by the characters in narratives. Especially helpful is when characters display contrasting emotions that disagree with a reader's expectations: "when a supporting tone precedes a leading tone, we should allow listeners to resonate with the emotions contrary to Christian maturity in order to create a moment of correction."[104] There are certain emotions that listeners expect to see in Biblical characters. When the emotions that are displayed do not meet expectations of the hearer, this reinforces in the hearer the acceptable emotion. Biblical characters encountering God also provide some insight into the mood of the text. A character's response, be it exemplary or inadequate, may help encourage the right emotion among the hearers. Conversely, God's response to individuals may also provide insight into the mood of the text: "should we not strive to be moved in the same way as Jesus when we observe the same realities today that prompted these responses?"[105] As preachers understand the Biblical mood of the text, they will find

---

[102] Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 107.

[103] Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 79.

[104] Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 83.

[105] Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 128.

that the emotions that are expressed within the passage may very will lead to similar emotions within their congregation.[106]

The Crafting of Sermons with Emotion

The importance of preparing a sermon that appeals to emotion through an exegesis of the emotion of the preacher and the emotion of the text has been examined. All of this prepares the way for the preacher to begin the process of crafting a sermon that appeals to emotions. When crafting the emotional sermon, the preacher must consider how to: incorporate vulnerability, enhance word use, and employ illustrations.

Introduction to the Crafting of Sermons with Emotion

Preachers desiring to craft a sermon with emotion give more thought to how they say what they say. This requires some careful attention by the preacher in his packaging of words and concepts in a way that will appeal to the emotion of the hearers. Warning of the lack of emotional impact in improper packaging, Vines and Dooley urge, "many people will never receive what is most important if the speaker does not thoughtfully consider how to package what he delivers."[107] It also requires a preacher expanding his sermon writing to reserve time for considering how the congregation may be moved. Writing with the congregation's responses in mind involves, as Daniel Hans, author of *If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach For* reminds, "ultimately a willing identification with

---

[106] Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 81.

[107] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 153.

another."[108] This identification with the congregants is imperative during the crafting of the sermon, as preachers attempt to "yield to the cognitive and emotional impact of their chosen text."[109]

Incorporating Vulnerability

As preachers attempt to craft sermons that appeal to the emotions, vulnerability is to be incorporated. Vulnerability, as alluded to by Ian Hussey and Allan Demon, Lecturers on Homiletics at Malyon and Whitley Colleges respectively, is defined as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure."[110] This type of exposure is exemplified by the Trinity in the offer of salvation, "Father, Son and Holy Spirit open themselves to wounds, tears and grief."[111] The vulnerability expressed by the Trinity is to be modeled in the pulpit as an effective means of emotional appeal. In fact, Daniel Hans stressing the necessity of vulnerability, questions, "if I did not use my personal life as the basis for preaching during time of crisis, would I have either an audience or a message?"[112] In providing an example after the loss of his child, Hans urges emotional exposure: "a congregation needs to hear how the preacher deals with those angry feelings we all have

---

[108] Daniel Hans, "Preaching Through Personal Pain," *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 95.

[109] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 139.

[110] Ian Hussey and Allan Demon, "Vulnerability in Preaching: How Far is Not Far Enough," *Journal of Evangelical Homiletics Society* 18, no. 2 (Sep 2018): 5.

[111] Hussey and Demon, "Vulnerability in Preaching," 7.

[112] Hans, "Preaching Through Personal Pain," 95.

toward God in times of tragedy."[113] If preachers are to reach humans, then they must be human in the pulpit. When that human preacher integrates vulnerability, it ultimately builds relationships between the preacher and the listeners, which encourages the expression of emotion in the congregants.[114] Baty captures this when he writes, "hearts are most deeply affected when the speaker exposes his own."[115]

Though vulnerability should be employed to engage the emotions of the preacher and congregant, there are cautions. It is possible that vulnerability will actually surface the temptation for congregants to focus on the preacher more than God himself.[116] In fact, Hussey and Demon alert that "vulnerability can mutate into a self-deceiving act of prideful attention-seeking." As a result, preachers can actually be tempted to be dishonest just so that they can be vulnerable.[117] Sounding another warning, Joe Stowell, President of Cornerstone University, also warns: "wanting not to appear perfect is important, but not if it costs the demonstration of progress in our walk with Christ. Our danger in our transparency is that we cease to be examples to the flock and become instead their excuse."[118] When the temptation of vulnerable self-aggrandizing is coupled with the projection of imperfection, one quickly sees the danger of vulnerable preaching: the

---

[113] Hans, "Preaching Through Personal Pain," 96.

[114] Hussey and Demon, "Vulnerability in Preaching," 8.

[115] Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," 561.

[116] Hans, "Preaching Through Personal Pain," 95.

[117] Hans, "Preaching Through Personal Pain," 96.

[118] Joe Stowell, "Self-Disclosure that Glorifies Christ," *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 144.

preacher becomes the focus and his personal struggle becomes a license for congregants to avoid faithfulness.

The dangers associated with vulnerability should not hinder its integration. To help offset the dangers, Hussey and Demon encourage preachers to "carefully assess whether their vulnerability is genuinely edifying or merely self-adulating."[119] If a preacher cannot trust himself to make that type of assessment, they are encouraged to "take counsel with others before you disclose too freely."[120] To avoid the pitfalls of vulnerability, preachers should seek to keep God, not man, the subject of the sermon. "As long as human actions are the focus, it is hard for preachers to become passionate about anything."[121] With these safeguards in place, preachers may risk and emotionally expose themselves in an appeal to the congregants' emotions.

Enhancing Word Use

In the crafting of sermons that appeal to emotion, word choice is to be considered. Though some of the words preachers use during the delivery of the sermon occur extemporaneously, others can be carefully honed and crafted during the writing of the sermon manuscript. Jerry Vines and Adam B. Dooley provide a helpful description of how to use words when crafting sermons to appeal to emotions. "Perhaps the most simple, direct way of effecting pathos verbally is the use of vivid language…use

---

[119] Hussey and Demon, "Vulnerability in Preaching," 11.

[120] Hussey and Demon, "Vulnerability in Preaching," 10.

[121] Paul Wilson, "The Source of Passion," 590.

adjectives pregnant with meaning in order to jar your audience intentionally."[122] As preachers write they pay careful attention to the words they use and endeavors to employ words that capture attention and paint pictures. In addition, they add to vivid language, the use of pithy statements. Pithy statements "stick in people's minds and are another way to emote the pathos of the Bible with our words."[123] Individual words that paint the picture vividly are reinforced by pithy statements that paint the picture in phrases. These pithy statements are powerful to elicit emotions because of their simplicity. "Few elements in a sermon pack as much punch as a simple declarative statement or command."[124] Simplicity is key as Miller goes on to explain, "every nuance and qualifier, though it may add technical accuracy, also blunts the force of the statement."[125]

As a preacher explores the different ways to use words for emotional impact, rhetorical tactics. For example, in the process of crafting, preachers should employ the use of poignant questions. "Whether rhetorical or open-ended, a well-placed question is both thought provoking and emotionally charged…these questions inspire visceral reactions."[126] Emotion is engaged as the hearers ponder the implications of the answer to the questions. These questions may also simply be a restatement of the general thrust of your sermon. For example, if the sermon proposition was that God chooses men who are unworthy of His love, then the proposition could be restated as a question throughout the

---

[122] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 155.

[123] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 156.

[124] Miller, "Preaching With Intensity," 597.

[125] Miller, "Preaching With Intensity," 598.

[126] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 156.

sermon manuscript, what type of man does God choose?[127] Implied in this restatement of a proposition in the form of a question is the effectiveness of repetition. Repetition in itself is an effective tool to encourage emotion. "Repeating words and phrases builds a sense of anticipation that increases the momentum of an idea or emotion. Also, the abrupt interruption of an expected reiteration is an equally effective measure."[128] Preachers can follow the example of the opening chapter of Genesis to hear not only the repetition, but also the abrupt interruption. Days progress with a common refrain, and "God saw that it was good;"[129] yet, only after the sixth day does one hear the interruption of the pattern when it is reported "behold, it was very good."[130] All of these rhetorical devices with an emphasis on word use will aid in a preacher's appeal to emotions.

Employing Illustration

Dennis Hollinger, President of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, explains that preachers appeal to the heart not only through personal vulnerability, but also through "image, symbol and story."[131] In employing illustrations, the preacher appeals to the emotions through image and story. His attempt is to make knowledge come alive.[132] "To engage the heart is also to engage the imagination and the imagination is more affected by

---

[127] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 157.

[128] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 160.

[129] Genesis 1:10.

[130] Genesis 1:31.

[131] Dennis Hollinger, "Preaching to the Head, Heart, and Hands: A Holistic Paradigm for Proclaiming and Hearing the Word," *The Journal of Evangelical Homiletics Society* 7, no. 1 (Mar 2001): 36.

[132] Keller, *Preaching,* 165.

images than by propositions…An illustration is anything that connects an abstract proposition with the memory of an experience in the sensory world."[133] The most effective means to making truth come alive and engaging emotions is not through the statement of proposition but through comprehension via illustration.

Illustrations can take many different forms. The simplest illustration is an analogy. "Analogies are mainly concerned with clarifying the truth for the mind but with a sensory wallop."[134] Analogies take commonplace experiences and infuse them with meaning in their connection to Biblical truth, and in so doing appeal to the emotions. In addition to analogies, some preachers employ examples which seek to reinforce material presented. Listeners may feign understanding of the material presented, but the example helps to ensure that the material actually engages the listener's heart.[135] Keller would add that the "simplest and most overlooked form of illustration is the brief word picture-using just a phrase or even a word to link an abstraction to concrete sense experience."[136] Illustrations encourage the listener to experience the information.

Another form of illustration is story. Stories have a way of moving a person to experience the truth that is communicated. "Stories move you. Stated differently, stories are powerful tools to aid our persuasion of others. Their inclusion motivates the heart as much as it informs the mind."[137] Not just any story is effective. In fact, the most effective

---

[133] Keller, *Preaching,* 170.

[134] Keller, *Preaching,* 173.

[135] Keller, *Preaching,* 174.

[136] Keller, *Preaching,* 174.

[137] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 161.

are stories about people, as Craig Brian Larson, chief editor for PreachingToday.com, explains, "while illustrations drawn from nature, mechanics, or mathematics can help clarify, people illustrations are more likely to stir emotion."[138] People illustrations may center around those unknown, but there's a certain effectiveness in the use of the preacher's own personal stories: "it's easy to access canned illustrations for sermons, but these lack the quality of freshness that emerges from the lives of preachers themselves." With that in mind, one finds themselves back where they started this section, in the importance of incorporating vulnerability.

Despite the method one employs, certain means benefit the crafting of a sermon to appeal to emotions. Indeed, preachers must give attention to how they packagey what they deliver. The incorporation of vulnerability will allow preachers to disclose their own emotions, thus encouraging the congregation's emotional engagement. The emphasis on using certain words and rhetorical devices will also benefit the hearers as they become more readily engaged in the truth of what is spoken. Lastly, employing illustration will allow the hearer more opportunity to experience the truth of what is spoken, so that the emotions will be engaged.

The Delivery of Sermons with Emotion

Who can minimize the importance of an emotional delivery? Having prepared themselves by examining their own emotions and the emotions of the text, and having

---

[138] Craig Brian Larson, "Preaching Pyrotechnics, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 488.

crafted a written manuscript containing vulnerability, rhetorical word use and illustration, one now considers the act of delivering a sermon with emotion. Preachers may give little thought to an emotional delivery: "we put lots of work into the content, we get the text right but little thought goes into its delivery. As a consequence, people in the pews, over the years, become bored."[139] A preacher's style of delivery must be as emotional as the delivery style of his savior.[140] Perhaps boredom could be overcome if preachers would take the time to consider aspects of an emotional delivery like their savior's because "sincere emotions expressed with eloquence make for honest persuasion."[141] The domains that preachers should consider for an emotional delivery is their voice and their body.

Vocal Strategies

The way the preacher uses his voice impacts his appeal to the hearers' emotions. The voice communicates much. A preacher who preaches in a monotone voice could bore the audience. Likewise, the speaker who uses verbal fillers such as "um" may subconsciously signal that the hearers are wasting their time. When vocal energy is missing it may lead congregants to the false conclusion that the main point of the passage is not really that important.[142] The voice can belie the very content of the sermon. Indeed,

---

[139] Raiter, "On Sermons and Preaching," 74.

[140] Eswine, *Kindled Fire,* 102.

[141] Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," 560.

[142] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 169.

the more the voice matches the mood of the passage, the more effective the appeal, as "the listener's ear informs his mind of pathos."[143]

The preacher considerate of an emotional delivery is conscious of his volume and pitch as well. A preacher speaks with loud volume, but it is the varying of that volume which results in emotion. More than any other delivery technique, "varying one's volume is perhaps the most crucial for the delivery of pathos."[144] A preacher would do well to recognize that "there will be times to speak with great volume, but other points are better made at a lower decibel."[145] Commenting on African Americans' skill in varying volume, Kevin Miller elucidates: "African American preaching hits home because it draws on the full range of human volume, from whisper to shout and the full range of human emotion, from rage to joy."[146] In addition to volume, preachers should be mindful of pitch in communication. In much the same way that musicians communicate the emotional tone of the text through the pitch, so too should preachers communicate their emotional tone through pitch. Providing an example of the movement of pitch, Vines and Dooley note: "the higher our pitch, the more we communicate uncertainty or judgment. Conversely, when our inflection moves from high to low, it conveys confidence and certitude."[147]

Alongside volume and pitch, a preacher's attention to the pace of their speech also engages emotion. As with volume, variety is key when it comes to pace. "It's true that

---

[143] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 169.

[144] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 170.

[145] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 170.

[146] Miller, "Preaching With Intensity," 598.

[147] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 171.

speaking slowly can be a powerful tool for emphasis. It is also true that a sermon works best when there's variety: fast, slow, and medium tempos."[148] Negative effects surface when the pace is not varied. "A constant rate will eventually bore listeners and discourage their awareness of any tone."[149] If the rate is constantly slow, the content and corresponding emotion can be lost. If the rate is constantly fast, listeners can become exhausted and disengage. Variety, however, is the key to emotional deliveries. In fact, the preacher need not be afraid at times even to pause, as "deliberately pausing can heighten the emotional energy of our preaching immensely."[150] The employment of these varying vocal strategies will enhance a preacher's appeal to emotion.

Body Language Strategies

The delivery of a sermon appealing to emotions involves not only the effective use of the preacher's voice, but even the use of his whole body. Body language impacts the communication of the content of the sermon, as "visual preference will reinforce or distract from the inspired mood of your pericope. People will not feel emotions that contradict what they see."[151] A hearer's sight of a preacher's body language that opposes their own feelings will be detrimental. However, when a preacher "embodies the pathos

---

[148] Miller, "Preaching with Intensity," 599.

[149] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 172.

[150] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 174.

[151] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 182.

of the pericope,"[152] the resulting union between the preacher's body language and the hearer's feelings are of great benefit.

What tactics should preachers keep in mind to ensure their body language encourages emotion in their hearers? Body language from head to foot should be examined, beginning with the eyes. If a congregation is to hear a certain emotion in your words, then they "need to observe a steady interest through your eyes that confirms the same compassion."[153] Along with your eyes, your entire face communicates. In fact, our facial features enhance our appeals to emotion because they "reassure the listeners that we believe what we say."[154] Our hands can communicate greatly as well. For example, "pointing is accusatory, but the same finger placed over the lips insists that the audience listen quietly."[155] Preachers may struggle to use their arms and their hands in great displays, but they would do well to remember that the way that they experience their movements are not the same way that the congregation does.[156] Lastly, the feet should be considered as the movement of the preacher's entire body on the platform can contribute to emotional engagement. For example, "staying in one place throughout your presentation can make you appear monotonous…appropriate movement can also coincide

---

[152] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 182.

[153] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 184.

[154] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 184.

[155] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 186.

[156] Miller, "Preaching with Intensity," 597.

with the emotional rhythm of the text."[157] In order to engage the emotions of the hearers, the preachers should engage their bodies from head to foot.

Summary of Homiletics' Emphasis on the Use of Emotion

The purpose of this study is to explore how preachers appeal to emotion to improve congregant sermon impact in a way that correlates with neuroscience findings. Given that the stated task is to explore how preachers appeal to emotion, this section sought to understand the homiletical emphasis on the use of emotion. In order to understand how a preacher would appeal to emotion, one first explores why a preacher would appeal to emotion.

The first section of this literature review, "The Logic of Emotion in Sermons," explored why a preacher appeals to emotion. In an effort to understand the rationale behind emotional preaching, emotion's unique role in communication was examined. Though logic and emotion exist complementarily, emotion is primary in decision-making processes. Not only was emotion shown to serve decision-making, it also has spiritual, instructional, and motivational roles. A sermon's appeal to emotions also serves to promote and evaluate spiritual health. In addition, it becomes a means to greater focus, attention, recall, as well as a motivator to greater knowledge and faithfulness. Alongside the importance and role of emotions, several cautions were surveyed. Preachers seeking to appeal to emotions must recognize certain pitfalls that are to be avoided, including preaching that is: emotionless, from the natural man, or manufactured. In addition, there

---

[157] Vines, *Passion in the Pulpit,* 188.

is a certain amount of discouragement that preachers will need to be on guard against as they make their appeals.

The second section of the literature review, "The Logistics of Sermons with Emotions," explored how preachers encourage appeals to emotion in the construction and delivery of sermons. Preparation to write the sermon begins with a preacher's examining of himself in light of the Biblical text. When preachers emotionally engage in the text, their listeners are more likely to engage emotionally. This preparation also involved examining the text's emotion. The Scriptures were written by men with emotions about people with emotions, so one might expect the passage to contain emotional content. Once this exegesis of self and text is performed, the preacher is ready to craft the manuscript. To more effectively to do this, they are encouraged to incorporate vulnerability into the message, taking the risk of emotional exposure. In addition, preachers should well consider the words that they use, including: vivid language, bold statements, poignant questions and repetition of words. Lastly, preachers should craft sermons that contain stories, especially personal stories of the preacher. Once the manuscript containing these elements is written, the preacher should be conscious of his delivery. All of his body should be involved in the delivery of a sermon, from head (eyes) to foot (movement), inside (vocal) and outside (facial and hand gestures). As a result of these tactics, the preacher appeals to the emotions of his hearers.

Cognitive Neuroscience and Emotion

In the previous section, both the logic and logistics of preaching sermons with emotions were highlighted. In this section, cognitive neuroscience's contribution to the study of emotion will be examined. This review area begins with an exploration of how emotions are to be viewed according to cognitive neuroscience. Here, the importance of emotions is introduced neuro-scientifically, followed by an exploration of the landscape of the emotional brain, and concluding with an overview of cognitive neuroscience's developing understanding of emotion. Following this introduction, emotion's impact on learning is surveyed. Two sections are examined: how emotions, in general, impact attention and recall specifically, followed by how the specific emotions of fear and happiness impact learning, in general. This section concludes with an explanation of how cognitive neuroscience provides a brain-based understanding of empathy.

How Emotions Are to be Viewed According to Cognitive Neuroscience

This section highlights the importance of emotions as confirmed by cognitive neuroscience. In addition, an understanding of the landscape of emotions in the brain is introduced. Lastly, a brief exploration of the development of cognitive neuroscience's understanding of emotions is examined.

The Importance of Emotions According to Cognitive Neuroscience

"Effective learning does not involve removing emotion. The most efficient and effective learning *incorporates* emotion into the cognitive knowledge being built."[158] Increasingly, cognitive neuroscientists like Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Associate Professor of Education, Psychology, and Neuroscience at the University of Southern California, are affirming emotions' importance in learning. Eric Jensen, educational leader and synthesizer of brain research for educators, reflects that past critics have dismissed the role of emotions in learning, believing that the "so-called scientific path is that of reason and logic."[159] Educators have followed suit, as Michelle Maiese, Philosophy professor at Emmanuel College and author of *The Mind-Body Politic*, admits, recognizing that "emotions do sometimes skew the epistemic landscape by highlighting features of the world that are not relevant, steeping in bias, or blinding to certain aspects of the situation."[160] Yet, the cautions should not negate the use of emotions. In fact, cognitive neuroscience is continually revealing how important the emotions are in learning.[161]

The impact of emotions on learning is extensive. The emotions are the starting point for "thought and other cognitive processes."[162] Sarah Rose Cavanagh, Associate

---

[158] Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Matthias Faeth, "The Role of Emotion and Skilled Intuition in Learning," *Mind, Brain, Education,* ed. David Sousa (Bloomington, IL: Solution Tree Press, 2010), 76.

[159] Eric Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD Publishing, 2005), 68.

[160] Michelle Maiese, "Transformative Learning, Enactivism, and Affectivity," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36, no. 2 (March 2017): 213.

[161] Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind, 78.*

[162] Maiese, "Transformative Learning, Enactivism, and Affectivity," 209.

Professor of Psychology at Assumption College and researcher on the effect of emotion on daily life, summarizes the many ways that emotional appeals engage the student: "tapping into emotion will harness our student's attention, dominate their working memory resources, enhance their long-term memory consolidation, and fuel their motivation."[163] Cavanagh's comments reveal that the emotions capture a learner's interest and lead them to engage. It is the emotions which lead a student to more likely recall information. It is the emotions that ultimately lead them to persevere and pursue further learning. Cognitive neuroscientists add that emotion nurtures a passion for learning, and ultimately helps to make meaning out of instruction.[164] To divorce emotion from learning is to negatively impact learning, as "emotions, thinking and learning are all linked."[165]

The Landscape of the Emotional Brain According to Cognitive Neuroscience

In order to understand the importance of emotions according to cognitive neuroscience, the emotional brain's landscape is introduced. Though emotions are distributed in structures throughout the brain, two broad areas are associated with the processing of emotions.[166] The first area, the cortex, or the "thick outer cap of our brain…is more involved in the conscious processing of events and control of

---

[163] Sarah Rose Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2016), 32.

[164] Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind,* 69.

[165] Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind,* 68.

[166] Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind,* 70.

behavior."[167] The second area associated with emotions is subcortical and contains structures that govern various sorts of emotional and hormonal reaction.[168] This set of structures below the cortex (subcortical) is known as the limbic system and "plays a central role in emotional processes."[169] Neuroscientists, like Elizabeth Johnston and Leah Olsen, co-authors of *The Feeling Brain,* summarize the cortex as the thinking brain where conscious processing of events take place, while the subcortical structures are identified as the feeling brain where the unconscious processing of emotion occurs. Much communication takes place within and between these two areas.[170] However, when a person responds to an emotional stimulus, activity in the cortex is suspended, and activity in the limbic system is elevated.[171] These two areas of the brain are referenced throughout the cognitive neuroscience literature review area.

The Developing Understanding of Emotions According to Cognitive Neuroscience

Historically, cognitive neuroscientists have viewed emotions as functioning independently from cognition. "The party line used to be that the subcortical structures governed emotional processing and the cortex governed cognitive processing, and each

---

[167] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning*, 23.

[168] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning*, 23.

[169] Christina Hinton, Koji Miyamoto, and Bruno Chiesa, "Brain research, Learning and Emotions: Implications for Education Research, Policy and Practice," *European Journal of Education* 43, no. 1 (March 2008): 91.

[170] Elizabeth Johnston and Leah Olson, *The Feeling Brain: The Biology and Psychology of Emotions* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015): 26.

[171] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 50.

did so somewhat independently.[172] It was thought that in much the same way that there is a portion of your brain that corresponds to vision, there is a portion of your brain that corresponds to emotion, and a portion that corresponds to cognition. However, the correction being offered by neuroscientists today is that those brain regions are not so bifurcated. Avoiding that bifurcation, Mary Helen Immordino-Yang corrects that recent discoveries have revealed that the brain is widely interconnected and integrated. In fact, she says, "learning involves the development of connections between networks of brain areas, spread across many regions of the brain. Instead of one brain area, learning involves actively constructing neural networks that connect many brain areas."[173] In the past when neuroscience considered emotion its own independent area, it was logical to emphasize cognition. However, with the advancements of neuroscience revealing that areas of the brain corresponding to emotions are connected to areas of the brain corresponding to cognition, appeals to emotion may be encouraged.[174]

In the past, cognitive neuroscientists also saw emotions merely working reactively. Identifying this perspective as the stimulus response view, Lisa Feldman Barrett, editor of *Emotion Review* and director of the Interdisciplinary Affective Science Laboratory, highlights the confusion: "neurons in your muscles lie still until stimulated and then fire to make a muscle cell respond. Scientists assumed that neurons in the brain operated similarly."[175] However, cognitive neuroscientists have recently discovered that

---

[172] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 23.

[173] Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, *Emotions, Learning and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 83.

[174] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 23.

[175] Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made* (New York: Mariner Books, 2017), 57.

this type of response is not the most accurate way to comprehend what occurs in emotional processing. Though emotions can be viewed reactively, as stimuli goes directly from "sensory processing areas to the amygdala, activating the body's threat response system before the information makes it all the way to the cortex to turn it into a conscious visual experience,"[176] a fuller way to view emotions is as predictive. Barret explains that the "brain is always predicting, and its most important mission is predicting your body's energy needs. These crucial predictions, and their associate prediction error turn out to be a key ingredient for making emotions."[177] Describing this same predictive dynamic of emotions, Ralph Adolphs, Professor of Neuroscience at the California Institute of Technology, writes: "emotions are not merely reactions to stimuli but also depend on expectations."[178] These expectations surface as a result of prediction.

A brief description of this predictive dynamic is warranted. Lisa Feldman Barrett provides an in-depth understanding of this predictive dynamic by noting two sets of brain regions involved in emotion. The first set of brain regions "sends predictions to the body to control its internal environment, including elevated heart rate, diminished breathing, and release of hormones."[179] This set of brain regions, also known as the body-budgeting regions, is ultimately responsible for preparing your body for action. The second set of brain regions interprets those reactions as sensations inside your body. "Each time your body-budgeting regions predict a physical change, like speeding up the heart, they also

---

[176] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 33.

[177] Barrett, *How Emotions are Made,* 57.

[178] Ralph Adolphs and David J. Anders, *The Neuroscience of Emotion: A New Synthesis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 225.

[179] Barrett, *How Emotions are Made,* 68.

predict the sensory consequence of that change, like a pounding feeling in your chest."[180] Those regions of your brain corresponding to emotion actually do not react at all, but rather predict in order to regulate your body budget, and "any event that significantly impacts your body budget becomes personally meaningful to you."[181] One can understand how then emotion may impact learning. When one's body perceives a stimulus, if the mind predicts and experiences a change in body budget, then the event will become meaningful, and the information will more likely to be recalled. This shift in the understanding of emotions is not without effect. Indeed, this new understanding reveals that it is nearly impossible to reason without emotion, and as such emotion may be appealed to impact the listener.

How Emotion Impacts Learning According to Cognitive Neuroscience

Having introduced cognitive neuroscience's view of emotion, this section surveys the impact of emotion on learning. Cognitive neuroscience provides insight into how the emotions in general impact learning, especially regarding attention and recall. In addition, the emotions of fear and happiness will be analyzed as they relate to learning.

---

[180] Barrett, *How Emotions are Made,* 68.

[181] Barrett, *How Emotions are Made,* 70.

The Place of Emotion in Attention and Recall According to Cognitive Neuroscience

Attention and recall are both part of the learning process. Cognitive neuroscience continues to affirm how emotions impact both attention and recall in learners.

The Place of Emotion for Attention According to Cognitive Neuroscience

It is tempting to overestimate the human brain's potential for attention. In fact, Cavanagh cautions against those who view the brain as constantly recording every little detail, while storing all of the information. The reality is that "attention is incredibly limited-it operates like a small spotlight, focusing on a narrow subset of information at any given time."[182] Indeed, some have contended it would be virtually impossible for the brain to encode all experiences. This misconception regarding the brain is why some view forgetting as "merely an inability to access that stored information."[183] The truth is that forgetting is often more a failure of attention than it is a failure of retrieval. When the information does not register in the brain as worthy of attention, then it ultimately is forgotten. What is needed is some marker to draw attention to significant stimuli. Affirming emotions' role as that marker, Jason Megill, Professor of Philosophy at Bentley College, describes them as "cognitive bookmarks… helping determine the information that we notice in our environment, the information that will get stored in memory, and the information that will be brought to mind in a certain situation."[184]

---

[182] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 34.

[183] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 40.

[184] Jason Megill, "Emotion, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence," *Minds and Machines* 24, no. 2 (May 2014): 193.

Though Megill postulates that novelty is just as important as emotion in attention,[185] Johnston and Olsen conclude that one attends to what they become aware of, and emotion is the key to that awareness.[186]

The process by which information is attended to is often called affective framing. Maiese describes affective framing as: "a spontaneous, non-inferential and pre-reflective way of discriminating, filtering, and selecting information that often operates prior to conceptual and propositional information processing."[187] Demystifying this description, affective framing occurs without conscious processing. As stimuli emerge, significant events capture the "attention" of the brain and are "disclosed through diffuse, holistic bodily feelings."[188] When these "holistic bodily feelings" are experienced, the brain registers the stimuli and attention is focused upon it. Describing this framing from a neuroscientific viewpoint, Immordino-Yang notes that when a significant event is perceived, a portion of the brain known as the reticular activating system springs into action "automatically selecting related sensory information and directing it to the lower, reactive and emotional brain."[189] When this area of the brain is engaged, an involuntary emotional response is elicited, thus capturing the subject's attention.[190] Were it not for this process of affective framing, humans would constantly be bombarded with "an

---

[185] Megill, "Emotion, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence," 197.

[186] Johnston and Olson, *The Feeling Brain: The Biology and Psychology of Emotions*, 183.

[187] Maiese, "Transformative Learning, Enactivism, and Affectivity," 205.

[188] Maiese, "Transformative Learning, Enactivism, and Affectivity," 205.

[189] Immordino-Yang and Faeth, "The Role of Emotion and Skilled Intuition in Learning," 50.

[190] Immordino-Yang and Faeth, "The Role of Emotion and Skilled Intuition in Learning," 50.

endless array of possible cognitive and interpretive options, and presumably would merely shut down from information overload."[191] Emotions narrow the focus.

Though the details of cognitive neuroscience may be tedious, Megill summarizes succinctly, "attention is drawn to emotionally significant stimuli."[192] Events that are more emotionally laden are more likely to focus attention, and consequently help ensure recall. Classroom practitioners would confirm this in practice, as Cavanagh explains: "when faced with a classroom of students who are drowsy, stressed, and exposed to competing stimuli, your best route for grabbing attention…may well be to tap into your students' emotions."[193]

The Place of Emotion for Recall According to Cognitive Neuroscience

Emotions' vital role in focusing the brain's attention also plays a role in determining what the brain remembers. Megill explains, "emotion plays a role in determining what specific memories make it into our long-term memory in the first place…People tend to remember those objects or events that are emotionally charged, as opposed to those that lack emotional import."[194] Yang provides an even more nuanced neuroscientific explanation for this statement when she states: "it is literally neurobiologically impossible to build memories without emotion. The brain is highly metabolically expensive tissue and evolution would not support wasting energy thinking

---

[191] Maiese, "Transformative Learning, Enactivism, and Affectivity," 205.

[192] Megill, "Emotion, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence," 190.

[193] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 36.

[194] Megill, "Emotion, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence," 192.

about things that don't matter to us."[195] One remembers what they care about. Indeed, Jensen even quantifies emotions' importance in relation to recall when he notes: "the correlation between the strength of the original emotional event and the likelihood of retrieval and recall of that event is astonishingly high, around 90 percent."[196] Emotions play a vital role in the ability of humans to remember.

The emotions' involvement in recall is understood on a cognitive neuroscientific level. Summarizing the role of emotions in remembering, Jensen notes that because emotions "give us a more activated and stimulated brain, they help us recall things better and form more explicit memories."[197] It is this emotionally stimulated brain that leads to memory consolidation. Cavanagh explains how this process begins, as emotion stimulating the brain results "in the cascade of hormonal responses like the release of stress hormones and adrenaline which yield great consolidation of memory. These same hormones encourage the brain to hold on to these memories."[198] Sousa further details this process by adding that "the release of hormones stimulate the amygdala to signal other brain regions to strengthen memory."[199] Johnston and Olsen further identify these stress hormones as norepinephrine and cortisol, and concludes with Sousa that the impact of emotion on the neurobiology of the brain ultimately leads to improved recall.[200] One

---

[195] Immordino-Yang, *Emotions, Learning and the Brain*, 83.

[196] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 135.

[197] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 71.

[198] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 44.

[199] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 50.

[200] Johnston and Olsen, *The Feeling Brain,* 180.

need not be able to articulate the neuroscientific complexities of how emotion impacts recall if they are able to recall Jensen's simple summary: "we are very good at remembering events that affected us emotionally."[201]

How Fear and Happiness Impact Learning According to Cognitive Neuroscience

This section surveys how the particular emotions of fear and happiness impact learning. Current literature reveals an emphasis by cognitive neuroscientists on these two specific emotions.

The Impact of Fear

Cognitive neuroscientists have performed much research on the impact of fear. In fact, Johnston and Olson, would contend that it is fear which has "begun to reveal most clearly the outlines of the emotional brain."[202] One educator applying cognitive neuroscience's findings on emotion actually found that anxiety and fear were the most frequently reported emotions, "comprising up to 25% of the student experiences in the classroom."[203] Fear is a part of human experience, and its presence can have an effect on one's processing of information.

Advances in cognitive neuroscience reveal what occurs in the brain when subjects experience fear and anxiety. Johnston and Olson describe fear responses by contrasting two "roads" in the brain. The "low road" is the emotion-laden limbic portion of the brain,

---

[201] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 125.

[202] Johnston and Olson, *The Feeling Brain*, 66.

[203] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 183.

while the "high road" is the cortical area where input is consciously processed.[204] "Low road" should not be considered the "slow road" especially given that stimuli producing fear responses "always take the brain's superhighway through a bundle of neurons that lead directly to the amygdala which is designed to respond to threats."[205] When a stimulus occurs, both "roads" are engaged as the visual and auditory pathways in one's brains processes information on the "low road," while the stimulus is simultaneously processed by the "high road." Adolphs and Anders, along with Jensen, identify the "low road" specifically with the amygdala, but nuance that neuroscientists are not sure if "the experience of fear causes activity in the amygdala, or if some other unobserved process causes both increased amygdala activity and the experience of fear."[206] Regardless of the order, the increases in the "low road" of amygdala activity create a physical and emotional response before the "high road" of conscious processing of the cortex has identified the potential threat.[207] Though both "roads" are engaged, it is the "low road" which exerts the most influence. In fact, Jensen highlights this by saying "more inputs travel from the amygdala into the cortex than the reverse," and then applies this by noting that the "design of these feedback circuits ensures that the effect of emotions will usually be greater than that of other kinds of input."[208]

---

[204] Johnston and Olson, *The Feeling Brain*, 71.

[205] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 73.

[206] Adolphs and Anders, *The Neuroscience of Emotion*, 225.

[207] Johnston and Olson, *The Feeling Brain*, 71.

[208] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 73.

This neuroscientific understanding has implications for learning. For example, Immordino-Yang and Faeth reveal that when "subjects are in a negative emotional state that the amygdala directs input to the lower, reactive brain."[209] Conversely, when subjects were in a positive emotional state, "the metabolic activity was lower in the amygdala and higher in the reflective prefrontal cortex."[210] The conclusion by Immordino-Yang is that when subjects are not experiencing fear and anxiety, then their ability to process conceptual informational in the prefrontal cortex is increased, whereas subjects who are experiencing fear and anxiety will be less efficient in processing conceptual information because of the increased amygdala activity. Jensen affirms a similar conclusion in his description of fear's impairment of learning but describes different circumstances. He notes that extremely stressful circumstances cause "blood flow decreases in various parts of the brain linked to cognition,…kills brain cells,…reduces the number of new brain cells produced,…causes atrophy of dendrites,…impairing a student's ability to sort out what's important and what's not."[211] Providing further description for the negative impact of fear and anxiety, Stephen Scoffham and Jonathan Barnes, lecturers on education and philosophy at Canterbury Christ Church University, record: "fear also prompts the amygdala to release stress hormones into the blood temporarily interrupting our thoughts…Stress responses provide the attention needed to cope with the emergency,

---

[209] Immordino-Yang and Faeth, "The Role of Emotion in Skilled Intuition in Learning," 54.

[210] Immordino-Yang and Faeth, "The Role of Emotion in Skilled Intuition in Learning," 54.

[211] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 74.

but have a significant negative effect on cognitive functioning."[212] Fear ultimately interferes with the ability to think.

Some have contrasted the negative impact of fear and anxiety and contended that some degree of fear and anxiety can actually enhance learning. Jensen notes that some studies have shown that a brief period of stress can actually enhance learning associated with explicit memories, and that subjects exposed to fear and anxiety in moderation over which "they have some control, usually turn out to be highly resilient."[213] Though brief periods of moderated stress may improve a student's performance, most classroom teachers would affirm cognitive neuroscience's conclusion that high levels of fear and anxiety actually impair it. In fact, Mona Irrmischer, Natalie Van Der Wal, Huibert Mansvelder, and Klaus Linkenkaer-Handsen, Danish neuropsychologists, have highlighted what many teachers would affirm, that stress and fear can "lead to an increase in mind wandering."[214] Jensen affirms teacher's experiences of students in fear and anxiety when he adds that the presence of corticosteroids associated with anxiety and fear reduce blood flow to the frontal lobes resulting in a lack of ability to "think on your feet."[215] Scoffham and Barnes also provide a classroom example to bring out the impact of fear and anxiety. They introduce a student with math anxiety that is exacerbated by her repeated failed attempts at answering questions correctly. When asked to come to the

---

[212] Stephen Scoffham and Jonathan Barnes, "Happiness Matters: Towards a Pedagogy of Happiness and Well-Being." *Curriculum Journal* 22, no. 4 (December 2011): 539.

[213] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 73.

[214] Mona Irrmischer, Natalie Van der Wal, Huibert Mansvelder, Klaus Linkenkaer-Hansen, "Negative Mood and Mind Wandering Increase Long-range Temporal Correlations in Attention Fluctuations," *PLOSone* 13, no. 5 (Spring 2018): 1.

[215] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 74.

board to work a problem, her brain, more driven by fear and anxiety, begins to diminish activity in the cortex that would enable her to solve the problem. "As she approaches the board…various thoughts converge to a cognitive confirmation that this is a threatening situation which reinforces her progressing fear response and disrupts her ability to concentrate on solving the math problem."[216] Fear and anxiety are not without their impact on learning.

The Impact of Happiness

Emotions have the ability to impact learning both negatively and positively. Having explored the impact on learning of negative emotions like fear and anxiety, the impact on learning of positive emotions will be discussed. Though Jensen reminds that "for some biological reason, our brain systems are set up to experience pain and sadness longer than joy,"[217] Scoffham and Barnes still contend that "positive emotions drive learning."[218] Irrmischer et. al. agree, noting that "positive moods are associated with better performance."[219] Commenting on students' ability to perform in the classroom environment, Cavanagh too affirms the importance of positive emotions such as happiness. She describes that our mood ultimately empowers us to decide how difficult a learning task will be, appraise whether one has the necessary skills to accomplish it, evaluate how much effort will need to be employed, and analyze whether one has

---

[216] Scoffham and Barnes, "Happiness Matters," 539.

[217] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 76.

[218] Scoffham and Barnes, "Happiness Matters," 541.

[219] Irrmischer, Van der Wal, Mansvelder, Linkenkaer-Hansen, "Negative Mood and Mind Wandering Increase Long-range Temporal Correlations in Attention Fluctuations," 1.

actually done enough. She concludes, "those in positive moods will be more optimistic about the difficulty of their skill level, the required effort, and will persist longer than people in negative moods."[220] Describing additional dynamics that happiness promotes in learning, Scoffham and Barnes summarize "the role of happiness: "exploration, imagination, inquisitiveness, playfulness, and the ability to make relationship all appear to be enhanced."[221] Ultimately, happiness and other positive emotions have a positive impact on learning.

Cognitive neuroscience confirms that much of happiness's impact is related to the release of chemicals affecting the prefrontal cortex, associated with attention and organization. When people recall happy episodes from their life, activity in this prefrontal cortex increases considerably, while sad recollections result in a deactivation of this area.[222] The reason for this activation may have to do with the release of hormones and neurotransmitters. Sousa describes how happiness "causes the release of endorphins in the blood…These endorphins stimulate the brain's frontal lobe, thereby increasing the degree of focus and amount of attention.[223]" In addition to the endorphins, high levels of dopamine are released when happiness is present. Eric Jensen explains how high levels of dopamine are associated with increased performance in the brain's executive functioning, the prefrontal cortex. When a person is happy, dopamine surges and creates a greater capacity for recognizing salient information, while suppressing information that is

---

[220] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 45.

[221] Scoffham and Barnes, "Happiness Matters," 540.

[222] Scoffham and Barnes, "Happiness Matters," 540.

[223] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 73.

irrelevant. He concludes by noting: "this frontal lobe system contributes heavily to school success, because it is associated with memory, decision making, and judgment functions."[224] The emotion of happiness is integral to successful learning.

How Empathy is Supported According to Cognitive Neuroscience

Given that the purpose of this study is to explore how preachers appeal to emotions to improve recall, the place of empathy according to cognitive neuroscience is examined. Amy Caplan, associate professor of Philosophy at California State University-Fullerton, defines empathy as that "feeling or caring for, being emotionally moved by, imagining oneself in, or being in another's situation."[225] Empathy allows one to be engaged in the emotion of another. Adolphs and Anders explain the phases of this emotional engagement process: "you first need to orient toward and attend to specific sensory cues…Once you have noticed the cues, they are processed further and can be categorized into an emotion category. Then you typically think more about why the person might be feeling the way that they do, the causes and explanations."[226] Providing a cognitive neuroscientific understanding of this process, they then describe what occurs in the brain: "the amygdala is activated in association with the rapid detection of salient

---

[224] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 76.

[225] Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie. *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

[226] Adolphs and Anders, *The Neuroscience of Emotion,* 257.

cues."[227] This corresponds to the orienting function of empathy. They continue by describing the categorization process: "information about biological motion that is relevant to an emotion is processed in the superior temporal sulcus, from which conceptual and lexical knowledge about the emotion category can be retrieved."[228] Finally, causation is considered, as "the most complex causal attribution to explain why the person whose face we are viewing is behaving the way that they are, and why they have the emotion we have categorized, involves specific regions in the prefrontal cortex."[229] As a result, one is able to engage in emotional empathy towards another.

Cognitive neuroscientists have also analyzed the concept of empathy through the study of mirror neurons. This insight into empathy was first attributed to the physical rather than emotional. In fact, cognitive neuroscientists first noted that neural activity in the brain would increase in an area associated with a certain movement that a subject was merely observing.[230] In a now prominent experiment on monkeys, neuroscientists learned that neural networks in the brain were activated merely at the observation of an action being performed by another. The experiment observed monkeys' brain activity while performing of a mundane task like reaching for food. David Hogue, professor of Pastoral Theology and Counseling at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, describes: "as the monkey sat quietly between trials a lab worker reached for one of the peanuts on the table…to the surprise of the experimenters, amplifiers blared out the rapid firing of the

---

[227] Adolphs and Anders, *The Neuroscience of Emotion,* 257.

[228] Adolphs and Anders, *The Neuroscience of Emotion,* 258.

[229] Adolphs and Anders, *The Neuroscience of Emotion,* 258.

[230] Barrett, *How Emotions are Made,* 71.

same neuron that had fired when the monkey was grasping the morsel, even though the monkey had not moved."[231] Though the monkey had not moved, his brain registered activity as if he, himself, had performed the movement. Hence, the term mirror neurons, as the neurons in the monkey's brain mirrored and mimicked the brain activity of the observed behavior.

The concept of mirror neurons is also applied to the emotional realm. After all, the mirroring of observed behavior was actually the mirroring of an experience. Even the emotions of others could be experienced, and the mirror neurons be activated.[232] Cavanagh notes that given the reality that humans are social beings, that they are, in fact, apt to perceive and to acquire the emotions of those surrounding them.[233] Immordino-Yang further explains this dynamic: "watching other people's actions and inferring their emotions recruits some of the same neural systems involved in planning and carrying out those actions in one's self."[234] Just as observing the physical actions recruited some of the same neural systems, so too emotions could recruit some of the same neural systems. Johnston and Olson reaffirm this dynamic but apply a cognitive neuroscientific understanding specifically to empathizing with the pain of others, "the overlap in neural activation of regions activated in subjective pain and when observing a loved one's distress is a form of 'neural resonance' that may undergird the ability to empathize with

---

[231] David Hogue, "Brain Matters: Neuroscience, Empathy, and Pastoral Theology," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 33.

[232] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 24.

[233] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 46.

[234] Immordino-Yang, *Emotions, Learning and the Brain,* 87.

other people's distress."[235] This cognitive neuroscientific understanding of empathy is described by Cavanagh simply as an "emotional contagion."[236] The emotions of one are contagious, and the evidence of the contagion emerges in a neuroscientific manifestation in the brain.

Summary of Cognitive Neuroscience and Emotions

The purpose of this study is to explore how preachers appeal to emotion to improve congregant sermon impact in a way that correlates with neuroscience findings. Given that the stated task is to note how cognitive neuroscience affirms an appeal to the emotions, this section explored a cognitive neuroscientific foundation of emotion's impact on the brain.

The first section of this literature review sought to examine how emotions are viewed by cognitive neuroscience. Cognitive neuroscience has affirmed the importance of emotions in learning. Recent developments in the field have shown that emotions are an integral part of the learning process and should not be avoided. In order to better understand the neuroscience behind this section, the landscape of the emotional brain was surveyed. Specifically, two areas of the brain are generally highlighted as it relates to emotion. The first portion is the cortex which is responsible for the conscious processing of information. The second portion of the brain is known as the limbic system and

---

[235] Johnston and Olson, *The Feeling Brain,* 166.

[236] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 48.

governs the physical and hormonal reactions associated with emotion. Having surveyed the landscape of the emotional brain, a brief description of the ever-evolving understanding of emotions was covered. In the past, the emotions were viewed as functioning independently and merely reactively. However, emerging neuroscientific studies reveal an integrated brain which connects both the cortex and the limbic system. In addition, these studies have also noted that the emotional system of the brain functions predictively, as well as reactively.

The second section of this literature review sought to understand how emotions impact learning. Two of the primary aspects of learning are attention and memory. Cognitive neuroscience has confirmed that the brain does not encode all of the information in the surrounding environment. Rather, only the information that is particularly noteworthy becomes the subject of the brain's attention. Emotion plays a key role in focusing the brain on certain information. Emotion not only directs attention, but it also enhances the consolidation of memories. Having regarded how emotions in general impact attention and recall specifically, the focus shifted to how the specific emotions of fear and happiness impact learning in general. Cognitive neuroscience confirms that intense fear and anxiety actually negatively impacts the neurobiological functioning of the brain, which in turn impacts learning. Though studies have shown that brief and moderate fear and anxiety can at times encourage learning and resilience, they generally impair learning. Happiness, on the other hand, has been shown to improve student learning as certain neurobiological processes are enhanced.

The final section of the review noted how empathy is supported according to cognitive neuroscience. Empathy was referred to as that ability of a person to be engaged

in the emotion of another. Given that this study explores a preacher's appeal to emotions, and how the previous literature review encouraged a preacher's own emotional engagement in order to move the congregation emotionally, a cognitive neuroscientific study of empathy seemed warranted. Neuroscience has confirmed that neurobiologically, certain neurons are activated in the brains of subjects who merely observe the actions of others. These observations activate neural networks in the brains of the observer, despite their lack of actual movement. This mirroring of neural networks has been confirmed to occur, not only regarding physical behavior, but also in observations of emotion among others.

The Doctrine of Illumination

The examination of what literature offers in the area of cognitive neuroscience is now followed by a focus on the doctrine of illumination. The first section works toward a definition of illumination by introducing the doctrine, reviewing various definitions offered, and surveying the doctrine historically. The second section seeks to distinguish illumination. Here, illumination will first be distinguished from inspiration, but will then be followed by a distinguishing between the different types of illumination theologians identify. The third section seeks to clarify the doctrine of illumination by revealing Biblical texts supporting the position, but chiefly exploring the different ways that one of the Biblical texts, namely 1 Corinthians 2, has been understood. The fourth section seeks to encourage illumination by examining the role of the Holy Spirit; in addition, practical aids as well as cautions will be surveyed.

Defining Illumination

In order to comprehend the doctrine of illumination, the various definitions of illumination are explored. A brief introduction to illumination is followed by a survey of definitions and various theologians' understanding throughout history.

Introducing Illumination

M.X. Seamen, pastor-theologian and church planter, notes: "the doctrine of illumination is often misunderstood due to its apparently enigmatic nature."[237] Seamen's comment highlights the very need for an exploration of the doctrine of illumination. Despite various theologians' attempts to nuance it in distinct ways, some like Jeffrey Crotts, pastor and author of *Illuminated Preaching,* would express dissatisfaction with the available material, seeing that "much of what was written merely scratched the surface."[238] Crotts affirms the implications of Seamen's comments, that an exploration of the doctrine of illumination is a necessary venture.

Perhaps one reason for the lack of extensive material regarding illumination is due to its relationship to the Holy Spirit. There is a certain mystery surrounding illumination because of the Spirit's involvement in the process. Highlighting this reality, Greg Heisler, Johnny Hunt Chair of Expository Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, explains: "that studying the illumination of the Spirit defies objective or empirical study. No amount of verifiable evidence or objective testing can 'prove' that

---

[237] M.X. Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation: The Holy Spirit's Role in Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 4.

[238] Jeffrey Crotts, *Illuminated Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Vital Role in Unveiling His Word, The Bible* (Leominster, England: Day One: 2010), 14.

the Spirit's illumination has taken place in the heart and mind of the Biblical interpreter."[239] Much of the confusion that occurs in discussions on illumination may be a result of the perceived subjectivity of the Spirit's role. Seamen supports this very notion when he avers, "the apparent subjectivity of the Holy Spirit's work, especially in regard to the doctrine of illumination, has exiled this doctrine to a place of solitude."[240] Though the subjectivity of the Spirit may be difficult to quantify, that reality does not dismiss the need for scholars and preachers alike to be transformed by the Spirit's work in illumination.[241] In fact, the Spirit's work in illumination should be embraced even in its mystery, as it ultimately reduces the pressure on preachers because they recognize that "it is up to the Holy Spirit to open people's spiritual eyes (illumine) to the truths presented in the sermon."[242] Note that it is the person who is illumined and not the text.[243]

Defining Illumination

Though the Holy Spirit's subjective role in illumination does make the application of the doctrine mysterious in application, a clear definition can serve to demystify the doctrine in theory. Generally, illumination "refers to the ways in which the operation of creaturely intelligence is caused, preserved and directed by divine light, whose radiance

---

[239] Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 39.

[240] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 165.

[241] Richard E. Averbeck, "God, People, and the Bible: The Relationship Between Illumination and Biblical Scholarship," in *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit: An Investigation in the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today,* ed. Daniel B. Wallace and James Sawyer eds. (Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), 137.

[242] Crotts, *Illuminated Preaching,* 12.

[243] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 25.

makes creatures to know. That light is what enables the soul to understand."[244] One hears in that definition a reference to light, which is anticipated in the use of the word illumination. The light serves to enable the soul to understand. What perhaps needs to have more light shone is the meaning of the word soul.

Shedding light on the meaning of the soul as it relates to this doctrine, some have defined illumination "as the opening of the heart and mind to receive and apprehend divinely revealed scriptural truth."[245] Explicit in this definition is the expression that both the heart and the mind are engaged. There is a cognitive (mind) understanding of the authors' intent by examining the words that they used, but there is also an emotional and volitional (heart) response to the meaning of the text.[246] Affirming the Holy Spirit's role in illumination of the mind and heart, Greg Heisler begins his definition of illumination thus: "the process whereby the Holy Spirit so impresses, convinces, and convicts the believer to the truthfulness and significance of the author's intended meaning in the text."[247] One hears in this definition an emphasis on the mind wherein the reader embraces the truth being imparted by the original author. Heisler continues however and describes the effect of such an embracing with the mind, "so that a change in action, attitude or belief occurs, resulting in a more transformed spirit-filled life."[248] Here, the

---

[244] John Webster, "Illumination," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 325.

[245] Rob Ventura, "The Holy Spirit and the Preacher of God," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (2017): 306.

[246] Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 43.

[247] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 43.

[248] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 43.

result of the mind understanding is that transformation occurs, such that the heart's motive and will responds.

Historical Context for Illumination

The Protestant Reformation greatly influenced the development of illumination. Crotts informs: "One of the heart cries of the Protestant Reformation was the slogan post tenebras lux: after darkness, light. This light was the spiritual light of illumination believers received from God's word."[249] After the darkness of centuries with little emphasis on God's word, the light of the Spirit illumining believers had dawned. Not only was an emphasis placed upon the importance of God's word, but an emphasis on the believer's comprehension was stressed. This Reformation emphasis on illumination was continued through Lutheran Pietism. In fact, Douglas Kennard, Professor of New Testament, would argue that the contemporary evangelical views of illumination emerged through Lutheran Pieitism, an offspring of the Reformation.[250] This influence by pietism emphasized not only the inspiration of the word of God by the Holy Spirit, but also emphasized the inspiration of the believer by the Holy Spirit.

Various Protestant Reformers emphasized the doctrine of illumination. Jean Calvin, Protestant Reformer, used the term "enlightenment" and "the internal testimony

---

[249] Crotts, *Illuminated Preaching,* 21.

[250] Douglas Kennard, "Evangelical Views on Illumination of Scripture and Critique," *JETS* 49, no. 4 (Dec 2006): 797.

of the Spirit" to describe the Spirit's role in illumining the minds of believers.[251] He stressed that this enlightenment occurs through the "medium of verbal testimony where a believer's blind eyes of the spirit are opened and divine realities come to be recognized and embraced for what they are."[252] Apart from the Spirit illumining the mind, men remained blind and divine truths were unclear. Reinforcing Calvin, John Owen, English theologian, affirms that illumination is essential to truly comprehend not only the truth of God's word but the very mind of God. The illumination of God's Spirit is "necessary unto their discerning and apprehending aright the mind of God in his word and the understanding of the mysteries of heavenly truth contained therein."[253] There is no way to apprehend rightly apart from the Spirit's illumination. Jonathan Edwards stressed this understanding of the mysteries of the heavenly truth as sensing the Lord's Holy Beauty, acknowledging that apart from illumination, "he may not have the least degree of that spiritual sense of the holy beauty of the divine things that has been spoken of and may see nothing of this kind of glory…in scripture."[254] The defining heart cry of illumination from God's word associated with the Reformation reverberated through history. To avoid illumination's inclusion was to remain in darkness.

---

[251] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 80.

[252] J.I. Packer, "Calvin the Theologian," in *John Calvin: A Collection of Essays*, ed. G.E. Duffield (London: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), 166.

[253] Owen, "The Reason of Faith," 4:124.

[254] Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1746; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1986), 204.

In an effort to avoid confusion about the doctrine of illumination, this section distinguishes the difference between inspiration and illumination. In addition, the various types of illumination are surveyed.

Distinguishing between Inspiration and Illumination

Because the Holy Spirit is involved in both inspiration and illumination, the two doctrines are distinguished. Sproul defines the two doctrines thus: "inspiration concerns the role of the Spirit in initiating and superintending Word revelation…while illumination concerns the Spirit's work in assisting the reader to achieve clarity in understanding the content of the word."[255] Sproul clarifies that there would be no word of God apart from the inspiration of the Spirit, but there would be no understanding apart from the illumination of the Spirit. The Spirit is heavily involved in both. In inspiration, the Spirit acts as the author of the scripture and in illumination, he acts as the interpreter.[256] Moreover, the continuing role of the Holy Spirit should be highlighted. There is no continuing work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to inspiration as "inspiration is a completed process that guaranteed the truthfulness of the Bible by the Spirit's superintending."[257] Conversely, illumination is a continuing work of the Holy Spirit as he persists in the ongoing process of bringing understanding to the meaning of the text.

---

[255] R.C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," in *Inerrancy* ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 337.

[256] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 22.

[257] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 41.

Though the doctrines of illumination and inspiration are to be distinguished, they do complement one another. Inspiration, of course, only applies to the original authors, as Voorwinde reminds: "Only the Bible writers were inspired. Every Christian can be illumined."[258] However, Fred H. Klooster, Systematic Professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, argues that despite those distinctions, that inspiration is akin to illumination, as "just as the biblical writer used his own talent and investigation so the biblical interpreter must read and study and struggle to understand the biblical text."[259] In so doing, the biblical interpreter understands the text in a way that is commensurate with the point the biblical writer intended to communicate. Yet, in order for the biblical interpreter to begin their work and to be illumined, they must be fully convinced that the text in which they work is truly the inspired word of God. Greg Heisler explains: "if we are not convinced that the text is inspired by the Spirit and therefore trustworthy, then we will not receive the illumination offered by the same Holy Spirit who inspired the text to begin with."[260] Though the doctrines of illumination and inspiration are to be distinguished, embracing the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiration ultimately encourages the role of the Holy Spirit in illumination.

---

[258] Stephen Voorwinde, "Illumination Re-Examined," *Vox Reformata* 77, no. 3 (July 2012): 29.

[259] Fred H. Klooster, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process: The Relation of The Holy Spirit's Illumination to Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from the ICBI Summit,* ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 460.

[260] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 40.

Distinguishing the Types of Illumination

Theologian M.X. Seamen distinguishes between two types of illumination: initial, and progressive illumination.[261] Initial illumination refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in "regeneration which brings about a radical redirection that manifests itself in repentance and faith."[262] Theologians generally classify this doctrine as conversion;[263] however, it warrants the identification of illumination because it is the initial stage in which the gospel message is brought to light and understood.[264] Theologian Graeme Goldsworthy affirms this very concept which he records that "the salvation event is a radical hermeneutical alignment that reorients the regenerate person's heart and mind, such that he is primed for proper biblical interpretation."[265] One hears in Goldsworthy's description a reference to an engagement of both heart and mind which fits with the definition of illumination offered in the first section of this literature review. The first time in which the Holy Spirit works to bring understanding to both the mind and heart of a person is at conversion, and as such is recognized as initial illumination.

The second type of illumination is progressive illumination. It is defined as the "continuing act of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer that enables the regenerate to understand the text."[266] Others refer to this aspect of illumination as conviction. [267]

---

[261] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 5,

[262] Klooster, "The Role of the Holy Spirit," 457.

[263] Crotts, *Illuminated Preaching,* 15.

[264] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 55.

[265] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010), 308.

[266] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 83.

[267] Crotts, *Illuminated Preaching,* 15.

Despite the term used, Seamen notes that when the term illumination is used, it generally refers to this type, progressive illumination. Given the space provided towards an understanding of illumination in the first and third sections of this literature review, no further description will be provided.

One final distinction regarding illumination, transformative illumination, will now be explored. Note that transformative illumination is not distinguished as a third type of illumination that is distinct from initial and progressive illumination. Rather, transformative illumination is "a framework for understanding the doctrine of illumination as a whole…it is recognized that the Spirit's illumination may aid the interpreter in understanding the interpretation but seldom is this understanding conveyed as a transformative work in the heart and life."[268] Transformative illumination is an attempt to understand the end of illumination: to experience an exchange with the Holy Spirit that is not informational but transformational.[269] Transformative illumination is ultimately a synthesis of the biblical teaching on illumination.[270] It stresses the importance of a life lived by the Spirit, wherein one's mind is renewed, so that they are able to bear spiritual fruit, for the "expressed purpose of being progressively and divinely changed."[271] Transformative illumination reminds that the intent of illumination in both

---

[268] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 5.

[269] David J. McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination: an alternative to the Fuller-Erickson Dialogue," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154, no. 613 (Jan 1997): 103.

[270] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 127.

[271] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 156.

mind and heart, both initially and progressively, is ultimately for the soul to be transformed "after the image of its creator."[272]

Clarifying Illumination

In the previous sections, the doctrine of illumination was defined as "the way in which the operation of creaturely intelligence is caused, preserved and directed by divine light, whose radiance makes creatures to know."[273] The definition raises as many questions as it answers. What type of creature is being referenced, regenerate or unregenerate? Moreover, what is meant by the word know? In an effort to clarify illumination, a brief overview of the scriptural support of illumination will be surveyed, followed by an attempt to understand the natural man of 1 Corinthians 2:14. As a result, insight into the understanding of the spiritual man will be pursued.

Scriptural Support for Illumination

It has been said that "illumination spans scripture."[274] Though it is conceded that the doctrine of illumination is more broadly evidenced in the New Testament, the Old Testament is not without its witness.[275] Psalm 119[276] specifically evidences the doctrine of illumination. In Psalm 119:18, the Psalmist asks, "open my eyes, that I may behold

---

[272] Colossians 3:10

[273] Webster, "Illumination," 325

[274] Crotts, *Illuminated Preaching,* 14.

[275] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 84.

[276] The following Psalms also help shape one's understanding of the doctrine of illumination: Psalms 73, 97-100, 103-105, 130, 144, 160, and 169.

wondrous things out of your law." Though there is no mention of light, the implication is that his sight is obstructed and the psalmist "requires the illumination of the divine in order to behold the truths of the word of God."[277] Several verses later the Psalmist declares in Psalm 119:34: "give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart." One commentator notes: "the attitude of the speaker reveals that he senses that there are hidden depths to God's revelation that cannot be searched out by man without divine aid."[278] Again, no mention of the word light, but the psalmist reveals that the truths of God cannot be explored apart from assistance by the Holy Spirit. In addition to the Psalms, Ezekiel highlights aspects of the doctrine of illumination. In both Ezekiel 11:19-20 and 36:26-27, there is reference to the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing understanding, as well as transformation. As Seamen summarizes, "the psalmist connects obedience to God's word with an understanding of God's word, and this understanding is not arrived at apart from divine aid."[279] Both the passages from the Psalms and Ezekiel reveal that there is little hope for proper understanding without the illuminating light of the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament also serves to provide understanding towards the doctrine of illumination. Passages such as Luke 24:45 hint at the divine aid offered through illumination: "then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." Illumination, in essence, becomes a constant and continual Emmaus Road experience for believers, as their minds are opened to understand the scriptures. Two passages in John also help shed

---

[277] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 86.

[278] H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 831.

[279] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 91.

light on the doctrine of illumination. In John 14:26 Jesus informs his disciples of the Spirit's enlightening role, "but the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Apart from the Spirit, there is no teaching, but as is the case with illumination, "the product of the Holy Spirit's teaching and illuminating activity in the life of the believer is understanding."[280] In addition, John 16:13 notes: "when the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." Jesus is clear that the work of the Holy Spirit will help provide a "deeper understanding and fuller comprehension of the things of God."[281] The reality is that some disagree with the application of John 14 and 16 to the life of the believer, as Kennard argues that these passages are "special promises of Spirit revelation given to the eleven disciples in the upper room so that they might remember Jesus' words in the inspiration of the scriptures and they are not promises of Holy Spirit enablement to help the Christian."[282] Rejecting this idea, others like Millard Erickson, Professor of Theology, insist that "unto this end is the Holy Ghost promised to all believers."[283] If indeed this passage applies to all believers, then the understanding promised by virtue of the Holy Spirit would be the understanding that accompanies illumination.

---

[280] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 645.

[281] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 98.

[282] Kennard, "Evangelical Views on Illumination of Scripture and Critique," 799.

[283] Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 277.

Understanding the Natural Man of 1 Corinthians 2:14

A separate examination of 1 Corinthians 2:14 will now be pursued. Out of all of the Biblical support for the doctrine of illumination, the verses in "1 Corinthians 2:6-16 are commonly held to be the key texts for the doctrine of illumination."[284] Chief among this pericope is 1 Corinthians 2:14 wherein Paul states: "the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." In examining this passage in light of the doctrine of illumination, the state of the natural man is considered.[285] The natural man "belongs to the world, while the spiritual man belongs to God. The one is an unbeliever, and the other is a believer."[286] With that in mind, the text would be interpreted, the unbeliever does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. It is noted that this natural man is also different from a believer who is just operating according to the flesh. This natural man does not possess the Holy Spirit.[287]

Three characteristics of the natural man in 1 Corinthians 2:14 are identified. First, when Paul writes "the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit" he highlights that the person without the Spirit rejects the things of the Spirit, in contrast to the spiritual man who receives them.[288] Secondly, Paul notes the reason why the natural man rejects

---

[284] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 101.

[285] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 103.

[286] Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians,* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 91.

[287] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 104.

[288] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 104.

them. To the natural man, the things of the Spirit are deemed as foolishness.[289] The last thing that Paul explains in this verse is the reason behind why the natural man is unable to regard the things of the Spirit in any other way than foolish. He notes that "he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Fee summarizes, "without the Spirit they lack the one essential quality necessary for them to know God and his ways."[290] It is this final characteristic which reveals why the natural man is not able to understand the things of God, they have not been given the Spirit. To use language from the previous section, they are unable to understand the Scriptures because they do not experience progressive illumination, but it is ultimately because they have not experienced initial illumination, conversion.

Understanding the Understanding of the Spiritual Man

That the natural man is unable to understand the things of the Spirit has been established. Does that mean that the natural man is unable to understand anything about the passage? Asked from the contrasting vantage point of the believer, in what ways does the Holy Spirit encourage understanding in the spiritual person? When a believer is illumined by the Holy Spirit in the reading of Scripture, what does understanding actually entail? Two main camps have emerged regarding how the spiritual person understands when the Holy Spirit illumines. "1. The Spirit's role in interpretation is to give believers cognitive understanding of the actual intended meaning of the author, which is

---

[289] Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 116.

[290] Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," 117.

unavailable to the unbeliever."[291] Two things are emphasized in this first position. The interpretation is merely a cognitive understanding, and that understanding is not able to be grasped by the natural man. 2. "The Spirit's role is to bring about the conviction of the truthfulness, authority and significance of the Scripture for the believer."[292] Here, the understanding resonates with conviction and is only received by the believer.

Some have argued for the first position believing that the understanding of illumination is based primarily on a cognitive understanding that the Holy Spirit provides. Men like A.W. Pink, Abraham Kuyper, and Hanley Moule believe "that only through the illumination of the Holy Spirit can a text's meaning be understood because…the Spirit gives the cognitive comprehension of the text to the interpreter so he knows what the passage means."[293] Erickson reinforces that understanding when he writes "it appears that the Apostle Paul is not saying that the unspiritual person understands but does not accept the things of God; rather, he does not accept because of his lack of understanding."[294] He states, in essence, there is a limit to certain exegetical and hermeneutical methods. The natural man is unable to attain to the true cognitive understanding of the text because he lacks the Spirit. The spiritual man, on the other hand, as a result of the illumination of the Spirit is able to attain to a true cognitive understanding of the text.

---

[291] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 45.

[292] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 45.

[293] Heisler, *Spirit-Led preaching*, 46.

[294] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 120.

Others have argued, however, that the notion of an unbeliever being unable to attain a cognitive understanding of the Scripture is overstated. Walter Kaiser Jr., Professor of Old Testament, argues, "it is not as if there were two logics and two hermeneutics in the world, one natural and the other spiritual."[295] Indeed, believers and unbelievers alike utilize the same lexical-historical methods; they need only both be "concerned about the historical context and the literary structure of the passage being studied."[296] The illumination of the Spirit is not necessary to attain a cognitive understanding of the text; that can be accomplished through proper hermeneutical preparation and study.[297] If the Spirit being needed to cognitively understand were the case, Kennard asks, why are there such superior non-Christian commentaries?[298] The reality is that the natural man is able to understand the concepts referenced in the Scripture. What he cannot understand, that a believer illumined by the Spirit is able to, is "the significance of that meaning in spiritual terms."[299]

The distinction between the two camps regarding the natural man's ability to understand the scripture highlights the difference between a notional knowledge and an experiential knowledge. Heisler appeals to the Greek word used for "understand" in 1 Corinthians 2:14, and he explains that it "carries the connotation of understanding

---

[295] Walter Kaiser Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy* ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 123.

[296] McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination," 102.

[297] McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination," 95.

[298] Kennard, "Evangelical Views on Illumination of Scripture and Critique," 804.

[299] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation*, 107.

something by experience, not cognition or 'mind-only' understanding."[300] The natural man's understanding in 1 Corinthians 2:14 is more in reference to his experiential understanding of the things of the Spirit, not the cognitive. Kaiser distinguishes this experiential understanding and cognitive understanding by the use of a colloquial phrase, "buying it." He notes that there are those who can understand Scripture so well that they can teach it, but they do not necessarily "buy it" such that they are transformed by it.[301] One can teach a notional understanding, but may struggle to teach an experiential one. Bernard Ramm, Systematic Theology Professor, further illustrates this distinction. He asks how a man would read a love letter from his lover if they spoke different languages. It would require him to first take out his dictionary and translate it word for word. He would have to first possess a notional understanding of the love letter. However, after translation he would relax and have an experiential understanding wherein he basks in the love of another and not just the words on the page.[302] The natural man of 1 Corinthians 2:14 can translate the words of Scripture, but they cannot receive the experience of the love letter of Scripture. Conversely, the spiritual person who is illumined by the Holy Spirit understands the things of the Spirit not just notionally, but experientially.

---

[300] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 46.

[301] Kaiser Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," 123.

[302] Bernard Ramm, *Rapping About the Spirit* (Waco, TX: Word, 1974), 85.

Having clarified illumination, this section seeks to explore how illumination is encouraged. This section begins by highlighting the Holy Spirit's role in illumination. Following this highlighting of the divine role in illumination, a highlighting of the human role in illumination takes place. This section concludes with a few cautions to consider in regards to illumination.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Illumination

No understanding of the doctrine of illumination is complete apart from a "meditation on the economy of the Spirit."[303] Illumination is not possible apart from the working of the Holy Spirit. In fact, there is no way to properly interpret God's word apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit.[304] This is in part grounded in the very nature of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit "is in himself infinite wisdom, light, and radiance."[305] Webster highlights that the Holy Spirit does not only produce wisdom, but that he is wisdom. He does not only give light, but he is light and radiance. Illumination flows from his nature.

Illumination is said to be grounded in the nature of the Holy Spirit, but why is it necessary that the reader be illumined? Answering this question, Heisler reminds that it is because of the depravity that still remains in the minds of men. He notes that the

---

[303] Webster, "Illumination," 328.

[304] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 106.

[305] Webster, "Illumination," 330.

human mind is clouded "by sin, doubt, and disobedience."[306] The Holy Spirit is necessary to lead past that depravity into understanding. Affirming this proposition of the Spirit's necessity, Seamen refers to depravity as the "darkened heart of the reader."[307] He clarifies as well by noting that the problem is within the reader's blindness and dullness and is not due to any lack of clarity in the scripture. McKinley explains what the Spirit must overcome when he affirms the personal prejudices that dwell within the reader. These personal prejudices interfere with any understanding of the Scripture. The Spirit in illumination therefore helps overcome these prejudices enabling the person "to accept the truth and understand Scripture genuinely and experientially."[308]

Though the mind of man is depraved, the Holy Spirit works to provide meaning to the truth that is garnered through human reason. As examined in other sections, some understanding of the text can be gained through hermeneutics and exegesis. Clarifying, McKinley affirms that the human mind can reason but ultimately "is subservient to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit."[309] Describing the relationship between the human mind and the Spirit's work differently, Webster reminds, "the Spirit works not by circumventing, but by arousing and actuating human intelligence."[310] Whereas McKinley notes the hierarchy of the Spirit over human reason, Webster identifies the synergy of the

---

[306] Heisler, "Spirit-Led Preaching," 47.

[307] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 27.

[308] McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination," 99.

[309] McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination," 99.

[310] Webster, "Illumination," 337.

Spirit's role with reason. What principles the mind garners, the Spirit works to induce a greater understanding and experience of from the text.

Practical Considerations to Encourage Illumination

Given that the doctrine of illumination is so tied to the Holy Spirit, is there anything that the reader can do to encourage its practice? Though there may not be an exact formula to ensure that illumination takes place, there are healthy practices that may encourage the Spirit's illumination of the believer.[311]

First, the role of prayer and meditation is emphasized. Indeed, Heisler urges prayer and meditation to sharpen the believer's receptivity to the Holy Spirit, "a direct correlation exists between the Spirit's illuminating ministry of the Scripture and the spiritual temperature of our hearts as believers. That is why we must persevere in the spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation."[312] The prayer offered is for the Holy Spirit to assist the reader in understanding and experiencing the text.[313] There is a certain subjective aspect to this practice, however, it should not be divorced from the "biblical interpretation anchored in authorial intent."[314] In fact, a prayerful reading of the text is performed that seeks the Holy Spirit's assistance to help discern the Biblical text. Identifying this prayerful reading as meditation, Bruce Shields, Professor of Christian Studies, encourages the slow, contemplative and prayerful reading of the Scripture and

---

[311] Crotts, *Illuminated Preaching,* 99.

[312] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 47.

[313] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 167.

[314] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 39.

notes, “as we begin praying our way through the Bible we will be looking not just for information but for the advocacy of the Holy Spirit.”[315]

The need for community in encouraging illumination is also mentioned. Though “illumination and interpretation is accomplished mainly through prayer, it should be noted that this is most effectively accomplished in the body of Christ.”[316] Few may consider the church community as essential to a believer being illumined; however, Seamen recognizes the importance of the body of Christ in the proper understanding and experiencing of the text. Indeed, he notes that one’s ability to understand the scriptures is directly proportional to the discipleship that takes place within the community of believers.[317] The community, he notes, helps to safeguard from an improper interpretation and understanding. Affirming the community’s role as a safeguard to proper understanding as well, McKinley emphasizes a balance between the personal and the corporate interpretation. To help ensure that interpretations resulting from illumination are not merely subjective, members of the community submit their understanding to other believers.[318] The Holy Spirit’s work of illumination and understanding is encouraged as believers employ both prayer and meditation, while they engage in the community of believers.

---

[315] Bruce E. Shields, “Preaching and the Vocabulary of the Holy Spirit,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 44.

[316] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 102.

[317] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 168.

[318] McKinley, *John Owen’s View of Illumination,”* 102.

Cautions Regarding Illumination

Given the subjective nature of illumination, some cautions are considered. A proper understanding of the doctrine of illumination avoids two ditches. Webster distinguishes one of these ditches, a "hermeneutical naturalism in which the actings of the mind, unmoved from the outside, claim sufficiency for themselves."[319] There is potential to consider illumination through the lenses of the hermeneutical process, as interpretation occurs apart from the work of the Spirit. Cautioning against this, Crotts disparages a reader's reliance on "academic minutiae," instead allowing the Holy Spirit "to sweep him up as he pores over the text."[320] Affirming Crotts' caution, Seamen admits, "the scientific study of the Scriptures has overtaken the force of the Biblical world established in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit."[321] To focus on the academic minutiae is to avoid the role of the Holy Spirit in illumination.

Webster describes the opposite ditch as an "hermeneutical immediacy in which seizure by the Spirit breaks off the exercise of intelligence and interpretation becomes rapture."[322] The caution here is an overemphasis on the role of the Spirit to the exclusion of the exegetical process. The Spirit's role in illumining the reader is indisputable. What is cautioned against is the stress on the Spirit such that a new revelation emerges.[323] Cautioning against a view that would see illumination as a new revelation, R.C. Sproul

---

[319] Webster, "Illumination," 337.

[320] Crotts, *Illluminated Preaching,* 100.

[321] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 25.

[322] Webster, "Illumination," 337.

[323] Ventura, "The Holy Spirit and the Preacher of God," 306.

denies that "any normative revelation has been given to the church by the Spirit since the close of the New Testament canon."[324] Indeed, the role of the Holy Spirit is not to reveal new truths "which went beyond those already taught by the Lord Jesus and the apostles, but of illuminating the mind and hearts that they might understand and believe the truths now registered in the Scriptures."[325] Moreover, Sproul warns of this ditch of hermeneutical immediacy, "the Spirit is not divorced from the word in such a way as to reduce revelation to an exercise in subjectivism."[326] The Holy Spirit, in fact, works consistently as he "that bears witness to the reading of Scripture is the same Spirit who was at work in the production of the scripture" such that the "witness of the one will correspond and reinforce one another."[327]

The reality is that there is some mystery accompanying the doctrine of illumination. Some may consider illumination to be a magic wand that the Holy Spirit waves over some passages to enhance understanding. Others may see it merely as some mystical moment wherein the reader sees something in a passage that no one has ever seen before.[328] As discussed in this section, some try to demystify the doctrine by equating it with hermeneutical naturalism, while others try to overly mystify by equating it with hermeneutical immediacy.[329] However, the "fact that we cannot fathom it does not

---

[324] R.C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005), 133.

[325] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 96.

[326] R.C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," *Inerrancy* ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 337.

[327] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation*, 23.

[328] Voorwinde, "Illumination Re-examined," 72.

[329] Webster, "Illumination," 337.

mean that we can understand nothing at all about it, that for our intellect it must always remain a scandal and a folly. The intellect which has been illumined is able not only to assert wisdom but to perceive it."[330]

Summary of the Holy Spirit and Illumination

The purpose of this study is to explore how preachers appeal to emotion to improve congregant sermon impact in a way that correlates with neuroscientific findings. Having sought in the two preceding literature areas to understand the homiletical emphasis on emotions as well as the cognitive neuroscientific underpinnings of emotion, this literature review area sought to understand the Holy Spirit's work of illumination. The review area on homiletics emphasized the rationale and practice of emotional appeals that would result in understanding and transformation, while the review area on cognitive neuroscience a neurobiological explanation of that understanding and transformation. This review area, however, sought to explore from a spiritual perspective how the Holy Spirit's influence upon a believer brought about understanding and transformation.

The first section sought a clear definition of the doctrine of illumination. Though several definitions were mentioned, Greg Heisler's definition ultimately emerged as "the process whereby the Holy Spirit so impresses, convinces and convicts the believer to the truthfulness and significance of the author's intended meaning in the text."[331] Aspects of this definition are reflected in various theologians' understanding of the doctrine of illumination. Reformed theologians such as Jean Calvin, John Owen, and Jonathan

---

[330] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 166.

[331] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 43.

Edwards contributed to the evangelical view of illumination, stressing the importance of the Holy Spirit in order to understand and experience the truths of Scripture.

The second section sought to distinguish illumination. First, the doctrine of illumination was distinguished from the doctrine of inspiration. Though the two doctrines are distinct, they also are akin. The same Spirit which inspired the text of the Scripture also superintends the interpretation. As such, the meaning and understanding drawn from illumination should be commensurate with the meaning of the original author who was inspired by the Holy Spirit. During this section, illumination was also distinguished in its types. Chiefly, theologians distinguish between initial and progressive illumination. Initial illumination refers to that understanding and meaning wrought by the Holy Spirit at conversion, while progressive illumination extends that same work of the Holy Spirit continually through the believer's life. One last nuance regarding a type of illumination was examined. This type, transformative illumination, is not to be considered as a third type of illumination, as much as it was a "framework for understanding the doctrine of illumination as a whole."[332] Illumination's end is ultimately transformation, that through understanding and meaning, change takes place.

The third section sought further clarification of the doctrine of illumination. First, an overview of Scriptural support occurred. The bulk of this section was spent examining the understanding of "understanding" associated with one specific verse, 1 Corinthians 2:14. In essence, two camps emerge in trying to clarify understanding as it relates to this verse. The first camp insists that illumination results in a cognitive understanding of the author's intended meaning. The second camp insists that even unbelievers can

---

[332] Seamen, *Illumination and Interpretation,* 5.

comprehend the author's intended meaning, and that illumination ultimately is about a conviction of the truth and meaning of the text. The two camps are summarized as illumination as notional versus illumination as experiential. It was concluded that any understanding of illumination must embrace both as the experiential flows as a result of the notional.

The final section aimed to consider the encouragement of illumination. An overview of the Holy Spirit's role in illumination was pursued. The Spirit ultimately must illumine due to the clouding of the human mind. Though the Holy Spirit is the primary mover in illumination, the believer also participates. In an effort to encourage illumination, prayer and meditation are to be pursued. In order to ensure a proper understanding, however, this should be done in light of the corporate community. In so doing, the reader avoids subjectivism and encourages an understanding of the text that is closer to the original author's meaning. Lastly, two ditches of illumination were surveyed. The first was an illumination that stressed only "hermeneutical naturalism" while the second was an illumination that stressed only "hermeneutical immediacy."[333] As the reader avoids these two ditches, the Holy Spirit works to bring understanding and transformation in the life of the believer.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature examined reveals that the influence of emotion cannot be overstated. The first literature review area highlighted homiletics emphasis on a preacher's appealing to emotion. There is both a motive and a method behind emotional

---

[333] Webster, "Illumination," 337.

preaching. The motive is that emotional appeals greatly influence the recall of listeners. In fact, emotion should be view complimentarily alongside reason in the recall of information and the motivation of the hearer. Specifically, it encourages a greater focus, attention, and recall, along with a motivation for greater knowledge and faithfulness. To perceive the importance of emotional preaching is pedestrian, but to practice emotional preaching is not without its challenges. Thus, an exploration of practices in emotional preaching was pursued. Any emotional appeals by preachers begin with the preacher himself being moved by the text. They must understand the Biblical mood of the text, but they must also understand his own mood as a result of the Biblical text. Only then can they employ tactics such as word choice, as well as vocal and delivery methods that will encourage emotion.

The second literature review area helped to explain the impact of emotion on a person's brain. What homileticians have encouraged regarding emotion, cognitive neuroscience is confirming. The brain is emotional and emotion impacts the brain. The brain was examined during this section to highlight both its emotional lower level regions and its cognitive cortical areas. In the past, these areas were believed to function rather independently of one another, but recent developments reveal that the two are highly integrated. This integration is vital to understanding emotions' impact on the brain. Though the brain has great capacity for attention and recall, emotion serves to heighten attention and maximize recall of given information. Specifically, the emotions of fear and happiness have been shown to have key impact in learning. There is a delicate balance to be struck regarding these emotions. Too much or too little of either may negatively influence learning.

The third literature review area sought to balance the objective physiology of cognitive neuroscience by affirming the spiritual role of the Holy Spirit in illumination. The doctrine of illumination has long been a mystery given its emphasis upon the role of the Holy Spirit. However, various Bible passages reveal that any true understanding of the Scripture will come only as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine can of course be confused as some have insisted that the Spirit gives merely a notional understanding of the text. Others argue that the Holy Spirit's role is experiential. A clear understanding of the doctrine of illumination embraces both, recognizing that the Holy Spirit moved the writers of the Scriptures in inspiration to record certain. Likewise, the Holy Spirit moves interpreters of the Scriptures via illumination to understand and experience these truths.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how a preacher appeals to emotions to impact congregants as it correlates with cognitive neuroscience findings. As Richard H. Cox, an ordained Presbyterian clergyman and Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University notes, "every preacher wonders about the effectiveness of his…sermons,"[334] and that effectiveness may be maximized as they embrace the relationship between the brain and the faith of his congregants.[335] Therefore, a qualitative study was designed to encourage preachers to consider emotion as they preach.

Why would a qualitative study be pursued instead of a quantitative study? One could argue the benefit of using emotion in preaching by appealing to empirical data. A quantitative analysis would survey a large sample of congregants and seek to determine how much content was actually recalled or how many people actually remembered the pieces of information from the sermon.[336] Though this type of quantitative analysis is permissible, a qualitative study can also be pursued. Given that the purpose of the research topic is how to communicate effectively, qualitative research analysis was used to help determine how emotion aids in the recall of sermons. Qualitative analysis seeks to gain an understanding that comes through wrestling with concepts in words, rather than

---

[334] Richard H. Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching,* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 17.

[335] Richard H. Cox, *Rewiring Your Preaching,* 70.

[336] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 5.

numbers.[337] In an effort to wrest these words from preachers, the following research questions are being proposed:

R.Q. 1: How do preachers appeal to emotion to impact congregants?

R.Q. 2: How do preachers evaluate the sermon's impact on congregants?

R.Q. 3: What obstacles hinder preachers from appealing to emotion as a homiletic method improve impact on congregants?

R.Q. 4: How does the use of emotion as a homiletical method to impact congregants correlate with neuroscience findings?

Design of the Study

The following section will further explain the importance of utilizing the qualitative method by first defining qualitative analysis and then summarizing its four key features: "process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process as inductive; and the product as richly descriptive."[338]

Van Maanen defines qualitative research as "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come

---

[337] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 6.

[338] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 15.

to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.[339]" Sharan B. Merriam succinctly summarizes Van Maanen by simply noting that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world." [340]

One of the terms the definitions share is the word, meaning. This is the first feature of qualitative analysis. Qualitative research intends to grasp the significance that participants have built in their involvement in a certain sphere. As postmodernism has emphasized people's existential understanding of reality,[341] so too qualitative analysis is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.[342] This qualitative analysis focuses on how preachers appeal to emotion to influence recall among congregants. Each participant enters into the discussion with their own experiences. These experiences differ because they have variable backgrounds, families of origins, previous church contexts, seminary experiences, homiletics professors, mentors, and examples to emulate. Qualitative analysis leverages these experiences to better understand an issue.

---

[339] John Van Maanen, "Reclaiming Qualitative Methods for Organizational Research: A Preface," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 24 (4), 520.

[340] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 15.

[341] Gene Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 16.

[342] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 15.

A second feature of qualitative analysis is that the researcher is the primary instrument. The researcher's assimilation and communication of the information garnered leads to comprehension of the phenomenon. Not only do they seek to understand the meaning that the research participants construct, but even the researchers becomes a part of the question.[343] Their experiences are given weight, just as the participants' are, and the final product is ultimately an explanation of the meaning they have constructed as a result. When the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, biases can occur.[344] However, the fact that there are biases does not negate the meaning that is constructed. Merriam notes that the biases and subjectivities actually "can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected."[345]

A third feature of qualitative analysis is the use of an inductive process. The word, inductive, is often used to describe a method of Bible interpretation wherein one makes observations, interprets them, and applies those findings to other areas of life.[346] That process of scriptural interpretation is akin to the inductive process of qualitative analysis. What Merriam describes as "researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories…from observations and intuitive understanding gleaned from being in the

---

[343] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 16.

[344] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 16.

[345] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 16.

[346] Robert M. West, *How to Study the Bible Illustrated* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2007), p. 53.

field"[347] reflects the observation, interpretation, and application process. Observations garnered through the participants' and the researcher's experience, coupled with literature from researchers and authors in various disciplines, are interpreted and processed, so as to "build toward theory."[348]

A fourth aspect of qualitative analysis is that the final product is richly descriptive. Though some process information numerically, cognitive neuroscience itself has revealed that most people more readily process information descriptively.[349] "Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned…and data in the form of quotes from documents, field notes, and participant interviews, excerpts from videotapes, electronic communication."[350] This data ultimately serves to paint a picture for readers to observe.

Participant Sample Selection

Having articulated the purpose of qualitative analysis and enumerated key features of qualitative analysis, the specifics of the participant sample is explored. A sample is to be chosen that that provides feedback on a given phenomenon, as "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning that people have constructed."[351] Given this fact, non-probability, purposive sampling was used, as this

---

[347] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 17

[348] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research, 17.*

[349] Eric Jensen, *Preaching with the Brain in Mind,* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005), p. 34.

[350] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 18

[351] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 15.

type of sampling, "is the method of choice for most qualitative research" and is "logical…to solve qualitative problems such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences."[352] The following two non-probable criteria were utilized in determining the ideal type to interview: competency in expression of emotion while preaching, and racial diversity.

Given that the research addresses sermons, the participants all display some degree of competency in preaching. All of the participants graduated from Reformed seminaries, and the majority hold doctoral degrees. The preachers share from the experience gained from over a combined 150 years of experience. This history is necessary for the preacher to examine his own craft. Moreover, given that the purpose of the study is to examine preachers' use of emotion, participants were also pursued on the basis of their reputation for appealing to emotion in their sermons.

In addition, the participants were of varied race. Two of the participants are African American, while one of the participants is Latin American. The remaining three participants are all Caucasian. This variety of races enhances the possibility for preachers in the researcher's largely reformed, Caucasian context to embrace insights and apply methods that they would not have been exposed to otherwise. Despite their race, all of those interviewed are Reformed in their soteriology and ecclesiology.

The researcher communicated with the participants via phone to establish the initial contact. Within that discussion, the researcher informed the participant of the context of the research, the type of research that was being performed, as well as the

---

[352] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 96.

time commitment for willing participants. Participants were then asked to pray about their involvement in the study. Within a week, participants were contacted via email with reiterated information regarding the type of research, along with the survey question sample. The intent for providing the survey questions was to prime the pump for participants to understand the nature of the study. Participants were asked to respond indicating their willingness to participate and suggesting potential times for the interviews to take place.

It is important to note that the sample size of six was purposeful. According to Merriam the "question of how many people to interview, how many sites to visit, or how many documents to read concerns-more likely haunts-the novice qualitative researchers."[353] The number of people to interview may not be answered as much it must be experienced, as Merriam notes that the "the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion."[354] Despite the diversity of denominations, races, and sexes, six participants were selected for the sample before a point of saturation was reached.

Data Collection

Data collection for this qualitative research project proved to be a "conversation with a purpose."[355] Consistent with the researcher's personality, interviews followed a semi-structured approach, as "either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the

---

[353] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 101.

[354] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 101.

[355] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 108.

interview is a mix of more and less structured questions."[356] All seven structured questions were field-tested with the researcher's pastoral staff before they were shared with the interviewees. Extemporaneous, probing questions were used to follow up on these structured questions to gain additional data. Given that the interview questions had been sent prior to the interview, all participants were familiar with the questions to be posed. In order to gather even non-verbal data, all interviews were conducted face-to-face.

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. Describe a time when emotions were expressed during a sermon.
2. How do you attempt to appeal to emotions in the sermon?
3. How do you think your view of emotional preaching was formed?
4. To what extent are you conscious of how the brain is impacted when the emotions are engaged in preaching?
5. What things stand in the way of you preaching with emotion?
6. How do you gauge whether congregants remember your sermon?
7. If you were teaching a homiletics class, how might you speak to your students about the use of emotion in preaching?

Data Analysis

Though the interviews took only nine hours to complete, the processing of data from the interviews required one month to complete. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed into Word documents by the researcher. With these documents in order,

---

[356] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 109.

the process of data analysis began. How does one make sense of all the data so that it has some bearing on the research question at hand? Merriam suggests the constant comparative method in which one segment of data is constantly compared to another segment of data to determine similarities and differences.[357] Merriam goes on to note: "data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category."[358] These categories ultimately enable the researcher to identify patterns and begin to formulate answers to the research question. Merriam, using a "forest-tree analogy," highlights that "the forest represents the big picture-the initial list of categories that the researcher might come up with from being immersed in the data… and the trees, or bits of data to go with the forest is the shift into the deductive mode of thought."[359]

The constant comparative method was labor intensive. After all of the interviews were completed, transcriptions of verbal interviews were produced. Each of the transcripts were then processed by the researcher as information began to group in categories. Marginal annotations were made that captured the category of the interviewee's response. These responses were then compared and contrasted multiple times with the categories that emerged from the same process of subsequent transcripts. As a result, certain categories were winnowed or merged with other categories; but an overall shape of the study emerged.

---

[357] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research, 202*.

[358] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 32.

[359] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 212.

Researcher Position

As the researcher is the interpreter of data collection, there is potential for bias, thus "it is important for researchers to deal with their own potential influences."[360] Merriam notes "that ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner."[361] Therefore, this section highlights areas in which the researcher identifies his tendency to discrimination.

Before pursuing pastoral ministry, the researcher received training in cognitive neuroscience. Working alongside teachers to employ teaching strategies that took into account the way that the brain processes information, he observed the effectiveness of encouraging instruction according to brain science. In addition, the researcher's Reformed theological position and pastoral training places a strong emphasis of the role of the Holy Spirit through the preached word, and often minimizes an emphasis on means. Coupled with this pastoral context, it should be noted that emotions have often been a struggle for the researcher. Despite the lack of emphasis on emotion in his personal context, the researcher attempted to conduct his investigation in an ethical manner.

Study Limitations

Study limitations include:

The very exploration of the topic of emotions may lend itself to limitations. Though the field of cognitive neuroscience is an objective science, emotions and their

---

[360] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research, 17.*

[361] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research,* 237.

effectiveness in recall is not always objective. Attempting to gauge and communicate emotions is a subjective experience. What the preacher may intend to communicate as happiness may only be received as frivolity, or what the preacher may intend to communicate as deep anguish may be processed as mild indifference. Another limiting factor is that the participants being sampled are given the task of gauging not only their use of emotion in the sermon, but they, too, are asked to evaluate their congregants' responses-again a subjective experience. In addition to the subjectivity of emotions, other study limitations include the participants themselves. Another limitation is that the congregations of preachers surveyed are largely above the age of thirty-five. Despite these limitations the findings of this qualitative study should not be dismissed.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore how a preacher's appeal to emotions impacts congregants that correlates with neuroscience findings. The following four research questions guided this exploration of emotional preaching correlating to cognitive neuroscience to impact the congregants:

R.Q. 1: How do preachers appeal to emotion to impact congregants?

R.Q. 2: How do preachers evaluate the sermon's impact on congregants?

R.Q. 3: What obstacles hinder preachers from appealing to emotion as a homiletic method to impact congregants?

R.Q. 4: How does the use of emotion as a homiletical method to impact congregants correlate with neuroscience findings?

This chapter provides the findings of six interviews and seeks to communicate relevant insights that pertain to the research questions stated above. The information has been organized under four headings that correspond to the four research questions. The material included under each heading has been analyzed and organized to highlight various themes, insights, and differences that emerged from the interviews.

Introductions to Participants and Context

The researcher selected six preachers to participate in the study. All names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect their identity. The six

participants varied in age from thirty-six to sixty-eight. These participants also varied in race. Two of the participants, McDonald and Thomas, are African American, while one of the participants, Stephen, is Latin American. The remaining three participants, Phil, Wes, and Roger are all Caucasian. All of the participants graduated from Reformed seminaries, and the majority hold doctoral degrees.

McDonald, the veteran of the group, has over forty years of preaching experience. He holds a Ph.D. from a prestigious evangelical seminary known for its academic rigor. He pastors in an urban setting to an established, multi-ethnic congregation in the Presbyterian denomination. Thomas has been preaching for nearly 20 years in various contexts. He also holds an advanced degree from a Reformed evangelical seminary. He, too, pastors in an urban setting to a multi-ethnic church plant of the Presbyterian denomination. Stephen is a church planter with over ten years of pastoral experience. His training at a Reformed evangelical seminary was followed by church planting in an urban context. His church plant is affiliated with the Presbyterian denomination. Phil has nearly twenty-five years of experience as a pastor in the Presbyterian denomination. He holds a Ph.D. from a Reformed evangelical seminary. He pastors a large multi-ethnic church in the suburbs of a large southern city. Wes received his MA and Ph.D. from a Reformed seminary. He has preached for the past twenty-five years in a largely suburban context. His current church plant is within the Presbyterian denomination. Lastly, Roger has been preaching for close to ten years. He pastors a Presbyterian church plant in an urban context.

Appealing to Emotions

The first research question sought to determine how preachers appeal to emotions. Included in this research question are two ways of considering this appeal. All six participants expressed the practice of appealing to their *own* emotions in the sermon preparation process, before they then appealed to the emotions of the congregants in the delivery of the sermon.

A Preacher's Appeal to His Own Emotions

McDonald stresses the importance of emotions when he states: "I wouldn't have a religion I couldn't feel." Immediately following, he notes that it is impossible for his congregation to embrace this "feeling religion" if the pastor himself has not taken the opportunity to feel the very things he communicates. Each of the six participants stressed the importance of preachers feeling in the study before they ever encouraged feeling in the pulpit.

The means through which this feeling comes to the preacher is through a quietness. Half of the participants noted that an important part of emotional preaching is the practice of quiet meditation. Stephen describes this quietness: "it's just a stillness. It's not an excited full space. For me, it's more contemplative, and still." Affirming this stillness, Roger adds that the degree to which his sermons are emotional is tied to the degree that he begins the process in quiet meditation. When that quietness and stillness is lacking it creates a lack of attunement to one's own heart: "when I'm moving too quickly, I'm not in tune with my own heart."

There was some variation in description regarding how the time of preparation would be spent. McDonald expresses that the majority of time in quiet meditation is

actually praying, “if you want to present a prepared sermon, make sure you spend time in prayer.” Stephen, on the other hand, is spent pondering beauty, “I want to think about what’s beautiful. I make sure that there’s margin for me to sit and think upon that which is beautiful.” It is this pondering of beauty that he explains “stirs his affections to the Lord.” There will be little emotion on his part if he does not spend time considering the beauty of Christ. Encouraging a similar pondering of beauty, Phil describes how his quiet meditation is spent pursuing Christ as a person. During his preparation and meditation, he tries to “press into him as if he’s my nearest and dearest friend.” Following this description he urged preachers in their preparation in that stillness to “cling to him, think of him, and conceive of him for nothing less than what he is.”

One participant explained how journaling in preparation becomes a way for him to maximize the quiet meditation. The hope ultimately is that his own emotions would be engaged in the sermon preparation as he journals: “I’ll write right before and right after where I’m at with the passage and that’s more how I’m feeling about it. I don’t write an outline, I write how I’m feeling, how the passage makes me feel, and what I’m struggling with.” In addition, Thomas notes that before he asks a single question to the congregation, he wants to wrestle through that same question in his study.

In addition to engaging their own emotions through quiet meditation in the study, all of the participants noted engaging the text responsibly led them to be emotionally engaged. Roger states that a failure to engage the text responsibly is actually “pastoral malpractice.” Insisting that the word of God properly interpreted is intended to move the hearer, both pastor and congregant, emotionally, he highlights that the “main question is what is this text saying to me?” McDonald however describes the bifurcated way in

which he answers questions of the text. He does not seek to answer the question only through the rational, but rather seeks two answers to the question:

> My emotions go on the prowl looking for ways to enter into the text in addition to the mind. Emotion is tracking alongside the mind and is saying I'm looking for something too. Rationality is saying I'm looking for a defense of this thesis. Emotion is saying I'm looking for a laugh, or a connection to my family. My cerebral side is reading about the importance of being committed and fastidious, but my emotional side was celebrating the lives of these Godly men and women.

Emotions are on the prowl alongside reason in an engagement of the text. Wes, on the other hand, notes that the emotion really flows from a proper reasoning through certain aspects of the text. Chief among these is the identification of the fallen condition focus. He warns "you haven't arrived at your fallen condition focus until you get down to the heart matter of that burden that only the gospel can be the antidote to. I can't be moved in writing a sermon until I get to the bottom of the FCF."

One of the primary ways that most of the participants noted that preachers engage the text emotionally is by immersing themselves into the story. Thomas explains that the whole time he is reading the text, he is trying to understand how the original hearers would have experienced the story: "What emotions do I have like the original audience? How do you exegete the emotion of any text unless you put yourself in the shoes of the original audience?" Wes insists that it is not just the original audience that a preacher should try to engage emotionally with; it is also the emotions of the characters in the story. "We don't need to be overly psychological. But we can ask, what's happening to Moses when he sees the burning bush. What would be going on? Why is he so afraid or so willing? What emotions do these characters feel?" Wes concludes that the reason one would seek to identify with the original audience or the characters in the story is ultimately because "you're just trying to understand how the human heart works." In

drawing parallels between the human heart of the original audience and characters, his conclusion is that the preacher's human heart will be affected as well. Phil succinctly summarizes that "we must taste from the text before our people taste from the text. In our preaching, we've got to taste in the word and the reality of the gospel, what we want our people to taste. If we don't, they won't."

A Preacher's Appeal to His Congregation's Emotions

The preacher, having engaged his own emotions privately in the study, also seeks to engage the emotions of the congregation. Comparing the preparation and preaching to a meal, McDonald quips, "I get to enjoy the meal twice; I get to enjoy it while I'm preparing it in the kitchen and I get to enjoy it while it's being served." Phil strikes a more reverent tone when describing the serving of this meal in preaching. He explains "when the preacher preaches, heaven touches earth, and the fulcrum point is the pulpit; you have a spiritual dynamic occurring, a true spiritual reality; it's different than a teacher lecturing." Stephen expresses a similar reverence for the majesty of the preaching event: "I want them to experience a God that is so big that beauty and peace flood over them." It is this dynamic which leads Phil to insist that the most emotion should come not in the preparation of the study, but in the preaching from the pulpit. It is there that a congregation experiences a "livingness of the word of God," and because of such, emotion must result. Roger encourages that preachers want "people walking away thinking, 'I have tasted and I have seen the goodness of the Lord,' and I can't help but be moved."

Every participant also noted that in order to appeal to the emotions of the hearers, the preacher must know his congregation. In fact, Wes notes that a preacher cannot engage the emotion of the hearers if he is not keenly aware of the lives of his hearers. He affirms, "you can't be a good preacher unless you're a good pastor. I'm often asking how would this make my congregation feel? How do my people tick?" Phil too describes the relationship between emotional preaching and knowing the lives of one's congregation when he instructs: "you must know the lay of your sheep's wool. You must know that what you're saying is the right medicine being applied to the right wounds." Roger, as a result, stresses that in order to preach effectively on Sunday, a pastor must be emotionally connected to his people throughout the week.

Several pastors noted the importance of visualizing their congregation as they prepared in order to ensure that their preaching would engage the hearer's emotions during the sermon. McDonald describes this visualization: "I see people's faces in my preparation. I see individuals as I'm preparing and almost forecast people's responses." This visualization comes not only during the preparation, but also during the sermon itself. Thomas notes that as a preacher stands before his congregation, he reads the faces of the congregation, and he emphasizes the truth in relation to his awareness of individual struggles.

There is some difficulty in trying to discern where your congregation is and what they are struggling with. Wes admits that he is becoming more aware of the different personalities and generations that are represented in his congregation. "New generations are struggling with things generations above me didn't. They're asking different questions. How do I, as a pastor, put them in terms that resonate with different

generations and personality types?" Thomas admits that he cannot always discern rightly the truths that will move his congregation so he stresses the importance of prayer. He notes the gospel passages that reveal that Jesus knew what a person was thinking even if they did not articulate it aloud. Thus, Thomas prays: "Lord, I do not know what they're thinking but you do…Part of my prayer is that he will speak to those things and what people are thinking."

In an effort to appeal to the emotions of the congregation, every participant stressed the importance of preachers modeling emotional responses for the congregation. McDonald emphasizes this modeling, "He's got to lead worship and preach so that they can see his passion. When he demonstrates that passion it gives them permission to explore the place of passion in their own lives. As he's very clearly adoring God, it gives them permission to adore God." McDonald stresses that there is a certain permission to emote that is granted to congregants when they observe the preacher himself emoting. Phil insists that this permission to feel is what the preacher is granting. He clarifies that the congregation "does not need to see my learning, they need to see my burning." If they can witness his burning, Phil argues, then they themselves will be more willing to give themselves over to this same passion. He follows noting that the congregation "wants to burn too, but until they see a man set on fire, they are not going to know how to do it." Comparing it to bondage, Thomas supports this argument that "by bringing my emotion in, I free them to do that too."

As an encouragement to preachers to emote, McDonald provides a helpful clarification. He states: "Your permission to emote comes from the text…If emotional permission is given in the text, then you have to be emotional." McDonald's allusion to

the text as guide for permission seeks to caution preachers who are caught up in emotionalism. The preacher is not just being emotional to give permission to the congregation. He is being guided by the text and is given permission by that text to be emotional. In so doing, says McDonald, the preacher receives permission from the text to be emotional and then grants permission to the congregation to do the same.

A preacher who is willing to grant permission to his congregation to be emotional will have some level of comfort being vulnerable before the congregation. Half of the participants used the word vulnerability specifically. Wes insists on it, "in this day and age you have to be vulnerable." McDonald describing his own vulnerability notes: "I'm pretty self-revealing in the context of worship and preaching. They know where I am. My body language and spoken words reveal to them where I am. They can see it when I stand up." It is this vulnerability which participants identified as the "permission slip" for congregants to emote.

Two participants offered further insight regarding vulnerability. Wes, though stressing the importance of vulnerability, also warned of its improper use. He notes that "you can be way overly vulnerable. You have to be really discerning about what's helpful and actually undermines you. When people start worrying about me more than about themselves, I've overdone it." In an effort to ensure that one's vulnerability is properly practiced, Wes adds: "I want my vulnerability to come from a place of confidence in the gospel." Phil, seeking to explore why vulnerability is so difficult, explains: "when you let them see your emotions, you're letting them see that which reduces you and weakens you. If something can reduce me to a place of emotional vulnerability, I'm admitting a certain weakness." Phil concludes that much of the reason that preachers struggle to be

vulnerable is because of their desire to avoid any appearance of weakness. Ironically, he says, weakness is key to people being willing to engage their own emotions.

The majority of the participants shared that there were certain rhetorical techniques that accompanied preaching that appeal to congregants' emotions. Two participants stressed that there should not be a focus on technique when it comes to appealing to emotions. McDonald, when asked what caution he would give regarding emotional appeals, referenced an overemphasis on technique: "Caution others on the danger of relying on emotional techniques. It should be natural and organic. Don't say, 'here's what I've got to do, preach louder, raise your voice, turn to your neighbor.' Don't depend on technique." Thomas also warned about what he saw as an overemphasis on technique, to the exclusion of the Holy Spirit: "there's hardly any mention at all about the work of the Holy Spirit. It's all more focused on the technique. Being Spirit-led is not tied to volume or excitement." Despite that conviction, Thomas did admit that the Spirit's leading can result in a sermon with common rhetorical characteristics like emotion, volume, and pacing.

In an attempt to focus preachers on the greater objective of preaching, McDonald insists that the goal of the sermon is to "take the congregation into a sacred moment." He notes that rhetoric and technique can not truly produce a sacred moment, but a sacred moment is often accompanied by certain rhetoric and technique. He does not deny that his own rhetoric, "I use language that is not merely cerebral because I want them to go somewhere with me." Roger also highlights the importance of certain rhetorical devices but urges that the sermon writing and preaching is not just "content creation." It is not just a preacher seeking to employ certain rhetorical methods to move the congregation. It

is a way, as he notes, for believers to engage emotionally with the text and the God of the text. Stephen particularly captures this same thought when he reminds that a sermon is not just a delivery system. A sermon "is not just a school bus that transports information from one place to another." It should be beautiful, and the use of rhetoric encourages that beauty, but rhetoric as a tool to manipulate the emotions is to be avoided.

Encouraging the use of rhetoric, Phil notes that one of the pastor's guiding principles is "I don't just want to say this, I want you to see this." Seeing "this" will encourage emotional engagement but seeing will ultimately require a use of the imagination. Phil reasons that preachers should not be so hesitant to employ the imagination to appeal to emotions given the magnificence of the word itself.

> If the word in all of its genres is so magnificent, the content, the doctrine, the tapestry, then it deserves our most imaginative prophetic efforts. We owe to the word and the congregation to appeal to the imagination in the way we expound the text and use illustrations. We must speak in terms that evoke imagery; words must of necessity evoke imagery. We need to lead people there.

Wes argues this same position when he notes that preaching that appeals to emotions both "shows and tells." He adds that emotionless preaching is caused by a lack of showing and an emphasis on only telling. The reason preachers so often avoid the showing is because "showing is time consuming. It is a lot harder than parsing Greek."

Every participant referenced some form of rhetorical device they use to help ensure that the sermon is shown and not just told. However, the dynamic that was emphasized by the majority of the participants was the creative use of words. McDonald describes this creative use of words as the preacher providing an "auditory gift." Though he admits that he is not sure how wordsmithing contributes to the emotional side of preaching, he recognizes that "the right word elevates a sentence…and it gives them an

auditory gift that people say it is delightful to listen to." Phil provided the explanation arguing that it enhances emotional engagement in the congregation because "it gives them a reason to stay with me to the end." He describes that our culture "has been raised on sitcoms that are short and contain mini-plots because people are unable to follow the overall plot of the story. Because of this dynamic, they do not know how to hold their attention to a line of logic." Beautifully worded sentences and expressions help hold their attention so that emotions can be engaged.

In addition to wordsmithing, every participant referenced the need for powerful stories and illustrations. McDonald, however, captures the importance of powerful stories and illustrations: "storytelling done well is a direct portal to the emotions if you can do it correctly." From a very practical side, he urges preachers to make sure that every sermon contains at least one powerful illustration or personal story that the congregation will be able to engage with emotionally and be able to recall later.

Thomas adds one more dimension of preaching to the congregation's emotions. He explains that there are certain practical things regarding the voice which a preacher should consider when it comes to emotional preaching. Thomas distinguishes himself from the majority of participants in that only one other participant referenced volume of speaking, as well as tone and intensity: "in emotional preaching there is to be generally speaking, more excitement, more volume, more intensity. It does depend on the passage." Thomas went on to describe how some texts he preaches at lower volumes and other texts at higher volumes. In addition, he notes that tone and intensity should be intentionally considered throughout. Phil confirms that very notion, as he speaks of the manner in which he color codes his sermon manuscript: "I color code my sermon, so that I can

glance down at the manuscript and when I see a certain color I know I should communicate in a certain way." Thomas did not reference any color-coding system regarding his manuscript, but he did reference that his sermons, consistent with his tradition's background, builds to a time of celebration at the end. "You go back to what you've already covered and reiterate the main points." This reiteration, however, is experienced as a celebration as the preceding points are connected to Jesus Christ. He confesses that both his congregation's and his own emotions "get caught up in that celebration."

Summary of Appealing to Emotions

All six participants were selected because of their competency in appealing to emotions in preaching. Of the six participants, the majority recognized that emotional preaching actually begins in the preacher's preparation in the study. It is in the study where his own emotions are first personally engaged. Most said that there would be no emotion in the congregation if the pastor did not engage his own emotions in the study. In order to do that, a quietness is encouraged in which the pastor spends time meditating on God and seeks to stir his affections for Christ. The preacher is also encouraged to engage the text by identifying the ways in which they share points in common with the original audience. They seek to insert themselves into the text, and using his imagination attempts to identify with the characters in the story. In addition to this, they attempt to understand the fallen condition focus of the text. One participant noted that this understanding will ultimately lead to emotional preaching. All of the participants would have identified that this time in the study does not seek merely a rational understanding of the text and

themselves; rather the time in the study seeks an existential and emotional understanding of the text and themselves.

In light of this preparation, the preacher is then ready to appeal to his congregation's emotions during the sermon. Most of the participants noted that it would be impossible to appeal to the congregation's emotions if the preacher was not aware of the conditions that the hearers were experiencing. It is this understanding of his congregation which will enable preachers to appeal to emotions. In addition, the majority of the participants revealed that congregants will be more likely to emote themselves if they see their pastor modeling emotion. The congregation needs permission to feel and the pastor's own emotion provides the freedom they deem necessary. Lastly, all participants referenced some manner of rhetorical devices that were used in order to appeal to the congregation's emotions. All of these devices helped to serve the purpose of showing the congregation the meaning of the text, rather than just telling them the meaning of the text. Most participants specifically stressed the importance of good stories and illustrations. A minority also stressed the importance of certain aspects of vocal volume and intensity to help encourage emotion in the congregation. Through these approaches, a preacher appeals to the emotions of himself and his congregation.

Measuring the Impact of a Sermon

The second research question sought to measure the impact of a sermon that appealed to the emotions. After all, if the preacher is attempting to appeal to the emotions of the hearers, then they might also desire to evaluate his effectiveness. Three broad categories of responses emerged in the analysis of the data, as participants: 1. minimized

the importance of measuring, 2. articulated how they measured during the sermon, and 3. explained how they measured after the sermon was over.

Minimizing the Measuring

Half of the participants appeared to minimize the importance of measuring the impact of the sermon. McDonald, in fact, expressed his reluctance: "I will simply say, I leave it to the Holy Spirit." His assessment was that preachers have a certain privilege to "handle the holy," and that they cannot understand or assess their preaching's effectiveness. The majority of the participants also noted that it is always hard to get a read on the effectiveness and impact of the sermon. This majority all echoed a common sentiment that Roger did: "sometimes the sermons I think I bombed, I end up getting the most feedback on, and the ones I think I nailed, I get nothing."

Though Stephen did later provide one aspect of measuring that he experiences, he initially commented "I have no mechanism to ensure any of this (emotional preaching's impact) is happening. I can only account for myself." Rather than seeking to assess his impact, Stephen notes that his focus remains on himself, as he seeks to engage emotionally with the sermon, trusting that God will act to "translate and improve my sermons." Within this same train of thought, Stephen expounds: "sermons are weird things. Some dude talks at you for 30 mins straight, and no matter my pedagogical approach, they're probably not going to remember it." Though Stephen did not dismiss the question of impact, he clarified that the impact is hard to gauge because ultimately it is experienced over the course of years. "In the overall arch of the year, is my preaching leading them to greater faithfulness and holiness?" Wes provides one last word of

comfort to preachers seeking to measure the impact of their sermons. “If I’m preaching the gospel, I cannot fail…there can be no bombs, if the gospel is being preached.”

Measuring In the Moment

Half of the participants recognized that they measure the impact of an emotional sermon in real time as it is being delivered. These same participants described a common characteristic that reveals to them that the emotions of hearers are being engaged: “arrestment.” Stephen highlighted this arrestment as the only measure of emotional impact that he sees. “In that particular moment, people listen differently. They look at you differently. When people are arrested, you can sense that something different is happening right now. They are arrested because they know something’s different.” McDonald captures this same arrestment when describing the time he was sharing an illustration regarding Christ’s work on the cross, “no one moved for everyone knew that God had already served his sentence.”

Commenting on the importance of measuring the impact of an emotional sermon during its preaching, Wes noted that it requires a preacher to rely on intuition. An effective emotional preacher knows his congregation and in the preaching moment is able to intuit the responses of his people because of his relational connection to them. “Preaching is a two-way street. You are talking to them but realize that they are also talking to you.” One aspect that Wes clarified was the importance of eye contact. Wes intuits that a person’s deep eye contact with the preacher may likely mean that the sermon is having some emotional impact.

McDonald also highlights the importance of non-verbal communication to measure the impact of a sermon. He asserts that to measure the impact of a sermon a preacher should read the faces and body language of his congregation. “Learn to read their faces well. Watch. People will nod their head in agreement. They’ll rock back and forth, so as to say, ‘yeah, yeah, that’s right.’ Their body language.” Clapping and crying also become obvious nonverbal cues that the sermon is having impact. Thomas adds that it works in the negative as well. As you read their body language, “you can see people are dozing off…they’re not connecting.”

Two of the African American participants also noted that verbal communication during the sermon also confirms the impact of the sermon. One commented that it is not uncommon for him to receive “auditory feedback” during the course of the sermon. “They say ‘preach pastor’ and I want to say ‘I’m trying.’ ‘Preach pastor’ and ‘Amen.’ I know it’s impacting them because of the verbal feedback I get.” This same participant also noted the dearth of “auditory feedback” in less demonstrative congregations. He commented: “in more demonstrative congregations it’s easy to tell if they’re not connecting. If they’re not demonstrative it’s really hard to tell if they’re connecting.” He notes that one of the difficulties of being in a congregation that does not express their support verbally, is that a preacher may find it difficult to gauge the impact their sermon is having on the hearers.

Measuring After the Moment

Half of the participants noted that they gauge the impact of their sermon mostly based on feedback that they receive after the sermon is over. These same participants agree that a congregant’s verbal affirmation of the sermon is the greatest confirmation

they receive regarding their sermon's impact. This affirmation most generally comes in one of three ways, a conversation, a text, or an email. It is through these avenues that these participants admit they gauge their effectiveness. Of course, sometimes the lack thereof also provides data to the preacher regarding the impact of the sermon. Roger commented "there are usually those encouragers who will always send me a text and affirm me. When I don't receive the text, I always think, 'that must not have been good.'" Wes also highlights a similar negative aspect to verbal feedback following the sermon. Speaking to his worship leader after one service, Wes recounted, "she said, 'your sermon really connected with me this time." Wes shared his consternation with the phrase "this time," admitting, "I'm super in tune to people's responses like that."

Half of the participants commented that what people communicate following the sermon provides insight into the level of impact. Wes lamented the handshake ritual at the door of the sanctuary at the close of the service because of the typical responses he would receive. "Good sermon, pastor" is not a response that indicates a high level of impact among congregants. What comments would indicate a high level? Half of the participants recounted specific instances in which they received communication that affirmed impact. Wes said that the thing that affirmed his sermon's impact the most was when congregants would simply express: "That was so helpful." Thomas articulates another common refrain among participants: "lots of time people will come up and say, oh man, how did you know. It seemed like you were talking to me." Thomas believes this phrase "it seemed like you were talking to me" reveals that the sermon has gone beyond the abstract and has become impactful to the individual. McDonald, however, reveals one final aspect of post-sermon verbal communication which reveals impact: "when they use

my sermon to share how it spoke to them." McDonald shares that following a recent sermon on Nehemiah's prayer that the Lord would remember him for good, he received this text: "my pastor, may the Lord bless you for another challenging and uplifting message. Just wanted you to know that I will remember you for good." These examples of communication help a preacher to gauge the impact of his sermons on the congregation.

Summary of Measuring the Impact of a Sermon

A preacher desiring to preach sermons that appeal to the emotions of the congregation also desires some means by which to measure its impact. Some participants were hesitant to discuss the measure of impact of a sermon on the congregation. In their estimation, the preacher was simply called to be faithful to preach the text and allow the Spirit to ultimately do its work. Despite that conviction, most of the participants shared that they measured the impact of a sermon either during the sermon or after the sermon was over. During the sermon, the preacher is often able to determine the sermon's impact based on how arrested the congregation is during the preaching. This is largely a non-verbal, intuitive evaluation as preachers seek to read the body language and non-verbal cues of the congregation. Some congregations provide auditory feedback during the sermon that clues the preacher that some impact is evidenced. Almost all of the participants expressed that some type of auditory feedback is given once the sermon is over. Of the various types of comments that are received through conversation, text or email, the most confirming of impact is when congregants express the preacher's effectiveness by using the sermon language to explain how it spoke to them.

Obstacles To Appealing To Emotion

The third research question addressed obstacles that hindered preachers from appealing to both their own and the congregation's emotions. These obstacles have been categorized according to three sub-headings: 1. Cultural mistrust, 2. Effects of the Fall, and 3. Lack of Time and Relationships.

Cultural Mistrust

Nearly all of the participants responded to the question regarding obstacles to appealing to emotions by referencing culture. Of particular note is that five of the six participants highlight the denominational culture as a barrier to preachers engaging emotions. McDonald, having already expressed the importance of preachers emoting in order to give their congregations permission to emote, recognizes that this may be difficult to do depending on your denomination: "the denomination of which you're a part may not give youth permission to be emotional or authentic or demonstrative." Identifying the characteristics of such a denomination, Thomas explains that denominational obstacles may be because "there is an overemphasis of the intellectual and underemphasis on emotion and it has no place." Each of the six participants are a part of the Presbyterian church and recognized the temptation denominationally to underemphasize the emotional. Describing his specific experience of the Presbyterian Church in America, Roger explains: "In the P.C.A., there is a heavy emphasis on intellectualism and knowledge. We want people to think we're smart, wise, and super-intelligent. We want people to say 'good sermon' because people think I'm smart, not because my emotions were engaged." He concludes that there needs to be more models of emotional health in the P.C.A. Attempting to distance himself somewhat from a

denominational explanation, Stephen notes that the specific church is more of an obstacle than the denomination as a whole. As a pastor in the P.C.A. denomination, he finds that individual churches are all along the continuum, and some are more emotionally engaged than others and much depends on "who the powerbrokers are" within the church.

Two of the participants argued that the cultural expectations are much larger than just denominational. Wes, for example, notes that Americans in general embrace "a machismo culture that thinks emotion is wrong and unreliable. A lot of men have bought into that lie to excuse their own emotion." Targeting a more specific culture, Stephen warns that certain regions of America may emphasize emotions differently. Stephen, speaking specifically about churches in the south said: "Southern culture is pretentious. They act as if life is fine, but their life is on fire." He argues that because pretense is encouraged in the south, that southern churches may struggle culturally to express emotion.

Targeting arguably the most influential developer of one's culture, McDonald concludes that one's family of origin may be the biggest obstacle. Even if one's culture at large, his denomination, or his church, emphasizes the importance of emotions, one cannot be unaffected by their family of origin. "It might not be possible to help a person get in touch with their emotions if they've had twenty years in a home where emotions were squashed or not given respect. If they lived in a place that said don't get emotional."

The reason, half of the participants would argue, that emotions are not always encouraged from within a culture is because there is a certain mistrust of them. Thomas captures this mistrust: "there is a mistrust of emotion and people think that it has no place and cannot be trusted. It's only seen as manipulative." Wes agrees with Thomas but

sounds a graver tone about the perception of emotion's unreliability: "the rational line of thought says emotions are bad and unreliable." He explains that the culture sees emotions not only as untrustworthy, but as evil, when in reality "they are God-given."

One of the ways that this mistrust of emotions is expressed is by viewing appeals to emotion as manipulation. Because the culture does not trust the emotions, any reference to them must be some form of manipulation. Stephen responds by embracing that emotions can be manipulative. However, he asserts that does not mean it is necessarily a bad thing. He quips: "manipulation presupposes a malignant agenda." McDonald captures a similar thread when he notes that "we're constantly manipulating. If you say, let us pray or stand, you're trying to make people do something. We're always going to have to move people to do something, 'manipulate,' but it doesn't have to be bad." It only seems bad, he would argue, because there is such a high mistrust of emotion. Thomas admits that mistrust is valid because some have used emotion to encourage "emotionalism." This "emotionalism is divorced from what you've already talked about, or from the text, or from the work of Christ." If one avoids this divorce he can avoid emotional manipulation, and encourage a renewed sense of trust in appeals to emotion.

Effects of the Fall

Though cultural mistrust may be an obstacle to a preacher's appeal to emotion, other more personal factors linked to the fall of creation emerge. Chief among those is personal suffering among the pastor or congregant. Stephen notes that any congregation will have hearers within who are spiritually depressed. "Depressed people aren't going to be crying in front of you, they're quite emotionless, as they won't be able to feel

emotion." He records that one of the reasons people appear emotionless is because their emotions have been shut down as a result of depression. In addition, Phil warns that personal suffering may manifest in "burnout, emotional pain, and utter disappointment." Thomas adds another example of obstacles related to the fall of creation. He states simply, "personal struggle." "People may be disengaged from their own emotions because of personal struggle; life is hard. If stuff is going on that's hard, or you're on the outs with your friends, something's going on with your kids, you will detach emotionally." These obstacles to emotional engagement are a result of difficulty outside of one's self creating inner turmoil.

Other obstacles to emotional engagement are a result of personal sin. Stephen warns preachers specifically, "if you come to the pulpit with guilt, you can't engage with your own emotions." McDonald echoes this sentiment but affirms its truth for both pastor and congregant. "If you come to the sermon with unconfessed sin, unresolved conflict between you and the eternal, and unresolved discord between you and a brother or sister, then people won't be able to enter in emotionally." He warns that if there is relational distance between you and God because of unconfessed sin, or if there is relational distance between you and someone else, "it will certainly affect your being able to enter into your emotions." In an attempt to explain this dynamic, Phil elucidates: "we have to have a view of sin that sees it as a metaphysical reality with metaphysical results. Sin dulls our heart's ability to hear and receive." He adds that a preacher can preach the most dynamically emotional sermon, but it will "bump off the head of the one who's treasured up sin in his heart, as his prayers are hindered along with his hearing of sermons."

The last aspect of the fall which may be an obstacle to emotional preaching is fear of man. The majority of participants identified fear of man as an impediment to emotional appeals. Wes notes that the difficult thing about preaching is that it "requires people to evaluate us based on our performance. When we preach the gospel we're being evaluated every Sunday." It is that evaluation, especially if accompanied by a cultural mistrust of emotions, which keeps preachers from emoting and congregants from emotionally engaging. Phil identifies this fear of man as an "occupational hazard" of the pulpit, as one "feels the disapproval or criticism of the congregation." Because it is difficult, he argues, to function feeling the disapproval, he shuts down all emotion. Roger summarizes fear of man as an obstacle by stating, "there's an image factor, and as a pastor you should have it all together." Any expression of emotion reveals your own vulnerability and creates opportunity for congregational critique. Attempting to encourage, McDonald highlights that fear of man may lessen with age. Now in his sixties, he exclaims: "I don't care what people think, I don't need people's approval, and I'm not trying to be popular with everyone." As pastors wrestle with fear of man, they experience an obstacle to emotional engagement.

Lack of Time and Relationships

Two participants identified that one of the greatest obstacles to emotional appeals in sermons is lack of time among pastors and congregants. Under the first heading of this findings section, the importance of a preacher's appeal to his own emotions was stressed. In order to accomplish that, several participants highlighted the need for quiet meditation. This theme reemerges as an obstacle for emotional engagement. Roger opines, "if I don't

have time to think through the emotional and rational aspects of the sermon. If I don't have time to think on my own sin, insecurity, then there will be little emotion." Phil identifies a similar problem among the hearers. He regrets that congregants "don't pay attention to anything for very long." He explains that they have gotten so used to "short sitcoms which seek to make their point in twenty minutes, that they cannot sit still long enough to allow emotion." He warns of this problem among congregants and preachers: "we (preachers) don't have time to prepare a sermon, and they don't have time to hear or prepare to hear a sermon. Nor do we have margin to reflect on the hearing."

One last obstacle to emotional preaching is a lack of relationships. Though few participants referred to relationships as an obstacle, two participants identified a lack of relationship as an impediment. In a previous section, Thomas explained that part of appealing to the emotions of the congregation is ensuring that the preacher has a relationship with hearers in which they are known. This explanation reveals how preachers may struggle to appeal to the congregation's emotions because they fail to apply the passage's meaning to the direct issues of the congregation. Phil, in addition, offered a very succinct explanation of an obstacle to emotional preaching: "Loneliness. We learn in community, and we receive and cross pollinate over a sermon in community." Where most participants identified obstacles associated with cultural mistrust or the fallenness of this world, Phil highlights the prevalence of loneliness, noting that an individual may struggle to understand a sermon's meaning. Yet, the community of which they are a part, helps to encourage an emotional engagement as the meaning of the text is better understood.

Summary of Obstacles to Appealing to Emotion

Participants readily identified obstacles that hindered preachers from appealing to emotions. Preachers exist within various cultures and those cultures will either encourage or inhibit the preacher's appeal to emotions. Though most participants quickly identified the denominational tradition as the chief context to impact preachers, some participants also identified America's "machismo" culture in general, as well as the South's culture of pretense specifically. In addition, specific church families as well as the preacher's family of origin will impact a preacher's appeal. Despite the variety of cultures which may influence, participants expressed that all of these cultures share a common mistrust of emotions. Stressing the rational, any appeals to emotion are seen as manipulation and are thus to be avoided.

In addition to the cultural mistrust, the effects of the fall and a lack of time and relationships may also hinder emotional appeals. The effects of the fall manifest in personal suffering and personal sin, often in the form of fear of man. Preachers and congregants both will struggle with emotional appeals if they are undergoing depression or difficulty associated with suffering. They may also struggle if they are unrepentant of sin or if their own personal relationships are unrestored. Fear of man was identified as an obstacle as well. If cultures have a mistrust of emotion, then the preacher within those cultures may be hindered in appealing to emotion because of the fear of those within the culture. Finally, emotional appeals will be hindered among the preacher and congregation if they do not have time for accurate preparation and reflection. A lack of relationship also hinders the preacher's ability to appeal to the emotions.

How Appeals to Emotion Correlate with Cognitive Neuroscience

The final research question sought to determine how a preacher's appeals to emotion correlate with cognitive neuroscience. Stephen, when explaining an impactful sermon that resulted in his own and the congregation's display of emotion, readily admitted that he had no real understanding as to what was happening in the brains of his hearers. He did not have the cognitive neuroscientific understanding to articulate that his use of poetry to empower the experience of the grace of God actually stimulated "a cascade of hormonal responses like the release of stress hormones and adrenaline which yield great consolidation of memory."[362] He had no context to describe how his own display of emotions engaged the emotions of his congregation due to an increase "in the blood in various parts of the brain linked to cognition."[363] Yet, despite not having that knowledge, what he did know is that he wanted his "congregation to feel it, to experience what peace means. I wanted to appeal to their minds and their hearts." Despite some preacher's lack of awareness, cognitive neuroscience helps explain and reinforce much of the practice that preachers employ.

Connecting Emotion

Cognitive neuroscience has revealed that the brain is widely interconnected and integrated and that the impact of communication "involves the development of connections between networks of brain areas, spread across many regions of the

---

[362] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 44.

[363] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 74.

brain."[364] The impact of a sermon comes as one actively constructs neural networks that connect many brain areas. McDonald reinforces this concept when he notes that his preparation involves both a "left-brain" and "right-brain" approach. With his "left brain" he is looking to engage the text logically, but with his "right brain," he seeks to engage emotionally. This two-pronged approach calls for him to allow "emotion to go on the prowl" while reason is looking for "a defense of his thesis." McDonald concludes that when both sides of the brains are searching, his preaching is more effective. This identification reinforces neuroscience's insistence that the neural networks connecting many brain areas lead to greater impact. Wes highlights that much of what makes his preaching impactful his use of various devices to make connections. "It's not the exegesis that connects, it's the description and connection to the explanation. I use word pictures, similes, application, and story." His use of the word "connection" highlights what is taking place neuroscientifically, as various portions of the brain are engaged depending on the device he employs. McDonald adds that the serving of communion is always one of the most impactful times in the service. He notes that it is his "rehearsing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ" that he finds weeping throughout the congregation. He attributes some of that to the senses being tapped: "the sound, the sights, the smells, the taste." Phil adds that the senses can even be appealed to figuratively. "We've got to get back to the idea of true exposition of the word in a way that is existentially impacting. That's why we use imagination, because people need to hear, see, taste, and smell." This, too, reinforces the various neural networks that neuroscience affirms, even if only in the appeal to imagination. Cognitive neuroscience asserts that effectiveness in

---

[364] Immordino-Yang, *Emotions, Learning and the Brain,* 83.

communication comes as various neural networks are connected in various regions of the brains; preachers affirm this assertion with their use of various means to connect the truth.

Cognitive neuroscience affirms that one of the ways to ensure greater impact through the various neural networks which form is through appeals to emotion. Most of the pastors interviewed admitted that they had no knowledge of cognitive neuroscience's contribution to the practice of emotional appeals in preaching. Having confessed his lack of awareness of cognitive neuroscience, McDonald stated, "I want to honor God with my mind, but I want my heart to be involved as well. I don't want to pursue God merely academically." Stephen, too, admitted his unfamiliarity with neuroscience, but he stated simply "I know that I have to appeal to their minds as well as their hearts. I hope to appeal to pathos and logos." Wes, the only pastor that made any reference to cognitive neuroscience stated, "I believe that the Holy Spirit changes biochemically the brain through the doorway of emotion. To disregard or downplay the emotions is not good. Engaging emotion is a way that pastors partner with the Spirit to change lives." No matter their awareness, these three comments reinforce the conclusions of cognitive neuroscientists: "the most efficient and effective learning incorporates emotion into the cognitive knowledge being built."[365]

Emotion as Cognitive Bookmarks

Cognitive neuroscience contends that emotions serve as "cognitive bookmarks…helping to determine the information that we notice in our environment, the

[365] Immordino-Yang and Faeth, "The Role of Emotion and Skilled Intuition in Learning," 76.

information that will get stored in memory, and the information that will be brought to mind in a certain situation."[366] Stephen implies this concept of a cognitive bookmark when he describes the importance of emotion in getting people's attention in preaching. Admittedly, Stephen is unable to articulate the cognitive neuroscientific explanation, that the reticular activating system springs into action, "automatically selecting related sensory information and directing into the lower, reactive and emotional brain, which when engaged elicits an involuntary emotional response, thus capturing the subject's attention;"[367] however, he can articulate the effect of emotional appeals in the arresting of attention. When congregants' emotions are engaged, "in that particular moment, they look at you differently. People listen differently. They look up so as to understand what is happening right now." When asked how he helps ensure that people will not only pay attention but be able to recall the sermon that he preaches, McDonald explains: "I work hard on illustrations that stand up…on the art of storytelling. Storytelling done well is a portal to emotions if you can tell it correctly." Sharing stories and illustrations becomes a vehicle for exploring emotions that subsequently serve as a cognitive bookmark. Wes seems to pick up on this similar idea as he describes preaching that people will not forget. "The showing! Not the telling. You can't just say the resurrection is awesome. You have to show them. They have to feel that the resurrection is awesome." When that showing occurs, as opposed to a mere telling, emotion serves a cognitive bookmark to help ensure the truths are recalled.

---

[366] Megill, "Emotion, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence," 193.

[367] Yan and Faeth, "The Role of Emotion and Skilled Intuition in Learning," 50.

Neuroscientists affirm that seemingly negative emotions have great impact on hearers and serve as cognitive bookmarks. Stephen notes that one of the sermons that his congregation identifies as most memorable was a time in which he became angry. Likewise, Roger noted that for his congregation the sermons that he thought "stick out the most, were the sermons where the worship leader was fired and his last Sunday at his church." When asked what it was about those days, he described the negatively experienced emotions of anger and sadness. "People were hurting, and they had a lot of uncertainty." Though intense negative emotions such as anger or fear have been shown to impair the impact of communication, cognitive neuroscientists like Jensen explain that some brief periods of stress which readily resolve actually enhance learning.[368] This cognitive neuroscientific explanation may help explain why congregants resonated with the sermons that displayed anger and grief. Wes seems to hold to this position in his explanation as to why his recent sermon was so impactful on congregants. As he was wrestling with "insecurity and his deep sense of unworthiness," he sensed that the congregation was even more attuned to the sermon because of the connection to the negative feelings he experienced. He did not linger in that position, he notes, because he tried to resolve the emotional tension by communicating the gospel. It was that tension of negative feelings needing resolution in the positive components of the gospel which he notes added to the sermon's impact.

The majority of participants described the role that positive emotions played in sermon impact reinforcing the cognitive bookmark of neuroscience's insistence that "when subjects are not experiencing fear and anxiety, their ability to process conceptual

---

[368] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 74.

information in the pre-frontal cortex is increased."[369] Thomas was quick to note what he thought was the most impactful portion of his preaching, the conclusion of his sermon. He describes: "in black preaching, at the end we have this celebration at the end of the sermon. This celebration, when done right, appeals to the emotion in such a faithful way. It's such a feeling of joy and celebration, but you're actually going back to what you've already covered and reiterating the main points." Thomas described later that it was the combination of joyful emotions along with the reiteration of the points of the sermon which made it so impactful to the congregation. Phil also described the impact of appealing to positive emotions for impact among the congregation. When describing how positive emotions impact the hearer Phil used the phrase "serendipity of discovery." He explains that when congregants get to experience this serendipity, their mind and hearts are brought into the sermon. These positive emotions result in a cognitive bookmark for the congregants.

McDonald also describes how positive emotions serve as a cognitive bookmark for himself. Cognitive neuroscientists assert that positive emotions like happiness have impact because of the "release of chemicals affecting the prefrontal cortex caused by the release of hormones and neurotransmitters."[370] Jensen also notes that happiness "causes the release of endorphins which stimulate the brain's frontal lobe, thereby increasing the degree of focus and amount of attention."[371] As a result one is better able to recall a matter. McDonald notes that when he experiences positive emotions in his study, he is

---

[369] Immordino-Yang and Faeth, "The Role of Emotion in Skilled Intuition in Learning," 54.

[370] Scoffham and Barnes, "Happiness Matters," 540.

[371] Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain in Mind,* 76.

more readily able to remember the sermon as he is preaching it without depending on any notes. “When I have a ‘hallelujah moment’ in the study preparing, I can almost guarantee it’s going to hit me in the pulpit as it did in my preparation…I can remember writing the sermon, so I can be less dependent on my notes.” Thomas, as well, highlights the importance of positive emotions like happiness for the preacher in his preparation and his preaching. He explains that for one’s sermons to have impact, there must be a degree of celebration and of joy. “Like David, dance before the Lord. Don’t dance in front of slave girls. Your preaching and preparation are before the Lord; it’s all a part of worship.” This celebration of positive emotions will result in both the preacher and the hearer being impacted by the sermon.

Observing Other’s Emotions

Half of participants mentioned that the means by which this occurs is that pastors must be very well attuned to the emotion accompanying the shepherding needs of their congregation, and they must allow the congregation to become attuned to their preacher’s emotion. To summarize, preachers, by way of their imaginations, must observe the emotions of their congregation, and the congregation must observe the emotions of their preacher. Two quotes capture these two means. Sam describes the importance of pastoral attunement. “He has to have some level of pastoral empathy. He has to feel the various circumstances that are weighing heavily on his people. Then he has to apply the gospel to where they are.” McDonald, on the other hand, explains the need for the pastor to express their own emotion to which the congregation becomes attuned. “When I emote,

people feel free to emote themselves. When they see their pastor or leader emote, it gives them permission to be free with their emotions."

Neuroscientists have confirmed these two means. Sousa concludes that "the mirroring of observed behavior was actually the mirroring of an experience. Even the emotions of others could be experienced, and the mirror neurons be activated."[372] Cavanagh also recognizes this as she concludes "humans are apt to perceive and acquire the emotions of those surrounding them."[373] What pastors describe taking place in the study and in the pulpit is a "putting yourself in their shoes." In fact, more than half used this exact same phrase. Thomas repeats it: "you put yourself in their shoes and then you think about your congregation and you put yourself in their shoes. I think through what people will feel, parents with young kids, kids home all day…some things they might be feeling as they're going through it." What is taking place in this identification is that preachers are attempting to observe the emotions of their congregation, even if it is only by way of their imagination. However, this identification impacts their ability to appeal to emotion. This empathy is possible, Hogue explains, because "neural networks are activated merely at the observation of an action being performed by another."[374] The participants seem to confirm that the neural networks are activated even in the imagination of what another is experiencing.

Yet, it is not only the preacher's emotions following the perceived emotions of the congregation. There is an invitation for the congregation to follow the perceived

---

[372] Sousa, *How the Brain Learns,* 24.

[373] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 46.

[374] Hogue, "Brain Matters," 33.

emotions of the preacher. Cognitive neuroscientists have captured what occurs within the brain:

> You first need to orient toward and attend to specific sensory cues…once you have noticed the cues, they are processed further and can be categorized into an emotional category. Then you typically think more about why the person might be feeling the way that they do, the causes and explanations…the amygdala is activated in association with the rapid detection of salient cues. This corresponds to the orienting function of empathy, conceptual and lexical knowledge about the emotion category can be retrieved…followed by complex causal attribution to explain why the person whose face we are viewing is behaving the way that they are… which involves specific regions in the prefrontal cortex." [375]

Adolphs and Anders describe two specific functions and two portions of the brain that are involved. First, there is an attending to certain cues to discern the emotion which triggers the activation of the amygdala. Second, there is a search for a cause of those emotions associated with the pre-frontal cortex. McDonald captures these steps in his description of his preaching while experiencing grief. He explains the importance of his modeling of grief before the congregation, "grief is an important emotion for my people to see. They can read my body language and my face. They can see it when I stand up to open the service. The way I frame things, I use language that is not merely cerebral because I want them to go somewhere with me." McDonald highlights the discernment of emotion when he affirms his congregation reading his body language and face. He also affirms the process of people seeking causation: "I want them to go somewhere with me." Speaking directly to the empathizing with the pain of others, cognitive neuroscientists, Johnston and Olson, conclude: "the overlaps in neural activation of regions activated by subjective

[375] Adolphs and Anders, *The Neuroscience of Emotion,* 257.

pain and when observing a loved ones' distress is a form of 'neural resonance' that may undergird the ability to empathize with other people's distress."[376]

Phil reinforces the importance of congregants mirroring the experience of the preacher. His description bears some kinship to the cognitive neuroscientific understanding of mirror neurons. As described in the literature review section, mirror neurons are those neural cells involved when observing the actions or emotions of another. Cognitive neuroscientists observed that activity in the brain would increase in an area associated with a certain movement that a subject was merely observing.[377] Phil affirms this mirroring of observation when he explains: "we need to give our people, we need to create within them a desire. We need to give them permission to taste what we taste by showing them that we taste in the word the reality of the gospel. If we don't taste it, they won't!" For Phil, the mirroring is almost a form of contagion. If the preacher will taste, then so too will the congregant. Cognitive neuroscientist Cavanagh affirms this dynamic as an "emotional contagion."[378] Emotions are contagious, and if the preacher will emote, the congregation may emote as well.

Summary of Lessons Learned

None of the participants selected had any profound understanding of cognitive neuroscience. In fact, in requesting an interview and explaining the dissertation topic, all

---

[376] Johnston and Olson, *The Feeling Brain,* 166.

[377] Barrett, *How Emotions are Made,* 71.

[378] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning,* 48.

of them responded that they lacked knowledge of cognitive neuroscience regarding emotion. Despite their lack of knowledge, all of the participants model emotional appeals that reinforce the conclusions of cognitive neuroscience.

Cognitive neuroscience affirms that learning is positively impacted when communicators encourage multiple connections to the material. Neuroscientists affirm that the way that the brain operates is through an array of diverse neural networks, and that the greater the variety of connections, the greater impact the communication will have. The interviewees intimated that the goal of their preaching was to have the truth spoken be connected through various devices. Their use of a variety of devices to impact congregants reinforces neuroscience's affirmation of the importance of neural diversity. Among this diversity were appeals to emotion. When preachers appeal to emotion in various ways, various connections are created throughout the hearer's brain.

Cognitive neuroscience also affirmed the importance of emotion as a cognitive bookmark. Emotion serves to help direct focus and attention to the material being presented, which also positively impacts the hearer's ability to retrieve and recall the information. The participants interviewed all shared ways in which they appeal to emotion. These approaches to engaging emotion highlighted neuroscience's assertion of cognitive bookmarks, as congregants displayed arrestment as well as recall of material. Participants described that both negative and positive emotions, such as grief or fear and happiness and joy respectively, serve as cognitive bookmarks for the hearers.

Finally, cognitive neuroscience affirms the importance of the observation of emotions. Of the participants interviewed, all explained that emotional appeals occur as pastors are willing to observe the emotions of their congregants, by way of imagination

or in real time. In addition, they asserted that congregants' emotions are more readily engaged when they are observing the emotion of the pastor. This agrees with the findings of cognitive neuroscience which record the presence of mirror neurons. Actions which are merely observed register neural activity in the brain of the observer which mirror the neural activity occurring in the brain of the observed. As such, emotion is contagious in that preachers can "catch" the emotion of the congregant, and the congregant can "catch" the emotion of the preacher.

Summary of Findings

This chapter examined the findings of preachers who appeal to emotions. The responses from participants were grouped according to the four research questions. Firstly, the means by which preachers appeal to emotions, both their own and their congregation, were explored. Secondly, the means by which preachers evaluate their sermon impact was examined. Thirdly, responses were summarized as to the obstacles which prevent preachers from appealing to emotions. Given that the purpose of this study was to explore how preachers' appealing to emotion correlates with cognitive neuroscience, the last section sought to collate the responses of participants with the findings of cognitive neuroscience from the literature review section.

In order to effectively appeal to emotions, participants revealed that a preacher must appeal to his own emotions first, and then proceed to engage the emotion of his audience. In order to engage his emotions, several participants noted the importance of the preacher having adequate amounts of quiet in his study. During this quiet, the preacher meditates on the truths presented in the text, especially seeking to mine the fallen condition focus. Their goal is to insert themselves into the text so as to experience

the emotion of the original audience, while at the same time insert himself into the emotion of his congregation. Following his time exploring his own emotions in the study, participants agreed that the means to appeal to the congregation's emotions is to ensure that they are modeling his own emotions before them. As they pursues this, they appeal to an array of rhetorical devices that seek to show, and not just tell, the congregation the meaning of the text. Through an appeal to his own emotions, the preacher also appeals to the emotions of his congregation.

Most participants revealed that they spend very little time attempting to measure the impact of their sermons. In fact, some revealed a hesitancy to evaluate, insisting rather that the preacher was simply called to be faithful to the text and allow the Holy Spirit to do its work. When pressed however, most of the participants admitted that they measure the impact of a sermon, as the sermon is being preached, as well as after the sermon is concluded. The measuring during the sermon occurs by observation of the arrestment of the congregation. Sometimes in more expressive congregations, there is auditory feedback in the form of encouragement. This encouragement may also occur once the sermon is concluded, as congregants reveal through various means of communication how the sermon impacted them.

All of the participants interviewed recognized that the display of emotions in churches was an issue. Each offered different explanations for the lack of emotion in congregations; however, the responses were categorized in three ways, as a cultural mistrust, a prevalence of the fall of man, and a lack of time and relationships. Several participants described the various avenues of cultural mistrust: societal, geographical, denominational, familial, as well as personal. Despite the various cultures, the

participants generally affirmed that emotions are seen as unreliable. The fall of creation also served as a category to explain the obstacles, as personal suffering and personal sin stood in the way of emotional engagement. Lastly, some participants offered that a lack of time and relationships would ultimately hinder a preacher's appeal to emotions.

In the concluding section, the participants' responses were compared to the findings of cognitive neuroscience as recorded in the literature review area of this document. The participants largely affirmed the findings that emotion was a key component of ensuring sermon impact. Employing a variety of devices in communication reinforced the cognitive neuroscientific conviction that impact in learning comes through a diversity of interconnected neural networks throughout the brain. Participants' responses also affirmed the cognitive neuroscientific understanding of cognitive bookmarks, as emotional appeals serve to increase attention, focus and retrieval. Lastly, the importance of observing of the emotions of the congregation by the pastor and the observing of the emotions of the pastor by the congregation were compared to neuroscientific explanations of mirror neurons.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to explore how a preacher appeals to emotions to impact congregants as it correlates with cognitive neuroscience findings. In chapter two, the review of literature shed insight on how the preacher appeals to emotions by an examination of the following three literature areas: homiletics' emphasis on emotions, cognitive neuroscience and emotions, and the doctrine of illumination. In chapter four, four research questions were pursued through the interviews of six respective practitioners.

The following research questions guided the research and the interviews.

R.Q. 1: How do preachers appeal to emotion to impact congregants?

R.Q. 2: How do preachers evaluate the sermon's impact on congregants?

R.Q. 3: What obstacles hinder preachers from appealing to emotion as a homiletic method to impact congregants?

R.Q. 4: How does the use of emotion as a homiletical method to impact congregants correlate with neuroscience findings?

Summary of the Study and Findings

This study reviewed relevant literature in three areas and analyzed interview data from six pastors. The literature review consisted of research across three major areas: homiletics' emphasis upon emotions, cognitive neuroscience and emotions, and the doctrine of illumination.

The first literature review area highlighted homiletics emphasis on a preacher's appealing to emotion. There is both a motive and a method behind emotional preaching. The motive is that emotional appeals greatly influence the listeners' recall. In fact, emotion should be viewed complementarily alongside reason in the recall of information and the motivation of the hearer. Specifically, the use of emotion then encourages a greater focus, attention, and recall, along with a motivation for greater knowledge and faithfulness. To perceive the importance of emotional preaching is pedestrian, but to practice emotional preaching is not without its challenges. Thus, an exploration of practices in emotional preaching was pursued. Any emotional appeals by preachers begins with the preacher himself being moved by the text. They first understand the Biblical mood of the text, but they also should understand their own mood as a result of the Biblical text. Only then can they employ strategies such as word choice, as well as vocal and delivery strategies that will encourage emotion.

The second literature review area helped to explain the impact of emotion on a person's brain. What homileticians have encouraged regarding emotion, cognitive neuroscience is confirming. The brain is emotional, and emotion impacts the brain. The brain was examined during this section to highlight both its emotional lower level regions and its cognitive cortical areas. In the past, these areas were believed to function rather independently of one another, but recent developments reveal that the two are greatly

integrated. It is this integration which is vital to understanding emotions' impact on the brain. Though the brain has great capacity for attention and recall, emotion serves to heighten attention and maximize recall of given information. Specifically, the emotions of fear and happiness have been shown to have great impact in learning. There is a delicate balance to be struck regarding these emotions. Too much or too little may influence learning negatively.

The third literature review area sought to balance the objective physiology of cognitive neuroscience by affirming the spiritual role of the Holy Spirit in illumination. The doctrine of illumination has long been a mystery given its emphasis upon the role of the Holy Spirit. However, various Bible passages reveal that any true understanding of the Scripture will come only as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine can of course be confused as some have insisted that the Spirit gives merely a notional understanding of the text. Others argue that the Holy Spirit's role is experiential. A clear understanding of the doctrine of illumination embraces both recognizing that the Holy Spirit moved the writers of the Scriptures to record certain truths through inspiration. Likewise, the Holy Spirit moves interpreters of the Scriptures in illumination to understand and experience these truths.

In addition to the literature review area, the responses from participants interviewed were grouped according to the four research questions. Firstly, the means by which preachers appeal to emotions, both their own and their congregation, were explored. Secondly, the means by which preachers evaluate their sermon impact was examined. Thirdly, responses were summarized as to the obstacles which prevent preachers from appealing to emotions. Given that the purpose of this study was to explore

how preachers' appeals to emotion correlates with cognitive neuroscience, the last section sought to collate the responses of participants with the findings of cognitive neuroscience from the literature review section.

In order to effectively appeal to emotions, participants revealed that a preacher must appeal to his own emotions first, and then proceed to engage the emotion of his audience. In order to engage his emotions, several participants noted the importance of the preacher having adequate amounts of quiet in his study. During this quiet period, the preacher meditates on the truths presented in the text, especially seeking to mine the fallen condition focus. His goal is to insert himself into the text so as to experience the emotion of the original audience, while at the same time insert himself into the emotion of his congregation. Following his time exploring his own emotions in the study, participants agreed that the means to appeal to the congregation's emotions is to ensure that they is modeling his own emotions before them. As they pursue this, they appeal to an array of rhetorical devices that seek to show, and not just tell, the congregation the meaning of the text. Through an appeal to his own emotions, the preacher also appeals to the emotions of his congregation.

Most participants revealed that they spend very little time attempting to measure the impact of their sermons. In fact, some revealed a hesitancy to evaluate, insisting rather that the preacher was simply called to be faithful to the text and allow the Holy Spirit to do its work. When pressed however, most of the participants admitted that they measure the impact of a sermon, as the sermon is being preached, as well as after the sermon is concluded. The measuring during the sermon occurs by observation of the arrestment of the congregation. Sometimes in more expressive congregations, there is

auditory feedback in the form of encouragement. This encouragement may also occur once the sermon is concluded, as congregants reveal through various means of communication how the sermon impacted them.

All of the participants interviewed recognized that the display of emotions in churches was an issue. Each offered different explanations for the lack of emotion in congregations; however, the responses were categorized in three ways, as a cultural mistrust, a prevalence of the fall of man, and a lack of time and relationships. Several participants described the various avenues of cultural mistrust: societal, geographical, denominational, familial, as well as personal. Despite the various cultures, the participants generally affirmed that emotions are seen as unreliable. The fall of creation also served as a category to explain the obstacles, as personal suffering and personal sin stood in the way of emotional engagement. Lastly, some participants offered that a lack of time and relationships would ultimately hinder a preacher's appeal to emotions.

In the concluding section, the participants' responses were compared to the findings of cognitive neuroscience as recorded in the literature review area of this document. The participants largely affirmed the findings that emotion was a key component of ensuring sermon impact. Employing a variety of devices in communication reinforced the cognitive neuroscientific conviction that impact in learning comes through a diversity of interconnected neural networks throughout the brain. Participants' responses also affirmed the cognitive neuroscientific understanding of cognitive bookmarks, as emotional appeals serve to increase attention, focus and retrieval. Lastly, the importance of observing of the emotions of the congregation by the pastor and the

observing of the emotions of the pastor by the congregation were compared to neuroscientific explanations of mirror neurons.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the literature and interview research were compared resulting in four principles. First, homileticians, neuroscientists, and practitioners are in agreement regarding the important practice of appealing to emotions in preaching. Second, the effectiveness of emotional appeals outweighs the risks associated with it. Third, the identification of emotions among the preacher and congregation is absolutely necessary for proper emotional appeals. Last, the mystery of the Holy Spirit in illumination does not mitigate the importance of emotional appeals.

Consensus Exists Between Homileticians, Neuroscientists, and Practitioners Regarding the Importance of Appealing to Emotions

One of the key findings of the research is that the philosophy and practices of emotional preaching described by practitioners agreed with the material presented in the literature review areas of homiletics and cognitive neuroscience. In fact, much of the information described by participants in chapter four may seem repetitive in relation to the practices encouraged by a survey of the literature review areas.

For example, the overall thrust of preaching was described by Paul Wilson, Professor of Homiletics. Wilson encouraged preachers to give congregants such an emotional experience of the text that an encounter with God is facilitated. It is not just

enough for preachers to give an objective understanding of the text, but rather they must give a subjective understanding, "to make the knowledge live."[379] Several of the participants captured this very idea, though none perhaps more clearly than Stephen. He expresses that his drive towards preaching is for his "congregation to feel it, to experience what peace means. I want to appeal to their minds and their hearts." One hears in this description an echo of Wilson's objective and subjective understanding of the text. Cognitive neuroscientists reinforce this duel aspect of understanding, as they argue for the importance of material that captures not only the objective attention of the brain, but also "is disclosed through diffuse, holistic bodily feelings."[380]

Not just an overall philosophy but specific practices presented in the literature review area were reinforced by the interviewees. Homileticians encouraged entering into the emotions of the text, recognizing that "every passage has a mood."[381] The participants echoed this same entering the emotions of the text. To determine the mood, one would have to explore the emotions of the text; as Roger notes, to attempt to preach without engaging the text on this level is tantamount to "pastoral malpractice." Homileticians like Jerry Vines encourage readers to become more comfortable interrogating the emotions of the story: "how does God want us to feel when we read his words?"[382] Preachers like Wes reverberate with the same wisdom when he insists that preachers in

---

[379] Paul Wilson, "The Source of Passion," 589.

[380] Maiese, "Transformative Learning, Enactivism, and Affectivity," 205.

[381] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 593.

[382] Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 155.

their preparation must answer when reading a text "what emotions do these characters feel?"

Other best practices encouraged by homileticians that were reinforced by participants included the use of vivid language and illustration. As Vines and Dooley describe it, "the most simple, direct way of effecting pathos is the use of vivid language…in order to jar your audience intentionally."[383] Capturing that very concept, Phil notes that one of his guiding principles in preaching is "I don't just want to say this, I want you to see this." The intent behind the vivid language is to jar the audience, just as homileticians note. Keller encourages illustration in order to drive to the emotions of the hearers, as "the most effective means to make truth come alive and emotions engaged is not through the statement of proposition but through comprehension via illustration."[384] Supporting this very notion, McDonald explains that stories and illustrations "done well are a direct portal to the emotions if you can do it correctly." Wes, too, affirms the importance of illustration and story: "it's not the exegesis that connects, it's the description and connection to the explanation."

As noted in chapter four, every participant referenced some form of rhetorical device they used to help ensure that the sermon engaged the emotions. These devices and best practices accompany emotional preaching and are typically encouraged by homileticians. What is of particular note is that some participants seemed to downplay the importance of technique. In fact, two of the participants specifically stressed that there should not be a focus on technique when it comes to appealing to emotions. Only one of

---

[383] Vines, "Passion in the Pulpit," 45.

[384] Keller, "Preaching," 170.

the participants, Thomas, seemed comfortable in discussing certain techniques. Specifically, homileticians like Vine and Dooley have noted a variety of techniques associated with delivery that accompany emotional preaching.[385] Thomas affirmed these delivery practices, highlighting the importance of volume, tone, intensity and pacing in the delivery of the sermon. Why were most participants more likely to downplay the importance of technique and devices to encourage emotional preaching, when during the interviews all were willing to discuss practices they employed in order to appeal to emotions? It seems that the participants may have been reticent to embrace technique for fear that they would do damage to the role of the Spirit and put the focus upon the preacher. Thomas himself, the one advocate for technique, provides a helpful clarification. He notes that the Spirit's leading *results* in certain techniques, as opposed to certain techniques producing the desired effect. Despite the reluctance to embrace technique, the interviews revealed best practices that were commended by homileticians and cognitive neuroscientists.

The Effectiveness of Emotional Preaching Outweighs the Associated Risks

What became very evident from participant interviews as well as the literature is that that there are certain inherent risks associated with appealing to emotions. Participants noted that preachers are at risk of pursuing emotionalism that "is divorced from what you've already talked about, or from the text or from the work of Christ."

[385] In fact, more than any other homiletics text, Vine and Dooley provide an abundance of information of both verbal and non-verbal delivery techniques that encourage emotional preaching.

When this occurs the "sermon's impact will be as fleeting as the feeling."[386] The point is not simply to appeal to emotions by any means necessary, and it is not just passion that the preacher seeks but a true experience of the truth of the Scripture. This does not occur just by relying on emotional techniques. In addition to pursuing emotionalism, some warn that emotional preaching can become attention seeking for the preacher. When this occurs, the focus becomes more on the preacher than it is God himself.[387] Little impact is measured when the focus is man-centered emotionalism.

Most of the participants were quick to use the same word in reference to the risks: manipulation. Partly due to the cultural mistrust of emotions, most participants verbalized manipulation as the inherent risk in appealing to emotions. When preachers begin engaging the emotions, they are more readily able to sway the congregation. However, McDonald offers a helpful correction when he questions if this is such a negative characteristic. Indeed, he notes that it is only because the culture does not trust emotions that they get referenced as manipulation. The truth is that the preacher should desire that the congregation be swayed and if appeals to emotion brings about a greater motivation and obedience to God, then it is to be encouraged. After all, emotions should not be the only aspect singled out as prone to manipulation. McDonald reminds, "we're always manipulating." The leader is always attempting to encourage the congregation to do something, so the question is ultimately one of motivation. Why is the leader engaging emotionally or performing any task? If it is to bring the congregation to greater faithfulness and obedience, then it should not be cautioned.

---

[386] Keller, *Preaching,* 161.

[387] Hans, "Preaching Through Personal Pain," 96.

Indeed, to avoid the emotion because of the risk would be counterproductive, given how effective emotional engagement is. Blomberg affirmed the relationship between reason and feeling: "logic and emotion are complementary to one another."[388] Yet, it is not just that emotion has a part to play. It is that emotion has a *primary* part to play, and as such emotional appeals are worth the risk associated with emotionalism. Arthurs contends: "all learning begins at the feeling level."[389] Reed agrees: "the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it."[390] Neuroscientists embrace it, noting that "tapping into emotion will harness our student's attention, dominate their working memory, enhance their long-term memory consolidation, and fuel their motivation."[391] Preachers warn against avoiding it: "I wouldn't have a religion I couldn't feel." Ultimately, it is because all domains recognize that "pathos influences the will more than logos,"[392] and as such emotional appeals are well worth the risks associated with them.

---

[388] Blomberg, "The Heart Has Reasons that Reason Cannot Know," 62.

[389] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 591.

[390] Reed, "Motive and Movement," 65.

[391] Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning*, 32.

[392] Arthurs, "Pathos Needed," 592.

No Emotional Appeals are Likely Apart from Preacher's Identifying with Others' Emotions

One practice to encourage emotional appeals found in the literature review areas as well as in the interviews was the importance of identifying with emotions. This identification is two-fold. Preachers have to identify with the emotions of others, and others have to identify with the emotions of the preacher.

In an assessment of his preaching, Baty acknowledged that his lack of effectiveness may be due to a lack of identification within his own heart. "The problem with the message…was not that I hadn't prepared enough; rather, I had neglected preparation in a vital area, the adequate preparation of my heart."[393] Adequate preparation involves an identification with the emotions of the text and of the congregation. It requires the preacher to "put himself in the shoes of" two parties, the original audience, as well as his modern audience. As Wes explains about the importance of identifying with the characters in the text, "what emotions do these characters feel?" His hope is to experience the text by attempting to feel the same emotions of the characters in the story. From this, he then turns to his modern audience and seeks to identify with their emotions. Indeed, visualization is encouraged, as the preacher seeks to see his congregant, and to identify with the emotions he may be currently feeling. This visualizing identification, McDonald reminds, occurs not only during the act of the sermon itself, but also in the preparation for it.

It is important as well for the congregation to be able to identify with the emotions of the preacher. For this to occur, the preacher must be willing to bear his

---

[393] Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," 559.

emotions in the pulpit, so that congregants can identify with them. Hans summarizes, "if a preacher is to reach humans, then he must be human in the pulpit."[394] Baty agrees, "hearts are most deeply affected when the speaker exposes his own."[395] It is this exposure of his own heart that enables congregants to identify with their own emotion. When they can identify with his expressed emotion then they are given permission to express their own emotion. Given the cultural mistrust of emotion, it is as if there is an emotional slavery that congregants endure. A preacher's expression of emotion and the congregants' subsequent identification become the means of freeing them to engage their own emotions.

Cognitive neuroscience reinforces this identification by pastor and congregant by describing what takes place neurobiologically. Hogue, for example, explains that "neural networks are activated merely at the observation of an action being performed by another."[396] When one observes another performing some task, there is neural activity in the brain of the observer that matches the neural activity in the brain of the observed. This is neuroscientific evidence of the identification that is possible between two parties. What is true of the physical is also true of the emotional, as there are "overlaps in neural activation of regions activated by subjective pain."[397] As pastors seek to identify with the emotions of the characters of the text and the congregation, there is neural activity within them that corresponds to the neural activity of the characters and the congregation with

---

[394] Hans, "Preach Through Personal Pain," 95.

[395] Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," 561.

[396] Hogue, "Brain Matters," 33.

[397] Johnston and Olson, *The Feeling Brain,* 166.

which they identify. Likewise, as the congregation identifies with the emotions displayed by the pastors, there is neural activity within that corresponds to the emotion of the pastors. As one identifies with the emotion of another, it is virtually impossible to not be affected either emotionally or neurologically.

The Mystery of the Holy Spirit in Illumination Does Not Mitigate the Importance of Emotional Appeals

Despite the explanations offered by cognitive neuroscience and the encouragement by homileticians and preachers to appeal to emotions, there is mystery associated with the impact of sermons. In answering questions about the impact of their sermons, nearly all of the participants noted that it was often difficult to gauge how impactful an emotional sermon would be. The common refrain was: "sermons that I thought would really be powerful would fall flat, and sermons that I thought would fall flat, ultimately turned out to be really powerful." Even when probed further, participants found it difficult to articulate why they had anticipated a sermon might be effective, or why they had anticipated a sermon might "fall flat." Some concluded that it was their own connection to the sermon which led them to believe a sermon would be impactful on their hearers.

Almost every participant noted that the impact of the sermon was in large part due to the role of the Holy Spirit. The third literature review area covered the doctrine of illumination and referenced the involvement of the Holy Spirit in a text moving the hearer. Yet, mystery was referenced even in an explanation of illumination. "The

illumination of the Spirit defies objective or empirical study. No amount of verifiable evidence or objective testing can 'prove' that the Spirit's illumination has taken place in the heart and mind of the Biblical interpreter."[398] How exactly the Spirit illumines the heart and the mind of the interpreter is not explicitly clear. Some participants capturing this, seemed to communicate something close to fatalism, that they simply preached and the Spirit would accomplish its work. They did not deny, of course, certain devices or techniques used to appeal to emotions; however, they did, and rightly so, seem to place the most emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit.

This bears mentioning because there may be a risk for preachers to emphasize the Holy Spirit such that they ultimately avoid the use of means. Arguments from silence perhaps are not always evidence; however, participants seemed reluctant to discuss techniques or means. Several participants mentioned that technique should be avoided. All of the participants readily admitted that they had very little knowledge of cognitive neuroscience or how certain methods they employ in preaching actually change their brain. In addition, though there was a right emphasis on the Holy Spirit for most participants, what seemed to be lacking was an emphasis on prayer. In fact, only one of the participants noted the importance of prayer in relation to impactful emotional preaching. One might expect more of an emphasis on prayer given its place in illumination by the Holy Spirit.

Webster provides a helpful correction when it comes to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and means. He writes, "the Spirit works not by circumventing, but by

---

[398] Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching,* 39.

arousing and actuating human intelligence."[399] Believers are encouraged to emphasize the Holy Spirit's role in all of its mystery, but they should also embrace the reality of the Spirit working through the proper use of means. If Webster is correct, his role is to not circumvent human intelligence, or human emotion for that matter. Instead, his role is to work through the means or emotional appeal to arouse and actuate human response.

Recommendations for Practice

In light of the findings described above, four practices are recommended for preachers: 1. Know your emotional God. 2. Know your emotional self. 3. Know the emotion of your scripture text. 4. Know your emotional contexts.

Know Your Emotional God

Given that the research has shown the priority of emotion in learning, it is paramount that preachers become more comfortable in knowing an emotional God. God is not just rational; he is also emotional. He "is a God who feels indignation every day." (Psalm 7:11) He is a God "moved to pity by their groaning." (Judges 2:18) He is a God "grieved to His heart." (Genesis 6:6) He is a God "who has loved with an everlasting love." (Jeremiah 31:3). He is a God "who hates the wicked and those who love violence." (Psalm 11:5) He is a "jealous God." (Exodus 20:5) He is a God "who rejoices over you with gladness." (Zephaniah 3:17) Not only the Father, but the Son is replete with emotions. Jesus, "when he saw the crowds had compassion on them." (Matthew 9:36).

---

[399] Webster, "Illumination," 337.

Jesus, “looked around at them in anger.” (Mark 3:5) Jesus “was troubled in his spirit.” (John 13:21) Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.” (Luke 10:21). Jesus, “looking at him, loved him.” (Mark 10:21) When Christ came, bearing the reflection of the Father, he came as a man full of emotions. To deny the emotions of Jesus Christ is to deny his very bodily incarnation.

It is not just that God has emotions, but that he desires for us to engage in relationship with Him through emotions. Indeed, the very nature of salvation is one of relationship, and as such it includes the emotions. In the Old Testament, salvation was viewed through the lenses of a covenant relationship, as in Exodus 16:7: “I will take you to be my people and I will be your God.” In the New Testament, salvation too is viewed through the perspective of relationship, as in John 17:3: “this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” This relationship is not to be considered as a mere exchange of information or an understanding of notional concepts. It is a relationship that is formed and enjoyed through reason, volition, and certainly emotion.

In order to know this emotional God and enjoy relationship with him, God has provided both the word of God and prayer. Believers would do well to read the Scripture as if it were the living word of God. They would do well to embrace the emotional language that is being communicated and affirm the human emotions that so often surface throughout the texts. In addition, prayer becomes a vehicle through which believers affirm an emotional relationship with God. They come, not just bringing information, or asking for items. Rather, they come seeking to speak, with their souls fully engaged. They desire to communicate and relate to God in such a way that they

express their emotions to him who is himself, fully emotional. In communicating in such a way, believers function more influenced by Biblical culture than the rational Western culture to which they have become accustomed.

Know Your Emotional Self

Given that man is created in the image of God, it is imperative that they recognize their own emotions. These emotions do not distance him from the creator whose image they bear. Rather, these emotions manifest the glory of the creator whose image they bear. Of course, in order to bear the emotional image of the creator, believers need to become more adept at discerning their own emotion. In a culture that so highly values reason and so mistrusts the emotions, this is not without its difficulties. The place where a believer should begin is in granting himself permission to embrace his emotions. Believers must be encouraged more to see emotions as a healthy aspect of their spiritual lives. Without ignoring the difficulty associated with negative emotions, it is important to see the emotions as revelatory in understanding how a person is experiencing their circumstances. In so doing, these emotions actually become a catalyst for closer relationship to God, rather than a deterrent to it.

To understand oneself more emotionally, it is important to increase one's emotional intelligence. Recall that emotional intelligence is that "subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's emotions, to discriminate among them, and use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."[400] The means by which this emotional intelligence is nurtured is vast and varied.

---

[400] Carson Reed, "Motive and Movement," 71.

One of the participants encouraged the use of journaling to become more in touch with emotions. Journaling often provides that opportunity to slow down and process on paper the inner life. In addition, it may prove worthwhile to research the growing literature available on emotions. In addition to cognitive neuroscience's contributions to emotions, there is a growing body of popular literature on emotion that could encourage emotional intelligence.

In addition to journaling, one should not dismiss the importance of community to increase emotional intelligence and to know oneself emotionally. The reality is that God has provided a community of believers, some of whom are much more competent emotionally. Of course, in order for the community to aid in emotional awareness, there has to be some level of acceptance of emotions in that cultural context. One participant noted that he would often go outside of his church context to worship and engage in community so that there would be a different sense of emotional engagement. Part of growing in our emotional understanding may come outside our primary communities. In fact, for those whose community discourages an emotional knowledge of self, a counselor might provide opportunity to enhance emotional intelligence. The counselor's role would be to explore the emotional processing of events and help enhance emotional awareness. Finally, one should not dismiss their spouse's involvement. Perhaps no one lives as closely to a person as their spouse. That spouse may already have an understanding of emotion, and they may be able to perceive things about one's emotional condition that one might be unaware.

Know the Emotion of Your Scripture Text

Unless one first embraces the reality of an emotional God who relates to his creation in relationship and becomes increasingly aware of his own emotions, they will be unable to fully enter the emotion of the Scripture text. However, as they grows in his understanding of an emotional God and his emotional self, there may be a positive correlation in his interaction with the emotion of the Scripture text. One should expect that the texts of scripture would contain emotion. The divine author and the human author are both emotional beings. In order for preachers to better appeal to emotions in sermons, they must grow in their ability to enter the text emotionally. This will require a shift in their approach to preparation. Certainly, they will continue to engage the text seeking propositional truth and trying to discern through reason what the purpose of the scripture is. However, in addition, they will look to engage the text emotionally, as one participant described his preparation as his emotional "right brain" and his rational "left brain" going "on the prowl." This may require a preacher to overcompensate until they become more comfortable with his "right brain." More time and attention should be given in preparation to ensure that the preacher, and consequently, the parishioners will be engaged emotionally.

Several key recommendations to understand the emotion of the text are given. First, recognize the Biblical mood of the passage. As many preachers prepare their sermons by identifying their proposition and their objective in the sermon, they should also delineate the Biblical mood or emotion of the text. Depending on its genre, it may be very easy to ascertain the emotions of God in the passage. The mood most readily is found in reference to the actions of God on display. In addition, it is important for the

preacher to identify with the emotions of the characters in the text. As mentioned before, to know the emotion of the text, one has to identify with the characters in the text, seeking to "put yourself in their shoes" so that one understands what emotion is being displayed. It is this identification with the emotions of the characters which will yield dividends as the preacher seeks emotional engagement with his congregation.

Know Your Emotional Contexts

It is imperative to be aware of the emotional context in which one ministers. Participants revealed that there is much variance of emotional engagement that is contingent upon the context. Each person is a part of multiple cultural contexts. One's family of origin, education, denominational affiliation, geographical location, and ethnicity may all influence a person's perspective on emotions. Because of this it is important for preachers to understand the personal cultural contexts that shape their view of emotion in relationship to the church contexts in which they minister. A preacher shaped by a positive embracing of emotions may struggle to communicate to a church context shaped by a mistrust of emotions.

The point to be made is not that ministers should surrender to the cultural context in which they minister. Rather, ministers need to be keenly aware of the context in which they minister, as they seek to encourage emotional engagement that is consistent with the overarching Biblical context. This awareness will allow them to begin seeking teachable moments with the congregation as they seek to highlight the emotion of the text and of the God of the text. The goal is not to align the Biblical expectation to the culture but

rather align the culture to the Biblical expectation. In an effort to encourage this, preachers may seek to expose their congregation and themselves to other cultural contexts that are more consistent with Biblical applications of emotional engagement.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused specifically on how preachers' appeals to emotions correlate with cognitive neuroscience. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. Therefore, pursuit of the following areas of study could be highly valuable.

1. The field of cognitive neuroscience is burgeoning, and some in the field of education are seeking to apply this brain research to the classroom in an effort to understand best practices. Given the breadth of neuroscience and its stretching far past emotion as shown in this study, further research could be conducted that sought to explore how additional brain research correlates with other aspects of preaching. Indeed, an entire homiletics text could be written applying neuroscience principles to affirm homiletical practices.
2. Texts have been written which provide a neuroscientific explanation of certain religious phenomenon. These texts look to determine the biochemistry of belief and seek naturalistic explanations for otherwise spiritual phenomenon. For example, studies have been conducted that seek to explain what occurs in the brain during belief and meditation. Without seeking to naturalize the spiritual, there would be merit in conducting research to determine what is taking place in the brain during the preaching of a sermon.

3. Given the variation of different culture's trust of emotions, a sociological study could be pursued which seeks to explain why certain cultures may be more accepting of or resistant to emotion.

Bibliography

Adolphs, Ralph and David J. Anders. *The Neuroscience of Emotion: A New Synthesis.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Anderson, Tamara and Shelly A. Skinner. "Feelings: Discipleship That Understands the Affective Processes of a Disciple of Christ." *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (2019): 66-78.

Arthurs, Jeffrey. "Pathos Needed." *Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching.* Edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Arthurs, Jeffrey D. "The Place of Pathos in Preaching." *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 1, no. 1 (December 2001): 15–21.

Averbeck, Richard E. "God, People, and the Bible: The Relationship Between Illumination and Biblical Scholarship," *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit: An Investigation in the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today*. Edited by Daniel B. Wallace and James Sawyer. Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2005.

Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *How Emotions are Made.* New York: Mariner Books, 2017.

Baty, Dan. "Heart to Heart Preaching." *Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching.* Edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Blomberg, Doug. "The Heart Has Reasons that Reason Cannot Know." *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 17, no.1 (2013): 61-77.

Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion.* Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Cammack, Richard, et al. *Oxford Dictionary of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Campbell, Charles L. "Learning to Blush: The Emotional Formation of the Preacher." *Journal for Preachers* 24, no. 4 (2001): 48-51.

Carver, William Owen. "An Outline Study of the First Chapter of Ephesians." *Review & Expositor* 1, no. 2 (July 1904): 211–18.

Cavanagh, Sarah Rose. *The Spark of Learning.* Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2016.

Cha, Jung Sik. "Some Aspects of Theological Anthropology in Jesus' Emotions." *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 103, no. 1 (2017): 373-398.

Choi, Kwang-Hyun. “The Theological Background of the Demythologized Spirit in Preaching.” *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 2 (2018): 274–79.

Coplan, Amy and Peter Goldie. *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Cox, Richard. *Rewiring Your Preaching.* Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012.

Crotts, Jeffrey. *Illuminated Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Vital Role in Unveiling His Word, The Bible.* Leominster, England: Day One: 2010.

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Religious Affections.* Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1986.

Elliot, Matthew. “The Emotional Core of Love: The Centrality of Emotion in Christian Psychology and Ethics.” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 105-117.

Erickson, Millard Erickson. *Christian Theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013.

Ervine, W J Clyde, and John A Vissers. “True Preachers Preaching Truly: The Goal of Preaching in the Reformed Tradition.” *Didaskalia* 15, no. 1 (2003): 29–46.

Eswine, Zach. *Kindled Fire.* Glasgow: Mentor Imprint, 2006.

Fee, Gordon. The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.

Gasque, Gabriel. "Seven Glimpses into the Emotional Brain." *PLOS Biology* 14, no. 12, (December 2016): 1-4.

Goldsworthy, Graeme. *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics.* Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Han, Diego. “From Postmodernity to a Post-Truth Society?” *Journal of Comparative Studies* 40, no. 11 (January 2018): 10–29.

Hans, Daniel. “Preaching Through Personal Pain.” *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching.* Edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Heisler, Greg. *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery.* Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018.

Hinton, Christina, Koji Miyamoto, and Bruno Chiesa. “Brain Research, Learning and Emotions: Implications for Education Research, Policy and Practice.” *European Journal of Education* 43, no. 1 (March 2008): 87-103.

Hogue, David., "Brain Matters: Neuroscience, Empathy, and Pastoral Theology." *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 25-55.

Hollinger, Dennis. "Preaching to the Head, Heart, and Hands: A Holistic Paradigm for Proclaiming and Hearing the Word." *The Journal of Evangelical Homiletics Society* 7, no. 1 (Mar 2001): 18-37.

Hussey, Ian and Allan Demon. "Vulnerability in Preaching: How Far is Not Far Enough." *Journal of Evangelical Homiletics Society* 18, no. 2 (Sep 2018): 5-20.

Immordino-Yang, Mary Helen. *Emotions, Learning and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience.* New York: W.W. Norton, 2016.

Immordino-Yang, Mary Helen and Matthias Faeth, "The Role of Emotion and Skilled Intuition in Learning," *Mind, Brain, Education,* ed. David Sousa. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2010.

Irrmischer, Mona, Natalie Van der Wal, Huibert Mansvelder, and Klaus Linkenkaer-Hansen. "Negative mood and mind wandering increase long-range temporal correlations in attention fluctuations." *PLOSone* 13, no. 5 (Spring 2018):1-4.

Jensen, Eric. *Teaching With the Brain in Mind.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005.

Johnston, Elizabeth and Leah Olson. *The Feeling Brain: The Biology and Psychology of Emotions* New York: W.W. Norton, 2015.

Kaiser Jr., Walter. "Legitimate Hermeneutics," *Inerrancy* ed. Norman Geisler. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980.

Keller, Tim. *Preaching.* New York: Viking, 2015.

Kelly, Doug. *Preachers With Power.* Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992.

Kennard, Douglas . "Evangelical Views on Illumination of Scripture and Critique," *JETS* 49, no. 4 (Dec 2006):797-806.

King, Jason. "Feelings and Decision Making." *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1067 (Jan 2016): 39-51.

Kistemaker, Simon. *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians,* New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993.

Klooster, Fred H. “The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process: The Relation of The Holy Spirit’s Illumination to Biblical Interpretation,” *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from the ICBI Summit.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

Larsen, David. *Telling the Old, Old Story.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1995.

Larson, Craig Brian. “Preaching Pyrotechnics." *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching.* Edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of the Psalms.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977.

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971.

Logan, Samuel. *The Preacher and Preaching.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1986.

Maiese, Michelle. “Transformative Learning, Enactivism, and Affectivity.” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36. no. 2 (March 2017): 197-216.

Manssuer, Luis, Ralph Pawling, Amy Hayes, and Steven Tipper. "The Role of Emotion in Learning Trustworthiness from Eye Gaze: Evidence from Facial Electroymyography." *Cognitive Neuroscience* 7, no. 1 (December 2016): 82-102.

McKinley, David J.“John Owen’s View of Illumination: An Alternative to the Fuller-Erickson Dialogue,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154, no. 613 (Jan 1997): 93-104.

Megill, Jason. “Emotion, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence,” *Minds and Machines* 24, no. 2 (May 2014): 189-199.

Miller, Kevin A. “Preaching with Intensity,” *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching.* Edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Mitchell, Henry H. “Emotion and Preaching: A Clarification.” *The Living Pulpit* 15, no. 3 (July 2006): 26–28.

Muthiah, Rob. "Surfacing Emotions to Teach Leadership." *Journal of Religious Leadership* 17, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 46-67.

Nauss, Allen H. “Preaching Sermons That Will Be Remembered: Unleashing the Spirit’s Power in the Brain.” *Concordia Journal* 34, no. 4 (October 2008): 264–91.

Owen, John. “The Reason of Faith.” *The Works of John Owen.* Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991.

Raiter, Michael. “On Sermons and Preaching: Evangelicals, Essentials, and Emotions.” *St. Marks Review* 1, no. 219 (Feb 2012): 72-85.

Ramm, Bernard. *Rapping About the Spirit*. Waco, TX: Word, 1974.

Reed, Carson. “Motive and Movement: Affective Leadership Through the Work of Preaching.” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 63-82.

Scoffham, Stephen and Jonathan Barnes. “Happiness Matters: Towards a Pedagogy of Happiness and Well-Being.” *Curriculum Journal* 22, no. 4 (December 2011): 535-548.

Seamen, M.X.. *Illumination and Interpretation: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Hermeneutics.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Sherman, Nancy. “Emotions.” In *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, edited by Stephen G. Post, 3rd ed., 2:740–46. New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004.

Shields, Bruce E. “Preaching and the Vocabulary of the Holy Spirit,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 39-46.

Sousa, David A. *How the Brain Learns.* London: Sage, 2017.

Sproul, R.C. “The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit,” *Inerrancy* ed. Norman Geisler. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980.

Sproul, R.C. *Scripture Alone.* Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005.

Stein, Robert. *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.

Stowell, Joe. “Self-Disclosure that Glorifies Christ.” *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching.* Edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Strachan, R.H. *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. "Preaching into the Next Millennium." *Journal for Preachers* 19, no. 3 (Easter 1996): 25-31.

Veith, Gene. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994.

Ventura, Rob. “The Holy Spirit and the Preacher of God.” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 2017): 303–21.

Vines, Jerry and Adam B. Dooley. *Passion in the Pulpit.* Chicago: Moody, 2018.

Voorwinde, Stephen. "Illumination Re-Examined," *Vox Reformata* 77, no. 3 (July 2012): 47-72.

Voorwinde, Stephen. *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels.* London: T & T Clark, 2011.

Webster, John. "Illumination," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 325-340.

West, Robert. *How to Study the Bible Illustrated.* Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2007.

Willimon, William H. "Preaching: Acting Up with the Holy Spirit." *Journal for Preachers* 39, no. 4 (2016): 2–6.

Wilson, Paul. "The Source of Passion," *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching.* Edited by Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.