COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection

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

www.covenantseminary.edu/library

A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING HOW REFORMED PREACHERS ENGAGE THE UNINTERESTED LISTENER'S IMAGINATION BY MEANS OF METAPHOR

By
Howard Cole

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

2022

Preaching to Engage the Imagination by Metaphor

By
Howard Cole

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 13, 2022

Dr. Clay Smith
Faculty Advisor _____

Dr. Hugh Barlett
Second Reader _____

Dr. Joel Hathaway
Director of DMin Program _____

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how Reformed preachers in a post-Christian context engage the listener's imagination with metaphor. Preachers face homiletical challenges in communicating gospel truth to apathetic audiences that impact a preacher's mission focused on listener attention and comprehension.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six pastors from various Reformed denominations who preached for five years or longer. The interviews focused on gaining data with four research questions: In what ways do Reformed preachers communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the listener's imagination? How do Reformed preachers select metaphorical illustrations that engage the listener's imagination? What resources do Reformed preachers utilize to identify metaphorical illustrations to engage the listener's imagination? What outcomes do Reformed preachers desire to observe by engaging listener's imagination with metaphorical illustrations?

The literature review focused on the philosophical and cultural forces contributing to listener engagement, preaching to the imagination with metaphor, and Jesus' use of metaphor.

This study concluded that the filtering effects of plausibility structures, the immanent frame, the social imaginary, and disenchantment have contributed to conditions that hinder listener engagement during the preaching event. The use of metaphor was found to exercise a unique function, power, and significance related to engaging the imagination. Jesus' use of metaphor focused on parables as extended metaphors and indirect communication. Participants described multiple tactics regarding

metaphor use and used metaphor and story interchangeably. Selection criteria varied based on rhetorical theories that undergirded practice. Resources ranged from authors and artists to cultural artifacts and living practitioners. The Scriptures were cited as the primary metaphor resource. Variable desired outcomes were expressed.

To address the challenges, apologetic sensitivity and homiletical tactics were utilized to circumvent secularizing forces and increase listener receptivity through an engagement with the imagination. Profound understanding was catalyzed as metaphorical aesthetics increased affective receptivity. Preachers aimed to have pictures and propositions cooperate so that the imagination and intellect were addressed. Engaging the imagination as a synthesizing cognitive faculty with metaphor increased listener interest.

To my beloved wife Alleyn, who awakens my imagination like no other.

"Sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness" Proverbs 16:17b

"The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth" Ecclesiastes 12:10

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

Chapter One

Introduction: Problem Statement and Apologetic

Preachers today are facing homiletical challenges in communicating gospel truth to apathetic audiences, challenges that cut to the core of a preacher's mission. Author and Professor of Preaching Duane Liftin states, "The herald's stance is focused on attention and comprehension."[1] He then adds that preachers must therefore adapt their messages to their listeners to attain these purposes.[2] So what are preachers to do when the congregants are not listening?

Author and social critic Os Guiness describes well the attention problem among congregants in modern cultures. He asserts, "Almost all our witnessing and Christian communication assumes that people are open to what we have to say, or at least are interested, if not in need of what we are saying. Yet most people quite simply are not open, not interested, and not needy."[3] Guiness adds, "Indeed, many are more hostile, and their hostility is greater than the Western church has faced for centuries."[4] He sounds the alarm for preachers to wake up and acknowledge that current listeners arrive with auditory filters that mute the communicated message of the Christian story.

Author and Reformed preacher Roger E. Van Harn supports Guiness' exhortation and explains, "The church commissions people to preach and gathers others to listen.

---

[1] Duane Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 178–80.

[2] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching,*178–80.

[3] Os Guinness, *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019), 22.

[4] Guinness, *Fool's Talk,* 22.

Preachers need to know that the people are hearing their words so they can get the message. 'Can you hear me?' is typically the preacher's question to the people," as it should be. [5] For communicators to successfully get their message across, they must first understand the receptivity of their audience.[6]

Reformed preaching has historically been interested in listener openness and has emphasized veracity and reasoning, assuming that people are asking "Is it true?"[7] However, according to several authors in the American post-Christian, post-Christendom, postmodern, secular age of disenchantment,[8] preachers must realize the questions have changed. Philosopher Paul Gould maintains that many people are not asking, "Is it true?" He contends that communicators "must demonstrate not only the *truth* of Christianity but also its *desirability*." Is it attractive, and is it good?[9] How do preachers ensure the existential questions dealing with desirability and utility are uncovered and addressed? Could an aesthetic approach stirring the imagination engage the disinterested listener?

---

[5] Roger E. Van Harn and Eugene H. Peterson, *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), xi.

[6] Harry Levi Hollingworth, *The Psychology Of The Audience: American Psychology Series*, ed. Henry E. Garrett (New York: American Book Company, 2012), 21. Harry Hollingworth, Past President of the American Psychological Association and author of *The Psychology of the Audience* Suggests 5 types of audiences, (pedestrian, passive, selected, concerted, and organized) each needing a different persuasive approach: Pedestrian challenge: Getting their attention, Passive challenge: Awaken their interest, Selected challenge: make an impression, Concerted challenge: Arouse conviction, Organized challenge: Give direction.

[7] William Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart: Recovering Christian Persuasion* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2003), 51–52.

[8] Gene Edward Veith Jr, *Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 18. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

[9] Paul M. Gould and J. P. Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 25. Gould continues "All too often our apologetic efforts focus on the plausibility of Christianity without much attention to its desirability…People question the goodness of God, the attractiveness of the church, the beauty of Jesus, and the sufficiency of the gospel to meet human needs and longings of the heart." 92.

The causes of disinterest must be probed and analyzed to adapt preaching to today's audience, and, as many have noted, multiple factors are combining to filter and numb listeners to religious content.[10] These factors fall into two categories: secularizing forces filtering out intended communication and preaching aimed at the intellect rather than the imagination.

Secularizing Forces Filtering Out Preacher Communication

Secular culture has abandoned all but a superficial awareness of a supernatural reality.[11] Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor asks, "Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"[12] He answers the question by calling this cultural moment, a Secular Age.[13] Taylor points out that the story of the secularization of the West has been told as a subtraction story.[14] Alan Noble, apologetics author and assistant professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University, agrees and explains that in the 1500's, it was hard not to believe in God and listen attentively to Christian content. Congregants assumed the world was part of a cosmos created by God, society was ordered in reference to God, and nature was enchanted because a transcendent God created it. Slowly, Western culture began accepting that the universe is best explained

---

[10] Craig Springer and David Kinnaman, *How to Revive Evangelism: 7 Vital Shifts in How We Share Our Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 7–10.

[11] Springer and Kinnaman, *How to Revive Evangelism,* 7.

[12] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2018), 25.

[13] This was the name given to his philosophical treatise on the subject, *A Secular Age,* Taylor, 1.

[14] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 253.

through science without reference to God, and Western society has been ordered according to human reason as a result. Belief in spirits and supernatural forces have been subtracted from the story and labeled superstation.[15] The intellectual and philosophical history leading up to this cultural moment offers congregants an alternative explanation for the origin of the universe without assuming the supernatural, thus eliminating any reason to care about sermons rich in supernatural truths. Their personal significance is not found in anything having to do with God.

Kyle Beshears, preacher, and apologetics author, agrees with and develops Taylor and Noble's secular thesis by describing four cultural conditions that contribute to listener apathy: "Belief in God is contestable and diverse, and our status of life is comfortable and distracted."[16] Preachers proclaim belief in God, but belief in God is now but one option, and contesting a belief is normal. Given these cultural conditions, when preachers proclaim answers to questions that listeners screen out their content becomes irrelevant. For instance, preachers who give rational premises for the existence of God encounter listener apathy because the listener assumes that there may be no God or many gods. Preacher and cultural author Mark Sayers agrees with Taylor, Noble, and Beshears and reasons that secularism fosters an apathy rather than antagonism because a person thinks they can build their own life and comforts without needing God.[17]

---

[15] Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age*, Illustrated edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 40.

[16] Kyle Beshears, *Apatheism: How We Share When They Don't Care* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2021), 13.

[17] Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience*, 2016, 15-20.

Beshears defines secularism as a state in which it's acceptable to disbelieve in God or believe differently than your neighbor, whether that belief has to do with God, gods or even nothing at all.[18] Preachers who do not consider secularizing philosophical forces perpetuate a cultural ahistoricism, refusing to connect the cultural present to its past. This denial is detrimental to communicating the gospel to the indifferent congregant.

The Cost of Secularizing Forces: A Shrinking Interest

The philosophical forces that have muted the message of the gospel have extracted a price; a decrease in participants at gathered preaching events. Rick Richardson, director of the Billy Graham Institute, and its Church Evangelism Initiative, cites the 2017 "Unchurched Report" and claims that 30 percent of the unchurched say they "lost interest" in the message of their pastors and found the message of the Christian church irrelevant and uncompelling.[19] According to Gallup Inc., "While it is possible that part of the decline seen in 2020 was temporary and related to the coronavirus pandemic, continued decline in future decades seems inevitable."[20]

Further, how badly is the church shrinking? According the Barna Research Group, "In the early 1990s, about three out of ten adults were churchless. In the next decade, the figure inched up to one-third of the population. During the current decade, the figure has

---

[18] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 15.

[19] The "Unchurched Report" can be found here: "Unchurched Report," Billy Graham Center Institute and Lifeway Research, January 5, 2017, http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/BGCE-Unchurched-Study-Final-Report-1_5_17.pdf. Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith*, (Chicago, IL: Downers Grove, 2019), 46–48, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

[20] Gallup, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup.com, March 29, 2021, https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx.

jumped to 43 percent of all US adults."[21] People identifying as Christian have been in a steep decline.[22] Many initial attenders of evangelical churches quit attending by the age of 23.[23] Richardson clarifies that "millennials are not leaving the church at the high rate that we have heard but rather at a rate of about 45 percent."[24] Sociologist of religion Rodney Starke predicted that many millennials would return to church, but that does not[25] appear to be the case.[26]

According to the Pew Research Center, random digit-dial surveys show that religious "nones," people who describe themselves, religiously, as atheist, agnostic, or simply-nothing in particular, have been growing as a share of the U.S. adult population, and

---

[21] George Barna, David Kinneman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Austin, TX: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 9, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

[22] Brian Black, *Built on the Sand: Biblical Solutions to the Crash of Church Attendance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021), 4.

[23] John S. Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors That Will Crash the American Church...and How to Prepare* (Baker Books, 2013), 98-99. Dickerson states "I found in separate studies Josh McDowell, LifeWay Research, the Barna Group, and secular researchers, including UCLA, have all landed at figures between 69-80 percent of evangelicals in their twenties who leave the faith.

[24] Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith*, (Chicago, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 49, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

[25] "Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones,'" *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed August 15, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/.

[26] Rodney Stark and Byron Johnson, "Religion and the Bad News Bearers," *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition* 258, no. 48 (August 26, 2011): A11, Business Source Premier. Starke writes "Surveys always find that younger people are less likely to attend church, yet this has never resulted in the decline of the churches. It merely reflects the fact that, having left home, many single young adults choose to sleep in on Sunday mornings." Current LifeWay research confirm sthat these young adults are not returning to church. In 2019 Scott McConnel Executive Director of LifeWay Research stated ""The reality is that Protestant churches continue to see the new generation walk away as young adults. Regardless of any external factors, the Protestant church is slowly shrinking from within." Ben Trueblood, Director of Student Ministry at LifeWay states when a college student drops out of church 69 percent will stay gone." Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church When They Become Young Adults," Lifeway Research, January 15, 2019, https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/.

Christians have been declining for quite some time.[27] In the Center's most current 2021 polling, 63 percent of U.S. adults identify as Christians, including 43 percent who are Protestant, 19 percent who are Catholic, and 2% who are Mormon, and 28 percent are "nones," including 4 percent who describe themselves as atheists, 5 percent who are agnostics, and 18 percent who are nothing in particular. By way of comparison, the Center's polling from roughly a decade ago, in 2009, 77 percent of U.S. adults described themselves as Christians, 14 percentage points higher than today, and 17 percent described themselves as religious "nones," 11 points lower than today.[28] Ryan P. Burge, associate professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University, presents an even higher number of the "nones," claiming, "There is one clear trend that is unmistakable, though. The line for no religion continues to trend in an upward direction. Nones were 22.2 percent in 2008; now they are 29.5 percent."[29]

Barna, Gallup, LifeWay Research, and the Billy Graham Center Institute, all note the same undeniable trend-Preachers are preaching to a shrinking audience.

---

[27] "Measuring Religion in Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), January 14, 2021, https://www.pewforum.org/2021/01/14/measuring-religion-in-pew-research-centers-american-trends-panel/.

[28] NW, Washington, and Inquiries.

[29] "Growth and Decline in American Religion over the Last Decade," *Religion in Public* (blog), July 9, 2019, https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/07/09/growth-and-decline-in-american-religion-over-the-last-decade/.

Preaching to the Intellect Rather Than the Imagination

A deficit of interest has hit gospel preaching hard.[30] The Barna Group[31] has written about it and Lifeway Research[32] recognizes it, but what are its root causes? One root cause, according to Reformed philosopher Justin Bailey, is the overemphasis of preaching to the intellect rather than the imagination.[33] Bailey asks, "Why is it that those of us who are confessionally Reformed have so neglected the imagination and the aesthetic dimension of faith?"[34] Since preachers are starting with a shortfall of listener interest, he is concerned that they have not added imaginative aesthetics in their homiletical approach.

Theologian Joseph Wooddell agrees with Bailey: "As modernity wanes, however, the arguments and reasons for wooing a modern audience have become passé at best, counter-productive at worst."[35] He clarifies, "I do not seek to pit the imagination against the intellect."[36] He wants Christian communicators to correct the imbalance and draw attention to how the imagination fosters beliefs. He argues, "It remains the case that contemporary apologetic method consistently discounts aesthetic concerns in favor of the rational ones."[37]

---

[30] According to the Barna Group "Today's churchless adults are not remarkably less favorable toward churches in their community; if anything, there is simply a growing "yawn," with 25 percent expressing they don't know whether they have favorable or unfavorable impressions. Barna and Kinneman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them,* 3-30.

[31] Barna and Kinneman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them,* 3-30.

[32] Aaron Earls, "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing," Lifeway Newsroom, April 6, 2021, https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/04/06/americans-views-of-lifes-meaning-and-purpose-are-changing/.

[33] Justin Bailey, "Reimagining 'Pre-Apologetics'?": Responding to Trevin Wax's TGC Review," *Justin Ariel Bailey* (blog), December 11, 2020, https://pjustin.com/reimagining-pre-apologetics-responding-to-trevin-waxs-tgc-review/.

[34] Bailey, "Reimagining 'Pre-Apologetics'?"

[35] Joseph D. Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith: Using Aesthetics for Christian Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 37.

[36] Justin Ariel Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics: The Beauty of Faith in a Secular Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 17.

[37] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 17.

For Bailey, rationality and truth remain essential, but first, current listeners need to connect faith with their imagination.[38] Historically, Bailey continues, modern culture could not address the aesthetic until facts had been adjudicated as truth. But now, the aesthetic dimension is the space where beliefs become believable. This shift does not mean that questions of truth are no longer relevant but that they should be situated in terms of the larger imaginative frame.[39] Based on Bailey's analysis, preachers need to help people see not only the truthfulness, but also the attractiveness of Christianity. "The Christian faith is true, but it is also beautiful."[40] Bailey writes, "I am not arguing against argument, reasoning, etc., as some postmodernists are apt to do, …rather, I am arguing for the use of more than mere argument in apologetics; I am reasoning for the use of more than mere reason."[41] Additional social philosophers agree that more than mere argument is needed to gain a hearing.

Alister McGrath, professor of science and religion at Oxford University, describes the relationship between the intellect and the imagination in the preaching event this way, "The use of arguments, as we shall see, remains an integral part of Christian apologetics and must never be marginalized. However, the waning of rationalism in western culture"[42] has made this less important than it once was. He asserts that other aspects of the Christian faith need to be recognized, "above all, its powerful imaginative, moral, and

---

[38] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 17.

[39] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 17.

[40] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith,* 14.

[41] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith,* 15.

[42] Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How To Help Seekers And Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 128–29.

aesthetic appeal.""[43] He notes how older Christian writers, particularly those who lived during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, placed a high value on biblical stories and images in teaching. He explains how postmodernity has emphasized story and image, and he encourages Christian communicators to make a significant appeal to the human imagination.[44] He writes, "We need to adapt our apologetics to our audiences, realizing there are several gateways of connection between the gospel and the human listener."[45] Philosopher and author Paul Gould develops McGrath's point by noting, "One of the best ways to begin reawakening the religious impulse is through imagination. Art, music, poetry, and story can awaken a desire for transcendence by inviting formerly closed-off listeners into engagement with reality."[46] Preachers engage listeners with transcendent, supernatural reality.

Reformed author and preacher Tim Keller notes that Reformed preachers are trained primarily to communicate the logos, or content, to their listeners.[47] Although pathos, persuasion, and the imagination are tools in preaching, what is missing is literature showing how to use pathos, persuasion, and the imagination to engage the disinterested listener. In his book *Making Sense of God,* Keller states, "In general, I'd say that…non-believers need to hear why Christianity makes emotional and cultural sense before they

---

[43] McGrath, *Mere Apologetics,* 128–29.

[44] McGrath, *Mere Apologetics* 129.

[45] McGrath, *Mere Apologetics* 129.

[46] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 72.

[47] Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 216–20.

are willing to devote significant time to weighting the more traditional, rational augments for our faith."[48]

Notice that Keller, McGrath, Gould, and Bailey do not ask for the removing of rational arguments in preaching. Bailey clarifies, "Traditional proofs remain part of the apologetic mix so long as they are placed in a larger context and so long as the human person is conceived as a complex individual with hopes, desires, and imaginings, and not just a "brain on a stick.'"[49]

Bailey's phrase "brain on a stick" is taken from philosopher James K. A. Smith, professor of philosophy at Calvin University, who challenges a strictly rationalist approach when he asserts the listener is not a "brain on a stick."[50] "Instead of the rationalist model that implies, "You are what you think," he proposes a different approach, "You are what you love."[51] Smith explains that the liturgy, including preaching "dug wells into the very imagination" of the participants. [52]He explains, "The church is to be an imagination station, a space for re-habituating our imagination to the 'true story of the whole world.'"[53]

American Social Psychologist Jonathan Haidt agrees with Smith: "A rationalist is anyone who believes that reasoning is the most important and reliable way to obtain

---

[48] Keller, *Making Sense of God,* 216, 271.

[49] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 160.

[50] James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, Illustrated edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 3,101,127, 157.

[51] Smith, *You Are What You Love,* 7.

[52] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 85.

[53] Smith, *You Are What You Love,*180.

moral knowledge."[54] He then asserts that reasoning is important but not the most important way to know. "I had found that moral reasoning was often a servant of moral emotions."[55] The intellect acts as an advisor, but our gut feelings or emotions process the messages received."

The Use of Metaphor to Address the Imagination

Sociologists of religion Rodney Stark and Roger Finke think the use of metaphors could be valuable to the preacher. They tracked demographics of major denominations in American between 1776 and 1850 and noted that the Methodists outpaced every other denomination in gaining adherents, growing a full 34.2 percent. A key differentiator was that the preachers "made careful use of vernacular imagery, metaphors, and stories that applied to the everyday life of their audience."[56] Conversely, Reformed Presbyterians saw an 8.4 percent decrease in adherents, as their preachers typically addressed the intellect by means of a formal, instructional approach.[57]

Philosopher Peter Kreeft claims, "The root of most atheism is not argument but attitude, not intellection, but feeling."[58] Pascal's famous prescription agrees with Kreeft:

> Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of

---

[54] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, Illustrated edition (New York: Vintage, 2013), 7.

[55] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind,* 29.

[56] Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, Revised edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 86.

[57] Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America,* 87.

[58] Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: PASCAL's Pensees Edited, Outlined, and Explained* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993), 28.

> reverence and respect. Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is."[59]

Kreeft and Pascal concur that preachers need to address the aesthetic desires in addition to intellectual reasons for faith. Bailey contends that for Pascal, the demonstration of faith's beauty precedes the demonstration of faith's verity, even if the demonstration of faith's rationality precedes both. But what has changed in this current situation is that the aesthetic dimension has become "the way into rationality."[60]

Cognitive and linguistics professor George Lakoff provides a way to connect reason to an atrophied imagination by means of metaphor.[61] He observes that metaphor unites reason and imagination because reason involves categorization and imagination involves seeing one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing. Metaphor is thus "imaginative rationality."[62] A preacher's use of metaphor connects images to propositional truth to gain congregational interest and understanding.

Jay Kim, author of Analog Church reminds preachers, "The Christian church has always been marked by her ability to create and invite people into *transcendent* spaces and experiences."[63] He noted, a preacher's use of metaphorical examples act as a bridge

---

[59] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London : New York: Penguin Classics, 1995), 4.

[60] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 19.

[61] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 193.

[62] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We live By,* 193.

[63] Jay Y. Kim and Scot McKnight, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 24.

to invite a disinterested listener into a transcendent space to encounter the gospel message.[64]

Purpose Statement

Multiple antecedent, socio-cultural, and homiletical conditions have contributed to gospel disinterest. Preachers have an opportunity to overcome this disinterest by engaging the imagination using metaphor. As significant as the findings from research into communicating to the unmotivated listener are, many Reformed preachers are unfamiliar with how to design and deliver messages that use metaphor. Perhaps more empathy is needed by the preacher regarding the conditions that negatively influence listeners, thereby muting the message of the gospel of God.

The purpose of this study is to explore how Reformed preachers in a post-Christian context engage the listener's imagination with metaphor. Three main areas are central to listener engagement in a post-Christian context: understanding the philosophical and cultural forces that mute the preacher's message, preaching to the imagination with metaphorical examples, and examining Jesus' use of metaphorical examples.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do Reformed preachers communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the listener's imagination?

---

[64] Kim and McKnight, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places and Things in the Digital Age,* 24–25.

2. How do Reformed preachers select metaphorical illustrations that engage the listener's imagination?
    a. What difficulties do Reformed preachers face in the selection of metaphorical illustrations?
    b. How do Reformed preachers navigate the difficulties of metaphorical illustration selection?
3. What resources do Reformed preachers utilize to identify metaphorical illustrations to engage the listener's imagination?
4. What outcomes do Reformed preachers desire to observe by engaging listener's imagination with metaphorical illustrations?

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for many preachers who struggle to connect with the mind and heart of their listeners in the disengaged, post-Christian U.S. context. The Apostle Paul directed his young disciple Timothy, "Preach the Word…with complete patience and teaching…do the work of an evangelist…fulfill your ministry."[65] Currently there is little in the way of literature to teach homiletical tactics that will circumvent the secularizing forces numbing current listeners to gospel truth. Moreover, there is insufficient literature to show how to engage the imagination of resistant listeners with metaphorical examples.

This research's literature review findings, coupled with the findings of preachers' best practices, could help the church in several ways. The literature and interview

[65] 2 Timothy 4:2-5.

findings will expose preachers to key homiletical strategies and tactics that connect with the imagination of their audience. The findings can also increase preacher empathy for listeners as they gain understanding of how listeners filter out their intended communication. Finally, the literature and interview findings will provide specific methods to enhance the preparation and delivery of sermons and facilitate the receptivity of the listener's mind and will. J. Gresham Machen had hopes for the church's communication with indifferent audience members when he wrote "Perhaps, by God's grace, through His good Spirit, in His good time, she might issue forth once more with power, and an age of doubt might be followed by the dawn of an era of faith."[66]

Definition of Terms

Contextualization – How to adapt one's gospel proclamation to one's audience.[67]

Post-Christendom – The culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian narrative and as the institutions and traditions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.[68]

---

[66] Machen, J. Gresham, "Christianity and Culture," *The Princeton Theological Review* 11, no. 1 (1913): 15, https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/princetontheolog1111arms-dmd002.

[67] Flavien Pardigon, "The Areopagus Speech and Contextualization: Some Hermeneutical and Exegetical Considerations," *Unio Cum Christo* 6, no. 1 (April 2020): 12. Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials. The term "contextualization" first appeared in a report of The Theology Education Fund in 1972. However, the issue of how to adapt one's gospel proclamation to one's audience is nothing new and was already raised by the earliest church fathers. In the past two centuries, it was mostly discussed under the rubrics of "adaptation," "accommodation," "acculturation," "inculturation," "nativization," or "indigenization."

[68] Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom : Church and Mission in a Strange New World. Second Edition*, vol. Second edition, After Christendom Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 19. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)

Disenchantment – The state of being buffered from the transcendent and therefore not needing a transcendent God to encounter humanity. In premodernity, human beings thought of themselves as enchanted or open, porous, and vulnerable to a world of religious spirits and powers. In the current era of disenchantment, all realities outside of the observable, natural realm need to be encountered first with doubt.

Reformed – Reformed Christianity emerged in the sixteenth century out of the Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions of the Protestant Reformation. Central to Reformed worship is the proclamation of the word of God through preaching in the vernacular of the people.[69]

Expressive Individualism – An invention of the Romantic period where people express their individual self authentically from a foundation of self-orientation[70]

Nova Affect – The explosion of an ever-widening variety of moral and spiritual options beyond the Christian metanarrative.[71]

---

[69] Donald K. McKim, "Christianity: Reformed Christianity," in *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Religious Practices*, ed. Thomas Riggs, vol. 1, Religions and Denominations (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2006), 233, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3437900035/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=780b3e5e. McKim goes on to explain "The Reformed emphasize that worship is for the people of God, who gather to honor and worship him, to pray, to *listen to his Word* (Italics mine) , to celebrate the sacraments, and to be nurtured in their lives of faith to serve God in the world in all they do. Worship services feature hymns, prayers, *a sermon (*Italics mine), the sacraments, an offering, and, often, announcements related to the local congregation."

[70] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473.

[71] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 299.

Social Imaginary – The sensed context that culture provides that acts as interpretive grids[72] in which beliefs develop; the default cognitive frameworks and filters for interacting with the world.[73]

Immanent Frame – The notion that everything in the world is part of a natural order understandable without reference to anything outside of itself and simply as a matter of causal relationships[74]

Indirect communication – Communication strategies that convey truth by way of story, narrative, and symbol, in contrast to direct communication that conveys truth by way of logic, reason, and doctrine.[75]

Metaphor – An implied comparison that acts as a bifocal utterance that requires listeners to look at both the literal and figurative levels.[76]

Metaphorical Illustration – A catch-all for vivid explanatory metaphors and analogies preachers use to dress their text to aid listeners in understanding the complex ideas connected to everyday life.[77]

---

[72] Josh Chatraw and Karen Swallow Prior, *Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 25.

[73] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 549.

[74] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 542.

[75] Benson P. Fraser, *Hide and Seek: The Sacred Art of Indirect Communication* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2020), 18.

[76] William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 5.

[77] Cornelius Plantinga calls metaphorical illustrations attentive illustrations and defines attentive illustrations as "The term is actually a catch-all for anecdotes, analogies, stories, blog entries, editorial opinions, famous tweets, incidents from history, memorable sayings, biographical profiles, statistics, snippets of dialogue from TV interviews, lines from Wikipedia bios, lines from poems, news reports, people's comments on news reports, summaries of film plots, sentences from one of Bonhoeffer's prison letters, and all the other fine things preachers gather, store, and retrieve in order to dress their exegeted text decently…" Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 22.

Fragilization – In the face of different faith options, where one's neighbors do not share one's beliefs, a person's faith commitment becomes fragile: put into question, challengeable, and doubtful.[78]

Preaching – Human verbal communication that proclaims in the here and now the will of God from the Word of God,[79] presenting and applying[80] the story of God in a manner[81] that is reasonable, imaginative, and intrinsic[82] to the text.[83]

Imagination – The part of human, cognitive architecture that consists of image-making and image-perceiving faculties,[84] which allows listeners to make applications of truth to life as an organ of meaning.[85]

---

[78] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299.

[79] McKim, "Christianity," 233.

[80] Wayne McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1999), 20. Wayne McDill, Senior Professor of Preaching at Southeastern Seminary defines preaching as "the expression of the revelation of God through oral communication, declared by a God-called messenger, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, containing a theological message, from the biblical text, addressed to a particular audience in their situation, with the aim of calling the hearers to faith in God."

[81] J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Pub, 1996), 125–32. Reformed Theologian Packer distinguished preaching from teaching by emphasizing truth applied to life. "A sermon then is an applicatory declaration…in relation to those whom the preacher addresses." 125

[82] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 200. Chapell states, "A preacher who constructs sermons to serve illustrations rather than solid biblical exposition inevitably drifts from pulpit to stage, from pastor to showman. Any trained public speaker can select a theme and gather a bundle of stories that will touch an audience emotionally, but this is not preaching." See Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 200

[83] Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching And Teaching With Imagination: The Quest For Biblical Ministry*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1997), 305.

[84] Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 21.

[85] A. R. Manser, "Imagination," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Donald M. Borchert, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), 596, http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3446800916/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=9e5e510c.

Apologetic Sensitivity – A principled attempt to communicate the vitality of the Christian gospel faithfully and effectively to the culture, engaging objections with empathy for the listener.[86]

Cultural Apologetics – The work of establishing the Christian voice, conscience, and imagination within a culture so that Christianity is seen as true and satisfying.[87]

Disinterested Listener – An uninquiring, apathetic, detached listener with a lack of desire or enthusiasm regarding content that is presented.

Experiential Preaching – Preaching that seeks to explain, in terms of biblical truth, how matters ought to go, how they do go, and the goal of the Christian life, where the preacher enters sympathetically into the hopes and fears of the hearer. [88]

Secularization – The process in which various sectors of modern social life have been emptied of theological substance and have ceased to need the concept of God to function reasonably, smoothly, and normally.[89]

---

[86] Alister E. McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics: Sharing the Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 17–25.

[87] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 21.

[88] Joel Beeke, "What Is Experiential Preaching?," Ligonier Ministries. August 29, 2016, https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-experiential-preaching/. Reformed Theologian Joel Beeke explains "Experiential preaching stresses the need to know by experience the great truths of the Word of God. A working definition of experiential preaching might be: "Preaching that seeks to explain in terms of biblical truth how matters ought to go, how they do go, and the goal of the Christian life." Such preaching aims to apply divine truth to the whole range of the believer's personal experience, including his relationships with family, the church, and the world around him."

[89] Craig Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Carlisle, Cumbria: Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1998), 124.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore how Reformed preachers in a post-Christian context engage the listener's imagination with metaphors.

To gain a broader understanding of the relevant issues, three areas of literature were reviewed to provide a foundation for the qualitative research. The first area describes philosophical and cultural forces that contribute to muting the preacher's message. The second area explores preaching to the imagination with metaphors. The third area examines Jesus' use of metaphors.

Philosophical and Cultural Factors

Why should preachers consider cultural philosophical factors that contribute to the muting of their message? Moreover, if present conditions related to a lack of listener receptivity follow these factors, how do preachers develop countermeasures to address the current cultural conditions? This first section examines the philosophical and cultural factors, starting with a discussion of the filtering effect of plausibility structures, followed by the filtering effect of the immanent frame, and the filtering effect of the social imaginary. Next there is a definition of disenchantment and what distinguishes fragilization from the buffered self, relating them both to distraction, then leading to a discussion encouraging preachers to convey apologetic sensitivity to insensitive listeners.

Filtering Effect of Plausibility Structures

Sociologist Peter Berger explains that plausibility structures play a part by excluding transcendent religious content in our post-Christian context.[90] He claims that plausibility structures are the sociocultural contexts for systems of meaning. People's interests are not a function of the quality of the information coming at them but arise from their filters of that information. He notes, "The dominant secularity exerts cognitive pressure upon the religious consciousness,"[91] thereby filtering out supernatural content.[92] Knowledge is rooted not in abstract thought but in social settings and structures[93] that act as a filtering basis. Certain social structures and institutions make particular ideas easier or harder to believe. [94] For example, "ice skates sell more quickly in Canada than in Mexico."[95]

Gould explains, "a plausibility structure is a set of ideas or beliefs that an individual or group of individuals is or is not willing to consider as plausibly true."[96] If the supernatural order is dismissed as old-fashioned or unscientific then the words of a preacher about God, an invisible, infinite Spirit who works miracles, will not sound plausible to the listener. Theologian Sarah Clarkson claims the materialist structure that filters out religious content "is the belief that the touchable world of science and matter is

---

[90] Peter L. Berger, *Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 27.

[91] Berger, *Heretical Imperative,* 27.

[92] Berger, *Heretical Imperative,* 17.

[93] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1967), 45.

[94] Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 27.

[95] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 59–60.

[96] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics,* 140.

all there really is."[97] Keller observes that every culture "holds to a set of 'common-sense' consensus beliefs that automatically make Christianity seem implausible to people. If belief A is true, then belief B cannot be true."[98] The secular mind simply removes the shelf for certain supernatural concepts to rest on.[99]

University Reformed Fellowship campus minister and author, Derek Rishmawy points out that many millennial listeners "live in the epistemological and moral atmosphere" that decreases the plausibility of the preacher's content.[100] Listeners dismiss the implausible presentation of a supernatural story spoken by a religious authority. Rishmawy believes that the internet has accelerated the problem by enabling an even more radically individualistic epistemology. Preachers are ignored as authoritative sources of religious truth.[101] For example Rishmawy suggests, "Being a religious professional means a lot less than it used to. What does a seminary degree count for when you can just Google anything yourself?[102] What's more, if you don't like what your pastor says, you can look up alternatives in the middle of the sermon on your phone—which you probably know how to use better than the pastor does."[103]

---

[97] Sarah Clarkson, *This Beautiful Truth: How God's Goodness Breaks into Our Darkness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021), 72.

[98] Keller labels beliefs that filter out other beliefs "Defeater Beliefs." John Samson, "Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs by Tim Keller, Effectual Grace (blog), July 19, 2011, https://effectualgrace.com/2011/07/19/deconstructing-defeater-beliefs-by-tim-keller/.

[99] Samson, "Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs."

[100] Derek Rishawmy "*Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age.*" The Gospel Coalition. Accessed June 4, 2021. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ministering-to-millennials-in-a-secular-age/.

[101] Rishawmy, "*Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age.*"

[102] Rishawmy, "*Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age.*"

[103] Rishawmy, "*Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age.*"

Psychology Professor Raymond J. Wlodkowski, whose expertise encompasses motivating disinterested learners, agrees with Rishmawy. He asserts, "Most adults are not easily impressed when they sit under someone's instruction…it is unlikely that we simply impress them with our title whether it is trainer or professor."[104] He goes on to assert most adults come to learning activities for specific reasons based on what they think they need or want. However, if the content or process of instruction does not in some way meet these goals, the learning will have very little meaning."[105] If modern listeners don't think they need the content of the preacher because secularizing forces have filtered them out, what homiletical countermeasures should be put in place?

A century ago, Princeton theologian J. Gresham Machen claimed that the disinterested listener is not necessarily in opposition to the Christian story but instead, disconnected with the truths of the story. Machen explains, "Culture is not altogether opposed to the gospel. But it is out of all connection with it. It not only prevents the acceptance of Christianity. It prevents Christianity even from getting a hearing."[106] Now, over a century later, the situation has worsened. Not only is there a disconnection with

---

[104] Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*, 3rd ed., Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 51.

[105] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn,* 57. According to Wlodkowski, most adults come to learn for a definite reason. They are pragmatic learners. They want their learning to help them solve problems, build new skills, advance in their jobs, make more friends—in general, to do, produce, or decide something that is of real value to them. The dominant question adult learners have for any instructor is, can you really help me? 51.

[106] Machen, J. Gresham, "Christianity and Culture," 11. Machen develops his argument by adding "…I do not mean that most men reject Christianity consciously on account of intellectual difficulties. On the contrary, rejection of Christianity is due in the vast majority of cases simply to indifference. Only a few men have given the subject real attention. The vast majority of those who reject the gospel do so simply because they know nothing about it. But whence comes this indifference? It is due to the intellectual atmosphere in which men are living. The modern world is dominated by ideas which ignore the gospel." 11-15. He went on to say that preachers unaware of these dynamics end up "preaching to the air."

the truth of Christianity but a new detachment with the plausibility and desirability of the Christian narrative. Philosopher Peter Kreeft describes the current crisis with a helpful metaphor: "Free heart surgery is good news to one who knows he has a fatal heart disease but not to one who denies it."[107] Many listeners screen out messages that deal with religious content because the epistemological cognitive sieve that receives the message strains out the content as implausible.[108]

Filtering Effect of the Immanent Frame

A second factor that weakens the biblical message of the preacher is the screening out of supernatural data by what philosopher Charles Taylor calls "the immanent frame."[109] Taylor defines the immanent frame as the structure of secular assumptions and expectations through which people filter and make sense of the world.[110] Secularizing philosophical ideas have led to conceptual underpinnings that bracket out religious content. Gould explains that Taylor's immanent frame must be understood against the backdrop of a pre-modern, epistemological, transcendent frame. Most cultures have interpreted reality assuming vital roles for spiritual beings and timeless truths. Once modernism and materialism took root, an immanent frame began to filter out transcendent reality.[111] In an immanent frame, a personal God who orders and acts in the

---

[107] Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans*, 28.

[108] Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 72.

[109] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 542.

[110] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542–43.

[111] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 53–54.

cosmos becomes unbelievable, or at least contested. Those living withing this frame can quite easily forget, deny, or simply not care that there is a transcendent dimension to reality. The goal of modern culture is no longer framed as religion oriented toward the divine, as the medieval mindset argued. A well-intentioned preacher may send a transcendent message, but an immanent frame will block it out. A message comprised of miracles, transcendent themes and immaterial beings won't register as real.[112]

In an interview with the *New Humanist,* Peter Kaufman, a Canadian academic and secularist was asked if secularism could provide meaning. He answered in the negative: "Part of my argument is that religion does provide…that meaning and emotion, and in our current moment we lack that. This is the challenge for secularism"[113]

A study from Nashville-based Lifeway Research supports Gould and Kaufman's analysis. Compared to a decade ago, U.S. adults today are less likely to believe strongly that finding a higher meaning and purpose is important.[114] Many thought the Covid-19 pandemic would change this devaluation, so that the spiritually disinterested would again accept spiritual realities. However, that does not appear to be the case. Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research, observes "A large majority still lean toward there being an ultimate purpose for a person's life, but instead of escaping the pandemic with thoughts of something greater, far fewer strongly hold such a view. A growing

---

[112] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542–43.

[113] Caspar Melville,"Battle of the Babies," *New Humanist,* March 22, 2010, https://newhumanist.org.uk/2267/battle-of-the-babies.

[114] Aaron Earls, "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing."

number of Americans have become open to the idea that this life might be as good as it gets."[115]

For current Americans, 37 percent say they never wonder if they will go to heaven if they die.[116] Today's listeners are less likely to believe there is more to life than this physical world.[117] Although in the middle of a discouraging and polarized season, fewer Americans are convinced there is something more to this life than their daily activities.[118] Most Americans (57 percent) say they wonder, "How can I find more meaning and purpose in my life?" at least monthly, with more than 1 in 5 saying they consider the question daily (21 percent) or weekly (21 percent). Few (6 percent) say they think about it yearly. Close to 1 in 4 (23 percent) say they never wonder about finding more meaning and purpose. Another 15 percent aren't sure.[119] Because of the immanent frame, preachers encounter hearers hardened against the presentation of supernatural content.

The Filtering Effect of the Social Imaginary

A third factor that exerts a filtering effect on the content of the preacher's message is what Taylor calls a social imaginary. He defines social imaginary as "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings."[120] It is not expressed in theoretical terms but it is carried in images, stories, and legends shared by large groups of people, if

---

[115] Earls, "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing."

[116] Earls, "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing."

[117] Earls, "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing."

[118] Earls, "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing."

[119] Earls, "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing."

[120] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171-172.

not the whole society. He stresses social imaginary as a common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."[121] Trueman adds that the unacknowledged assumptions of this present age make up the social imaginary.[122] He writes "Most of us do not think about the world in the way we do because we have reasoned from first principles to a comprehensive understanding of the cosmos. Rather, we generally operate based on intuitions."[123] These intuitions are often passively absorbed from the culture. In a post-Christian culture, materialist intuitions screen out supernatural beliefs presented by the preacher.

Following Taylor and Trueman, Bailey explains, "A social imaginary is an unarticulated and often unexamined sense of the world and our place in it."[124] He adds that it is carried around and carried on through practices and stories which are often profoundly dissonant with what people say they believe.[125] McGrath agrees with Bailey, adding that those exercising a social imaginary experience "deeper normative notions and images that underlie their expectations about themselves and their social context."[126] Author and Reformed preacher David de Bruyn agrees, asserting that before people are able to consider the validity of biblical teaching, they already have prejudices for or

---

[121] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 171–72.

[122] Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 122.

[123] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self,* 65.

[124] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 223.

[125] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 223.

[126] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 11.

against the content being presented because of their imagination.[127] Preachers must understand the effect of the social imaginary on their congregants if they desire to communicate effectively.[128]

The Filtering Effect of Disenchantment and its resultant Buffered Self, Fragilization and Distraction

Psychology professor Richard Beck posits that disenchantment has contributed greatly to the current non-supernatural social imaginary.[129] What is disenchantment and how has it contributed to listener receptivity?

Beck argues that a "rising tide of disenchantment has profoundly affected our religious imaginations. We've lost our capacity for enchantment, our ability to see and experience God as a living, vital presence in our lives."[130] Sociologist and historian Max Weber is credited with the concept of disenchantment.[131] According to Weber, disenchantment refers to a process through which people no longer explain the world and their cosmos with the help of magical forces, but instead rely on science, technology, and calculation to achieve their ends. The processes of rationalization, instrumentalization, and mechanization are ridding the world of the supernatural.[132] In an enchanted world,

---

[127] David J. de Bruyn, *Save Them From Secularism: Pre-Evangelism For Your Children*, (Self-Published, CreateSpace, 2013), 2.

[128] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 76.

[129] Richard Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels: Recovering an Enchanted Faith in a Skeptical Age* (Minneapolis, MI: Broadleaf Books, 2021), 3.

[130] Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels,* 3.

[131] Richard Swedberg and Ola Agevall, *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 86.

[132] Peter Lassman, Irving Velody, and Herminio Martins, eds., *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation"* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13.

explanations point to the actions of gods and demons. Since the preacher communicates in categories and propositions from the enchanted world, the disenchanted listener often fails to register interest. Therefore, Beck calls disenchantment a "failure to attend" rather than listener hostility toward beliefs that preachers present.[133] He claims, "This pervasive disenchantment, which affects Christians as much as nonbelievers, poses the single greatest threat to faith and the church in our post-Christian world.[134]

Taylor narrows the threat down to a feeling of malaise amid the self-sufficient, secular mindset. He suggests that the secular age has a sense of "living behind a screen," and this creates a sense of being cut off from something and missing something, creating an existential disposition of dissatisfaction.[135] Listeners to supernatural content screen out any enchanted material and experience a flat, empty world devoid of transcendent meaning.[136] Root agrees with Taylor, adding that all realities outside of the observable, natural realm are encountered with doubt by a settled disposition to disregard anything in the realm of mystery.[137]

Gould concurs with both Taylor and Root and adds, "The felt absence of God is the defining feature of our day. In a disenchanted age, belief in God is unwelcome, unnecessary, and unimaginable."[138] He combines Taylor's concept of the social

---

[133] Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels*, 7.

[134] Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels,* 7.

[135] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 302.

[136] Taylor, *A Secular Age,*130.

[137] Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 5.

[138] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 54.

imaginary with Weber's idea of disenchantment, adding, "Disenchanted imaginations are some of the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel."[139]

Gould proposes that communication full of ideas about souls and an invisible God, granting forgiveness for guilt due to sin, falls on deaf secular ears.[140] The deafness is because of the palpable felt absence of God.[141] Gould explains that because of this, the "defining goal of an individual's life in this disenchanted age is the satisfaction of their personal desires."[142] Disenchantment creates the lack of resonation between the personal desires of the hearers and the proclaimed message of the preacher. Because of disenchantment, the hearer is, in essence, buffered from gospel-rooted content proclaimed by the preacher.[143]

Taylor argues that disenchantment produces this state of affairs and coins the phrase, "the buffered self."[144] The disenchanted listener becomes invulnerable to the transcendent realm because they are cut off from a transcendent referent.[145] The buffered self, he explains, is not open and porous and vulnerable to a world of spirits and powers. Professor of Psychology Richard Beck adds that a buffered self is walled off from the outside immaterial world by a self-sufficiency steered by scientific naturalism.[146]

---

[139] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics,* 72–74.

[140] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics,* 114.

[141] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics,* 53–54.

[142] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics,* 53–54.

[143] Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 40.

[144] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 27.

[145] Swedberg and Agevall, *The Max Weber Dictionary*, 86–87.

[146] Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels*, 191.

Beshears agrees with Taylor and Beck and argues that the buffered self erects barricades of beliefs that refuse to listen to religious facts and arguments.[147] The barrier occurs because the continuity that used to exist between the mundane world and the spirit world has been severed by the framing-out effect of the immanent frame in a disenchanted social imaginary.[148] Noble adds that this buffering effect expresses itself as the way modern people imagine themselves to be insulated from forces outside their rational mind, an assumption resulting from living in a closed, physical universe in which everything has natural explanations.[149] The need for a preacher to communicate supernatural explanations ceases to exist.

Taylor claims that the buffered self leads to a further state of decline he calls "fragilization."[150] He explains fragilization thus: "in the face of different options, where people who live 'normal' lives do not share my faith (and perhaps believe something very different), my own faith commitment becomes fragile - put into question, dubitable."[151]Many listeners growing up with traditional, religious beliefs break with those ideas after being exposed to cultural assumptions that contest these beliefs with new scientific, anti-supernatural presuppositions.[152]

---

[147] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 105.

[148] Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 169.

[149] Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 3.

[150] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 331.

[151] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 141.

[152] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 331.

Beshears notes the explosion of beliefs in the West, ranging from the pre-modern to modern to post-modern. [153] Taylor describes this explosion of beliefs as the Nova Effect whereby the Western mind can no longer live under the cross pressures of belief and disbelief, the supernatural and disenchantment. Like a star collapsing under its own weight, the Western mind, under cognitive compression, has exploded into a massive disarray of beliefs co-existing in a pluralistic age.[154] Beshears adds, "We approach belief with the practice of combining ideas and beliefs, regardless of their origin, to create a unique, customized belief system."[155] When preachers declare a proposition and expect every congregant to understand and believe, the listeners may refuse to accept parts of the sermon that do not fit into their current belief system. Their refusal is often the result of distraction caused by competing beliefs cobbled together from multiple faith systems. Ordway agrees with Taylor and Beshears, adding, "Christianity is just one more option on the spiritual menu, and an outdated one at that."[156]

A precursor to fragilization and the Nova Effect is what Taylor calls "the authentic self,"[157] a self that Beshears explains as refusing to conform blindly to the expectations of society. Everyone wants to "follow my heart" and "choose my own adventure."[158] Subjective authenticity replaces submission to objective authority. Taylor

---

[153] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 22.

[154] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 300.

[155] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 23.

[156] Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017), 4.

[157] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 203.

[158] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 8.

labels this orientation "expressive individualism" where people express their individual self authentically from a foundation of self-orientation.[159] Root reasons, "That which is authentic is more important than that which is holy, good, or righteous…the church is bad not because it is corrupt or evil but because it is inauthentic, boring and irrelevant."[160] The uninterested do not want the message of the church because it seeks to enslave the authentic desires of people with the exclusive chains of morality, dogma and piety.[161] If people were honest and brave enough, they could admit that they don't need God and could therefore live authentically out of their own subjective desires.[162]

Bailey considers this age of authenticity a positive opportunity for preachers to present content full of significance that stirs subjective feeling in the hearers. He maintains, "In an age of authenticity, faith and doubt are first navigated imaginatively and affectively, and the felt dimension of faith is most decisive in belief."[163] Trueman agrees with Bailey's connection between authenticity and feeling. He explains; "Authenticity is to be found by freeing oneself from, or transcending, the alien demands of civilization…and by rooting what it means to be truly human in feeling."[164] Bailey concludes, when preachers understand the assumptions of listeners, who expect their

---

[159] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 473.

[160] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 7.

[161] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 6–7.

[162] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 5.

[163] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 14.

[164] Trueman and Dreher, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 144.

subjective authenticity to be respected, they can better communicate to those who may dismiss their perceived narrow dogmas.[165]

Because of the age of authenticity, the explosion of an ever-widening variety of moral and spiritual options causes listener distraction.[166] People often find meaning in many things, which distracts them from exclusive propositional content. According to Beck, while openness to various competing beliefs can help learners' perspectives, the resultant distractions blind listeners to any circumscribed, supernatural set of truth claims.[167]

Root agrees with Beck and points out that science and technology have grabbed the attention of listeners causing an attention blindness to issues pertaining to God.[168] Beshears adds two more distractions to generalized secularism: affluence and technology. He asserts, "First, people lack a reason to care about God because of secularism, and second, people lack the motivation to care about God because of affluence and technology."[169] Conditions of existential security such as lower poverty rates, decreased infant mortality, longer lifespans, economic stability, and reliable government services decrease motivation to care about God.[170] Beshears explains "God isn't merely unneeded,

---

[165] Justin Bailey, "Reimagining 'Pre-Apologetics'?: Responding to Trevin Wax's TGC Review," *Justin Ariel Bailey* (blog), December 11, 2020, https://pjustin.com/reimagining-pre-apologetics-responding-to-trevin-waxs-tgc-review/.

[166] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 299.

[167] Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels*, 4–5.

[168] Andrew Root, *Pastor in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 90.

[169] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 39.

[170] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 162.

he's unnoticed. There simply isn't time to think about something that we doubt exists, is too diverse in options, and doesn't seem necessary."[171]

How distracted are listeners in this current cultural context? Guiness writes, "We live today in the grand age of diversion." Most people are happily diverted but not conscious of it.[172] Jay Akkerman, professor of pastoral theology at Norwest Nazarene University, agrees and analyzes the concept of distraction. He explains, "While the word 'attract' often has an alluring sense to it, the Latin source for our English word "distract' carries with it a more visceral connotation: literally, distraction means 'to drag away.'"[173] Noble agrees and concludes that the persistent distraction prevents people from asking the deepest, most important questions about existence and truth. "The things that prick our souls for the sake of the gospel (e.g., death, beauty, anxiety, etc.) can be numbed quickly by an eight-hour dose of binge-watching 'The Office. "'[174] Fraser agrees and laments that many listeners are distracted from the real questions of life.[175] Noble further observes that "mental fatigue"[176] often sets in. Preachers desiring to address the big, difficult questions of life find many congregants distracted by fatigue even before the sermon is preached.[177]

Beshears explains the divided attention of congregants by noting digital distractions. He argues, "Our digital age offers relief from thinking about things beyond the

---

[171] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 37.

[172] Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 103–4.

[173] J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Preaching in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014), 125, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

[174] Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 21.

[175] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 154.

[176] Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 21.

[177] Noble, *Disruptive Witness,* 20–24.

moment."[178] Noble concurs adding, "Constant distraction…shields us from the kind of deep, honest reflection needed to ask why we exist and what is true."[179] Breshears adds, happiness is found in affluence and the distracted pursuit of meaning. When it's all said and done, listeners don't want to care because their wants have been trained to look elsewhere for meaning and joy.[180]

Apologetic Sensitivity

Apologetic sensitivity is a principled attempt to communicate the vitality of the Christian gospel faithfully and effectively to a disenchanted culture, engaging objections with empathy for the listener.[181]Bailey argues that apologetics remains an essential dimension of Christian witness in a secular age but that the discipline is in need of an approach that is more sensitive to the situation of the hearers.[182] Beshears agrees, claiming that communicators must "modify—not jettison" their apologetic method. Rather than beginning with God questions, preachers must perform a prefatory maneuver. They need to first gain listener interest by communicating an apologetic sensitivity.[183] Sire concurs, writing that communication should entail "such a winsome embodiment of the Christian faith, that for any and all who are willing to observe, there will be an

---

[178] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 5.

[179] Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 3.

[180] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 42.

[181] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics,* 17–25.

[182] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 4.

[183] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 88.

intellectually and emotionally credible witness to its fundamental truth."[184] Giving attention to the emotional credibility of the listener resonates with this age of authenticity and expressive individualism. Apologetic sensitivity deepens an understanding of the listeners' frame of reference and assists preachers with a proper communication approach.[185]

Zack Eswine, former director of homiletics at Covenant Theological Seminary, applies apologetic sensitivity to preachers when he contends that they must "no longer expound the Bible with disregard for the unchurched people around them."[186] Preachers are to study and understand the cultural forces and ideas that shape the listeners receptivity. Dennis Johnson, preaching professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, explains, "The predominant concern [of the felt needs approach] is to minimize the cultural distance that non-Christians must traverse in order to be engaged by the gospel"[187] Though he cautions against making felt needs the central focus of the preaching event, he upholds a balanced apologetic sensitivity. He asserts preaching must take account of the fact that the truths of the gospel are counter-intuitive to the unregenerate mind. He advises, "Therefore, preaching must incorporate apologetics-'sidebars,' where the preacher frankly acknowledges the alien-ness of the gospel to

---

[184] James W. Sire, *Apologetics Beyond Reason: Why Seeing Really Is Believing* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 22.

[185] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect With Our Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 189–90.

[186] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World,* 11–12.

[187] Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 30.

prevailing cultural assumptions."[188] He challenges preachers to discern cultural assumptions that block out certain content and adjust their language to make the gospel intelligible to congregants.[189]

Summary of Philosophical and Cultural Forces

The purpose of this study is to explore how preachers can communicate to disinterested listeners by engaging their imagination with metaphors. The first area of literature review examined seeks to understand philosophical and cultural forces contributing to listener disinterest, starting with a discussion of the filtering effect of plausibility structures, followed by the filtering effect of the immanent frame, and the filtering effect of the social imaginary. Next, there is a definition of disenchantment and what distinguishes fragilization and the buffered self, relating them both to distraction, then leading to a final discussion encouraging preachers to understand and convey apologetic sensitivity to insensitive listeners.

Preaching to the Imagination with Metaphorical Illustrations

The next area of the literature review examines preaching to the imagination with metaphors. The first section of this review introduces the concept of contextualization and its relationship to preaching with a definition of the imagination. The second section works toward understanding the nature and function of the imagination. The third section clarifies the imagination's connection to epistemology and rationalism. The fourth

---

[188] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim,* 58–59.

[189] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim,* 58–59.

section examines the imagination and its effect on the affections, surveying suspicions regarding these effects. The fifth section reviews the Holy Spirit's relationship to preaching to the imagination, along with the importance of beauty. It concludes with an exploration of the concept of signals of transcendence. The final section defines metaphor and examines its function, power, and significance in the preaching encounter. It concludes with methods preachers can use related to metaphors as they seek to engage the imagination of their hearers.

Contextualization and a Definition of the Imagination

Adapting religious content to congregants in a post-Christian context is known as contextualization. [190]Eswine acknowledges, "Biblical preaching takes a missional turn when it proposes not only to say what the text says but to say what the text says by accounting for how people culturally hear what the text says."[191] One way to contextualize sermons to engage apathetic listeners centers on engaging the imagination. For instance, McGrath contends that "abstract terms need to be translated into images to connect with listeners."[192] Before reviewing literature regarding metaphorical illustrations, literature exploring the imagination and preaching will now be examined.

How does preaching relate to the imagination? Weirsbe includes imagination in his definition of preaching, writhing that it is "biblical truth, presented in a manner that is

---

[190] Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 13–16.

[191] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 184.

[192] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 19.

reasonable, imaginative, and intrinsic to the text."[193] Reformed theologian Herman Bavink agrees, asserting that the preacher must focus on the imagination, since poetry is the mother of eloquence. He explains, "The orator must make us perceive what he is saying. The address is an argument, but it is also a drama, a spectacle…. born of feeling, it [eloquence] makes itself known in the language of imagination."[194]

Janine Langan, professor emeritus of Christianity and Culture at the University of Toronto, contends there is nothing more fundamental than the imagination and that the loss of respect for it "is directly linked to religious apathy."[195] She argues that people access all reality – past, present, and future – through its screen, as it prepares the food of thought through raw sense that is given.[196] Contextualization that incorporates images into the communication process increases connection and understanding. Comprehension leads to acquisition of meaning by means of experience. She challenges the assumption that reason does all the work of communication and understanding by stressing that communicators must "seduce the imagination of others if we wish to transmit our message to them."[197] Though she warns against using the imagination to manipulate listeners, she encourages communicating with apologetic sensitivity. Beshears agrees with Langan regarding the importance of the imagination, contending, "We are more than

---

[193] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 305.

[194] Herman Bavinck, *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*, trans. and ed. James P. Eglinton, (Peabody, MA: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017), 36.

[195] Leland Ryken, *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2002), 63.

[196] Ryken, *The Christian Imagination,* 64.

[197] Ryken, *The Christian Imagination,* 66.

'man' (*homo*) who thinks or reasons (*sapiens*). As creatures created in the image of the triune God revealed in creation and scripture, we are fundamentally *Homo imago*, 'man who images.'"[198]

The Nature and Function of the Imagination

Imagination is a faculty of perception. It is "our image-making and image-perceiving capacity."[199] Ordway writes "The imagination is what allows us to conceive in our minds the image of something that is not present."[200] With imagining, one pretends and acts "as if" this is that (*e.g.* God is a rock, Is. 17:10; Christ is a bridegroom, Mt. 25:1–13)."[201] DeBruyn adds that the imagination is a faculty that acts as a grid of interpretations, sensibilities, and dispositions that filters, integrates, synthesizes, and gives meaningful cognitive shape to all that is perceived. [202] Agreeing with DeBruyn regarding the imagination as a grid of sensibilities that shape perception, Smith adds that the imagination runs off the fuel of images channeled by the senses.[203] As a faculty of perception it takes what the senses perceive and delivers it to reason, so action can be executed by the will. Baily agrees, claiming that the imagination as a faculty of

---

[198] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 50.

[199] Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, xx.

[200] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 15.

[201] C. Seerveld, *New Dictionary of Theology*, s.vv. "Imagination in Theology" (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 331.

[202] Bruyn, *Save Them From Secularism*, 2.

[203] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 57.

perception is also an organ of truth.[204] Though the imagination is not less than a faculty of perception it is much more.[205]

Gould describes the imagination negatively and then positively. "It is not our memory…or beliefs…it is crucial to our lives, playing a significant role in perceiving, creating, dreaming, meaning, judging, learning, and moralizing."[206] He defines imagination as "a faculty of the mind that mediates between sense and intellect (i.e. perception and reason)…for meaning and inventing."[207] Smith concurs adding an aesthetic dimension describing the imagination as "a kind of faculty by which we navigate and make sense of our world, but in ways and on a register that flies below the radar of conscious reflection, and specifically in ways that are fundamentally aesthetic in nature."[208]

Since the imagination is consistently defined as a faculty, what does this concept mean? Gould explains that a faculty is a group or set of powers or capacities. In addition to the faculty of the imagination, the mind has sensory, emotional, and intellectual faculties. These faculties of the mind give humans the capacity to think, feel, and imagine. [209] Kevin Vanhoozer prefers the term "instrument," rather than faculty. He

---

[204] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 90.

[205] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 88–92.

[206] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 106.

[207] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics,* 108.

[208] James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 19.

[209] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 107.

claims the imagination is "a cognitive instrument."[210] He explains that images and metaphors are not non-cognitive but rather have a surplus of cognition.[211] The imagination is essentially a faculty of cognition that facilitates profound understanding.[212]

Alison Searle, research fellow of the Craig Center for the Study of the Westminster Standards, drawing from Ephesians 1:18, argues that the bniblical text locates the imagination in the heart, specifically the eyes of the heart.[213] She explains that the heart combines vision and volition and that the imagination assists a person to first see what is to be chosen before it is acted upon.[214] She writes, "Predominate among Hebrew words used to connote imagination is *yastar*….Its basic meaning is to form, frame, or purpose."[215] It is used of God, in creation of human beings from the dust of the earth[216] and of people, as when the potter forms vessels from clay.[217] It also refers to intellectual frameworks as manifested in purpose, imagination, or devices.[218] It is an aspect of human nature that can be used for good or ill. Yastar appears in a wide range of situations

---

[210] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 88.

[211] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine,* 88.

[212] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine,* 88.

[213] Alison Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart: Literary and Theological Trajectories of Imagining Biblically*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 32.

[214] Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart,* 32–35.

[215] Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart,* 262.

[216] Genesis 2:7, 8, 19; Psalm 103:14; Isaiah 64:8

[217] Isaiah 29:16

[218] Genesis 6:5; 8:21

finding expression in common daily existence, the planning of future actions, as well as in great artistic works.[219] Searl adds that another word rendered as imagination is *machashabah*, which connotes thought or device, including the concept of planning, purpose, or invention.[220] These two dimensions are contained by and originate within the word sometimes translated as "imagination" in the Old Testament: *leb* (derived from lebab),[221] the heart.[222]

Imagination functions specifically in the making of meaningful connections with reality.[223] Moreover, it is fundamental to the experience of meaning. C.S. Lewis calls reason "the organ of truth" and imagination "the organ of meaning."[224] Baily agrees with the emphasis on meaning, explaining "In exercising our imaginations, we are looking for connection amid chaos."[225]

Gould believes imagination also awakens the religious impulse in those that have filtered out supernatural reality. He states, "One of the best ways to begin reawakening the religious impulse is through imagination. Art, music, poetry, and story can awaken a desire for transcendence by "[shocking] people into engagement with reality."[226] Lewis

---

[219] Isaiah 22:11; 37:26; 43:1; 44:9, 24; 46:11; 54:17.

[220] Exodus 31:4; 35:32, 33, 35; Proverbs 6:18; 12:5; 15:22

[221] Genesis 6:5; Exodus 36:2; 1 Chronicles 28:9-10; 1 Kings 8:17; Psalm 73:7; Matthew 15:18-20

[222] Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart,* 33.

[223] C. S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 265.

[224] Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays,* 265.

[225] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 90.

[226] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 72.

pointed out that the imagination steals past the "watchful dragons" of hardened secularism allowing supernatural reality into the heart and mind for consideration.[227]

Weirsbe claims that the major functions of the imagination encompass recalling, perceiving, and combining culminating in the act of creating.[228] Theologian James Nkansah-Obrempong agrees with Weirsbe and proposes that the imagination can offer a concrete platform for creativity, hope, perception of the mysterious, and thus spiritual insight regarding our world.[229] Laughery agrees with Nkansah-Obrempong adding "Imagination provides access to knowing…we can attain *access* to God as the truth and mystery of the world.[230] The function of the imagination includes accessing certain kinds of knowledge leading to deeper understanding and insight.[231]

According to Weirsbe, this access facilitates subjective experience. After surveying the history of the philosophical development of the concept of the imagination, Weirsbe notes that the writing in the Romantic era was a right-brain reaction against the Enlightenment with its left-brain emphasis on science, logic, authority, and formulas. The Romantic writers claimed that truth was something to experience as well as to explain.[232] The basic approach of the Romantics - Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, Schiller,

---

[227] C. S. Lewis, *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (San Diego, CA: Harvest Books, 2002), 47.

[228] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 25.

[229] J.O. Nkansah, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Imagination," 3rd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 418.

[230] Gregory J. Laughery, *Living Imagination: Who Am I and What Is Real?* (n.p.: Destinée, 2017), 50–51.

[231] Laughery, *Living Imagination,* 50–51.

[232] 5/3/*2022 9:14:00* AM

Goethe, Emerson, Thoreau - was that the imagination helps people experience reality."[233] Bryan Chapell challenges the Romantic era's overemphasis on the imagination and the elevation of the subjective experience of the listener. He upholds the importance of propositional truth supplied by the preacher rather than an experience derived by the hearer. He reasons that if "propositions cannot communicate, then personal experience becomes the master interpreter and, ultimately, the ruler of understanding."[234] The focus on the imagination of the hearer limits the meaning of scripture to the horizons of the listener and, thus, is not enough to communicate objective truth of a transcendent nature. He concludes, "The apostles and prophets meant for their words to address the experiences of the people of God and not for the people's experiences to construct the Word of God (Deut. 28:45)."[235] He cautions against elevating subjective experience above objective doctrine as the imagination functions to catalyze subjective experiences.

The Imagination's Connection to Epistemology and Rationalism

Preachers employ rhetorical approaches to facilitate the apprehension of knowledge. How does the imagination relate to knowing? Theologian John Frame considers the imagination a key part of how people know anything. He asserts that epistemology as a division of philosophy deals with human knowing distinguishing the roles of various human faculties like reason, sensation, intuition and notably imagination. He asserts that people know through three sources: the rules or norms of knowledge such

---

[233] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 321.

[234] Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 189–90.

[235] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power,* 189.

as logic, the facts that people seek to know, and the subjective equipment by which we gain knowledge. He proposes that the imagination is the subjective equipment people use to know.[236] McGrath agrees with Frame noting that the imagination involved in reading or hearing a story allows people to taste reality before they try to capture it in abstract terms."[237] Laughery also agrees with Frame: "The problem is that reason, sense observation, and logic cannot go it alone. Imagining is also an essential informer."[238] Laughery describes imagination as a faculty that holds together all the other ways of knowing. He claims, "Reason, sense observation, feeling, and experience…are potentially valid informers of truth and meaning, yet each undergoes impoverishment without the recognition that imagination is a *lynch pin* providing interface that holds them all together in a related and distinct manner."[239] He insists "Imagination…plays a *decisive*, though not *exclusive*, role in knowledge, truth, theology, and our interactions with the whole of life."[240]

Fraser agrees with Laughery calling the imagination "our best means of knowing or understanding certain kinds of truth"[241] He warns communicators against limiting themselves to one method of communication, either by the exclusive use of reason or imagination which leads to a diminishment of knowing. Bailey asserts that the

---

[236] John M. Frame and J. I. Packer, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 32.

[237] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics,* 92.

[238] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 5.

[239] Laughery, *Living Imagination,* 115.

[240] Laughery, *Living Imagination,* 9.

[241] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 101.

imagination is not just sensing but is also responsive to the self-giving revelation of God as an organ of truth. He points out, "This epistemological framework…operates on the conviction that the imagination must be responsive to a reality not of its own making."[242] Ordway claims, "It is not possible to have even a minimal grasp of propositional knowledge without the effective working of the faculty of imagination."[243] She argues "We cannot think unless we have things to think about, and it is the imagination (recognized or unrecognized) that brings meaningful images to our intellect."[244] Bailey concurs with Ordway regarding meaning adding that listeners seek "concrete meaning by moving in a subjunctive mood, exploring possibilities, in search of a firmer grip on reality, using the imagination as an organ of truth."[245]

Smith declares his concern for emphasizing knowing through rational reflection alone, observing that "The church thinks it only has to get into our heads."[246] Smith is concerned with reducing knowing to bare rationalism, the view in Western philosophy that regards reason as the chief source, basis, and test of knowledge.[247] Theologian Kyle A. Roberts argues that many preachers emphasize propositional doctrine to gain

---

[242] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 73–74.

[243] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 18.

[244] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination,* 150.

[245] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 90.

[246] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 126–27.

[247] *Encylopedia Britannica, s.v.* "Rationalism," accessed November 6, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/rationalism.

credibility, in response to challenges from communities of faith who question religious authority.[248]

McGrath affirms that rationality remains integral to apologetics; however, he observes that other aspects of Christianity, namely "its powerful imaginative, moral and aesthetic appeal" ought to be considered.[249] He recollects that Christian communicators during the Middle Ages and Renaissance placed a high value on images in teaching, but the rise of modernity brought a devaluing of the imagination. He proposes that postmodernity has gifted Christian communicators with a new and needed emphasis on images that "make a significant appeal to the imagination."[250] He argues that Enlightenment rationalism has had a lingering effect on evangelicalism, evidenced by its resistance to the use of narrative preaching and an emphasis on propositional proclamation rather than the imagination.[251] He calls for a retrieval of this older approach to develop a "balanced approach in our shifting cultural context." He notes "The Bible does not exclude propositional statements, but their proportion is a fraction of the images and narratives."[252] Sire agrees with McGrath's appreciation for certain strengths of postmodernism observing that the postmodern world distrusts the arguments of modern Christian rationalists as irrelevant, doubtful and lifeless.[253] Sire approves of this distrust,

---

[248] Kyle Roberts, *Emerging Prophet: Kierkegaard and the Postmodern People of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 15–16.

[249] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 128–29.

[250] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics,* 126–27.

[251] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics,* 12.

[252] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics,* 126–27.

[253] Sire, *Apologetics Beyond Reason*, 16.

claiming that in addition to reason, people can know by direct perception—the sort of intuitive seeing not un-reasonable yet beyond reason.[254] Woodell agrees with McGrath and Sire noting, "As modernity wanes, however, the arguments and reasons useful for wooing a modern audience have become passé at best, counter-productive at worst."[255] Chapell disagrees with Woodell calling for preachers to value argument by means of propositions and stories that capture the imagination, and he considers "suspect any communication system that would deny the value of either."[256]

Brain research has found that the two sides of the human brain respond differently to different types of stimuli. The left hemisphere's forte is reason and logic while the right hemisphere is dominant in the exercise of emotion and the imagination. Conceptual and emotionally neutral words activate the left hemisphere, while words that name images and are emotionally laden activate the right hemisphere.[257] Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis promote inductive preaching because they believe the Bible uses many right-brain appeals. "Traditional homiletics for centuries has emphasized a left-brained pattern of verbal, analytical, sequential appeals."[258] They argue that this dominant homiletical approach has downplayed appeals that would involve right-brain functions such as memory, imagination and emotions. [259]

---

[254] Sire, *Apologetics Beyond Reason,* 39.

[255] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith*, vii.

[256] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 187.

[257] Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery,* xii.

[258] Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983), 160.

[259] Lewis and Lewis, *Inductive Preaching,* 160.

Poet and theologian Malcolm Guite explains the history that led up to the postmodern distrust of rationalism. He writes "A great divorce took place between reason and imagination and a split between the objective and subjective world from the Enlightenment occurred from the 17th-19th century."[260] The realm of affect, honor, and love were separated from the mathematical, verifiable and visible.[261] He calls for a reunion of reason as an aid of comprehension and imagination as an aid toward God-given faith in Christian claims. He contends that finding a way to unite the apparent opposition of reason and the imagination is perhaps the most urgent task today[262]

Laughery agrees with Guite but cautions against the over-correction to rationalism in the form of Romanticism. He notes that Romanticism focuses on reality illumined by imagination but it "tended to privilege aesthetics over analysis."[263] Woodell agrees with Laughery about the caution regarding an overcorrection to rationalism stating "I am not arguing against argument, reasoning against reason, etc.,…Rather, I am arguing for the use of more than mere argument in apologetics"[264] He claims that an "aesthetic element" might benefit certain listeners.[265] Fraser agrees asserting that an "imaginative approach attracts hearers who would never think of or listen to our well-reasoned proofs or logical

---

[260] Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 64.

[261] Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry,* 64.

[262] Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry,* 64.

[263] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 55–56.

[264] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith,* xv.

[265] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith,* xv.

arguments."[266] Rather than mere rationalism, an imaginative, aesthetic element is called for which leads to communicating to the affections.[267]

The Imagination and the Affections

Concerning the affections, Gould asserts that all too often apologetic efforts focus on the rational plausibility of Christianity without paying much attention to its desirability. He challenges Christian communicators to connect to the universal longings for beauty, truth and goodness by utilizing the imagination.[268] In fact, he asserts that those that are immune to rational arguments would filter the Christian message through beauty and goodness for initial consideration.[269] McGilchrist, a psychiatrist, put it this way: "Affect comes first, the thinking later."[270] Theologian Paul Williams explains that something must first capture the imagination of the hearer, since "what we aim at is not so much a rationally deduced objective as something desired or longed for."[271] Augustine taught the same concept when he claimed, "The hearer must be pleased in order to secure his attention, so he must be persuaded in order to move him to action."[272]

---

[266] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 20–21.

[267] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 80.

[268] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 92.

[269] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics,* 117.

[270] Iain McGilchrist, *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 184.

[271] Paul S. Williams, *Exiles on Mission: How Christians Can Thrive in a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020), 150.

[272] Augustine, *Augustine, vol.18,* Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1988), 684.

McGrath concurs that an over-emphasized rational approach neglects winsome, imaginative, emotionally intelligent approaches to apologetic communication.[273] He explains that communicating to the imagination is not primarily about persuading people that a certain set of ideas is right. "It is more about depicting its world of beauty, goodness, and truth faithfully and vividly…in a way contemporary culture can appreciate and understand."[274]

For preachers to communicate to congregants regarding moral issues of right and wrong they need to understand how listeners make up their minds regarding moral issues. Sociologists and rhetoricians study what listeners find more important: the way they think about a problem or the way they feel about it. Sociologist Jonathan Haidt has gathered vast quantities of data illuminating that reason is dependent on emotions; much of what passes for thoughtful evaluation really operates on more of a gut level.[275] He pictures a small man riding an elephant, where the rider represents the rational self, and the elephant represents the desiring and feeling self. If communicators want to change listeners' minds, they will need to appeal to the emotional elephant as well as to the intellectual rider on top.[276] He explains "Human rationality depends critically on sophisticated emotionality. It is only because our emotional brains work so well that our reasoning can work at all."[277] Williams claims that imagination is a moral faculty and agrees with Haidt

---

[273] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 8.

[274] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics,* 18–19.

[275] Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 2–3.

[276] Haidt, *The Happiness Hyposthesis,* 2.

[277] Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis,* 4–13.

that in the imagination, people's deepest desires run free.[278] Beshears concurs and asserts that the approach of the communicator in today's context must appeal to the feelings of the heart.[279] He asserts that people don't just believe God is unimportant; they feel that way as well. They are cognitively indifferent because of their "emotional apathy…they couldn't care less because they feel nothing about God questions."[280]

Specifically, how does the imagination relate to affections?[281] Gould proposes that the imagination is that which awakens desire and moves hearts and minds like nothing else. People are captured by that which captivates their imaginations, and without the imagination the mind lacks the raw materials to judge something as true or false. It is the "aesthetic currency of the imagination-story, poetry, music, symbol, and images" that God uses to awaken our desire."[282] Smith agrees with Gould and claims that people are oriented by their loves and longings and directed by their desires.[283] The imagination triggers longing and searching. Preachers addressing the affections by means of the imagination move beyond appealing to mere superficial appetites in the listener and

---

[278] Williams, *Exiles on Mission*, 153.

[279] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 84–85.

[280] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 48.

[281] Storms defines affections as "sensible and intense longings or aversions of the will. Perhaps it would be best to say that whereas affections are not less than emotions, they are surely more. Emotions can often be no more than physiologically heightened states of either euphoria or fear that are unrelated to what the mind perceives as true. Affections, on the other hand, are *always* the fruit or effect of what the mind understands or knows…One can rarely if ever experience an affection without it being emotional and involving intense feelings that awaken and move and stir the body." Sam Storms, *Signs of the Spirit: An Interpretation of Jonathan Edwards's "Religious Affections"* (Wheaton, Il: Crossway, 2007), 43.

[282] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 74.

[283] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 11.

instead connect to profound wants and hopes in the hearers. But imagination's triggering effect on the affect must be applied with caution.[284]

Since the imagination awakens and moves listeners, some have noted that it must be addressed with restraint. Suspicions surround the use of the imagination in preaching. Ordway observes, "Many people consider the imagination to be a fanciful extra at best, or a dangerous source of lies and deception at worst."[285] Chapell agrees, acknowledging that an attitude of reservation pervades the use of the imagination by preachers. He observes that the apostle Paul urged that preaching not be characterized by "enticing words,"[286] "flattering words,"[287] or "the wisdom of this world."[288] Preachers are also cautioned about misusing rhetorical devices to manipulate an audience.[289]

Secondly, imaginary illustrations have the propensity to mishandle truth. For example, medieval interpreters asserted that a variety of allegorical meanings underlay every biblical text. A literal interpretation based upon grammatical-historical insights was considered simplistic. Chapell noted, analogy piled upon analogy and "led to wild interpretations that left the church with few biblical anchors since a text could mean whatever a good imagination determined."[290] Legitimate Bible analogy slid to absurd depths when preachers allowed their imaginations to race without restraint or

---

[284] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 25–30.

[285] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 15.

[286] 1 Corinthians 2:4

[287] 1 Thessalonians 2:5

[288] 1 Corinthians 2:6

[289] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 25–28.

[290] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power,* 26–28.

responsibility. Such excesses led to the basic exegetical principle of the Reformation, insisting every scripture passage be rooted in authorial intent.[291] Chapel insists on caution rather than condemnation concluding, "While the ministerial record warrants caution with this technique, analogy can be another effective inductive ingredient in sermons."[292] Laughery agrees with Chapell suggesting, "both passionate embrace and cautious discernment are in order."[293] He argues that no one has the capacity to form beliefs or to acquire knowledge without imagination. To blame imagination for fabrication and fancy, and then pretend to do without it for faith, life, and knowledge, is highly dubious. He asserts, "The assumption that we are merely rational and logical beings concerned with mechanism and matter, who have no time and place for imagination, is simply another fantasy."[294] He cautions against over-valuing the imagination as the only accurate informer, ignoring reason, sense observation, and logic and also under-valuing it as irrelevant for understanding or engaging the actual world.[295]

Baily agrees with Chapel's concerns, but rather than surveying the medieval period, he observes the Post-Romantic period's suspicion related to the imagination. He notes that in the Post-Romantic period, the imagination, associated as it was with Romantic excess, became dangerous, a distraction from truth.[296] He notes that a biblical search for imagination in the King James Version, which held sway in the English-speaking world

---

[291] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 26–39.

[292] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power,* 39.

[293] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 72.

[294] Laughery, *Living Imagination,* 72.

[295] Laughery, *Living Imagination,* 2.

[296] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 5.

for 300 years, renders every instance of the term in a negative context. Genesis speaks of the imagination [*yēṣer*] of humanity as "only evil continually."[297] The prophetic hope in Jeremiah is that one day the nations will be gathered at the throne of God and no longer follow "after the imagination [*šərrirût*] of their evil heart."[298] Proverbs reveals that one of the seven things that God hates is a heart that plans "wicked imaginations [*maḥăšābāh*]."[299] The New Testament seems to show more of the same. Three different Greek words (*dianoia*, *dialogismos*, l*ogismos*)[300] are rendered "imagination" with consistently negative connotations.[301] He argues that the biblical authors are not rejecting the imagination but rather its fallen direction, away from God. He concludes, "Rather than trivializing the imagination, these passages treat the imagination as a faculty to be reckoned with!"[302] Trueman agrees with Bailey's concern with the fallen direction of the imagination, pointing out that the imagination is implicated when theologians consider the heart as a forger of idols. He explains that we live in a world in which it is increasingly easy to imagine that reality is something people can manipulate according to their own wills and desires and not something they need to conform to or accept.[303] In summary, imagination is a function of all human beings, held by virtue of their creation in the image of God; it can be used either for good or evil.

---

[297] Genesis 6:5

[298] Jeremiah 3:17

[299] Proverbs 6:18

[300] Luke 1:51; Romans 1:21; 2 Corinthians 10:5 respectively.

[301] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 97–98.

[302] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 88–89.

[303] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 38–39.

Searle answers another suspicion that arises regarding preaching to the imagination, namely the concern that faith is no longer needed because preachers rely on their rhetorical technique rather than the gift of faith. Searle explains that faith cannot operate without imagination and yet cannot be equated with it. Faith is a supernatural gift,[304] biblically focused upon Jesus Christ in his saving work upon the cross,[305] that engages, re-orients, and transforms the heart of an individual, so that the mind, affections, will, and imagination are all directed by the Spirit of God in obedience to the commands of God.[306] Saving faith, therefore, operates existentially through the imagination and other aspects of rational personhood, but it is not native to it nor able to be generated by it,[307] the Spirit of God is necessary to a truly saving transformation,[308] resulting in a relationship of living, personal communion.[309] She concludes, "This distinction between faith and imagination also enables a differentiation…faith must step in and do much that imagination cannot be expected to do…obey, trust, acknowledge, respond, decide." [310]

The Holy Spirit, Beauty and Signals of Transcendence

How does the Holy Spirit relate to preaching aimed at human longings and the captivation of the imagination? Gould maintains that communicators join the Holy Spirit

---

[304] Ephesians 2:8

[305] Acts 20

[306] Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart*, 50.; and Romans 8:1-17.

[307] Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 11:6

[308] Romans 8:9

[309] John 14:17-18, 20-21, 23-26

[310] Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart,* 50.

in awakening desire.[311] Bailey agrees and asserts, "It is because the apologist has confidence that the Holy Spirit is already at work within human longings that she orients her presentation there."[312] McGrath likens the use of imaginative communication and the Holy Spirit's role to opening shutters to allow light into a dark room. He explains this image by noting that the action of communication is just as a shutter that needs to be opened to let the light in. He adds that the illumination of the mind must ultimately come from the work of God's grace, just as the sun is the ultimate source behind the room being filled with light.[313] Machen agrees with McGrath regarding the foundational role of the Holy Spirit in enabling a listener to understand the content of preaching:

> the decisive thing is the regenerative power of God…but as a matter of fact, God usually exerts that power in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel. [314]

Edgar agrees with Machen saying, "The gospel never stands alone; it always requires some kind of agency to bring it within earshot of real people."[315] Van Til agrees with McGrath and Machen writing that the preached message is the starting point, not the ground of understanding. According to Van Til the preacher relies on the Holy Spirit to tell people they are lost and in need of a savior. "The natural man is, by virtue of his creation in the image of God, always accessible to the truth; accessible to the penetration

---

[311] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 72.

[312] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 231.

[313] Mcgrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 61.

[314] Machen, J. Gresham, "Christianity and Culture," 11.

[315] Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart*, 38.

of the truth by the Spirit of God."[316] He concludes by saying that Christian preaching is "valuable to the precise extent that it presses the truth upon the attention of the natural man. The natural man must be blasted out of his hideouts, his caves, his last lurking places."[317] Woodell disagrees with Van Til's warfare metaphor calling for a more winsome presentation of Christian content: "The Holy Spirit may as well use…an apologist's beautiful presentation of God."[318]

How does beauty intersect with preaching to the imagination? Baily claims that the Christian faith is not simply a set of truths the intellect affirms but more fundamentally a way of seeing beauty. Beauty exercises the imagination.[319] He argues that methodological priority be given to aesthetic communication, guiding the preacher to ask, "What would make belief beautiful and believable for this person?" or alternatively, "What makes belief ugly and unbelievable?"[320] The aesthetic dimension is the dimension in which the felt sense is essential to what is meaningful.[321] He contends, "In our Post-Romantic situation, this aesthetic dimension is most decisive, and the first question is not, 'Is it true?' but rather, 'How does it move' the listener?[322] Woodell adds, "Postmodernists…do tend to appreciate and find compelling such things as art, beauty,

---

[316] Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 105.

[317] Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith,* 105.

[318] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith*, 106.

[319] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 240–41.

[320] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 29.

[321] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 4.

[322] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics,* 229.

and aesthetics."[323] He observes that pleasure, personal fulfillment, and creativity are important, whereas logic, reason, evidence, and argument are relatively unimportant.[324]

Sire agrees with Baily and calls beauty a pointer or signal of the existence of transcendence.[325] Gould agrees with Sire and cautions, "We neglect the role of beauty to our detriment, as beauty plays a key role in awakening and sustaining our longing for what is good, our longing to return home in our spiritual journey."[326] He posits, "In a world immune to rational arguments, beauty and goodness are the filters through which the gospel message is first considered."[327] He continues, "The imagination guides us forward. Beauty will save the world."[328] He relates beauty to the imagination and enchantment when he describes beauty as a divine megaphone to rouse a disenchanted world.[329] He claims that the imagination "transports us toward beauty"[330] and explains "If beauty is what calls us, drawing forth our longings, it is the imagination that guides us in perceiving and creating beauty."[331] Preachers are not only to present content but to present content in such a way that the listeners are moved by the beauty of the content.[332]

---

[323] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith*. XV.

[324] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith,* 28.

[325] Sire, *Apologetics Beyond Reason*, 77.

[326] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 90.

[327] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 117.

[328] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 118.

[329] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 104.

[330] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 29.

[331] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 106.

[332] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith*, 109.

When Sire calls beauty a signal of transcendence, he is borrowing this term from Berger. Berger observes five signs or signals that point to a supernatural frame of reference: a human propensity for order, the pervasiveness of human play, the human propensity for hope, the human demand for not just condemnation but damnation for certain despicable deeds, and finally the reality of humor.[333] Sire adds poetry and art as a signals of transcendence, because the beauty and meaning poetry and art evoke via the imagination cannot be fully explained by materialistic assumptions. He claims the way art moves people arises "from the deep wells of the human imagination."[334] Gould explains that a signal of transcendence whets the appetite and awakens desire for the true objects of longing, namely the beauty of the invisible God himself.[335] He argues, "To speak of a signal of transcendence is….to try for a glimpse of the grace that is to be found 'in, with, and under' the empirical reality of our lives."[336] Gould adds to Berger's and Sire's list of signals: "cosmic wonder, morality, beauty, music, death, the directedness or 'aboutness' of our mental lives, religious experience of the divine…glances, a kiss, a smile, the real presence of another."[337] Preachers addressing these signs have the opportunity to connect the sign to that which the sign is ultimately pointing to: transcendent reality.[338]

---

[333] Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1970), 53–69.

[334] Sire, *Apologetics Beyond Reason*, 120.

[335] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 87.

[336] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 62.

[337] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 64.

[338] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 62–65.

How do preachers assist listeners in connecting these signals of transcendence with the supernatural content of their message? Johnson writes, "Metaphor is a witness of language to the interconnectedness of all things visible and invisible."[339] A word that we commonly used to refer to a thing experienced with the five senses is then used to refer to something beyond the reach of those immediate senses.[340] Professor of Homiletics David Buttrick argues that people "explore 'the beyond our world' only… by imagination's wonderful wordplay expressed in metaphors."[341] He claims preaching involves bringing the unseen reality into view by means of metaphorical images and illustrations. He asserts "preaching makes metaphor" because preaching is inescapably a work of metaphor.[342] Keller agrees, claiming, "The imagination is more affected by images than by propositions … An illustration is anything that connects an abstract proposition with the memory of an experience in the sensory world."[343] Keller's claim is consistent with Reformed experiential preaching. Experiential preaching seeks to explain, in terms of biblical truth, how matters ought to go, how they do go, and the goal of the Christian life. The preacher enters sympathetically into the experiences, hopes and fears of the hearer.[344] Preachers who arrest and captivate the imagination through metaphor facilitate a connection with their message and the lived experience of their hearers. [345]

---

[339] Trygve David Johnson and Eugene Peterson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 24.

[340] Johnson and Peterson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist,* 24–25.

[341] David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 183.

[342] Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*, 113.

[343] Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 170.

[344] Beeke, "What Is Experiential Preaching?"

[345] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 110–14.

Metaphor's Nature, Function, Significance and Power in Preaching

How do metaphor and imagination relate? Laughery insists "metaphor is rooted in the imagination."[346] It finds its foundation and beginning in the imagination. What is the nature of a metaphor that develops out of the imagination? Lakoff and Johnson explain that the essence of metaphor is "conceiving and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another."[347] Ordway adds that it is a comparison of "one thing to a second thing that is outwardly *dissimilar* to the first but that has some inner likeness to it, in order to convey something true about the first thing."[348] Brown agrees with Ordway, noting, "at the very least, the metaphor "enables one to see similarities in what previously had been regarded as dissimilars."[349] One image compared to another image opens the mind and heart to greater understanding through the use of the imagination.

The literal meaning of the word "metaphor" means "to carry over, from the Greek."[350] One image is presented, and the meaning derived from that image is carried over to another thing. The connection between the halves of the comparison is not arbitrary but reasonable. To perceive the logic of the connections that a metaphor makes, people need to do justice to the literal qualities of the image, remembering that metaphors are images first and comparisons second.[351] Scholar of Biblical Figures of Speech, E. W.

---

[346] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 5–9.

[347] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

[348] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 47–48.

[349] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 6.

[350] Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, xiv.

[351] Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery,* xiv.

Bullinger agrees with Lackoff and Johnson, noting the Greek *metaphora* means "to carry over, a transference," claiming that a metaphor is confined to a distinct affirmation that one thing is another thing, owing to some association or similarity. Two nouns themselves must both be mentioned and are always to be taken in their literal sense, or else no one can tell what they mean. He clarifies the essence of a metaphor by distinguishing metaphor from simile, calling metaphor a representation rather than a figure of resemblance. He explains, "While the simile gently states that one thing is like or resembles another, the metaphor boldly and warmly declares that one thing IS the other."[352] A metaphor is a representation not just a resemblance.[353]

How does a metaphor function? Bullinger explains that the representation referred to in the metaphor usually does not lie on the surface and may not be apparent in the language itself. It is instead in the use of the thing represented or in the effects which it produces. In this case the metaphor often functions as a surprise which the hearer discovers when the two unrelated objects have some point in which they really agree.[354] Brown agrees calling the metaphor "a master of surprise"[355] He explains that the metaphor exploits an irresolvable incongruity between the target and source domains to generate a "semantic shock," effectively wedding analogy and anomaly.[356] Metaphors

---

[352] E. W. Bullinger, *Figures Of Speech Used In the Bible Explained and Illustrated* (New York: Martino Fine Books, 2011), 735.

[353] Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated,* 735–37.

[354] Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated,* 736.

[355] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 7.

[356] Brown, *Seeig the Psalms,* 7.

create conceptual and emotional friction by which new meaning is revealed and the impossible becomes conceivable.[357]

Lakoff and Johnson assert that the metaphor's primary function is understanding.[358] Understanding is crucial in preaching. Liftin asserts that the essential role of the preacher is not only to gain listener attention but also to "couch the message in such a way that his listeners can comprehend it."[359] Debruyn adds that preaching "works with metaphor and analogy to fire the imagination of our hearers and enable them through the sheer power of the choice phrase, metaphor or word-picture, to see and feel the glory of what is being said."[360] Laughery agrees, noting that metaphors do not often measure up to modernity's criteria for understanding reality by facts and figures alone. He asserts that metaphors bring a deeper understanding of reality.[361]

The metaphor functions to increase understanding by implicit comparison. Johnson writes, "Scripture often uses metaphor (implicit comparison) rather than simile (explicit comparison using 'like' or 'as')."[362] For example, when Paul writes, "I planted, Apollos watered,"[363] he is not speaking of farming but instead of declaring the gospel to save souls and the teaching of the truth to foster Christian growth. A simile compares one

---

[357] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms,* 7.

[358] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

[359] Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 280.

[360] David de Bruyn, "Persuasion without Manipulation: Conservative Preaching without Being Boring, or The Beautiful Sermon." New Covenant Baptist Church, accessed October 11, 2021, https://www.ncbc.co.za/conservative-preaching.

[361] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 70.

[362] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 207.

[363] 1 Corinthians 1:6

thing to another but makes the comparison explicit by using the prepositions like or as. An example is the Proverbs 25:25: "Like cold water to a thirsty soul, / so is good news from a far country.[364] Bullinger points out that "The metaphor is not so true to fact as the simile, but is much truer to feeling."[365] Brown agrees with Bullinger claiming that the metaphor stimulates emotion by communicating suggestive and expressive meanings through a fusion of sense with sound.[366] Eswine adds that a metaphor leaves room for the listener. It does not propose to cover every angle, and it does not require only one possible explanation. Metaphor allows for shades of meaning and difference. Metaphor provokes further thought and exploration. It is a word of invitation more than destination[367]

A metaphor not only brings understanding but, as Brown points out "A good metaphor…[is] the birth of a new understanding, a new referential access. A strong metaphor compels new possibilities of vision."[368] Weirsbe adds, "Metaphors challenge us and make us think. They arouse our curiosity and force us to adjust our perspective and try to see two things at one time."[369] Brown adds a reflective and emotive function saying, "A metaphor stimulates reflection and emotion as it signals the transference of

---

[364] Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. xiv.

[365] Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used In the Bible Explained and Illustrated*, 735.

[366] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 5.

[367] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 71–72.

[368] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 6.

[369] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 47.

meaning from something well-known to something new; it describes one thing in terms of another."[370]

Laughery observes an affective dimension of the metaphor. The imagination produces metaphors that have the capacity to affect people and bring them more deeply into reality by touching us and making them feel one way or the other.[371] Weirsbe adds, "When two seemingly contrary ideas…are brought together, the union creates a dynamic tension that excites the mind and arouses the emotions; and the will is held captive until the tension is either resolved or dismissed."[372] Ellen Siegelman maintains that the inner life can't be changed unless feeling and understanding are connected. She writes, "Cognition without affect is simply an intellectualization that will not hold; affect without cognition is just a feeling-state without a home."[373] Weirsbe, in reference to this claim by Siegelman expresses, "My conviction is that this connection involves the use of the imagination and metaphorical images."[374]

What weaknesses are connected to the use of metaphor when communicating? Gredanus observes that metaphors may create ambiguity by carrying an unintended freight of meaning. He argues that listeners connect meanings to images that were not intended, and confusion may occur rather than clarity. He acknowledges the potential for misunderstanding due to ambiguity but advises "As we are to hear two meanings together

---

[370] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 5.

[371] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 63.

[372] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 46–47.

[373] Ellen Y. Siegelman, *Metaphor and Meaning in Psychotherapy*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993), 42.

[374] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 60.

in synonymous parallelism, like stereophonic sound, so we may be intended to hear more than one meaning in a metaphor, like surround sound."[375] He concludes, "If ambiguity can lead to various connected depth dimensions…the context will have to determine which is the dominant tone."[376]

How important is the metaphor in the communication between preachers and congregants? Cognitive linguistics professor George Lakoff and British neuroscientist Mark Johnson observe, "Metaphor has traditionally been viewed…as a matter of peripheral interest…it is, instead, a matter of central concern, perhaps the key to giving an adequate account of understanding"[377] They explain that metaphor is for most people a device of poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish, but in fact an ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which people both think and do, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. They conclude that our conceptual structure - what people perceive and their conceptual system - is largely metaphorical. "The way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor."[378] Buttrick agrees with Lackoff and Johnson, asserting, "Metaphors are more important than we know…they disclose the models that shape our minds and set our behavioral patterns with terrifying power. We live our lives *in* metaphor."[379] Ordway pictures the importance of a metaphor as a bridge: "Metaphors are valuable because they build a bridge between the known and

---

[375] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 42.

[376] Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes,* 42.

[377] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. xii.

[378] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* 1–3.

[379] Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 123.

the unknown. Or, to put it another way, metaphors serve the same purpose as propositional statements: to orient the reader toward reality."[380]

What is the power behind the metaphor? Ordway explains "By having a basic understanding of how metaphor works, we will better understand how it is that imaginative approaches can convey truth - and can do so in such effective ways."[381] She asserts, "Metaphors are potent because they can hold a great deal of meaning packed into a very small space."[382] Author Fredrick Buechner adds that poetic language like metaphor transcends all other language "in its power to open the doors of the heart."[383] It raises the subtext to the text and converts closed awareness to open awareness in a way that allows hearers to let their guard down.[384] Preachers wanting to present complex and threatening material in an indirect, non-threatening way can lean on this linguistic tool for support.[385]

Professor of Religious Studies, Lynn Huber claims the power of metaphor is contained in its ability to encourage an audience to make abstract concepts concrete through comparison. The metaphorical comparisons may resonate with human

---

[380] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 52.

[381] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination,* 54.

[382] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination,* 47–48.

[383] Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*, (San Francisco,CA: Harper & Row, 1977), 21.

[384] Vyjeyanthi S. Periyakoil, "Using Metaphors in Medicine," *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 11, no. 6 (July 2008): 843, https://doi.org/10.1089/jpm.2008.9885.

[385] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 214.

experience,[386] proving to be a useful tool for understanding and communicating a specific set of ideas. [387] McGrath agrees, pointing out, "The abstract terms need to be translated into images to connect with listeners."[388] Brown adds that the metaphor is not simply a literary ornament or a vehicle of emotive import; it is a means of cognitive mediation because "it bears a conceptual power, namely, the power to create structure in our understanding of life."[389]

What practices or homiletical tools can preachers employ regarding metaphor? Wiersbe directs preachers to "flesh out" abstractions like truth, beauty, and goodness with a metaphor so that listeners are enabled to make concrete in their minds what would otherwise be unreal.[390] He is quick to remind preachers that they do not need to manufacture these pictures because they are usually embedded in the text. He directs preachers to use the images placed in the scripture to allow a "verbal incarnation" to make the abstract concrete.[391] He explains, "When you study a text, ask first 'What is the point?' Then ask, 'Where are the pictures and how do they both fit together?'"[392]

---

[386] One common human experience is sickness. Doctors are encouraged to use metaphors in two ways: First to introduce unfamiliar material connecting new information about the illness with something they already know and second to break preexisting mind sets by making the familiar unfamiliar. In this situation, clinicians help patients and families break known connections and pre-existing mind-sets in order to discover something new about the illness. This facilitates crucial conversations and difficult decisions. Periyakoil, "Using Metaphors in Medicine," 1–4.

[387] Lynn R. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 180.

[388] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 19.

[389] Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 5–6.

[390] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 81–83.

[391] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination,* 82.

[392] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination,* 87.

McGrath agrees with Weirsbe about making the abstract concrete by calling preachers to transpose, that is to say, reformulate the abstraction in terms of an image capable of connecting listeners with the substance of the theological abstraction.[393] He points to the example of using the illustration of Eustace Scrubb, a character in C.S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader,* to explain sin's corruption and enslaving power. Eustace is depicted as trapped by a force he cannot control and as he attempts to master others, he himself has been mastered. By using a literary analogy, the abstraction of sin becomes understandable as listeners relate to the character.[394]

Homiletics Professor Silas Krueger points preachers to discover and then express what he calls the "color" of the text by showing the picturesque quality of the words, the image contained in the words or the scenes the words evoke.[395] He argues that preachers need to find extended metaphors, such as parables, that enlist listeners to participate and enter into the text, rather than metaphors that only illustrate a proposition. By finding and using extended metaphors, preachers set listeners up to experience the text more fully.[396] Dr. Steve Jussley, senior pastor of Lakeland Presbyterian Church, advises preachers to appeal to the experiential, affective desires of listeners with short illustrations, like the

---

[393] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 19.

[394] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics,* 69.

[395] Silas Krueger, "Preaching in an Oral Age: Preaching Styles That 'speak' to a Post-Literate Generation," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 112, no. 2 (2015): 105-106, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerialsPLUS.

[396] Krueger, "Preaching in an Oral Age," 98.

metaphor, to keep the interest of modern hearers who demand short, compressed picture thinking.[397]

To identify metaphors, homilitician Jay Cormier asks preachers to look for everyday examples that are relatable to the experiences of the listener, not necessarily the preacher. He tells preachers to ask the following question: "Where do I see the truth; I want to proclaim taking place in the every-day lives of my listeners? For example, if preaching about the prodigal son, ask, 'Where do I see the forgiveness of the Father for the prodigal?' If preaching about the grain of wheat dying, ask, 'Where do I see the grain of wheat dying to itself to become something greater?' [398] He adds one more step to drive the metaphor into the conceptual and affective experience of the listener: "Make them see how what you are talking about matters to them."[399] Enter into what your listeners consider important, interesting, and beneficial and choose metaphors that engage what matters to congregants.[400] What tool or method can preachers use to gauge when to utilize a metaphorical example during their sermon delivery?

Past Editor of Preachingtoday.com Craig Bryan Larson advises preachers to place metaphors at strategic points: the introduction, key sentences and paragraphs, and conclusion.[401] Eswine guides preachers to ask the following question of the sermon text

---

[397] Steve Jussely, "A Case for Illustrative Preaching," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 2 (1998): 47–48, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerialsPLUS.

[398] Jay Cormier, "Forum: Preaching Visually: Helping Your Community 'see' God in Their Midst," *Worship* 86, no. 5 (September 2012): 437–44, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerialsPLUS.

[399] Jay Cormier, *The Deacon's Ministry of the Word* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 7.

[400] Cormier, 7–9.

[401] Robinson Haddon, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, Illustrated edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 395–96.

in order to discern when the use of metaphor is appropriate: "Is the language God uses in this text poetic, technical, or ordinary?"[402] When the answer to this question is poetic, preachers submit to the language and allow the metaphor to function according to its unique purpose in expressing truth via image that stirs the imagination.[403] Eswine guides preachers to use metaphor in the best homiletical section of the sermon by comparing the sections to an ocean tide. Preachers begin by proclaiming the meaning of a text first, which is like the tide of an ocean gradually moving toward land. If the metaphor is given immediately with intensity before the meaning of the text is given, no foundation is given to move the hearer's heart. The metaphor given after explaining the meaning allows the waters to foam and momentum to build in the listeners' imagination. Application would follow metaphor to speed the water into and over the beach.[404]

What misuses of metaphor are preachers to stay away from? Larson cautions preachers regarding methods that misuse metaphors by directing them away from mixed metaphors. Multiple comparative images in close proximity confuse rather than clarify.[405] He claims preachers are most prone to mixing metaphors when using "dead" metaphors - ones so common people no longer recognize them as metaphors: "If you can't take the heat, start firing back."[406] Next he warns against what he calls overreaching, where preachers reach too far with a comparison that is illogical, weak or non-existent, or that

---

[402] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 107–8.

[403] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World,* 107–8.

[404] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World,* 129.

[405] Robinson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 394–95.

[406] Robinson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 395.

stretches imagination too far. "Love is the tree sap of human relations. It nourishes the leaves of our soul."[407] Lastly, he advises preachers to steer clear from adverse associations. "The gospel is a nuclear bomb." Though both are powerful, the comparison fails because it compares something glorious and life-giving with something destructive.[408] Misuse of metaphor must not be misconstrued as mistrusting the significance of metaphor to engage the congregant's imagination.[409]

The purpose of this study is to explore how preachers can communicate to disinterested listeners by engaging their imagination with metaphors. The second area of the literature review examines preaching to the imagination with metaphors. The first section introduces the concept of contextualization and its relationship to preaching followed by a definition of the imagination. The second section works toward understanding the nature and function of the imagination. The third section clarifies the imagination's connection to epistemology and rationalism. The fourth section examines the imagination and its effect on the affections, surveying suspicions regarding these effects. The fifth section reviews the Holy Spirit's relationship to preaching to the imagination, along with the importance of beauty. It concludes with an exploration of the concept of signals of transcendence. The final defines metaphor and examine its function, power, and significance in the preaching encounter. It concludes with specific practices preachers can employ to engage the hearer's imagination regarding the use of metaphors.

---

[407] Robinson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 395–96.

[408] Robinson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 396.

[409] Robinson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 395–97.

Jesus' Use of Metaphors

The examination of what literature offers in preaching to the imagination with metaphor is now followed by a focus on Jesus' use of metaphors. The first section establishes Jesus' priority in using metaphors in preaching. It offers a connects parable and metaphor in the preaching of Jesus. It concludes by showing the reasons preachers in today's secular context should consider Jesus' use of metaphor even though he lived and preached in an enchanted age. The second section observes Jesus' use of nature in his metaphors as an act of indirect communication. The final section explores Jesus' use of metaphor to surprise and subvert so listeners will reevaluate reality.

Jesus' Priority in Using Metaphor

Gould observes, "Jesus used metaphor to engage his listeners and assist them in understanding his message."[410] Edgar agrees, stating "Jesus often spoke in the wisdom tradition, couching his speeches in the language of parable or proverb."[411] Bailey agrees adding, "Jesus was a metaphorical theologian. That is, his primary method of creating meaning was through metaphor…rather than through logic and reasoning…. He created meaning like a poet rather than a philosopher."[412] He describes metaphor as "a mode of theological discourse. The metaphor does more than explain meaning, it creates

---

[410] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 114.

[411] Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart*, 47.

[412] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 279.

meaning.[413] In Jesus' preaching his discourse included metaphor to evoke meaning in the lives of his listeners.[414]

Johnson calls Jesus a "metaphorical preacher who understands that a powerful picture or image communicates meaning that a thousand words cannot express."[415] He lists the following stories Jesus told that contain many metaphors: "The Camel and the Needle,"[416] "The Great Banquet,"[417] "The Two Debtors,"[418] "The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin,"[419] the seven "I am" statements in the gospel of John[420] and his dramatic use of symbol in the last supper.[421] Rather than primarily teaching with straightforward propositions Jesus taught with word pictures.[422]

Theologians note that parables and metaphors are often connected needing no sharp distinction.[423] Wenham explains that a parable is the putting of two ideas side-by-side, or, a putting together of two ideas from different spheres in such a way that one idea illuminates the other.[424] He notes that Jesus used these side-by-side pictorial sayings, also

---

[413] Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes,* 280.

[414] Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes,* 279–80.

[415] Johnson and Peterson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist*, 85.

[416] Luke 18:18-30

[417] Luke 14:15-24

[418] Luke 7:36-50

[419] Luke 15:4-10

[420] John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11-14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1

[421] Matt 26:17-19; Johnson and Peterson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist*, 85.

[422] Johnson and Peterson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist,* 85–88.

[423] David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 228–29.

[424] Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus,* 226.

be called parables,[425] and concludes, saying "what made Jesus's teaching different was the centrality of his parabolic or metaphorical speech…when Jesus spoke to crowds he taught almost entirely in pictorial language, not just an aid to illustrate his points[426]

Homilitician Alyce McKenzie agrees with Wenham and asserts, "Several of Jesus' narrative parables about the kingdom are metaphors in story form.[427] She describes a metaphor as an equation of two things not conventionally seen as alike. She writes that Jesus used these equations of comparison and contrast to spark back and forth between the two things being equated so that fresh insights occur. She asserts, "This is often what I believe Jesus was doing when he places his short narratives next to the mysterious notion of the kingdom of God. He was giving listeners the chance to reflect on how the kingdom is like and unlike our everyday existence."[428] Craig Blomberg agrees with McKenzie and distinguishes metaphor from proposition, describing them thus: "The parables as metaphors are performative rather than propositional—utterances which do not convey information but perform an action, such as promising, warning, giving a gift, or making a demand.[429] Bailey agrees and adds an invitational nature regarding the parable as metaphor, asserting, "A parable is an extended metaphor and as such is not a

---

[425] Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus,* 12.

[426] Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus,* 12–13.

[427] Alyce M. McKenzie, *The Parables for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 23.

[428] McKenzie, *The Parables for Today,* 23.

[429] Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables,* 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 155.

delivery system for an idea but a house in which the reader/listener is invited to take up residence."[430]

C.H. Dodd agrees with McKenzie but adds the connection to the natural order. He observes that Jesus' metaphors are often drawn from nature to make his teaching understandable. He writes, "The parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."[431] Dodd explains that a simple metaphor may be elaborated into a picture by the addition of detail or a story by the addition of details serving to develop a situation.[432] Jesus derived many of those details from the natural realm.[433]

Dodd's observation, that Jesus used metaphors drawn primarily from nature suggests that metaphors drawn from nature connect to listeners in today's naturalistic context.[434] Choctaw agrees with Dodd and argues that humans of every time period hunger for a story that is livable, observable, and fitting their down-to-earth experiences.[435]He also contends that every human being is given the faculty of the imagination which allows

---

[430] Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 279.

[431] *Parables of the Kingdom by C. H. Dodd* (Great Britain: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 16. Dodd lists the following examples of metaphors Jesus used: "They do not light a lamp and put it under the meal-rub, but on a lamp-stand; and then it gives light to all in the house"; "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old coat, else the patch pulls away from it-the new from the old-and there is a worse tear"; Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye, without noticing the plank in your own eye: How can you say to your brother, let me take the splinter out of your eye, when there is a plank in your own…"

[432] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 17.

[433] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom,* 20.

[434] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom, 16-17*

[435] Josh Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 33.

them to see how life and the world around them fit together in an integrative whole. Metaphors in the way of stories speak to people of all ages.[436] Keller adds that all people have universal longings and seek meaning, identity, hope, satisfaction, freedom, and a moral compass.[437]

Jesus' Use of Nature Metaphors as Indirect Communication

Dodd notices that "Jesus did not feel the need of making up artificial illustrations from the truths He wished to teach. He found them ready-made by the Maker of man and nature."[438] Wenham agrees with Dodd, noting the following farming metaphor used by Jesus: "The sowing metaphor was a particular potent one as applied to Jesus' ministry. The vulnerable, seemingly insignificant seed yielding great power and connected to explaining the kingdom."[439]

Hans Boersma adds, "Earthly signs and heavenly realities are intimately woven together."[440] Calvin taught, "There is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory….this skillful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible."[441] Weirsbe agrees stating, "It is important to know the book of nature and the book of human nature if we

---

[436] Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story,* 44.

[437] Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 4–76.

[438] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 20. Dodd supplies the following metaphorical illustration derived from nature: Consider the fowls of the air… (Mt. vi. 26-30; Lk xii. 24-48).

[439] Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus*, 44.

[440] Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 24.

[441] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1.5.1

hope to penetrate the picture gallery of the human mind with the truth of God's Word."[442] Jesus knew that book of nature well and created metaphors from nature to arouse interest and understanding in his hearers.

Wolfe also points out that Christ's parables are not full of direct propositions but instead explain reality through indirect, "between the lines" communication utilizing the imagination. He cautions "If we are too quick to boil these unsettling stories down to one-dimensional morals, they will no longer detonate in our hearts with the power that Jesus poured into them."[443] Johnson agrees and notes that in Luke 9:57–58 the text reads, "As they were going along the road a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'" He observes that if Jesus had responded directly, he might have responded with something like, "Bold statements are easy to make but you have to consider seriously what it will cost you to follow me." But instead, Jesus used metaphors "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."[444] Rather than the abstract statement followed by a clarifying illustration, Jesus has a metaphorical illustration.[445]

Fraser distinguishes these two communicative approaches: "direct, which conveys truth by way of logic, reason, and doctrine; and indirect, which conveys truth by way of story, narrative, and symbol."[446] He maintains "The direct approach is a straightforward

---

[442] Wiersbe, *Preaching And Teaching With Imagination*, 39.

[443] Gregory Wolfe, *Beauty Will Save the World: Recovering the Human in an Ideological Age* (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), Kindle Locations 607-611, Kindle Edition.

[444] Luke 9:58

[445] Johnson and Peterson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist*, 85.

[446] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 18–19.

strategy of communication and can be used effectively when a person is open to the gospel (i.e., does not emotionally resist following Christ) and simply needs to become aware of what Christ asks of a person."[447] He emphasizes the primary purpose of indirect communication as effecting a fundamental change in the way of life of hearers as they seek to understand the meaning of the artistic or communicative act.[448]

Fraser explains the function of indirect communication. The indirect approach emphasizes strong imaginative stories aimed at the heart rather than the mind and are a useful antidote to a culture that privileges reason and proposition over imagination and revelation.[449] Fraser argues that indirect communication engages the imagination of those with misconceptions and misapprehensions about Christian content by allowing them to let their guard down so they can consider what is presented.[450] He notes "It was the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) who first articulated what might be called a philosophy of indirect communication. His extraordinary insight was that it is primarily indirect communication that conveys a "realization." [451] The indirect use of metaphor and story focuses more on feelings or images than ideas or doctrines. It speaks to the imaginative part of person awakening images replacing present structures of

---

[447] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 22–23.

[448] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 39.

[449] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 275.

[450] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 49–50.

[451] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 18.

knowing and being.[452] Philosopher Benjamin Daise agrees, stating, "The object of [indirect] communication is therefore not knowledge but a realization."[453]

Barrs agrees with Fraser noting, "Jesus was pleased to use stories to communicate truth to people, especially those who, for all sorts of reasons, no longer would listen to straightforward presentations of the truth."[454] Fraser points out that if the hearer is resistant to the message, or even predisposed to believe they already know and understand the message someone is trying to communicate when in fact they do not, then the indirect approach is needed.[455] Jesus taught resistant listeners predisposed to believe they knew all they needed to know. He used indirection to move past their guarded resistance to his countercultural message.[456]

Jesus' Use of Metaphor to Surprise and Subvert

Jesus often used metaphors with shocking juxtapositions. Selby notes, "…Parables represented one important rhetorical form with the power to bring about a kind of self-confrontation that would give rise to new states of self-awareness.[457] Beuchner agrees, observing that Jesus preached in the language of metaphor, which suggests rather than

---

[452] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 192.

[453] Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 19.

[454] Jerram Barrs, *Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 96.

[455] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 39.

[456] Fraser, *Hide and Seek,* 39–45.

[457] Gary Selby, *Not with Wisdom of Words : Nonrational Persuasion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 135, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

spells out. Jesus "evokes rather than explains. He catches by surprise."[458] Buechner calls attention to the parable of the Good Samaritan where acts of mercy were attributed to a Samaritan who stood for one's most hated enemy. This juxtaposition would have shocked his Jewish audience.[459]

Surprise results from the sudden subversion of an expectation.[460] Laughery notes, "parables, and their focus on the Kingdom of God in Jesus' context, often *subvert* expected meanings to *reveal* unexpected ones. Their metaphorical clout is dynamic."[461] Van Til asserted, "The natural man must be blasted out of his hideouts, his caves, his last lurking places."[462] Fraser proposes that the best way to "get around" a person's intellectual and emotional prejudices is by telling good stories.[463] He explains that a subversive approach does not guarantee one will come to belief but provokes the hearer in a way that is engaging and creative causing listeners to question preconceived beliefs.[464] He explains "In the New Testament Jesus used these brief narratives containing vivid and arresting metaphors and with them lured his listeners to view reality in a new way.[465]

---

[458] Buechner, *Telling the Truth the Gospel As Tragedy*, Comedy and Fairy tale, 62–63.

[459] Buechner, *Telling the Truth the Gospel As Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale,* 62–63.

[460] Aaron Smuts, "The Paradox of Suspense," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Archive, last modified October 26, 2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/paradox-suspense/.

[461] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 95.

[462] Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 105.

[463] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 54.

[464] Fraser, *Hide and Seek,* 13.

[465] Fraser, *Hide and Seek,* 158.

Walter Brueggemann notes that Jesus used metaphors to get to the "deep places in our lives - places of resistance[466] that don't need more instruction but rather, a phrase that Jesus so often said, "The kingdom of heaven is like…" was to lead to reflection. His use of metaphor also explains why the common people heard him gladly and why so many lives were transformed when he preached the Word of God.[467] Keller agrees with Brueggeman's observation about Jesus' use of a metaphorical example, noting, 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."[468] Guiness agrees and adds that raising questions through story or parable can reframe the content that is presented in such a way as to indirectly subvert and involve by captivating the hearer's imagination."[469] Jesus connected to his listeners while simultaneously confronting their preconceived values and beliefs by means of metaphors.

This third section of the literature review examined Jesus' use of metaphors. The first section highlighted Jesus' priority for metaphor in preaching. It offered a connection between parable and metaphor. The second section observed Jesus' use of nature in the creation of his metaphors as an act of indirect communication. The final section sought to explore Jesus' intention to surprise and subvert the values and expectations of listeners by using metaphors.

---

[466] Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 109–10.

[467] Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet,* 109–10.

[468] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, (New York: Viking, 2015), 174.

[469] Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 167–68.

Summary of Literature Review

The first area of the literature review sought to understand the philosophical and cultural forces contributing to current conditions impacting listener engagement during the preaching event. It began with the filtering effect of plausibility structures, the immanent frame, the social imaginary, and disenchantment. Fragilization and the buffered self were distinguished and correlated to listener disinterest. Preachers were encouraged to utilize apologetic sensitivity.

The second area of the literature review examined preaching to the imagination with metaphors. The first section introduced the concept of contextualization and its relationship to preaching and concluded with a definition of the imagination. The second examined the nature and function of the imagination. The third clarified the imagination's connection to epistemology and rationalism. The fourth examined the imagination and its effect on the affections, surveying suspicions regarding these effects. The fifth reviewed the Holy Spirit's relationship to preaching to the imagination, along with the importance of beauty, concluding with an exploration of the concept of signals of transcendence. The final section defined metaphor and examined its function, power, and significance in the preaching encounter.

The third section of the literature review examined Jesus' use of metaphor. The first section highlighted Jesus' priority for metaphor in preaching. It offered a connection between parable and metaphor. The second section observed Jesus' use of nature in the creation of his metaphors as an act of indirect communication. It concluded by showing the reasons preachers in today's secular context should consider Jesus's use of metaphor even though he lived and preached in an enchanted age. The final part sought to explore

Jesus' intention to surprise and subvert the values and expectations of listeners by using metaphors.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain a rich description of how Reformed preachers engage uninterested listeners by means of metaphors. The assumption of this study was that through their own experience, Reformed preachers have learned, developed, and implemented important principles and methods involved in engaging the imagination of congregants with metaphorical illustrations. To address this purpose, a general qualitative study was proposed to explore how Reformed preachers think about and experience this.

The literature review identified three main areas of focus. These included identifying the contributing causes of listener disinterest in the current context, discovering the homiletical benefits of engaging the imagination with metaphorical illustrations to increase the motivation of the uninterested listener and observing Jesus' use of metaphorical illustrations to engage disinterested listeners.

To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do Reformed preachers communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
2. How do Reformed preachers select metaphorical illustrations that engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
    a. What difficulties do Reformed preachers face in the selection of metaphorical illustrations?

b. How do Reformed preachers navigate the difficulties of metaphorical illustration selection?

3. What resources do Reformed preachers utilize to identify metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
4. What outcomes do Reformed preachers desire to observe by engaging the uninterested listener's imagination with metaphorical illustrations?

Design of the Study

Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, defines a general, basic qualitative study as research "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."[470] This method proved to be advantageous, as it allowed insight into the practitioners' experiences and how they interpreted their experiences in an environment that is fluid and changing.

Merriam identifies four characteristics of qualitative research.[471] First, qualitative research focuses on process, understanding, and meaning: "The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience."[472] Second, qualitative research

---

[470] Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 15, Kindle.

[471] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 15–16.

[472] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 15.

focuses on the researcher as the "primary instrument for data collection and analysis."[473] She offers the following advantages: "…the researcher can expand his or her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses."[474] Third, "the process is inductive; that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research."[475] She explains that findings are "in the form of themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses, and even theory about a particular aspect of practice."[476] Finally, she asserts, "The product of a qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon."[477] The discovery of data harvested from multiple participant contexts, perspectives and phenomena, generate profusive, descriptive findings.[478]

This study employed a qualitative research design and conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. This qualitative method provided for the discovery of more comprehensive and descriptive data from participant perspectives in the narrow phenomena of Reformed preachers engaging uninterested listeners by means of metaphorical illustrations.

---

[473] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 16.

[474] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 16.

[475] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 17.

[476] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 17.

[477] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 17.

[478] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 17.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the gathering of descriptive data from the participants. Merriam explains that in the semi-structured interview, "Either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions…most of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time."[479] Using this method, researcher gained a more complete emic, or insider's point of view from those involved in preaching to uninterested listeners.[480]

Participant Sample Selection

For this study, a purposeful-sampling strategy and criterion-based selection process was used. The researcher decided the attributes crucial to the study and then found participants who met the criteria.[481]

This research required participants who can communicate in depth about preaching to uninterested listeners by engaging their imagination with metaphorical illustrations. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of preachers who met four criteria.[482]

First, participants needed to be Reformed preachers. This study method design minimized variables because all the participants were Reformed preachers who shared many homiletical presuppositions regarding the appropriate utilization of metaphors.

---

[479] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 110–11.

[480] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 15.

[481] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 96–97.

[482] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 96–97.

These homiletical presuppositions are grounded in a general adherence to the *Westminster Confession of Faith,* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*.[483] This distinctive minimized theological variables not a focus in the data analysis.

Second, participants needed to be experienced preachers with a minimum of five years of preaching. The experience increased the likelihood that participants encountered uninterested listeners and intentionally accommodated their homiletical methods to engage the listeners with metaphors. Multiple years of preaching also increased the number of opportunities to practice the employment of metaphorical illustrations and process the effects they had on the listeners. This amount of experience allowed time for the preachers to move towards best practices in their efforts. Limiting participants to those with more than five years of preaching also reduced the possibility of confounding variables effecting how the preacher acted and reacted in navigating challenges connected with engaging uninterested listeners with metaphors.

Third, to minimize other personal and gender variables beyond the perspective of this research, only male preachers were selected.

Fourth, the participants needed a familiarity with, and value of, preaching in relation to apologetic sensitivity and appropriate accommodation to the context of the listener. These criteria helped to move the data towards best practices and deep insights into the area of focus.

---

[483] "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church," accessed May 22, 2021, https://opc.org/preface.html. All of the participants in this study verbalized general agreement with the doctrinal standards set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith (*1646) together with the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms* (1647). This confession and set of catechisms were adopted by various reformed churches as their standard of doctrines, subordinate to the Bible.

Participants were chosen for purposeful sampling to provide for a reduction in variables in relation to the data collected.[484] Participants were chosen to provide variation in geographical context, age, and years of experience. They also varied in seminary training which provided a wider spectrum of relevant findings for the study.[485] The researcher found that by varying the age, experience, and training institution of the participants he would gain a broader sample, and thus avoid limitations in insight that could arise from a more homogenous group. The participants also varied in type of ministerial setting (urban, suburban, small town, large town) and congregation size to further broaden the spectrum of rich data so that more could be learned.[486]

The final study was conducted through personal interviews with six pastors who met the above criteria and were identified through a networking selection technique.[487] They were invited to participate via an introductory letter, followed by a personal phone call. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. In addition, each participant signed a "Research Participant Consent Form" to respect and to protect the human rights of the participants. The Human Rights Risk level assessment is "no risk" according to Seminary IRB guidelines.

---

[484] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 96.

[485] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research* 248.

[486] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research* 96.

[487] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research* 98.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by *(researcher name)* to investigate *(topic)* for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1) The purpose of the research is to investigate *(explain very briefly)*
2) Potential benefits of the research may include *(list general hoped-for benefits. Also add something like, "Though there are no direct benefits for participants, I hope they will be encouraged by the experience of sharing their experiences with an eager listener and learner.")*
3) The research process will include *(describe briefly how many participants are involved and what your dissertation research process involves, including audio recording interviews)*
4) Participants in this research will *(describe what you are asking them to do, and time required)*
5) Potential discomforts or stresses:
6) Potential risks: (Write "*None" or "Minimal" with the relevant descriptions using the relevant "Human Rights Risk Level Assessment" document descriptions)*
7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

_____

Printed Name and Signature of Researcher Date

_____

Printed Name and Signature of Participant Date

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one. Return one to the researcher. Thank you.

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues to explore them more thoroughly.[488] Ultimately, these methods enabled this study to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants.[489]

The researcher performed a pilot test of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature but evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing constant comparison work during the interviewing process. Coding and categorizing the data while continuing the process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.[490]

The researcher interviewed six pastors with interviews ranging from 50 to approximately 90 minutes each. Prior to the interview, the participants were provided a brief description of the research topic along with a sampling of protocol questions. To accommodate participant schedules, the researcher performed a mixture of face-to-face and audio phone interviews. The researcher audiotaped the interviews with a digital recorder. By conducting two interviews in a week, the researcher completed the data

---

[488] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 114.

[489] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 248.

[490] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 228–29.

gathering in four weeks. Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with descriptive and reflective observations on the interview time.

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. Please tell me a story about a recent sermon where you intentionally used a metaphorical illustration to engage possible uninterested congregants.
2. In what ways do you observe the metaphorical illustrations engaging the congregants?
3. In what ways do you communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
    a. What sections of the sermon?

    What changes in communication style do you make for giving the illustration?

    b. How do you relate your propositions to your metaphorical illustrations?
    c. What challenges do you face in the utilization of metaphorical illustrations in relation to the uninterested listener?
    d. How do you navigate those challenges?
4. How do you go about selecting metaphorical examples that engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
    a. What are some rhetorical theories or practices that guide you in the selection of these metaphorical illustrations??
    b. What challenges do you face in selecting these metaphorical illustrations?
    c. How do you navigate those challenges?

5. What resources do you utilize to identify metaphorical examples to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
    a. Do you suggest any internet resources?
    b. Do you suggest any authors?
6. What benefits do you hope uninterested listeners gain because of your engaging them with metaphorical examples?
    a. What are some ways you wish you could see and hear these benefits from the listeners?

Data Analysis

As soon as possible and always within one week of each meeting, the researcher personally transcribed each interview by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and typing out each transcript. Each transcript was checked for consistency with the field notes of the interview. The text was then edited as the researcher listened to the recordings, editing the interview text as necessary. This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. This method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories.[491]

When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using open coding and the constant comparative method. The analysis focused on discovering common themes, patterns, and repetitive

[491] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 32.

terms across the variation of participants and identifying congruence or discrepancy between the different groups of participants.[492]

Researcher Position

The researcher has been an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America since 2011 and has been the primary preacher in a congregation for five years. As corollaries to the centrality of the preaching of the scriptures, the researcher also affirms the inspiration, authority, and integrity of both the Old and the New Testament, as well as the necessity of contextualization in preaching. The researcher has also practiced as a registered nurse in culturally diverse settings for 28 years. The interview skills of the researcher may have been strengthened because of the nursing assessment process which uses probing questions for more comprehensive data collection.

Like all participants, the researcher is male and identifies as a "theologically conservative, Reformed" preacher. Consequently, the researcher's experience in preaching is much like the participants, and this helped the researcher gain a more thorough understanding of the interview data. The researcher's common experience also presented a liability because it allowed for potential assumptions and inferential understanding without comprehensive clarifying questions.

Study Limitations

Due to limited resources and time, this research has significant limitations that readers should note. The participants interviewed for this study were limited to eight,

---

[492] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 32.

male Reformed preachers serving in contexts that engaged uninterested listeners. Therefore, the interview findings may not be universally applicable to all times and situations. Additionally, the researcher has not analyzed any interview data outside of the Reformed preaching frame of reference. The results of this study may also have implications for evangelical, non-Reformed preachers or other rhetoricians, but more research is needed to confirm this. Some of the study's findings may be generalized to other similar theological or ecclesiastical preaching situations. Readers who desire to generalize some of the aspects of these conclusions related to the engagement of the uninterested listener's imagination, by means of metaphorical examples, should test those aspects in their context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.[493]

[493] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research,* 1.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how Reformed preachers in a post-Christian context engage the listener's imagination with metaphor. This chapter provides the findings from six pastoral interviews, revealing common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. Interviews made use of one recorded in-person interview and five recorded phone interviews. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed after each interview, looking for patterns and themes related to the study's four research questions. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the qualitative research.

1. In what ways do Reformed preachers communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
2. How do Reformed preachers select metaphorical illustrations that engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
    a. What difficulties do Reformed preachers face in the selection of metaphorical illustrations?
    b. How do Reformed preachers navigate the difficulties of metaphorical illustration selection?
3. What resources do Reformed preachers utilize to identify metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?
4. What outcomes do Reformed preachers desire to observe by engaging the uninterested listener's imagination with metaphorical illustrations?

Introductions to Participants and Context

The researcher selected six Reformed preachers, and all names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect identity.

Participant #1 – Gene

Gene is a Korean American church planter in New York, which he describes as an intellectual, secular, skeptical city. He started the church with 30 percent of the congregation skeptical of the Christian message. Over the first few years of the plant, the congregation is still 8-10 percent skeptical, but he said his church is a safe place to ask big questions. He enjoys philosophy and apologetics and is the primary preaching pastor. He earned a DMIN from Westminster Theological Seminary, examining the importance of storied catechisms.

Participant #2 – Kevin

Kevin is a veteran church planter in central Florida, which is 85 percent unchurched. While an undergraduate, he was involved with Campus Crusade for Christ and majored in rhetoric. Many of his congregants consider his church the "first church of adult choice" meaning, they were exposed as kids but drifted away from the local church only to return to learn the message of Christianity. He learned how to address unbelievers from Reformed pastors Tim Keller and Dick Kaufman. He describes his church as a place where members can bring their unbelieving friends.

Participant #3 – Art

Art is a Graduated from Cincinnati Bible College. He was invited onto the preaching team of a Missionary Alliance church after playing a part in the musical *It's a Wonderful Life* put on by the church. He went to the mission field in Guatemala and was

chosen to preach there because he preached in a way that would not alienate certain denominations. He is the primary preacher in his current South Carolina church, located in a suburb of South Charlotte. A high percentage of his congregants don't want a show and have had difficulty in their life. Many have been out on the mission field.

Participant #4 – Jon

Jon grew up on an island in Puget Sound, where no one went to church, which affected his interior life profoundly. He graduated from Northwest College where his mind was "reconverted" into the Christian liberal arts world. He was then trained by Tim Brown, professor of preaching at Western Seminary. His PhD studied the preacher as liturgical artist. He has been a dean of a Christian liberal arts college and preaches frequently to the students and faculty.

Participant #5 – Alan

Alan is a Filipino American preacher and author who also teaches philosophy at a Christian liberal arts school in Iowa. He has preached in multicultural churches but currently preaches in a homogenous setting to a rural, younger congregation. He has studied the imagination, aesthetics, and apologetics.

Participant #6 – Danny

Danny is a Korean American church planter in the research triangle of North Carolina. His congregants are highly educated, multi-cultural, younger, averaging 36 years old with 2.5 kids. Many congregants who have been missionaries overseas, along with some who want to become missionaries. Approximately 50-100 people a year attend who are not necessarily interested in religious subjects.

Metaphorical Methods

The first research question asked, "In what ways do Reformed preachers communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination? The first protocol questions for this RQ were as follows: Please tell me a story about a recent sermon where you intentionally used a metaphorical illustration to engage possible uninterested congregants. In what ways do you observe the metaphorical illustrations engaging the congregants? In what ways do you communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination? What sections of the sermon? How do you relate your propositions to your metaphorical illustration? What challenges do you face in the utilization of metaphorical illustrations in relation to the uninterested listener? How do you navigate those challenges?

The following themes emerged from the participants' answers: persuasive communication tactics, pictures favored over propositions and a combination of internal and external challenges experienced during sermon creation and delivery.

Persuasive Communication Tactics

Several participants described the need for persuasive tactics, due to a high level of listener disinterest. Apologetic sensitivity guided their cultural apologetics and rhetorical techniques to engage the listeners.

Demographic of Disinterest

Jon's preached to college students. He said, "If there is a demographic that's harder to get the interest than 18–22-year old's, I'd like to know what it is." Danny noted that many are disinterested and said they are "over-entertained, over-stimulated, and

flooded with too much information." He added that Christians don't tell a compelling story with their lives where sacrifice is observed. He claimed, "If it was back to the Roman times with Christians running into the plagues, and running and dying to save others," the disinterested would take interest. Jon added that listeners are often indifferent, and indifference is worse than contempt because with "contempt they care about something, but indifference is the killer of our cultural age right now." Art added, "I assume that every listener is an uninterested listener, probably because when I start my study Monday morning, I'm usually an uninterested studier thinking, 'why does this matter to me?' Until I can figure out how it matters to me, I don't think I am ready to share it." This high level of listener indifference moved some of the participants to use affective apologetic methods to enhance their communication. One affective persuasive tactic used by Gene uses comedic relief. He observed, "Reformed preachers are terrible at this." He called for comedy and winsomeness in the delivery of metaphors to persuade the uninterested.

Jon and Alan mentioned the importance of communicating metaphors to invite skeptical or disinterested listeners into the story of Christianity. Jon aims to engage the desires that all people have. His use of metaphor gives listeners a chance to see how their deep desires best fit in the story of Christianity. He mentioned how a parable as an extended metaphor is an "imaginative construct we step into. Jesus spoke parables not as illustrations but the plausibility structure for us to see God's relationship to us." He constructs a reality for his listeners to step into from the words and metaphors of scripture. For instance, when preaching about Jesus's metaphor of building a house on sand or rock, Jesus does not want to tell them to build a house on rock. Instead, he asks,

"What does it look like for you to build your house on a rock?" as he invites listeners take their story into the story of Jesus. Alan concurred with Jon noting that people live in a frame of reference where their subjective experience is prioritized. He advises, "We don't start with what is wrong with expressive individualism but enter the frame of uninterested hearers." He mentioned how he enters their world first and then invites them to sit down at the table of the Christian story, inviting them into a new frame of reference.

Indirection and Invitation

Jon mentioned taking an indirect approach with disinterested listeners. "You can say propositional truth without saying it." He will tell his listeners that the scripture is a burning bush. The metaphor is an allusion to the biblical story of Moses seeing a bush that is not consumed. He wants his listeners to see the scriptures as full of meaning that can never be exhausted. He claimed, "Part of the preacher's job is to uncover that." He emphasized that indirection via metaphor engages listeners to consider timeless truth.

Jon also uses invitation rather than force-feeding information. "What I am doing is pointing to God, not trying to make him happen, and I'm trying to make an invitation to come home to God. Everyone loves to be invited to the party. A sermon should be the invitation into God's party." He said preachers should use words to create invitation, and the ultimate invitation is to the Lord's Supper. "There is the metaphor, Jesus is here, his life, body, blood, and sacrifice is here. I know that my word that I'm offering from the Word is leading us to the table of communion. That provides its own metaphor rhetorically and a place to land each sermon."

Apologetics of the Heart

Two of the participants mentioned the desire to persuade the hearts with affective apologetics rather than simply informing their brains. Gene explained, "I do this dance between philosophy and apologetics" when he uses metaphor, stories, and analogy. He explained, "For a lot of people in our congregation and city they view Christianity in two ways. It's either implausible or immoral." He explained that miracles seem implausible, and many of the ethical teachings sound immoral. He uses metaphors to persuade listeners that "Christianity is not bad, but it is the good, the true, and the beautiful."

When addressing the implausibility of the miracle of the resurrection, Gene approached two sermons on 1 Corinthians 15 "less from a legal forensic perspective" and appealed to his listeners' emotions and the existential angst they feel about life and death. He used metaphors to enhance an emotional perspective on why they should wish the resurrection were true, even if they thought it to be scientifically impossible. He gave them reasons why they should hope and want it to be true. He added that he was trying to argue that "whether its evolution, Darwinism, or Christianity, or secularism everyone is telling a story, but the Christian story has the happiest endings out of all the other stories." He appealed more to the heart, emotions, and the human condition. Alan concurred with Gene, noting that apologetics deals with giving an answer for why Christians have hope and using metaphors allows for "an affective, imaginative" encounter with truth "before it is an intellectual project." He called for a nourishing of the imagination rather than trying to input ideas into the brains of listeners.

Kevin and Alan expanded on the apologetic approach by using metaphors that spoke to universal hopes and fears. Kevin described his process as a weekly, intentional effort where he assumed the doctrine of common grace and the universal truths that

exegesis uncovers. He insisted that exegesis of universal meaning must proceed homiletical method. He explained, "I'm starting every week asking this question, 'What is a universal dynamic, positive or negative, a hope or a fear, that is in play for every person in the room?' He distills this answer down and tries to tap into something that even the non-Christian would have to acknowledge. He begins with a universal creation truth and then plunges into a problem which can feel despairing, claiming, "If I don't lead my people to have just a little bit of an existential despair every week, I'm not doing my job. I cannot leave them hoping in themselves." He explained how Isaiah 25 has a metaphor of swallowing up death but that the metaphor follows the pattern of first creation, and then the fall into sin. Only then does he mention the good news of Jesus and the image of the veil in the temple that ripped when Jesus died for sinners.

Alan mentioned that he preaches to the universal longing for rest to persuade his listeners who have little interest in the text. He described preaching on Jacob sleeping on a stone after a long journey. He noted for his listeners, "If we have been sleeping on a stone pillow, we are really restless and need rest." He moves quickly to Jesus as the fulfillment of the metaphor of rest. He mentions how Jesus fulfils people's longings and added another image related to Jesus, "If you think of stones in the Bible, there is another stone over the tomb that was rolled away." He began with the universal longing for rest and then preached the narrative of Jacob, moving to the resurrection of Jesus as the final rest for those who have faith in him.

Kevin noted that a universal reality introduces listeners to something they do not know, so he begins with what they do know. He explained, "This is like that, and then you begin to say this is different than that. From that model, it is not just a model of

communication. It is a model of knowing, an epistemology as much as it is a communication strategy." He mentioned the metaphor of rescue as an example. People can imagine a person being trapped in a car or burning building and how a rescuer must go into the carnage of the one needing rescue. Kevin explained how Christ rescues sinners from their dreadful condition, using what was known about rescuers, and inserted Christ as rescuer, an unknown to many listeners. Art agreed with Kevin, stating that metaphors make difficult concepts like sovereignty or predestination more understandable, connecting something everyone knows about with the intangible concept. He wants to show disinterested listeners why the concept matters, and he shows them by a vivid metaphor.

Beauty

Two participants mentioned the universal longing for beauty. Jon challenged preachers to think of themselves as artists who craft words and preach not only what is true but also what is beautiful. He noted, "One of the things we do not talk about in seminary is aesthetics. We don't talk much about beauty." He observed, "Everyone who is trying to communicate something, from Madison Avenue to HBO, to whatever commercial is on, is trying to help you not only know something about a product but feel something about a product. They are doing aesthetics." Gene agrees with Jon, noting, Christianity is not bad, but rather beautiful. When he communicates a metaphor, he does it in a way that is beautiful asking, "So, is it a beautiful metaphor?" By appealing to the universal desire for beauty, they aim to persuade their listeners.

Audience Participation

Kevin and Alan also invited listeners to participate in the metaphor being communicated. Kevin described how a college-aged listener named Matthew was in the middle of the sanctuary, and he asked him to raise his hand. He then asked the entire audience, "What happens in geometry, with lines like spokes on a wheel, if everyone moves to a common hub? What is happening to the corresponding distance between me, and you if we all move toward Matthew?" He explained that the distance gets smaller. He then described how Jesus can take people who, outside of him, can't get along with each other, but by geometry, they all get closer to Jesus, and they all get closer to each other.

Alan mentioned how he preached a sermon on Ecclesiastes and the word "vanity." He had his listeners hold up their hands and act like they were wrapping their fingers around smoke. He asked them to imagine how it would slip through their fingers. Audience participation was used as a method to enhance persuasion.

To further engage listeners with metaphor, Kevin emphasized the importance of eye contact, while Jon emphasized speaking to the ear. Kevin said he doesn't read his sermons but instead follows what he learned from Josh McDowell. When he talks, he surveys the room for a pair of eyes and delivers an idea and then surveys for another pair of eyes and delivers an analogy or metaphor. He explained, "I'm not there to read to people but talk with people and look them in the eye. In my delivery, you will see that I look around the room." He does not yell, proclaim, or declaim but simply converses. He said he might have notes like "illustrate from sports teams," but after looking around the room and seeing a person who plays volleyball he says, "For example, with your

volleyball team," or another person who is a golfer, "Maybe this week with your golf team." He knows the people he is preaching to.

Kevin added, "If you put me in a room where I don't know everyone, I would speak differently, but I would still try to read the room non-verbally." He engages a general audience by saying, "Maybe for example you might be in college…maybe in college you did this." He is aware of his listeners, saying, "Eye contact breeds eye contact."

Jon delivered metaphors by focusing how people hear the image presented. He said the imagination is connected to orality. "We need to reclaim the rhythmic speech of the sermon. Part of the imagination of preaching is writing for the ear, not for the eye. So much for what is passed off as theological education is to write for the eye not the ear." He uses very short sentences to keep the movement crisp. He preaches without notes and said, "I am eyeball to eyeball with my congregation." He claimed that sermon notes are an enlightenment activity. Preachers historically would preach without anything in front of them. Jon noted, "of the 864 sermons of Augustine, he did not have any notes in front of him, he had a transcriber in the back." Jon engages the ears and eyes of his listeners.

Gene agrees with Jon and Kevin but mentioned that verbal communication of metaphor must match nonverbal cues. If the preacher is preaching a funeral message and smiling, the tone and delivery is out of sync with the metaphors of loss and lament.

Questions

Two participants mentioned the persuasive power of questions in metaphorical examples. Kevin learned about the importance of questions in preaching from AmyK Hutchens. He changed his main points from factual statements to questions to engage the

listener. He explained, "If you call upon someone and ask a question, an interrogative, you do something that gets them to either evaluate, reflect, or predict," and their brain lights up with engagement. He described preaching about the root of Jesse and asked his listeners to reflect on a stump. After the question, he illustrated to explain the meaning.

Alan described a sermon series that consisted of questions asked in scripture. He is always thinking about the questions his listeners are asking so that he can create ways to convey metaphorical examples. When he preached on the "Where are you?" question from Genesis 3, he asked his listeners to imagine being in a place they had never been. He used that metaphor as a sense of orientation vs. disorientation. Alan continued, "Good preachers will often speak in the subjunctive; what if the freedom you are looking for is found in Christ?" He concluded, "That is how to engage the imagination." He concluded by saying he asks things like "Could it be?" to invite others to imagine.

Internal and External Challenges

All participants mentioned internal and external challenges in using metaphorical examples.

Internal Challenges

Taking Time to Interiorize the Metaphors

Three participants mentioned how important it is to muse over the text, alongside their metaphors, so that they could interiorize the message. Art noted that he spent a lot of time in study to better understand the cultural background of the text he was preaching. He explained, "Now I have the story in a way that's emotional to me," because he had

studied it long and hard. Alan agreed with Art and said, "I start with the part of the text that is most personally gripping to me and I just start there. When I start a sermon, I think 'What part of the sermon do I feel the most energy or passion around?'" Jon agreed with Art and Alan and expressed the importance of internalizing the scripture metaphors he studies. When he memorizes and moves his message inside of his heart, his mind and imagination are moved so that when he preaches there is more passion. Art added, "I'm trying to engage my heart, so there is a left side and a right side of my brain. The imagination, if it is not connecting with the other side of the brain, then I'm not fully experiencing that truth." He asks himself, "Why does this matter?" over and over, engaging his imagination before he preaches. He noted, "Until I can figure out how it matters to me, I don't think I am ready to share it." He described how he finds his way through the narrative, searching for metaphors he can connect to the life he is living since he does not enjoy simply the intellectual stimulation. He concluded that every week he needs to get to a place in his sermon preparation where he asks, "What do I do with this?" He explained, "I'm always able to use metaphors wondering how it matters to me. How is it lived out in my life?" It is after the interiorization of the message that these preachers are ready to preach their metaphors.

Two participants interiorized scriptural metaphor usage to the point that it has become part of who they are. Art and Kevin noted that using metaphor "is" how they communicate. Art noted that friends and family have seen this in his communication approach, but to him it is coming out of who he is. Kevin used the metaphor of a conveyer belt to picture his philosophy of preaching and method of metaphorical delivery. He explained that a conveyer belt does not create. It is not highly imaginative.

It simply relays and conveys. He aims to convey God in Christ to listeners. He added one more metaphor to explain his role as a preacher saying, "I am an instrument. It was the guitarist for Aerosmith who said, 'I want to be the fire around which the tribe can dance.' When he said that, wow, he had a sense of identity and mission. I want to be a conveyer."

Starting

Alan noted an internal challenge related to discerning what the congregation needs at the present moment. He said, "The biggest challenge is knowing where to start. You have all of scripture, and it is full of all this imaginative food; there is a feast here." But the question he asks himself is "Where do I start?" He acknowledged that once he makes the decision to pick a part of scripture, whether it is the Psalms or prophetic book, narrative, or parables, once he makes that decision things get easier. The texts have within them the pictures and metaphors driving exposition. He navigates the challenge of starting by picking the text well beforehand. He finds it easier because he can then go to that text and seek the central picture to wrestle with and experience during the preaching event.

Familiarity and Frequency

Gene mentioned the internal struggle of finding fresh ways to describe the familiar. He explained, "I think one of the challenges of any preacher, particularly a preacher who preaches week in and week out, is telling the same story, the gospel story, in refreshing ways." He uses different metaphors to describe familiar concepts.

For Danny and Kevin, it was not familiarity but preaching frequency that challenged them. Danny said, "I've also been preaching at least one sermon a week for

the past 20 years." He is always looking for fresh metaphors. Kevin also mentioned frequency, stating, "I spoke over 20 times on campus my senior year of college. Probably by the age of 45, I had 10,000 hours of public speaking. Communication comes by experience. You need reps." He noted that he also needs new and engaging metaphors.

Danny and Gene expressed the challenge of having fresh metaphors for each new sermon. Danny felt pressure to have a good metaphor for every point while Gene said he runs out of stories that have a strong metaphorical emphasis. He admitted, "I want to preach, and I know that story or metaphor is supposed to go after this proposition, but I'm drawing a blank and that's when the art of sermon crafting can be difficult." He therefore archives stories and illustrations. He added, "The bigger challenge is just finding these stories. That means you must read very widely and cast your net out deep into all sorts of different spheres." He looks to commentaries and the cultural sphere and noted that he does broad reading rather than deep reading. He noted, "Finding new metaphors can be difficult. It's not easy to do that every week."

Using Scriptural Metaphors Rather than Creating New Ones

All the participants mentioned using metaphors from scripture to communicate to the uninterested. Alan noted that scripture is full of genres that engage the imagination. He claimed, "The masterclass in imagination is the book of Revelation," which "expects that you are well-versed in the imaginative literature of the Bible." According to Alan, "Biblical texts assume a high level of imaginative virtuosity." Jon agreed, noting, "I'm always, in any sermon…trying to zero in on any image that that scripture provides. Oftentimes you don't need to look for illustrations." He advised, "Just provide what the text gives you. Oftentimes in my experience, the scripture is filled with imaginative

images that we often neglect in favor of rationalistic propositions." He mentioned how the Psalms are full of some of his favorite metaphors, like the tree planted by streams of water or chaff that has no lasting value. The metaphors in scripture allow his hearers to see the world in a new way and gain wisdom.

Alan added that preachers need to get many of their metaphors from the true story found in the scriptures. He analyzed, "Another step for me as a preacher is do I see the metaphor in the Bible and understand what that metaphor meant to them? If I just share the metaphor, that doesn't mean anything to a modern listener." He studies hard to understand the cognitive framework of the original audience so that he finds appropriate metaphors for his congregation. Jon added, "The core is really: go and develop a relationship with Scripture. That is the key. The preacher's job is not to talk about our experience but to be in awe and wonder at it," as images like the burning bush are given to us to proclaim to the listeners. Alan agreed and noted, "I tend to mine Scripture for the metaphors it uses, especially agricultural metaphors, like seed in the ground that leads to new life. Metaphors of exile, wilderness, desert, steams, or floods in the dessert come to mind as metaphors."

External Challenges

Expectations

Jon expressed an external challenge saying, "Another challenge is people want me to give them an answer not a picture. They expect the preacher to tell them what to think, not how to think." He explained that a good sermon isn't one presents what to think, but one that engages listeners with scripture metaphors, so they are taught a different way of

thinking. He further noted, "What I'm trying to do is give a different script to read from, but they must do the reading. I can't do the believing for them." Jon agreed adding, "The challenge is people want the preacher to be their surrogate faith, and the preacher cannot believe for you. The preacher can only point, like John the Baptist, pointing to Jesus saying, 'There is the Lamb of God.'" Jon noted that people often want a celebrity or a shopkeeper who gives them what they want, but the vocation of preaching depends on a preacher who stays in scripture and communicates the metaphors of scripture out of a motive of love, for the story of God.

Danny agreed with Jon's experience of people wanting answers and not pictures and added that the imagination is important but not everyone is deeply creative or imaginative. Some want a concrete, literal set of points, rather than pictures. He mentioned one congregant who names a dog, "Dog" rather than a personal name, and when asked what she saw in a cloud, she simply responded, "A cloud." He concluded that metaphor usage with literal, concrete thinkers, presents a challenge.

Jon insisted on the importance of presenting pictures. He quoted biblical scholar Stanley Hauerwas, who said, "If you want to change the way people live, don't give them an argument, give them a picture." He explained, "Jesus did not give an argument but a set of pictures that they can live into." He said that preachers must trust in the power of the imagination to do the deeper work that rational explanation cannot do. He noted that Emily Dickenson said, "Tell the truth, but tell it slant," and T.S Eliot said, "Humanity cannot bear too much reality." He claimed that the preachers' job is to help tell the truth in a subversive way. "Tell it slant so that it plays on us, working on our hearts and minds on multiple levels, so that we cannot only know but see, and that seeing shapes the desire

for something new." Jon and Danny wanted their listeners to engage their imaginations with pictures rather than simply being exposed to raw information.

Preaching to the Choir

Jon claimed that one of his biggest challenges comes from "the choir," or people who already believe the Christian faith. They demand sermons that are angry, prophetic, "culture warrior" sermons and want preachers to wag the finger, castigating them for how bad they are. He explains how people have assumptions about how the sermon is supposed to be communicated. Many of his believing listeners have been captured by the cultural politics of the day. By using a scripture metaphor, he challenged a desire for an immediate, relevant political issue. Kevin agreed, noting that as he addresses skeptics with metaphors from culture, believers are often "scandalized by the things I refer to." He noted, "Un-churched listeners and non-Christians do not even blink." He mentioned how he referred to the Apple TV show *Ted Lasso* and had a super-conservative, older couple then go and watch *Ted Lasso,* which ended in their sending him a blistering email. He noted how they were out of touch with the narratives of unbelievers and expected his metaphors to be appropriate for Christian audiences.

Metaphor Eclipses Truth

Art noted, "People remember the metaphor more than the proposition and can abuse and misuse it, later making it bigger than the proclaimed truth." He asks himself, "Is my story or metaphor distracting? Is it too extravagant? Does it take people away from the proposition or get them closer to it?" He used the metaphor of preacher as a good referee who focused spectators on the game. He didn't want listeners to leave

saying, "I really like Art," but instead, to see God as the hero and his word as the main attraction. He concluded, noting that he did not want metaphors to distract from the text.

Translation Congruency

Three participants noted that listeners may translate what is preached into a different meaning than what was intended. Jon described, "It is not only what is true, but how do people hear truth?" He acknowledged that he wanted to use words that people understand. He admitted that it is tempting to use theological words, learned in seminary, but in this cultural moment, where people don't know about terms like the hypostatic union or Trinity. The key is to find language that honors them, even if they don't know about the concept, and language that facilitates understanding. Danny added that culturally appropriate translations cannot be offensive, since metaphors can be easily misinterpreted.

Alan spoke about a congruency between delivery and textual intent. "My hope is that the delivery and the emotions that are evoked fit the communicative intent of the text, so if the text is a warning passage, I want them to feel warned by it." He noted that if he is preaching through the Psalms, he needs to adjust his metaphor use to the tenor of each Psalm. Some Psalms are about longing; others about celebrating. He concluded that adjusting to the tenor of the text helps listeners experience deeper understanding based on his translation.

Pictures Favored over Propositions

Relating Propositions to Metaphors

All six participants favored metaphorical illustrations over propositions. While none rejected the importance of propositional declaration, they highlighted the priority of metaphor use to deepen understanding and engage the imagination. Alan admitted, "I always give preference to pictures and think that is what scripture does as well." He claimed, "I take the pictures to be more primary because they engage us on more levels and the propositions to be that which allows us to keep our imagination within the limits of reality." Gene emphasized the importance of connecting the metaphor to the proposition. He cautioned, "If there is no smooth connection between the two, the metaphor, as good as it might be, is not worth using at that moment because there is no fidelity to the text." Art agreed, expressing the importance of having a one-to-one relationship between proposition and metaphor. He aims to understand the proposition but then use the metaphor to answer the question that relates to the proposition. Kevin added, "Every week I'm trying to ask, 'What is a universal idea?' Then I'm trying to ask of the proposition, 'Where Have I seen that?'" After Kevin finds a metaphor from a movie or a cultural artifact, he closely relates the two to deepen understanding of the textual point.

Gene added, "The propositional route does feel a little bit more Western, but I think that scripture is mostly narrative." Art agreed, adding, "I think in higher education, it is getting the propositions right and understanding them completely and getting all the words right when you explain them. But nobody is asking 'So what?'" He described propositional content as a map but noted that the preacher is not trying to get listeners to

fall in love with the map and learn information. Instead, they are to experience a transformed heart.

Gene defined metaphor as "helping another image something they can't see." He noted, "Pictures are worth a thousand words, and I want you to have a picture of what I'm trying to say. Very rarely will anyone remember the three points of your sermon, but they will remember how you made them feel during the sermon." He concluded, "With a proposition, the only feeling that you get is, maybe a lightbulb will go off, or it is kind of boring. A metaphor, on the other hand, facilitates repentance and belief and the desire for deep change." Jon asserted, "Show don't tell. If you fall into preaching that is 'telling,' you are not doing it well."

Danny defined the imagination as "The ability to see without using your sight. The ability to dream without being asleep. A process by which you can visualize and think and create inside headspace." He agreed with Gene and insisted that preachers engage not only the rational capacity of listeners but also the capacity of the imagination. He noted, "Just telling people what to do, and expecting them to do it, without giving them the why, is not building relationship intimacy or dependence." He gives metaphorical illustrations to, "hammer home the points."

Art claimed, "I think people remember metaphors more than truth propositions, because they say, 'Remember the sermon where you said,' and it's not going to be a proposition but a story that I shared that they closely relate to the proposition." The story "makes the truth real," and the gospel has more weight. Kevin agreed, stating, "Narrative matters more than didactic. Even if it's a didactic principle, if you put it in a narrative, it becomes sticky. A fact in a story has more punch than just a fact."

Alan admitted, "I don't like to talk about the points of the sermon, I like to talk about the movements of the sermon." For him, points conjure up a picture of a person doing a Power Point presentation with information to know. Instead, he likes "to talk about movements which suggests a musical piece. So, what I am doing is more like singing a song to you and more like a story. We are taking this journey together through this text." Jon concurred, "I think movements not sections. Sections implies propositions. Movements, I'm always thinking of a guiding image for a sermon. How does that image move from movement to movement to movement." He explained how like a good stand-up comedian, he might begin with a guiding image like a tree and then bring it back up as one telling a connected story rather than a debate with arguments. "I want the sermon to feel like we are moving through a story together. A story has movement and conflict, you must get inside of a story and feel it. Thinking imaginatively is thinking narratively."

Alan imagined what he does as inviting listeners into a strange story and his preaching as "weaving a spell" in such a way that people wished it were true, whether or not they think it is true, but saying, "Yes, that is beautiful." He concluded, "What I'm trying to do, whatever text I'm preaching from, is to lay a thick foundation of imaginative engagement so that it is not necessarily 'here is all the stuff you need to know,' but more, 'what if this is true, actually true,' and 'what if the world is really this way?'" Alluding to C.S. Lewis's thoughts on science and Christianity, he explained how, in science, listeners have the notes to the poem, but Christian truth is the poem itself. Propositions are the notes to the poem, but preaching is hearing the poem read, with the listeners experiencing it. "It would be sad if people were only interested in getting the notes to the poem, and getting them right, and missing the meaning sent by the poet. It would be sad if we lost

the poem itself, the beauty of music, song, pictures and only cared about notes or the truth value of propositions."

Jon and Art denied having any standard structure they followed relating propositions to pictures. Jon said, "I don't have a standard section or a standard three-point sermon, like a Tim Keller sermon with three points, with illustrations to make the point." He noted that this approach is highly effective, but that he thinks more like a poet than a philosopher. He explained, "I don't go into a sermon with a set style; it has to come to me." Art agreed, "I don't' have a system or structure where I think I need three metaphors in this sermon." Instead, he looks for concepts in the text that a metaphor can improve understanding at the heart level.

On the other hand, Gene and Kevin admitted to following the traditional three points, but noted, "I don't tell the congregation what the three points are because I usually don't remember the three points, no matter how much alliteration there is. It just gets old after a while if there's three points." He emphasized, "Somewhere, interspersed within that point, there must be some kind of metaphor, illustration, story, seed becoming a plant, something like that interspersed in each point." Kevin said he explains, illustrates, and applies but begins his explanation with a question rather than a statement. The question engages the imagination in a way the proposition fails to accomplish. He maintained that he connects a metaphor with every main point.

Art, Danny, and Alan prioritize a story in the introduction, but not all the time, because it may come across as being manipulative. Art said, "I want to begin by telling a story and usually that story is most effective if you also end with that story. There is a way to have an introductory thought about something that happened, with you or your

wife, or you're thinking as you were driving." He explained how he gets into the text and then comes back to the opening illustration in different points of the sermon. He noted, "It feels like an important thing to do for a pastor in terms of metaphor." Danny agreed, adding the importance of gaining interest early on but keeping interest by relating propositions and pictures throughout the sermon. Alan reported that the introduction is where he wants to invite the listener to imagine themselves in a certain place or condition. He described how Psalm 13 has the concept of waiting, so he introduced the sermon by talking about the play *Waiting for Godet*. He used that metaphor for the sake of giving a question that will drive the rest of the sermon. He concluded, "When composing a sermon, the creativity in metaphor is in the introduction, faithfulness is in the body of the sermon, and the fulfillment of the metaphor is in the conclusion, where you are getting people to Jesus."

Metaphorical Engagement Indicators

Four of the six participants noted specific metaphorical engagement indicators as they delivered the metaphors to their listeners. Gene noted that his goal is to capture his listeners' imagination, "and you know you are doing that from the nonverbal clues. "I can see a light bulb go off." He mentioned people shaking their head up and down or just "being on the edge of their seat listening with big eyes. Or saying 'Amen,' or taking down notes. He knows it is not really working when he doesn't see those indicators. He admitted that there may be ethnic or Reformed, denominational components that may decrease these cues, due to being less emotionally expressive. Art added, "Usually they are not laughing or crying or smiling or emoting because of an intellectual truth. I'm probably getting feedback from some sort of emotion that a metaphor is meeting them

where they are at." Danny expressed, "I love it when I see someone smirk or laugh or chuckle, or their eyes communicate, 'Oh, OK, that makes sense.' That rewards me as a preacher. That's why I use these metaphors." Alan noted that he often gets feedback after he preaches that a metaphor connected to a listener and deepened their understanding of a truth. He mentioned how after he preached a message on Ecclesiastes with a metaphor of smoke someone said, "I never really got why there would be a Bible book saying everything is meaningless, but when you say everything is smoke, it does lead you to look for something more solid and substantial." These indicators assisted these preachers in ascertaining if their metaphors engaged their listeners.

Summary of Metaphorical Example Methods

The first research question asked, "In what ways do Reformed preachers communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?" The following themes emerged from the participants' answers, regarding ways they communicate metaphorical examples: persuasive communication tactics, a combination of internal and external challenges and pictures that were favored over propositions. To recap, persuasive communication tactics included indirection, invitation, addressing universal hopes and fears, audience participation, aesthetics, and the use of questions. The combination of internal and external challenges related to metaphorical communication included internal challenges related to interiorization, starting, and receiving scriptural metaphors. External challenges were inventory, listener expectations and appropriate metaphorical usage.

Metaphorical pictures were favored over propositions by all participants, and propositional content was valued. Most of the participants noted that pictures engaged the imagination, thereby increasing the impact of the propositional truth.

Metaphorical Selection

The second research question asked, "How do Reformed preachers select metaphorical illustrations that engage the uninterested listener's imagination?" This RQ had two follow up questions: What difficulties do Reformed preachers face in the selection of metaphorical illustrations? and How do Reformed preachers navigate the difficulties of metaphorical illustration selection?

The protocol questions for this RQ were as follows: How do you go about selecting metaphorical examples that engage the uninterested listener's imagination? What challenges do you face in selecting these metaphorical illustrations? How do you navigate those challenges? What are some rhetorical theories or practices that guide you in the selection of these metaphorical illustrations?

The following themes emerged from the participants: sticky selection criteria, variable challenges encountered and navigated, and eclectic rhetorical theories that drove practice.

Sticky Selection Criteria

All participants selected metaphors that were concrete, unexpected, emotional, and vivid so that the truth they were declaring would become "sticky," when heard. Alan asserted, "I have thought deeply about narrative, which is an imaginative extended metaphor, and there is a sort of stickiness to metaphor."

Aesthetics

Four of the participants selected metaphors based on aesthetic considerations. Jon noted, "Everyone who is trying to communicate something, from Madison Avenue to HBO, to whatever commercial is on is trying to help you not only know something about a product but feel something about a product. They are doing aesthetics." He asked, "Why weren't we talking about aesthetics in seminary? Why were we not talking about communicating what is true, but also what is beautiful?" He chooses metaphors based on their aesthetic excellence. Art does the same and added, "Does it fit?" Gene agreed and added, "The metaphor or story must be good. It also can't be random stuff but faithful to what the text is saying, so that there is some power behind it and justification behind what you are saying."

Alan asked, "What kind of life is beautiful? What does a beautiful life look like; a life worth living?" He assumed that people are engaged in the project of making a beautiful life in some way. They are using their creativity to take whatever situation they are in and somehow make it better, or they feel like something is blocking that ability. He asks, "What is the aspect of the gospel, the good news, that I need to draw out for them to hear?" All three noted the importance of beauty in their metaphor selection criteria.

Affections

Four of the participants select metaphors based on their affective impact. Gene described himself as an ENFJ on the Myers Briggs personality test. He said, "I'm a strong F, much more of a feeler than a thinker." When describing his desire to feel something when using metaphors, he began to blend metaphor selection with story selection. He expressed, "I need to feel something when I go to church, I don't want just

my mind convicted, but I need my heart tugged. I think this is where metaphors, stories and analogies all come into play." He selects metaphors that first hit home to his heart. He admitted that his heart is calloused and he looks for a metaphor to capture his imagination. He wagered, "Chances are it will hit people whose hearts are softer than mine." He praised the words of a Pentecostal Puerto Rican pastor friend who told him, "It is about getting to the heart, getting to the heart, getting to the heart, pulling the emotion, the emotion, the emotion." Referring to Reformed preachers he contended, "I think for our tribe and our camp, we are too much about getting to the head, the head, the head, and we don't do as much as my friend does with the heart and capture people's emotions."

Danny agreed and also blended metaphor and story noting, "I'm an emotional guy who loves stories. I tend to be more art and literature, not math and science. I'm more of a feeler. I like my emotions being tugged on." He selects metaphors that make him want to cry, celebrate, enjoy weep, and sing. He chooses metaphors that affect him. Art added "Is it honest? Is it an authentic metaphor?" to ensure that the affections of his listeners are not manipulated.

Alan added, "My hope is that the delivery and the emotions that are evoked fit the communicative intent of the text. If the text is a warning passage, I want them to feel warned by it, the tenor of the text." He chooses metaphors that "connect to the longings and lament" of his congregation. Gene discussed the longings of his congregation too and described preaching on the resurrection, "appealing to their emotions and the existential angst they feel about life and death and more just from an emotional perspective on why they should wish the resurrection were true, even if they think it is totally, scientifically

impossible." He claimed, "I was trying to appeal more to the heart, the emotions." He described using the metaphor of a seed that enters the dark earth but then changes mysteriously into a living plant to stir hope in those that want life after death.

Art noted that preachers can connect to real people's affections best by listening to their stories. He explained, "If you are always sitting in front of professors, it is great for the truth. But the more you can sit with fisherman, the more you are going to hear story. And truths come out of story." He contended that the preacher's relationship to the secular world matters, especially in listening to what actually happens to people that they find upsetting or hurtful. He concluded, "Metaphors that resonate with those stores will be more meaningful."

Universality and Meaning

Three participants pointed to the importance of metaphor having a universal appeal. Kevin said, "It is back to simplicity, universality." He often brings up failure in his own life to connect to the universal experience of failure experienced by his listeners. Danny pointed out, "Even with different cultures, we have universal truth since we are all made in God's image." Alan added that he looks for "things that unite us despite even political differences or whether we have been in church a long time or haven't. Basic existential questions we all struggle with. Where do I fit? Do I belong here? The question of purpose."

When selecting metaphors, Gene, Art, and Alan focused on meaning. Gene pointed out, "What really engages people is meaning, satisfaction, freedom, identity, hope, morals, and the questions, 'What is the Meaning of Life? How can I be happy?" Art argued, "Everyone is spiritually interested, everybody is in one sense interested in

meaning and value and waking up every day and wondering if their lives matter and how will I know that life matters?" He assumes that most of the people in the crowd are not really who they say they are. He explained that they struggle with meaning, "which means they are still in process themselves. Those are my people and that's who I'm talking to and meeting with story." He asked, "Does the metaphor mean something to me?" as a good test to see if it may mean something to his listeners. Alan asks, "What kind of life is maximally meaningful, beautiful and worth living?"

Three participants select metaphors from meaningful, personal experiences. Danny observed, "When I play with my kids, they end up in all my stories and illustrations, that's my life now." Kevin noted, "I'm always thinking in light of the gospel, daily rehearsing the gospel, and every day I am seeing things, and daily I'll record it. This is like that; that is like this." He directed, "Be attentive. Live with your eyes open and always pay attention." He noted, "I'm not head down, looking at the sidewalk, but I can walk and look around at the same time. It is almost like a state of mind to sharpen what I think - what I notice." Alan said, "Other people have said this before; if your sermons are boring maybe your life is boring. Interesting lives yield interesting sermons." All three paid attention to their lives, struggles, and feelings and imagined how others relate to their lived experience. Alan concluded, "Pay attention to your life and to the things that ignite your own imagination and make sure you do have poetry and fiction that you are reading. Ask what it is that ignites my imagination, and maybe it will ignite someone else's imagination too."

Metaphorical Selection Challenges Encountered and Navigated

Challenges in Metaphorical Selection

Distraction from Main Points

Two participants noted that they try to stay away from metaphors that distract from the main points. Art said, "That's the issue with metaphor, you can also take away from the proposition or distract from it. I go through a process of 'Is this good; does it fit?'" He noted that overuse and oversimplification are key distractors. Danny agreed and noted that he picks metaphors that reduce confusion for concrete thinkers who struggle with idioms. He intentionally points out the connection between a metaphor and a main point so that certain listeners are not distracted.

Gender and Generation Gap

Danny commented that he intentionally stays away from sports and war metaphors. "I steer away from those analogies, illustrations, and examples just because I don't want to alienate all the women all the time. I think I alienate them enough talking about *Lord of The Rings* and *The Avengers*."

Kevin noted, "I'm old. I'm recently an empty nester. The struggle in communication is content. When I was young and the father of little kids, I would use Disney movies like *Toy Story* or *The Little Mermaid*. Now I'm not watching any of those movies." What he reads and watches may not appeal to a younger generation. Since the majority demographic in his church is young families with children, he selects metaphors that connect with the ages and stages of the listeners.

Navigating Challenges in Metaphorical Selection

Kevin navigates his challenge of the generation gap by regularly engaging with young parents and asking others, "Where have you seen this?" Every six to eight weeks he has a team of a half dozen people on a text thread he calls "Sermon Illustration Assist." He asks this group made up of parents to supply stories and current children's movies where they see the sermon's main point in everyday life and culture.

Gene navigates challenges in metaphorical selection by sticking to a routine. "I usually have a routine every morning. I wake up and for the first two hours I just do reading." He selects appropriate metaphors from daily reading.

Art tells his congregation that his metaphor may break down, but he chose it as an attempt to shine the right light on the passage. He acknowledged that if preachers choose a metaphor that connects to the concrete culture of your listeners, they are more likely to hurts somebody's feelings than if they had just left it as a concept." He will call a person who might get hurt, prior to the sermon, to forewarn the person that the metaphor may appear to be aimed at them, even though that is not his intent. He asks himself, "Do I have permission?" He noted that he wants to make sure he has the right permission, whether its kids, friends, or wives.

Danny agreed that metaphors can break down and admitted, "I don't have the time as a church planter to spend 30 hours a week on a sermon. If I did, maybe I could come up with catchy or better illustrations. If I can't come up with them, I don't put the pressure on myself to make sure I have to do it." He lowers his personal expectations, in order to overcome the difficulty in selection.

Eclectic Rhetorical Theories Undergirding Practices

All participants reported that rhetorical theories undergirded their metaphorical selection. Some mentioned philosophers, theologians, or writers, while others mentioned general theories and practices.

Aristotle, Plato, and Augustine

Kevin admitted to relying on Aristotle's theory of rhetoric. "This is absolutely how I think." He noted that Aristotle theorized that all knowledge is on a spectrum from how things are different and how are things alike. The only way to possibly interact with the unknown is in terms of the known. People are always making comparisons. How do words describe the indescribable? The only way is to describe it in the light of what is already known. He concluded that all learning has a comparative dynamic to it. He said, that metaphor "is a dynamic of communication that might be especially helpful with the unbelieving. We are trying to introduce them to something they do not yet know. We represent to them what is unknown. We are giving them categories in terms of what they do know to understand what they don't yet know." He continued, "With all learning the only way anyone can learn what they do not know is in terms of what they already do know. This is like that, and then you begin to say this is different than that." He considers Aristotle's model of knowing to be an epistemology as much as it is a communication strategy. He concluded, "It is the bedrock of how I think about all learning."

Jon noted an aversion to the teachings of Plato, who conceived of the philosopher-king and expelled all the storytellers from the kingdom. "The philosopher is set up as the one who is wise and rational but the storytellers, the ones who traffic in the imagination are to be distrusted." John described how Plato sets up a false dichotomy in the Western

tradition. Particularly for modernity and the Enlightenment, truth is defined merely by rational content, communicated by propositional statements. This practice commandeered the pulpit for hundreds of years. Jon concluded, "The problem with that is the imagination is not just thinking in pictures, not just storytelling, not just what kids do on the playground, but high-level philosophy. Science and rationality require imaginative thinking." He explained how there is no thinking or epistemology that is not driven by imagination. "It is the engine that runs rationality, they are not over against each other but working in tandem…You can listen to a parable by Jesus and say that is highly imaginative, but it is also deeply rational."

Jon gave attention to Augustine, who mentioned Cicero. "Pay attention to proportion. You need to have limits. Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* is stealing from Cicero who taught that any sermon could be small, modest, or grand." Jon noted, "Cicero's point was that your rhetoric should fit the event. There are high metaphor events like a pomp and circumstance event requiring grand metaphors and small metaphor events like a small group presentation." He advised, "Pay attention to the moment in order to fit the style to fit the moment."

Biblical Themes

Alan pointed to biblical theological themes that serve as metaphors. He used the metaphor of rest to picture salvation, since it is mentioned often in the narratives of scripture. He explained how faith itself is resting in the finished work of Jesus who said, "Come to me, all who are weary, and I will give you rest." He looks within the larger cannon of scripture for textual pictures that appear as theological themes. He uses those thematic images and draws connections between them from Old and New Testaments.

Catechism: Questions and Answers

Gene insisted that catechisms with a story format undergird his selection of metaphors. He called them "storied catechisms." He posited that catechisms, since Luther's time, have been in the question-and-answer format. "The word 'catecheo' simply means "teaching and instruction." He noted that asking questions by means of story assists listeners in learning the teachings of the scripture.

Kevin agreed with Gene and gave the communication author AmyK Hutchens credit for his practice of starting every main point with a question. He said Hutchens taught him the power of questions, "particularly questions that ask a person to evaluate, reflect or predict." By asking a question, "the listeners have their brains light up with curiosity and then, by connecting a metaphor, the brain is reflecting and engaged."

Coaching

Kevin mentioned getting training from two pastors in the art of addressing skeptics with metaphor. Pastors Tim Keller and Dick Kaufman modeled and coached him and had a profound influence on how he thinks about communication with outsiders to the Christian faith. He modified his preaching by prefacing a point with phrases like, "Now if you are not a Christian, or new to this, or new to reading the Bible, or trying to figure out what you believe," after hearing Keller do this. He noted, "I was 35 years old and churched my whole life before I heard a pastor acknowledge the presence of those who were not Christians in the room. I remember that was a moment when I just thought 'Holy smoke, this is different.'" He mused, "That was really new and left a mark. That is part of my story."

Fallen Condition Focus

Alan mentioned how Brian Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus grounds much of his metaphorical usage. Alan noted how Chapell takes the real needs of today's listeners who have fallen in sin and live in a fallen world and connects that with the fallen condition found in the ancient text. Alan casts the common condition as a metaphor for many of his sermons.

Metaphorical Thinking

Jon commented, "There is no way to think that is not metaphoric. All thinking, imagining, creativity is a metaphor engagement." He based this assertion on the writings of Lakoff and Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By*. Instead of picturing a preacher as a teacher or lecturer, Jon pictures the preacher as "a liturgical artist." Since the preacher is an artist, he must "get inside a text" and ask, "What are the metaphors that the cannon gives me? What metaphors do the scriptures provide as they work on our reason and imagination at such complex levels?"

Negation

Kevin mentioned "the way of negation" as an important rhetorical practice in metaphor and preaching. Mentioning the American Reformed preacher, Jonathan Edwards, he explained, "There are two ways you can do analogies. Edwards was brilliant at this. In rhetoric it's called the way of negation. You can illustrate something by what it is or illustrate something by what it's not. So, I will regularly do that." Kevin mentioned Tim Downs, one of the leaders of the Communication Center with Campus Crusade. Down's challenged communicators to "live illustratively." In other words, they can always be

living with your eyes open to what is like or not like that which they proclaim. They live with a curious awareness of comparison and contrast.

Story

Gene expressed that he believes in the power of story. "As far as rhetorical theories and practices that guide selections, the Bible, if I had to guess, 90 percent of scripture is not proposition, but story. The scriptures begin with, 'in the beginning.'" He described scripture as a narrative. "It is far less a list, like the Ten Commandments, and far more a story." He discussed the way Nathan the prophet used a story as an extended metaphor to persuade King David regarding his sinful behavior, rather than issuing a declarative statement.

Summary of Example Selection

The second research question asked, "How do Reformed preachers select metaphorical illustrations that engage the uninterested listener's imagination?" This RQ had two follow up questions: What difficulties do Reformed preachers face in the selection of metaphorical illustrations? "How do Reformed preachers navigate the difficulties of metaphorical illustration selection?

The following themes emerged from the participants: sticky selection criteria, variable challenges encountered and navigated, and eclectic rhetorical theories that drive practice. Sticky selection criteria included aesthetics, affections, universality, meaning, and significance. Variable challenges encountered and navigated included distraction, gender, and generation gaps. Rhetorical theories included Aristotle, Plato, Augustine,

biblical themes, storied catechism, coaching, Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus, metaphorical thinking, negation, and story.

Metaphorical Resources

The third research question asked, "What resources do Reformed preachers utilize to identify metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?" The interview protocol included questions such as: What resources do you utilize to identify metaphorical examples to engage the uninterested listener's imagination? Do you suggest any internet resources? Do you suggest any authors?

The following themes related to resource utilization emerged: authors and artists, cultural artifacts, and listening to living preachers as models.

Authors and Artists

Authors

All participants listed authors from whom they drew metaphors. Gene listed Charles Taylor, Tim Keller, Trevin Wax, Sam Alberry, James K.A. Smith, Alan Noble, and Bret McCracken. He observed, "One of the things that I've been convicted of over the years as I look at my bookshelf and my academic career, most of the people that I have read are white and male." Increasingly, over the years, he has been reading authors who are not white and male. "There are so many brilliant female, Asian American, and Black writers that I've been diving into." He mentioned Jemar Tisby, Soong-Chan Rah, and Rebeccah Mclaughlin. He also stated that he reads articles by Tim Challies, a writer who curates a website with many featured authors.

Art listed J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis who use "big narratives" along with Jordan Peterson. Kevin listed Tim Dodd who lectured at the Communication Center for Campus Crusade for Christ. Alan mentioned Cornelius Plantinga's book *Reading for Preaching*, along with David Zahl, who comments on culture and grace. He notes that Bryan Chapell's writings have been a primary influence on his use of metaphor. He added Frederick Buechner and Barbara Brown Taylor as helpful authors.

Jon listed the authors of the gospels from which he drew metaphors spoken by Jesus. He directed, "Trust the imagination to be at play as Jesus did." He noted how Jesus used images and spoke them to people and just walked away, understanding that the metaphors that he spoke shaped them. He noted, "Jesus did not give an argument but a set of pictures that people live into. Read some Jesus and pay attention to Jesus as a preacher." He also mentioned Eugene Peterson, Fred Craddock, Thomas Long, Fleming Rutledge, and Tim Keller because "they speak out of who they are."

Artists

Art noted that artists describe what is happening on this earth, stirring our imagination with more ease than others. He mentioned listening to singers who are storytellers. He added, "I'm not listening to music to tap my foot; I want a story." He listed Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard and the Eagles and observed, "They are telling something that happened in their life, and it is usually metaphorical." He recited some lines from an Eagle's song that communicated metaphors of addiction, "You're losing all your highs and lows, ain't it funny how the feeling goes away?" He advised, "Listen to music that's talking about stories. A pastor, if he wants to richly share metaphors, has to

richly be immersed in stories." He cautioned against preachers doing research in a clinical way, since it will cause them to struggle to connect with listeners.

Alan agreed with Art and said, "Pay more attention to storytellers, poets, artists and musicians." Kevin said, "I love film" and noted that he reads fiction to find metaphors that connect to his listeners. Gene added comedians to the list of artists, mentioning David Chappelle. He noted how comedians observe the real world and make connections well. Jon said, "Listen to good singer/songwriters. Taylor Swift tells a good story. She says a lot with a little bit. That is what a metaphor does; it says a lot in a little space." Art noted, "We tend to split the secular and sacred, but the artists and movies and songs and Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash, they're all trying to understand the same truth." Alan remarked, "Poets pay attention to language and teach us to pay attention. I would love it if preachers would learn more from other than business or thought leaders or professors and learn more from storytellers, musicians and spoken word poets." Jon stated, "You want to learn how to use metaphor, memorize the Psalms. I want you to pull out ten Psalms and memorize them. Preaching is trained in the school of prayer."

Cultural Artifacts

All participants mentioned finding metaphors in cultural artifacts. Gene reads *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* and said, "I try to use what our people are watching, reading, and digesting." He noted, "Twitter is not necessarily something that you would put in your bibliography for your doctorate, but it is a semi-credible resource depending on who is tweeting in the world as a whole." He added, "Netflix or *Tiger King* or whatever's on social media. I tend to dip a lot more into pop culture. My context is mostly 20s, 30s, and a sprinkle of 40s."

Kevin expressed that he reaches out to family and friends to collect cultural artifacts. He explained, "Every week, I'm trying to ask, 'What is a universal idea?' then I'm trying to ask of the proposition, 'Where have I seen that?'" For a sermon he recently preached, he asked his family, "Where have you seen someone squander a great love relationship, only to come to the realization, 'Oh God, what have I done?' And my daughter, lightning fast, mentions the movie *Thirteen Going on Thirty*.'" He concluded that this was the perfect metaphorical example, and his audience perked up "because every girl in the room had seen that movie. It was palpable when I said for example…"

Gene noted, "I listen to a lot of podcasts. 'Unbelievable,' by Justin Brierly, and Keller just started a new podcast called 'How the Reach the West Again.' There is an Asian American one that started a year ago called 'Off the Pulpit.'" He noted that these podcasters are "very sympathetic to engaging the culture and capturing the imagination." He mentioned a television show called "Alter Ego." He noted that in his context, most people don't watch this show, but he thought it was a show that dips into whatever the metaverse is going to become. He stated, "The question, 'Who Am I?' is gonna get a lot more complex. We are all going to have our own avatars eventually, and it is going to get a lot more confusing." He mentioned his commitment "to stay ahead of the cultural curve" so that his congregation can anticipate what is coming. "That takes a lot of cultural exegesis, in addition to scriptural exegesis."

Danny listed the social media platforms Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter as rich repositories for metaphors. He said, "There is a story about a foster care situation, and I saw it on Facebook. I see stories on TV and YouTube. I even find metaphors on fishing videos." Kevin does not use social media like Danny. He explained, "I intentionally am

on zero social media, Facebook, Twitter, Tic-Toc, or Instagram. I'm in recovery over porn and need to be careful and that is known to the whole congregation. I will regularly talk about being in recovery." While steering clear of social media, Kevin mentioned doing a lot of news searches for metaphors. He reads and watches business news like the CNBC "Morning Show" or "Squawk" so that he can find metaphors that connect him to congregants who are heads of corporations.

Living Preachers as Models

Four out of the six participants mentioned gleaning rich metaphorical help from living preachers. Jon mentioned how Tim Brown, a local pastor and seminary professor ended up modeling preaching with metaphor. He remembered, "I heard him preach, and it literally changed the way I thought about what preaching could be. What preaching should do. What was unique about Tim was he had a real sense of internalizing scripture." He added, "Preaching is learned by being around preachers, and you learn by doing. You can teach skills, but you really learn how to play the game by playing the game." He noted that Brown modeled memorizing metaphors before they were preached so that the internal work of the image impacted the preacher before he preached to his people."

Gene agreed with Jon and stated, "I listen to a lot of other preachers. Some preachers are sadly not preaching anymore because of moral failure or something like that but some of those guys were really great prior to that." Danny noted, "Tim Keller moves me." He considers Keller as one who understands culture, the philosophy of the age, research and then articulates how to think deep thoughts and know God. He listed

seminary professors Ray Ortlund, Larry Futado, John Frame, and Richard Pratt as influences on his metaphorical usage.

Alan mentioned Charlie Dates, a Baptist preacher in Chicago, as a great example of a contemporary black preacher who engages the imagination. "He is a great example of black preaching at its best." Jon advised, "Find someone who you want to emulate out of who you are but pay attention to who you are; you are not them. My kids do Suzuki violin method. Listen to who you want to sound like. Don't copy the sermon but learn the spirit of the communication."

Art commented, "When you listen to other pastors, listen for the metaphors. You'll probably do like your congregation does when they hear you preach; you'll say, 'Oh, now I get it.'" He advised preachers to clothe their concepts with their own clothes rather than always using the metaphors of others.

Summary of Example Resources

The third research question asked, "What resources do Reformed preachers utilize to identify metaphorical illustrations to engage the uninterested listener's imagination?"

The following themes related to resource utilization emerged from the participants: authors and artists, cultural artifacts, and listening to living preachers and professors as models.

Metaphorical Desired Outcomes

The final research question asked, "What outcomes do Reformed preachers desire to observe by engaging the uninterested listener's imagination with metaphorical illustrations?"

The first protocol question for this RQ was "What benefits do you hope uninterested listeners gain because of your engaging them with metaphorical examples?" with a follow up question of "What are some ways you wish you could see and hear these benefits from the listeners?" The following themes emerged from the participants regarding the desired outcomes of metaphor use: a deeper desire for Jesus, personal ownership of the preached message and transformational thinking and behavior.

Five of the participants admitted that they rarely get feedback about how their use of metaphor impacted their listeners. Art noted, "It just doesn't happen much. I think people are afraid of a pastor getting a big head, or they just leave Sunday, and they're not thinking, 'I'm gonna share with him how much that meant to me,' or it is probably my wonderful Lord who knows that's probably not helpful." Danny agreed and stated, "I'll be honest, I don't know how well my sermons are received every Sunday. I don't know if it makes a difference. That's part of the scary things about being a pastor." Kevin added that it never occurs to him how the metaphors impact his listeners. He noted, "That never occurs to me. The fruit of a transformed life here, but I suspect that a lot of that has to wait till eternity." He described the metaphor of a chain of people who from the time of Christ led the next person to Christ up to the present. He expressed, "Can you imagine those stories and how enthralling it is going to be to sit and listen to person after person after person regaling the name of Jesus? It will be greater than any movie we have ever seen, and all will be true." He concluded, "My prayer is somewhere in there, the chain continued beyond me. That's the only way to think about the benefit. Being part of that chain, I hope."

Alan described that at times all he hears is "That was a good sermon." And Jon said, "I don't know what is going on in the hearts and minds of someone listening to me. But it is hard to say. Preaching is one of those jobs where you just constantly feel like a failure. You have no idea what is going on." He noted that preaching with metaphor requires "a tremendous endurable hope each time." He admitted that he wishes at times that listeners would say, "Man you changed my life with that illustration and sermon; you are awesome," but more often than not he feels like his preaching may not have made much of a difference.

A Deeper Desire for Jesus

Love for Jesus

Five of the six participants expressed that they wanted their listeners to experience a deeper love for Jesus. Jon said the best sailors don't just sail but "gain a love for the sea." In the same way he noted that the goal of using metaphors is for his listeners to have "a love for God." He stated in reference to Jesus' metaphors, "The goal of a sermon is not that you know more but become more." Danny agreed with Jon and noted, "I want our people to not just have knowledge, but to fall in love with Jesus. To taste and see and know who He is. Sometimes metaphors help them get to the point where it's more than just head knowledge." Kevin agreed and added, "Keller said if at the end of your sermon people are talking about you, you failed. If they are talking about how amazing Jesus is, you succeeded. Leave them amazed with Jesus."

Alan concurred, "What I want for every person that I meet is that they could experience the beauty of Jesus and know him as trustworthy and worthy of giving their

life to Christ. That is the deepest hope that I have for people." Gene agreed, "You want others to fall in love with Jesus a little bit more." He described how a friend who had stayed away from church for many years heard him preach and said, "I feel like Jesus just gave me a big hug." He expressed, "That's kind of what I want everyone to feel. The hurting, the broken, those that had a terrible week of sinning, I want them to feel like Jesus just gave them a big hug at the end of the sermon, and it's going to be OK." Kevin used one word: "Eternity. It results in praise to Jesus and that people repented and believed. That's the goal. All I ever want to do is lead unbelieving and believing to Christ. I want to get them to Jesus."

Desire

Five of the six participants expressed a goal of moving the desires of their congregants with metaphors. Jon mentioned, "The end goal of any sermon is to shape the desire to want God. The preacher should speak in such a way that leads you to a deep desire for God. That is what I'm trying to create. To do that, you must take imagination seriously." He added that he wants his listeners "to want to come back for more and walk out saying, 'Something happened, and I want to come back for that. Something is going on here that is bigger than me and I can't control, and it wasn't the preacher.'" He concluded by expressing the need to preach beautifully to move the listeners with the metaphors given in the text. Danny concurred, noting that he uses metaphors to hammer his points into the hearts of his hearers. He gives them metaphors to give them a "why" so that they want to believe the message.

Gene explained how his personality as a feeler leads him to preach to the feelings of his listeners via metaphor. "Personally, I'm an ENFJ not a T. I'm a strong F -- much

more of a feeler than a thinker. This is where the imagination comes in. I need to feel something when I go to church, I don't want just my mind convicted but I need my heart tugged." He noted, "This is where metaphors, stories, and analogies all come into play." He concluded, "At the end of the day, we are not just robots that we download information into; we are human at the end of the day. We still need our heart strings tugged." He said that at the end of a sermon he wants his listeners to put their pens down and experience not just having their mind convicted but also their hearts moved.

Alan agreed, "My hope is that the delivery and the emotions that are evoked fit the communicative intent of the text." If the text deals with warning, he finds a metaphor that will evoke warning. If it is encouragement, he finds a metaphor that will evoke encouragement. Art agreed and expressed, "There is something that I should I feel at the end of a sermon" and noted that he wants his listeners to feel deeply the truth and claims of the sermon's message.

Interest Is Generated

Two of the participants mentioned a goal of stirring desire with those who are suspicious or disinterested with the Christian story. Jon explained, "I want a self-proclaimed atheist at every gathering. The one who says, 'I don't believe any of this, but I'll come back because it is interesting.'" He observed how he uses metaphors with the outcome of surprising the skeptical or suspicious listener with an unpredictable, beautiful picture that they find attractive. Kevin concurred and noted he wants to spark interest with critics, skeptics, and anyone who is suspicious and show that the Christian faith is not stupid. He mixes logic and metaphor to show the rigor of the Christian faith. Jon added, "I want the benefit of someone feeling invited to the party." He mentioned how he

avoids sermons that berate the culture or bad behavior and instead uses metaphors from scripture that invite sinners to experience grace.

Impact

Half of the participants mentioned wanting to impact the listener with the truth of the Christian story. Jon admitted, "Preaching is not just about what you know, but how does it impact how you feel and think. Not that those are separate things, knowing and feeling but there had to be some relationship to that." He observed, "One of the signs of my preaching making an impact is whether people want to pick up the Bible and read it and get into it. I have seen my preaching impact students if they want to pursue the story of God in their life."

Danny wanted his metaphors hammered into the heart of his hearers so they experienced a deeper dependency on God. Alan explained desire for impact by describing how he wants to leave his listeners better than he found them. He pointed out, since Jesus had risen from the dead, he was "discipling imaginations" with metaphor and not just intellects. He hoped that people would make a difference because of the difference the story of God makes in the hearing of the Word. He concluded, "I don't want to just tell people the right thing to think but to hope that tomorrow can be better than today, and they can change things because Jesus has risen from the dead."

Personal Ownership of the Preached Message

Ownership

Three of the participants wanted their listeners to take ownership of the preached message. Jon said, "I want them to know that if they disagree with me, I am offering something true for them and they must think about it." Art described ownership as "the weights been passed from me to you." He did not want listeners walking away with mere knowledge. Instead, he commented, "The biggest benefit is now they have something they can't shake themselves. They must do something with it." He contended, "My understanding of the concept and the weight of the concept is also being laid upon them as a modern idea of a prophet to a crowd, crying out, 'Choose you this day what will you do with this truth.'" He noted, "Even if you dismiss it, it's gonna be a hard process for you. It's hard to dismiss it and then just say it was stimulating for you, and you enjoyed it." Speaking specifically about metaphorical illustrations, he concluded, "Now I've just given that concept a covering in our world and now you have to deal with it It's more real now, and you can't just dismiss it and say its intellectually stimulating. Now I have given you the burden I have had all week." He expressed he wants them to take the truth and ask themselves what their next step is and then take it.

Kevin described ownership as engagement. "Hopefully, by asking the question the person feels engaged." He explained how he used the metaphor of a stump and asked the listeners to consider what a stump is. By asking them to reflect on the metaphor he wanted them to engage and own the meaning of the text. He described metaphors as a tether or hook that takes one thing the listener understands and connects it to another they do not, which gives "an existential 'settled-ness' or pleasant experience." He stated

that he did not want to leave them there but move them to see the meaning in something strange becoming familiar that you then engage with.

Meaning

Four participants described personal participation in metaphor. Jon noted, "I want to create a narrative that you step inside of and see the deeper meaning of the text, not just giving you interesting historical data; that is not the end goal." He expanded this goal by stating, "I had internally this idea that preaching was not just about trying to pass off information but help you see and participate in a bigger world." He described going to a matinee and seeing the movie *Star Wars* in the middle of the day. When people walk outside after being immersed in the story, they feel like you participated in a bigger story. He preaches with metaphors to invite participation in the drama of the gospel.

Danny aimed at watching for non-verbal cues that communicate, "Oh OK, that makes sense." He said, "That rewards me as a preacher. That's why I use these metaphors." Kevin agreed and called this aim at meaning, "Connection, I want my people to have knowledge to connect heart, emotions and spirit." He added that he desired "clarity of understanding that they can see the connections of all of God's world to all of God's truth." Alan concurred with Danny and Kevin and added that he uses metaphors to enhance "threads of meaning" for his listeners.

Transformational Thinking

Transformation

Five of the six participants described a goal of transformed thinking and living. Jon reported, "The goal is not to just say, 'This is interesting.' It is to keep people from dying. We need to speak metaphors in such a way so that we can help the imagination see a different kind of life." Art agreed and noted that if he can connect the life of the listener to the metaphor's meaning, "They can leave, and they have a way to view their lives and the truth is now stuck on their lives." He concluded, "There is something that I should feel at the end of a sermon that makes me think, 'Like what do I do with that. What's my next step with that?'" Danny described it as growth. "As a preacher, what an edifying thing to hear my people growing, that makes me so happy to see someone growing." Kevin said he wanted to see "the fruit of a transformed life here, but I suspect that a lot of that has to wait till eternity. There is no greater joy than when they hang onto the idea. It is not Kevin you said this but, 'I now know this.'"

Repentance and Belief

Gene described transformation as repentance and belief. He explained how he pleads with people to repent and believe after offering metaphors that reveal the truth of the gospel. "It is a plea to repent and believe. It does not end that way all the time, but this is my aim." Kevin concurred, stating his goal of wanting listeners to "repent and believe." Alan wanted his listeners to "Go and creatively live out that in a way that I could not even have thought of. That is the feedback I love to see. I love to see how people take, do, and run in new directions. It is surprising and encouraging to see."

Summary of Desired Outcomes

The final research question asked, "What outcomes do Reformed preachers desire to observe by engaging the uninterested listener's imagination with metaphorical illustrations?"

The following themes emerged from the participants regarding the desired outcomes of metaphorical example use: a deeper love for Jesus, personal ownership of the preached message and transformational thinking.

Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how Reformed preachers in a post-Christian context engage the listener's imagination with metaphors. Participants described metaphorical example methods, selection criteria, resources, and desired outcomes for their listeners.

The participants also provided vision for how preachers could locate and communicate metaphorical examples in scripture and culture. The following themes emerged from the participants' answers: persuasive communication tactics, pictures favored over propositions, and a combination of internal and external challenges experienced during sermon creation and delivery.

The following themes emerged from the participants related to selection criteria: sticky selection criteria, variable challenges were encountered and navigated, and rhetorical theories were offered that drive homiletical practice.

Multiple themes related to resource utilization emerged from the participants: authors and artists, cultural artifacts, and listening to living preachers and professors as models.

The following themes emerged from the participants regarding the desired outcomes of metaphorical example use: a deeper love for Jesus, personal ownership of the preached message, and transformational thinking.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how Reformed preachers in a post-Christian context engage the listener's imagination with metaphor. In chapter two, the review of literature shed insight on three areas central to listener engagement in a post-Christian context: understanding philosophical, cultural forces that mute the preacher's message, preaching to the imagination with metaphor, and examining Jesus' use of metaphors to engage listeners. In exploring how this is experienced in the preaching event, the following research questions guided the research:

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. In what ways do Reformed preachers communicate metaphorical illustrations to engage the listener's imagination?
2. How do Reformed preachers select metaphorical illustrations that engage the listener's imagination?
    a. What difficulties do Reformed preachers face in the selection of metaphorical illustrations?
    b. How do Reformed preachers navigate the difficulties of metaphorical illustration selection?
3. What resources do Reformed preachers utilize to identify metaphorical illustrations to engage the listener's imagination?

4. What outcomes do Reformed preachers desire to observe by engaging listener's imagination with metaphorical illustrations?

This chapter will bring together the literature reviewed in chapter two and the interview findings of chapter four in summary fashion. These findings will be discussed and recommendations for practice and further research will be suggested.

Summary of the Study and Findings

This study reviewed relevant literature in three areas and analyzed interview data from six Reformed preachers. The literature has shown that philosophical, cultural forces have contributed to conditions that impact listener engagement during the preaching event. Preachers encounter the filtering effect of plausibility structures, the immanent frame, the social imaginary, and disenchantment. Taylor noted that disenchantment dismisses supernatural preaching content,[494] while Berger explained this phenomenon as the filtering effects of plausibility structures.[495] Fragilization and the buffered self were distinguished and correlated to listener disinterest. The literature demonstrates the necessity of apologetic sensitivity, which McGrath described as a principled attempt to communicate the vitality of the Christian gospel effectively to a disenchanted culture, engaging objections with empathy for the listener.[496]

The second section of the literature review found that contextualization and its relationship to preaching to the imagination enhanced listener engagement. Bavinck

---

[494] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

[495] Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 27.

[496] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 17–25.

explained how the message of the preacher must make itself known in the language of the imagination.[497] The nature and function of the imagination were explored and the connection between epistemology and rationalism was explained. The imagination and its effect on the affections was observed. The Holy Spirit's relationship to preaching to the imagination along with the importance of beauty was studied, concluding with an exploration of the concept of Berger's signals of transcendence.[498] Metaphor was defined by Ordway as comparing a known thing with a second thing to enable deeper understanding.[499] The literature examined metaphor and found that it has a unique function, power, and significance in the preaching encounter. Specific practices were discussed to engage the hearer's imagination regarding the use of metaphors. For instance, Larson advised preachers to place metaphors at key strategic points: the introduction, key sentences and paragraphs, and conclusion.[500]

Finally, the literature examined Jesus' use of metaphors and found that he prioritized the use of metaphors in preaching. Baily pointed out that Jesus' primary method of creating meaning was through metaphor, rather than logic and reasoning.[501] A connection between parable and metaphor was established. Jesus was observed using metaphors from nature as an example indirect communication. It concluded by showing the reasons preachers in today's disenchanted, secular context should consider Jesus' use

---

[497] Bavinck, *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*, 36.

[498] Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, 53–69.

[499] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 47–48.

[500] Haddon, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 395–96.

[501] Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 279.

of metaphor, even though he lived and preached in an enchanted age. A final finding was Jesus' intention subvert the values and expectations of listeners by metaphor.

After conducting the literature review, the question remained: How do Reformed preachers use, select, and find metaphors that engage the imagination? Moreover, what were the desired outcomes regarding metaphor use? Multiple tactics were described regarding metaphor use. Selection criteria varied based on rhetorical theories that undergirded practice. Resources ranged from authors and artists to cultural artifacts and living practitioners. Variable desired outcomes were expressed. Jon summed up what most of the participants revealed, "We need to speak metaphors in such a way so that we can help the imagination see a different kind of life."

Discussion of Findings

The literature and interview research, along with my personal perspective, revealed thirteen significant findings. These findings support and challenge existing thinking and practice to engage uninterested listeners with metaphor. Recommendations for future preaching practice and research follow.

Metaphor and Story Were Used Interchangeably

The literature review and the research participants spoke of metaphor and story or parable as interchangeable. When participants described how they used metaphor, they mentioned a story, without distinguishing it from a metaphor. Jon said that a parable is an extended metaphor that acts as an "imaginative construct we step into." Gene equated story and metaphor when he explained, "I want to preach, and I know that story or metaphor is supposed to go after this proposition." When asked about challenges he

encounters using metaphor, Art asked, "Is my story or metaphor distracting?" When asked where he places metaphors during sermon delivery he answered, "I want to begin by telling a story." When asked to describe how he selects metaphors, Gene replied, "The metaphor or story must be good." In the literature McKenzie combined metaphor and story claiming, "Several of Jesus' narrative parables about the kingdom are metaphors in story form.[502] Dodd connected metaphor and story noting that a parable is a metaphor drawn from nature or common life.[503] Buechner observed that Jesus preached in the language of metaphor and then called attention to the story or parable of the Good Samaritan.[504] In my preaching I often choose a story to represent a textual truth and have not thought of this strictly as a metaphor. The literature and participant data challenged my narrow preconceptions. Are other preachers limiting themselves to a strict definition of metaphor and neglecting the storehouse of stories to deliver propositional content?

Holy Spirit as First and Final Persuader of the Heart

The literature found that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate personal power behind persuading and convincing disinterested listeners to believe; metaphorical examples hold a penultimate place.[505] Preachers join the Holy Spirit in awakening desire with confidence that he is already at work within human longings. The illumination of the

---

[502] McKenzie, *The Parables for Today*, 23.

[503] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, I6.

[504] Buechner, *Telling the Truth the Gospel As Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale,* 62–63.

[505] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 13.

mind must come from the prior work of God's grace, but the preacher's use of metaphor is important in the delivery of truth to listeners.[506] Machen asserted

> the decisive thing is the regenerative power of God…but as a matter of fact, God usually exerts that power in connection with certain prior conditions of the human mind, and it should be ours to create, so far as we can, with the help of God, those favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel. [507]

The preacher is responsible for winsome persuasion, but only the Spirit brings conviction and regeneration. Edgar agreed, noting that the gospel requires agency to bring it within the earshot of real people.[508] Kevin noted, after he communicates a metaphor to challenge the unquestioned intuitions of listeners, he relies on the Holy Spirit to open the heart to believe what was presented.

Searle noted that the ultimate cause of the receptivity and belief in Christian truth is the gift of faith. She rightly pointed out that faith cannot operate without the imagination, yet it is not to be equated with it.[509] Faith is a supernatural gift. The Spirit of God directs the imagination to trust truth presented by the preacher. Imagination has limitations as it cannot be expected to respond, decide, or trust. Preachers believe that the Spirit is already enabling the understanding of metaphorical meaning. Jon presupposed that the metaphors of scripture were a "burning bush" that living with new meaning for hearers. As Van Til noted, the preached message is the starting point, not the ground of understanding.[510] The preacher must rely on the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of the heart.

---

[506] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 294.

[507] Machen, J. Gresham, "Christianity and Culture," 11.

[508] Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart*, 298.

[509] Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart*, 50.

[510] Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 105.

Pictures Cooperate with Propositions

Metaphors are pictures that cooperate, rather than compete, with propositional truth. Gene emphasized the importance of connecting metaphor to proposition in the presentation of truth. I agree with Chapell's assertion regarding the Romantic overemphasis on the imagination, wherein subjective experience eclipsed objective scriptural truth. The listeners' experience is not meant to construct truth.[511] At the same time, Reformed preachers may overemphasize explanatory, propositional truth and neglect addressing the subjective, affective experience of their listeners, by engaging their imagination. Baily was right when he said that the imagination must be responsive to a reality not of its own making.[512] Gene insisted that preachers engage the rational and imaginative capacity of the listeners. A cooperation between picture and proposition allows for an engagement with the heart and mind.

Guite contended that finding a way to unite the false dichotomy of reason and the imagination is perhaps the most urgent task today.[513] I don't think he is overstating his case given the secular, philosophical forces in our context. In relation to Reformed preaching, the urgent need to communicate proposition and picture must be addressed at both the Reformed seminary and the local church. Art noted that metaphors, "make the truth real," and the gospel has more weight. McGrath said that the imagination allows the tasting of reality before it is captured in abstract terms.[514] Laughery pointed out that

---

[511] Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 230.

[512] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 238.

[513] Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry,* 64.

[514] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 233.

reason and logic cannot go it alone as the only informers. Imagination is also an essential informer.[515] Ordway agreed, noting that it is not possible to have a grasp of propositional truth without the faculty of the imagination.[516] I agree with Chapell's advisement to suspect any communication system that would deny the value of proposition or picture.

All participants valued picture and proposition, insisting that a propositional approach without pictures would bypass the imagination. Gene noted, "The propositional route does feel a little bit more Western," and called for valuing metaphor and narrative along with propositions. Art said, "I think in higher education it is getting the propositions right and understanding them completely...But nobody is asking 'So what'"?

Ordway noted that metaphors serve the same purpose as propositional statements: to orient the reader toward reality.[517] All participants favored pictures over propositions as the best way to orient the reader toward spiritual reality. Jon insisted that metaphors change the way people live, not arguments. He noted, "Jesus did not give an argument but a set of pictures." Though every participant emphasized the priority of pictures over propositions, none of them pitted the two against each other.

Profound Understanding Catalyzed by Metaphor

Depth of understanding was favored over superficial understanding by the literature and participants. Liftin asserted that preachers are to focus on comprehension,

---

[515] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 5.

[516] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 239.

[517] Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination,* 52.

or deeper understanding.[518] The metaphor has an explanatory power that facilitates profound understanding. All interview participants voiced their intent toward deeper understanding, rather than a dry exposure to data. Gene said, "We are not just robots we download information into; we are human…and need our heart strings tugged," where deep understanding occurs. Gene said preaching is "not just about trying to pass off information," but helping listeners expand their imaginary vision in a larger reality.

Most participants used metaphor to catalyze information into deeper knowledge that simmered with life-changing implications. Jon quoted Hauerwas who said, "If you want to change the way people live, don't give them an argument, give them a picture." Lakoff and Johnson asserted that metaphor's primary function is understanding.[519] Understanding is crucial in preaching, and Liftin asserted that the preacher presents the message in a way the listener can comprehend it.[520] Alan said that metaphors assist listeners with understanding better than bare statements of information. Laughery concluded that metaphors bring a deeper understanding of reality.[521]

Metaphors build a bridge between the known and unknown. As I have preached to listeners with high biblical illiteracy, I've seen how building a bridge between the unknown and the known is crucial. By engaging the imagination via metaphor, the known and unknown can meet, moving simple understanding to deeper comprehension.

---

[518] Liftin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 178–80.

[519] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 341.

[520] Liftin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 280.

[521] Laughery, *Living Imagination*, 70.

Sociologists Stark and Finke credited metaphorical illustrations as the catalyst for church growth in major American denominations between 1776 and 1850.[522] Those preachers used imagery and metaphor applying them to everyday life. Conversely, Reformed preachers of this era saw an 8.4 percent decrease in adherents as they typically addressed their listeners' intellect by means of a formal instructional approach.[523] The Reformed preachers failed because they prioritized superficial knowledge acquisition. Experiential knowledge can be fired by a metaphor spoken to the imagination. Laughery concluded that the imagination functions by allowing the listener to access certain kinds of knowledge, leading to deeper insight. He contended that reason played a decisive, though not exclusive role in knowing.[524] Fraser agreed, calling the imagination our best means of knowing or understanding certain kinds of truth.[525] Gene stated, "With a proposition…a lightbulb will go off," but with a metaphor, "repentance and belief and the desire for deep change" may result, because of deeper understanding. I agree with Danny when he noted, metaphors hammer home points that might otherwise be superficially apprehended and discarded.

Assume Disinterest

It is best to deal with what is the case rather than what we wish were the case. Guiness noted that most people in today's post-Christian context are not open, interested,

---

[522] Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 86.

[523] Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America,* 86.

[524] Laughery, *Living Imagination,* 50–51.

[525] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 101.

or needy concerning the content of preaching.[526] Preachers who ignore this observation put their listeners in spiritual peril. Preachers who exegete their listeners can choose appropriate methods to penetrate listener apathy. Jon noted that he preaches to college students who arrive with a baseline of disinterest, due to their overstimulated social context. Taylor, Berger, and Gould, mention a multitude of cultural and auditory filters that numb receptivity, such as plausibility structures and an immanent frame. I have listened to Reformed sermons where preachers assume the opposite, namely that their listeners are open and interested in their message when this not the case. Disenchantment has buffered the transcendent world of listeners who are now open only to the observable, natural realm. Art agreed, noting that he assumes that every listener is disinterested. While I would not say every listener is disinterested, I agree with Art's assumption, based on my own preaching experience in a post-Christian context, and have noticed a high percentage of listener disinterest.

Taylor and Noble explained that our secular age has subtracted out supernatural reality.[527] Today's listeners do not order their life by sacred, transcendent liturgies, because science has framed out any reference to the story of God. Beshears listed the comforts and distractions that increase listener apathy.[528] Taylor's concept of the Nova Effect, where listeners experience distraction from a multitude of moral and spiritual options, thereby framing out Christian teaching, is a force to be reckoned with. Rishmawy added that the internet has accelerated the enablement of a more radical,

---

[526] Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 22.

[527] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 253. Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 40.

[528] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 13.

individualistic epistemology.[529] If preachers fail to take the current cultural moment into account, which offers listeners an alternative explanation of reality stripped of the supernatural, they are failing to exposit their congregants with accuracy. Misdiagnosing their listener's critical condition may lead to preacher malpractice. By beginning with the assumption that listeners have a deficit of interest, preachers may consider metaphors as crucial interventions to engage flaccid, insulated imaginations.

Moreover, preachers who ignore secularizing forces perpetuate a cultural ahistoricism that refuses to understand the present in relation to the past. This oversight disrespects listeners, as preachers fail to empathize with, and properly address, their listeners' cultural deafness. As Barna, Pew, and Lifeway research reveals, the interest in the Christian message is shrinking, especially in the younger generation. Preachers must adjust their homiletical approach to influence the qualitative listening experience of the disinterested.

Apologetic Sensitivity

All participants prioritized apologetic sensitivity as they preached. They wanted to engage the disinterested effectively, engaging objections with empathy. Jon preaches to students and mentioned how they are overstimulated and disinterested. He practices sensitivity to cognitive and emotional barriers. Many participants preach with an intentional, hospitable style, using metaphor to facilitate the intelligibility of their message. Jon aims to preach with a sensitivity to his listeners' desires and existing

---

[529] Derek Rishmawy, "Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age," The Gospel Coalition, accessed June 4, 2021, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ministering-to-millennials-in-a-secular-age/.

plausibility structures as he invites them into the metaphors of scripture as "imaginative constructs" they can step into. The metaphor has a way of assisting listeners who have never examined their foundational assumptions.

By using apologetic sensitivity, the "barricades of belief,"[530] mentioned by Beshears, can be dismantled by a metaphor to allow a religious argument to access the heart of the hearer. Empathy for the listeners' honest objections can communicate sensitively to their situation. Art assumed, "every listener is disinterested," and practiced sensitivity to find metaphors that would connect with their disinterest.

Preachers desiring to increase listeners' perception of the mysterious can engage the imagination to allow for spiritual insight. Preachers need to be aware of the attitude of their listeners. An attitude is a predisposition to respond positively or negatively to a message. Does the receiver of a message have intuitions that might make that message impossible, unreasonable, or unacceptable? Why is the message important to them not just the preacher? Preachers are to be receptor-sensitive, but content centered.

In my own experience, some Reformed preachers study the text and declare it clearly but fail to exercise empathy when it comes to how the information is heard by the disinterested listener. Art mentioned spending time with the people in his congregation to find ways to use images that relate to their lived reality. Preachers need to value empathetic, apologetic sensitivity as a key responsibility in today's context. Empathy with the disinterested is itself an exercise of the imagination.

I was surprised at how much importance four of the six participants gave to investing in listening to living preachers and professors who exercise apologetic

---

[530] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 105.

sensitivity with metaphors. Based on my preaching experience, I have found that listening to preachers and how they relate propositions to images has helped me improve my ability to engage the disinterested listener. Unfortunately, many of my Reformed professors were better at teaching sensitivity to propositional meaning rather than sensitivity to interpreting the cognitive and emotional readiness of hearers.

Metaphorical Aesthetics Increase Affective Receptivity

Jon and Alan mentioned the universal longing for beauty. For example, Jon challenged preachers to think of themselves as artists who craft words that are not only true but also beautiful. Do our Reformed seminaries prioritize propositional accuracy over metaphorical aesthetics? Jon noted, "One of the things we do not talk about in seminary is aesthetics." Many of my Reformed professors were analytical, textual experts, rather than synthetic thinkers who expressed truth that created aesthetic pleasure. Gould asserted that many are not asking if the preached message is true, but rather, "Is it attractive?"[531] He noted that one way to reawaken the religious impulse in the uninterested is to address the imagination via metaphor. Baily agreed, challenging preachers to engage the imagination with metaphors to demonstrate the Christian faith's beauty and generativity. He referenced Pascal's directive to demonstrate faith's beauty before demonstrating faith's verity.[532] Gene mentioned how his metaphorical selection began with the question, "Is it a beautiful metaphor?"

---

[531] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 92.

[532] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 17.

I agree that the aesthetic dimension can be a helpful invitation into rational consideration. Many watch films or enjoy nature to experience beauty because they want to be part of something attractive. Wlodkowski noted that most adults learn what they think they need or want to learn. If the process of learning does not meet these goals, they ignore the content deeming it unnecessary.[533] Smith argued that preachers need to move beyond, "You are what you think" to "You are what you love," by digging deep wells into the imagination of listeners. He called the church an imagination station where listeners have their imagination "re-habituated to the true story of the world."[534] The imagination as part of our cognitive architecture allows listeners to apply truth to life acting as an organ of meaning. Bavinck noted that the orator must present truth with feeling in the language of the imagination.[535]

Preachers have underestimated the power of imagination. Gene mentioned, "Pictures are worth a thousand words," and Danny defined the imagination as "the ability to dream without being asleep." Vanhoozer pointed out that images and metaphor give the listener a surplus of cognition and preachers who engage the imagination, via aesthetics, tap into a faculty of cognition that facilitates profound understanding.[536] Searle located the imagination in the heart. People plan and invent with the imagination, as they use this instrument to make meaningful connections with reality.[537]

---

[533] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 51.

[534] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 180.

[535] Bavinck, *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*, 36.

[536] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 88.

[537] Searle, *The Eyes of Your Heart*, 33.

Preachers can pay closer attention to the universal longing for beauty in their hearers. Listeners often filter the plausibility of truth through the desirability of what is presented. Kevin insisted that exegesis of universal meaning from the listeners' perspective must precede how to express the diversity of theological, propositional truth. McGilchrist claimed that affect comes first and thinking later.[538] Preachers engage the imagination to awaken desire and Gould considers metaphorical examples aesthetic currency that preachers can exchange to make this happen.[539]

Beauty can act as a pointer, signaling transcendence. The imagination guides us in perceiving and enjoying beauty. Sire added that beauty in the form of metaphor can move listeners in ways that cannot be fully explained by materialistic assumptions.[540] Jussley directed preachers to appeal to the affective desires with short, compressed pictures to assist modern listeners.[541] I was surprised that four of the six participants mentioned that they select their metaphors based on their affective impact. Gene said, "At the end of the day, we still need our heart strings tugged…I need by heart tugged." They wanted to experience a personal tug of the heart before they presented a metaphor that would move the listeners. They calculated that if it moved them, it would move their listeners.

---

[538] McGilchrist, *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning*, 266.

[539] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 74.

[540] Sire, *Apologetics Beyond Reason*, 120.

[541] Jussely, "A Case for Illustrative Preaching," 47–48.

Meaning and Emotion Matter

Three of the participants noted how they took the time to interiorize the metaphors to feel and experience personal meaning before presenting the examples to the listeners. Art noted that he spent time in study to know the cultural background so that he has "the story in an emotional way" before he delivers his message. Alan starts with the part of the text he finds most personally gripping and meaningful. Jon said he memorizes and internalizes scriptural metaphors to experience their meanings before he communicates. I have found this to be true in my own preaching practice. By memorizing or repetitively reading over the text and metaphors to be used, the images have a way of etching themselves into the heart.

Metaphors are powerful because they hold a great deal of meaning packed into a small space. The literature revealed Jesus as a metaphorical theologian. His primary method of creating meaning was through metaphor, rather than through logic or reasoning. He created meaning like a poet, rather than a philosopher.[542] Jon said, "I think more like a poet than a philosopher." Alan noted, "It would be sad if people were only interested in getting the notes to the poem and getting them right," and missing the meaning intended by the poet. Jesus aimed to evoke meaning in the lives of his listeners. Wenham went so far as to say that Jesus almost entirely taught with metaphorical speech to engage listeners with meaningful content.[543] Kaufman, a secularist, admitted that secularism does not provide meaning and emotion like religion does.[544] Kevin and Alan

---

[542] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 394.

[543] Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus*, 12–13.

[544] Melville, "Battle of the Babies."

mentioned the importance of exegeting the listeners' longing for meaning before they embarked on preaching promotional content. Kevin said he starts every week asking, "What is a universal dynamic, positive or negative, a hope or a fear, that is in play for every person in the room?" Closed listeners may open to the content of preaching filled with metaphor because they desire emotional experience and meaning in a secular climate that has pushed these human yearnings out of reach. By taking their emotions seriously, and their hunt for meaning, the apt metaphor can minimize the pre-screening many listeners use to distance themselves from preaching content. Taylor noted that those screening out God experience an existential disposition of dissatisfaction.[545]

Preachers may hesitate to speak to the subjective satisfaction of personal desires because of a conviction to stay focused on God. Johnson cautioned preachers from making the felt needs of listeners the central focus of the preaching event but noted that a balanced apologetic sensitivity was needed. God is the creator of human desires, and many biblical metaphors speak to the satisfaction of human desires. Bailey challenged preachers to employ metaphors to go with the grain of Taylor's authentic self where listeners want to follow their hearts. Scriptural metaphors can tug on the subjective yearning of hearts in a meaningful way. Rather than hearing a preacher in a way that appears enslaving, the metaphor liberates emotion and meaning, surprising the hearer. Keller added that all people have universal longings and seek meaning, identity, hope, satisfaction, freedom, and a moral compass. In my experience, I have found it important to use metaphors that tap into these universal longings.[546] By engaging a listener's hunger

---

[545] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 302.

[546] Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 4–76.

for meaning with an evocative image, I have found hearers willing to think, feel and act differently in their lives.

Gould reminds us that the imagination is a faculty of the mind that mediates sense and intellect for meaning.[547] Kevin pointed to the universality of meaning as a key indicator in his selection of appropriate metaphors. Many listeners struggle to have a sense of meaning in their lives regarding work, suffering, relationships, the possibility of the supernatural and hope. Gene stated, "What really engages people is meaning." The imagination allows the heart to make meaningful connections with God, others, creation, and the self. Lewis goes so far as to call the imagination the organ of meaning.[548] Johnson noted that Jesus was a metaphorical preacher who understood that a powerful picture communicatees meaning that a thousand words cannot express.[549] Gould noted that in the midst of the chaos of competing visions of reality in our pluralistic, post-Christian milieu, imagination reawakens the religious impulse and helps make connections.[550] Beshears challenges preachers to appeal to the feelings of the heart. Preachers are to ask, "How does it move" listeners?[551] Bullinger found that metaphor is not so true to fact as the simile, with its explicit comparison, but is much truer to feeling with its implicit suggestiveness.[552] I have found that the human heart is not primarily a

---

[547] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 108.

[548] Lewis, *On Stories*, 265.

[549] Johnson and Peterson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist*, 85.

[550] Gould and Moreland, *Cultural Apologetics*, 72.

[551] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 84–85.

[552] Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 735–37.

debating chamber but a theatre where story, image, and meaning matter at a deep emotional level.

Preaching Must Be Aimed at the Imagination and the Intellect

When selecting the best metaphors, Alan advised, "Pay attention to your life and things that ignite your own imagination…maybe it will ignite someone else's imagination too." Bailey noted that Reformed preachers overemphasize the intellect to the neglect of the imagination.[553] Wooddell added that prioritizing the intellect over the imagination can be counterproductive. He directed preachers to question their focus on the intellect at the expense of the imagination.[554] I agree with Bailey, who clarified that the imagination is not to be pitted against the intellect. Rather, the imbalance of intellect over the imagination must be corrected. Questions of truth are not irrelevant, instead they are situated in the imaginative frame.[555] I do not resonate with postmodernist communicators who argue against arguments. Reasons are helpful, but we must use metaphors to fire the imagination so that reasons have a better chance of being considered. I agree with McGrath who calls for a significant appeal to the imagination since rationalism has waned in our Western context.[556] Since reason involves categorization and metaphor involves seeing one thing in terms of another, an imaginative rationality emerges when preachers engage the imagination with metaphor.

---

[553] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 35.

[554] Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith*, 37.

[555] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 17.

[556] Mcgrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 128–29.

My seminary training at a Reformed institution, praised for its preaching curriculum, taught me to reason, exposit, and proclaim propositions. There was little attention given to the aesthetic considerations of sermon delivery or the listeners' imagination. There was an aversion to emotionalism, and the preaching aimed solely at the base appetites of listeners. While this caution is important, listener affections were neglected as rational arguments were emphasized. I share Smith's concern that the church has often reduced knowing to bare rationalism.[557] McGrath agreed claiming that enlightenment rationalism has had a lingering effect on evangelicalism evidenced by a resistance to use narrative preaching.[558] Gene noted, "The propositional route does feel a little bit more Western, and I think that scripture is mostly narrative." I have experienced Reformed preachers gravitating toward propositional texts from Romans or Ephesians, rather than narratives. But the reverse error was noted by Alan who admitted that he rarely preaches from propositional texts because he wants to engage the imagination.

Keller concurred with my seminary experience, noting that Reformed preachers are trained to communicate content to minds, rather than pathos aimed to persuade the imagination.[559] I agree with Langan, who challenged preachers to question the assumption that reason does all the work.[560] Gene noted how he chose to preach with the metaphor of a seed when communicating about the resurrection. His chose a picture over a set of reasons to "connect the longings and lament" of his listeners to the hope of the

---

[557] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 126–27.

[558] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 12.

[559] Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 216–20.

[560] Ryken, *The Christian Imagination*, 63.

resurrection, instead of giving a list of propositions. Preachers must engage the imagination of others if they wish to transmit a message that will be heard. Beshears termed humanity *homo imago*, "man who images."[561] I agree with Art, who noted, "A fact in a story has more punch than just a fact."

Smith cautioned Reformed communicators, directing them to stop seeing listeners as brains on sticks.[562] Preachers need to zoom out and conceive of listeners as complex individuals with hopes, desires, and imaginings along with their rational faculty. Preachers can then explain truth and stoke the experience of truth by speaking to the imagination. The imagination, fueled by images, helps the understanding by delivering a perception to our reason so that action can be executed by the will. By sending messages straight to the will or the intellect, the imagination is bypassed, and listeners can't use all their cognitive faculties. This missed opportunity bypasses the chance to deepen understanding and call for a response to the information presented.

Guite calls for a reunion between reason, as an aid of comprehension, with imagination as an aid toward apprehension of Christian claims.[563] I agree with his assessment that this reunion is perhaps the most urgent task of our time. The realm of affect and love must connect with the verifiable and visible. Each matters, separating reason from the imagination, decreases the impact of the preached message. Both analysis and synthesis that fire the affections engage congregants who would otherwise dismiss content as uninteresting.

---

[561] Beshears, *Apatheism*, 50.

[562] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 157.

[563] Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry*, 64.

The Importance of Questions

McGrath directed preachers to adapt their apologetics to their respective audiences, appreciating several gateways of connection between gospel truth and the human listener.[564] All of the participants listed various persuasive tactics to move the passive listener into active thought, feeling, and action. Trueman added that the unacknowledged secular assumptions of the present age make up a social imaginary that suppresses transcendent universal longings.[565] Two of the participants prioritized questions to excavate buried assumptions so that listeners were engaged to evaluate, predict, or imagine. Kevin mentioned the importance of questions to persuade the listener to surface their buried assumptions. He begins every point of his sermon with a question to facilitate the persuasive process. Only after giving a question, does he offer a metaphor for consideration. After giving a metaphor, he challenges the unquestioned intuitions of his listeners and relies on the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of their hearts, so they see the beauty of Jesus and the truth he is preaching. Guiness agreed with Kevin, noting that questions through a metaphorical story reframe the content of what is presented in such a way as to involve the listener's imagination.[566] Questions kindle curiosity in the disinterested listener. Metaphors provide fuel to maintain the fire initially kindled by questions.

---

[564] McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 129.

[565] Trueman and Dreher, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 122.

[566] Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 167–68.

The Importance of Indirect Communication

A key persuasive tactic is indirect speech. The literature found that indirect speech, which emphasizes imaginative symbols aimed at the heart, is crucial to penetrate the defensive or disinterested condition of post-Christian hearers. Fraser distinguished direct speech from indirect speech, noting that direct speech conveys truth by reason and doctrine, but indirect speech by way of story and symbol. Direct speech works best when a person is open to the preached message.[567] Kevin and Jon cautioned preachers using indirect speech with the "choir." They experienced a backlash of criticism from those already committed to the gospel. I have experienced both confusion and hostility from Christians who desire direct communication. Even after explaining why indirect speech is used, some have lost trust in my credibility. They lack empathy for the listeners who have their guard up or who interpret information through an immanent frame.

Jon mentioned taking an indirect approach when he noted, "You can say propositional truth without saying it." Many hearers have what Lewis called "watchful dragons," or hardened assumptions of secularism, that push away any direct propositional truth claims.[568] I have encountered listeners with their guard up. By addressing the imagination via metaphor, their defenses are allowed to remain up while a new vision on a side path invites consideration. The defenses finally lower because the meaning of the metaphor has slipped deeply into their mind and heard through that side route.

Jesus used earthly images to describe spiritual reality as a form of indirect speech. He called himself a shepherd, bridegroom, door, and vine to engage the imagination with

---

[567] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 439.

[568] Lewis, *On Stories*, 47.

speech that invited a change in the way listener's thought, felt and acted. Listeners may let their guard down when presented with a picture so that the information the preacher communicates can provoke a realization about reality.[569] His use of indirect speech often surprised listeners by subverting their expectations and fostering an epiphany, leading to a new state of awareness.

Scripture as Metaphorical Warehouse

I was surprised to find all participants mentioning that they begin with the scriptures as the first source of their metaphors. Alan looks for textual pictures and biblical theological themes. Jon said he wants to move listeners with the metaphors given in the text. Kevin used the metaphor of a stump found in his text. I assumed they would create their own metaphors or begin with a metaphor they found in literature or film. These preachers trusted the images in scripture that transferred meaning from something familiar to something unfamiliar. Wiersbe directed preachers to flesh out abstractions with a metaphor and use the images embedded in the text rather than feel the pressure to manufacture pictures.[570] Half of the participants struggled to find fresh metaphors in their everyday life or from the arts, but all valued the timeless metaphors found in scripture.

None of the participants devalued selecting metaphors from cultural artifacts, artists, authors, or social media. I was surprised that Kevin transparently shared with his listeners that he does not go on Facebook due to his pornography addiction. This decision decreased his metaphorical sources, but he made up for it with his team of people who

---

[569] Fraser, *Hide and Seek*, 18.

[570] Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching With Imagination*, 82–87.

found apt metaphors for his sermons each week. It also resonated with the importance of the authentic self for his listeners who expected attention given to expressive individualism. His subjective admission of a struggle with this sin may increase listener engagement with his presented content.

Preachers Unaware of Metaphorical Impact Beyond Surface Cues, but Desired to Know

I was disappointed to find five of the six participants mention they rarely get feedback about how metaphors impacted their listeners. Most noted surface cues, like nodding of the head, or taking notes, but most admitted to being unaware of deep impact. Art noted, "It just doesn't happen much." Danny mused, "I don't know if it makes a difference." Kevin commented that it never occurs to him how metaphor impacts his listeners. I was surprised at the disinterested attitude but impressed with their goal of preaching with metaphor, even if they did not get much feedback.

Recommendations for Practice

Because of secularism, when listeners assume that they do not need the supernatural God of Christianity, preachers begin with a deficit of listener interest. Listener disinterest can be addressed with homiletical engagement of the imagination through metaphor. Is the church willing to pay the price of ignoring the current communication crisis when the message of the gospel must first be heard before it is

believed?[571] In light of the findings described above, several recommendations for practice emerge.

See Scripture as the First Source of Metaphorical Examples

Rather than struggling to find fresh metaphors that engage the imagination, preachers can confidently search the scriptures for images. Preaching a sermon series on Revelation would prove fruitful since it is full of vivid images. Many of metaphors in Revelation are found in sections of the Old Testament. The Psalms are full of rich images as are many of the prophetic books that seek to address the imagination of the hearers. Preaching a sermon series on the parables would present the metaphors of Jesus and engage listeners with universal truths.

Utilize Different Persuasive Tactics in Sermon Delivery

The following four persuasive tactics increase listener interest and understanding. First, indirect speech allows for the invitation to explore the implicit meaning in the message of the preacher. For example, when Kevin asked his hearers to imagine the movie *Thirteen Going on Thirty*, he engaged them indirectly. He began with a storyline many would know and moved to the storyline of the text that many did not know. Once their imagination was stretched, the proposition of the text could be proclaimed directly. In today's postmodern, post-Christian, disenchanted context, listeners predisposed to ignore the plausibility structure of the preached message often experience a break-through in understanding the countercultural nature of the Christian story. Indirect speech

---

[571] Romans 10:14

is also a key tactic when speaking to listeners who think they know all that they need to know. It is particularly helpful to get around those with intellectual and emotional prejudices to certain propositional content. Van Til noted that the natural man must be blasted out of his hideouts and caves.[572] Rather than blasting out listeners with direct speech, preachers must use beckoning, indirect speech to engage the imagination.

Second, questions kindle imaginary engagement. Baily noted that preachers are to use the subjunctive mood, asking the listener to explore possibilities as they search for a firmer grip on truth. Questions can suggest, rather than spell out, leading the questioner to surprising answers. Two participants used questions and related them to metaphor. Kevin noted that questions that invite prediction, evaluation or reflection engage the imagination best. I would prefer that preachers use the questions, "What if this were true in your life?" or "What if the world really was this way?" to stretch atrophied imaginations.

Third, look for everyday examples. Kevin advised preachers to begin with what they know. They can ask how, "this is like that" when trying to find a metaphor that fits. Cormier advised preachers to look at everyday examples that are relatable to the listeners, not necessarily the preacher. By asking, "Where do I see this truth?", the preacher will become more observant and connect everyday things to propositional truths.[573] Jesus' metaphors were often drawn from nature or common life.[574] By using metaphorical examples found in nature, preachers catalyze connection with listeners who view reality through a naturalistic lens. Down to earth examples help listeners see how propositional

---

[572] Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 105.

[573] Cormier, *The Deacon's Ministry of the Word*, 7.

[574] Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 410.

content integrates with the world around them in an integrative whole. Three participants advised preachers to take the time to interiorize selected metaphors so that emotional engagement and meaning were experienced first-hand before presenting the metaphor to the hearers. Jon noted how memorization leads to interiorization. Preachers could memorize the text and say it from memory before the sermon begins.

Fourth, place the metaphor in different strategic sections of the sermon. Eswine directed preachers to place the metaphor after the text was explained to allow the content to fill the metaphor with meaning, thereby intensifying the effect on the hearer's heart.[575] Danny and Art prioritized the use of metaphor in the introduction but not all the time. Art did not want to communicate any form of manipulation with formulaic introductions that might cause listener distrust.

Re-evaluate the Importance of the Imagination as a Cognitive Faculty of Synthesis

Langan contended that there is nothing more fundamental than imagination. Our loss of respect for it is directly linked to religious apathy.[576] Reformed seminaries would do well to add aesthetics with specific applications to sermon preparation and delivery.

Many of the linear-thinking students in my Reformed seminary valued analysis over connections. The imagination deals with synthesis where connections are made. Meaning and significance are the fruits of synthesizing truth and beauty.

---

[575] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 129.

[576] Ryken, *The Christian Imagination*, 63.

Re-enchant Imaginations with Natural and Scriptural Metaphors

Gould noted that disenchanted imaginations present great obstacles to the reception of the gospel. Preachers can use scriptural metaphors as primary means to re-enchant the disenchanted trusting the power of metaphor to penetrate the disenchanted listener' disinterest and looking to the scriptures as a key resource. Jesus did not feel the need to design artificial illustrations from the propositions he wished to preach but instead received ready-made metaphors from the Old Testament and nature.

Preachers can create databases that list rich metaphors found in scripture and nature. By collecting these images and indexing them, retrieval can occur for future sermons. Based on Kevin's admission of being in recovery over pornography, it would be best to caution preachers from seeking metaphors on social media without weighted consideration of the risks and benefits.

Reformed Seminary Preaching Courses Must Teach to the Affections and Intellect

Keller noted that non-believers need to hear why Christianity makes emotional sense before they are willing to devote time to weighting rational arguments.[577] As Jon noted, preachers should use words that create an invitation to a wonderful party. Many courses teach preachers how to interpret points to ponder, even if the listener might feel force-fed during the preaching encounter. More attention is needed in teaching ways to use metaphors that warm and invite listeners so that they will desire to be fed by the preaching of the Word. Reformed preachers are cautioned against manipulative,

---

[577] Keller, *Making Sense of God*, 216.

emotional appeals that can come across as underhanded. Arm twisting, seduction and sweet-talking have no place in Reformed homiletics that must rely on the presentation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit. While these cautions have merit, the imagination can be neglected, resulting in poor engagement with the affections. Finding images in scripture that evoke the emotions can counter the tendency to preach primarily at the intellect.

Exegetical and homiletical outlines often begin with three points. Preachers need to be taught how to create sermons with movements which suggest the development of a story that engages the imagination. Points address the intellect, but movements, according to Jon and Alan, engage the imagination without devaluing the intellect.

Since most of the participants mentioned getting little to no feedback regarding the use of metaphor, seminary training should include setting realistic expectations for preachers. If preachers improve in the areas of pathos but fail to hear any positive comments from the listeners, they may interpret this as a waste of time. They need to be taught to be faithful in preaching and ensure that they are preaching to the head and heart regardless of any feedback. The feedback they must look for is a deeper desire for Jesus in their listeners. They should hope for repentance and belief as hearers think, feel and act differently after the preaching encounter.

Create a "Sermon Illustration Assist" Team

As Kevin noted, preachers need help to find excellent metaphors for the ages, genders, and situational make-up of congregants. Preachers can enlist people of different ages, stages, and cultures and ask them to help. They can supply key propositions or simply the big idea of a sermon and ask this team to find something in their world that

compares or contrasts with the point. As preachers age, this team will help them to stay in touch with the lived imaginations of their hearers and choose appropriate cultural artifacts.

Apologetic Sensitivity: Add a Preliminary Apologetic Step

Since supernatural content may be filtered out by secularizing forces, preachers can add a preliminary apologetic step in their presentation. Prefatory maneuvers must precede propositional declarations. How can this be done? Eswine asserted that preachers must not only say what the text says, but say what the text says by accounting for how people culturally hear what the text says.[578] For instance, one might say, "I'm going to bring up something invisible to the naked eye, called sin, and many of you will dismiss it out of hand. I understand. But what if instead of dismissing what I am going to say, you opened your mind and at least tried to imagine that it might be true." Or say, "For those of us who are Christians, this is part of our narrative. I invite you to simply listen and look over my shoulder as I address Christians with what we believe to be true about fundamental reality. It is OK to disagree. But would you at least try to imagine and empathize with why Christians would believe the concept?" Another example of a preliminary step would be to say something like, "We would be honored if you entertained a thought experiment by considering an everyday image from scripture that fills many of us with deep meaning. What if the world of matter was not all that really exists? Would you be willing to re-imagine reality?" McGrath noted that first translating truth into images allows better connection with resistant hearers.

---

[578] Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 184.

Johnson calls these preliminary maneuvers apologetic sidebars.[579] Preachers need to acknowledge the alienness of the gospel, when considered through the lens of cultural assumptions. By adjusting our language with preliminary metaphors, the hearer is given space to engage the truth claims of the preacher. The preacher can ask the two questions offered by Bailey: What would make belief beautiful and believable for the listener, and what makes belief ugly and unbelievable?[580]

Celebrate the Subjective Age of Authenticity While Simultaneously Remaining Centered on the Objective, Preached Message

Rather than resisting the age of authenticity due to its anthropocentric excess, preachers can reframe the age of authenticity as a positive opportunity to engage the lived experience of the listener. Preachers invite listeners into the social imaginary of the scripture story, proclaiming metaphors found in the text that awaken and arouse the imagination. Preaching metaphors full of significance, which stir subjective feeling, allows listeners to navigate faith imaginatively. Such preaching respects the subjective authenticity of listeners by giving affective biblical metaphors that engage the truth about God. By connecting objective truth to universal longings through metaphor, the presented truth goes with the grain of how someone thinks and feels. Though individual experience must not be celebrated as the foundation for truth, it can be highlighted as the connection point for how a person thinks, feels, and acts.

---

[579] Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 30.

[580] Bailey, *Reimagining Apologetics*, 29.

Preachers enter the plausibility structure of the disinterested listener via a metaphor that invites them into the plausibility structure of the story of God. In this way, the preacher engages the listener where they are at, not where the preacher expects them to be. Jon and Alan mentioned the importance of this method in their preaching. Jesus used metaphors as imaginative constructs that listeners can step into to see the truth, beauty and goodness of his person and works. He instructs listeners to take their story into the story he presents. Preachers need to value this approach, rather than starting with what is wrong with expressive individualism and the plausibility structure of the age of subjective authenticity. I agree with Alan's method. He enters the frame of reference of his listeners first and then invites them to sit down at the table of the Christian story.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the preachers' use of metaphor to engage the disinterested listeners' imagination. 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 for further exploration.

Biblical Theology Themes

I was surprised that only one participant mentioned biblical theological themes as a metaphorical source. Reformed preachers tend to emphasize systematic theology that categorizes propositional truth. Since biblical theology follows themes in scripture as they develop from seed form to fruit, more research is needed to consider the value of thematic, mega-metaphors in scripture like water, temple, mountains, shepherd, and garden.

Distinguish Metaphor and Story

I was surprised to find the literature and participants conflating metaphor and story. Though communication methods can compare one thing in terms of another, more research is needed on the distinctives of metaphor and how it engages the imagination. Since the literature often fused parable and story, it would be helpful to further differentiate parable and story in terms of metaphor. The literature and participants noted how Jesus used story and metaphor to engage listeners indirectly. More research is needed to discover why, how, and when Jesus chose a certain parable, story or metaphor to communicate.

Metaphorical Malpractice

More research is needed in understanding metaphor malpractice. Since the metaphor connects deeply to the hearts of hearers, misuse and abuse must be minimized. Art noted that people may remember the metaphor more than the presented proposition. When the image becomes bigger than the truth presented, a distraction from crucial content occurs. Larson noted that preachers misuse metaphors by mixing them and causing confusion, communicating dead or over-used comparisons, or overreaching.[581] I did not see sufficient literature covering metaphorical malpractice. Since metaphors are powerful, more research is needed to ensure they are used properly. How can metaphors be used appropriately to take people closer to the proposition than further away?

---

[581] Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 391.

Addressing The Imagination of Resistant Listeners Who Question Utility

There is insufficient literature available to guide preachers in how to address the imagination of resistant listeners with metaphorical examples related to utility. Preachers who address the reasonability of scripture through rational argument and the desirability of scripture through metaphorical engagement with the imagination must still address the goodness of scriptures claims. Gene noted that many of his listeners consider the Chrisitan story immoral and unethical. Even if a metaphorical example deepens understanding and meaning, a listener who considers the story of God as unethical will need further persuasion. The literature is full of metaphorical use centered on that which is true and beautiful but very little focused on what listeners consider good.

Technological and Economic Distractions

When preachers expect certain truths to meet immediate acceptance in all listeners, they must keep in mind the fragilization of beliefs and the Nova Effect, along with the distraction toward preaching content.[582] Philosophical, cultural forces can cause distraction, but more research is needed regarding technological and economic distractions. The cell phone has created new liturgies that have fractured attention to preaching content. The designers of the cell phone have embedded marketing goals into many of the algorithms that demand user attention. Studying cell phone use before, during, and after a preaching event may reveal important findings.

Economic forces need to be studied regarding listener distraction. Since listening to preaching presupposes need, an affluent listener may not notice presented material

---

[582] Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 36–45.

deemed unnecessary. More research is needed on assessing the disinterest of the affluent related to preaching.

I join Machen who hoped for a breakthrough in the church's communication with disinterested listeners when he wrote "Perhaps, by God's grace, through His good Spirit, in His good time, she might issue forth once more with power, and an age of doubt might be followed by the dawn of an era of faith.[583] The literature and participant data displayed significant findings regarding metaphor use, as a crucial way to engage the uninterested listeners' imagination.

[583] Machen, J. Gresham, "Christianity and Culture," 15.

Bibliography

Augustine. *Augustine, Volume. 18.* 13th ed. Great Books of the Western World. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1988.

Bailey, Justin. "Reimagining 'Pre-Apologetics'? Responding to Trevin Wax's TGC Review." *Justin Ariel Bailey* (blog), December 11, 2020. https://pjustin.com/reimagining-pre-apologetics-responding-to-trevin-waxs-tgc-review/.

Bailey, Justin Ariel. *Reimagining Apologetics: The Beauty of Faith in a Secular Age*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.

Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.

Barna, George and Kinneman, David. *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*. Austin, TX: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

Barrs, Jerram. *Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

Bavinck, Herman. *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*. Translated by James P. Eglinton. Peabody, MA: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017.

Beck, Richard. *Hunting Magic Eels: Recovering an Enchanted Faith in a Skeptical Age*. Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021.

Beeke, Joel. "What Is Experiential Preaching?" Ligonier Ministries. August 29, 2016. https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-experiential-preaching/.

Berger, Peter L. *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1970.

———. *Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980.

———. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967.

Beshears, Kyle. *Apatheism: How We Share When They Don't Care*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2021.

Black, Brian. *Built on the Sand: Biblical Solutions to the Crash of Church Attendance*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021.

Boersma, Hans. *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.

Brown, William P. *Seeing the Psalms*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.

Bruyn, David J. de. *Save Them From Secularism: Pre-Evangelism For Your Children*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

Buechner, Frederick. *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1977.

Buechner, Fredrick. *Telling the Truth the Gospel As Tragedy*. HARPER & ROW, 1956.

Bullinger, E. W. *Figures of Speech Used In the Bible Explained and Illustrated*. Martino Fine Books, 2011.

Buttrick, David. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987.

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

———. *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*. Rev. ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001.

Chatraw, Josh. *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

Chatraw, Josh, and Karen Swallow Prior. *Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019.

Clarkson, Sarah. *This Beautiful Truth: How God's Goodness Breaks into Our Darkness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021.

Cormier, Jay. "Forum: Preaching Visually: Helping Your Community 'See' God in Their Midst." *Worship* 86, no. 5 (September 2012): 437–45. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

———. *The Deacon's Ministry of the Word*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016.

Daise, Benjamin. *Kierkegaard's Socratic Art*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000.

de Bruyn, David. "Persuasion Without Manipulation: Conservative Preaching Without Being Boring or The Beautiful Sermon." Accessed October 11, 2021. https://www.ncbc.co.za/conservative-preaching.

Dickerson, John S. *The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors That Will Crash the American Church...and How to Prepare*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013.

Dodd, C. H. *Parables of the Kingdom*. Great Britain: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961.

Earls, Aaron. "Americans' Views of Life's Meaning and Purpose Are Changing." Lifeway Newsroom, April 6, 2021. https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/04/06/americans-views-of-lifes-meaning-and-purpose-are-changing/.

Edgar, William. *Reasons of the Heart: Recovering Christian Persuasion*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003.

Eswine, Zack. *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect With Our Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.

Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. Rev. ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Flemming, Dean. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005.

Frame, John M., and J. I. Packer. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*. Ill. ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013.

Fraser, Benson P. *Hide and Seek: The Sacred Art of Indirect Communication*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2020.

Gallup. "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time." Gallup.com, March 29, 2021. https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx.

Gary Selby. *Not with Wisdom of Words : Nonrational Persuasion in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

Gay, Craig M. *The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Gould, Paul M., and J. P. Moreland. *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019.

Greidanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010.

"Growth and Decline in American Religion over the Last Decade," Religion In Public. July 9, 2019. https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/07/09/growth-and-decline-in-american-religion-over-the-last-decade/.

Guinness, Os. *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019.

Guite, Malcolm. *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010.

Haddon, Robinson. *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*. Ill. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic Books, 2006.

———. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. Ill. ed. New York: Vintage, 2013.

Harn, Roger E. Van, and Eugene H. Peterson. *Preacher, Can You Hear Us Listening?* Stiff Wraps. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

Hollingworth, Harry Levi. *The Psychology Of The Audience: American Psychology Series*. Edited by Henry E. Garrett. New York: American Book Company, 2012.

Huber, Lynn R. *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse*. New York: T&T Clark, 2007.

Johnson, Dennis E. *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007.

Johnson, Trygve David, and Eugene Peterson. *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014.

Jussely, Steve. "A Case for Illustrative Preaching." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 2 (1998): 44–48. Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

Kalas, J. Ellsworth. *Preaching in an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical.* New York: Penguin Books, 2016.

———. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Viking, 2015.

Kim, Jay Y., and Scot McKnight. *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020.

Kreeft, Peter. *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascals Pensées Edited, Outlined, and Explained*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993.

Krueger, Silas. "Preaching in an Oral Age: Preaching Styles That 'Speak' to a Post-Literate Generation." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 112, no. 2 (2015): 83–125. Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Lassman, Peter, Irving Velody, and Herminio Martins, eds. *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation."* New York: Routledge, 2015.

Laughery, Gregory J. *Living Imagination: Who Am I and What Is Real?* Huemoz: Destinée, 2017.

Lewis, C. S. *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*. San Diego, CA: Harvest Books, 2002.

———. *Selected Literary Essays*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Lewis, Ralph L., and Gregg Lewis. *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen*. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983.

Litfin, Duane. *Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015.

Machen, J. Gresham. "Christianity and Culture." *The Princeton Theological Review* 11, no. 1 (1913): 1–15. https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/princetontheolog1111arms-dmd002.

Manser, A. R. "Imagination." In *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Donald M. Borchert, 2nd ed., 4:596–99. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006. http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3446800916/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=9e5e510c.

McDill, Wayne. *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 1999.

McGilchrist, Iain. *The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012.

McGrath, Alister E. *Mere Apologetics: How To Help Seekers And Skeptics Find Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.

McGrath, Alister E. *Narrative Apologetics: Sharing the Relevance, Joy, and Wonder of the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019.

McKenzie, Alyce M. *The Parables for Today*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

McKim, Donald K. "Christianity: Reformed Christianity." In *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Religious Practices*, edited by Thomas Riggs, 1:228–34. Religions and Denominations. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2006. http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3437900035/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=780b3e5e.

"Measuring Religion in Pew research Center's American Trends Panel." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), January 14, 2021. https://www.pewforum.org/2021/01/14/measuring-religion-in-pew-research-ceners-american-trends-panel/.

Melville, Caspar. "Battle of the Babies." New Humanist. March 22, 2010. https://newhumanist.org.uk/2267/battle-of-the-babies.

Merriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. 4th ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015. Kindle.

"Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth on 'Nones.'" *Pew Research Center* (blog). Accessed August 15, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/.

"Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church When They Become Young Adults," Lifeway Research. January 15, 2019. https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/.

Noble, Alan. *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age*. Ill. ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018.

Ordway, Holly. *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith*. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The. "Our Standards: Preface." Accessed May 22, 2021. https://opc.org/preface.html.

Packer, J. I. *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life*. Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Pub, 1996.

Pardigon, Flavien. "The Areopagus Speech and Contextualization: Some Hermeneutical and Exegetical Considerations." *Unio Cum Christo* 6, no. 1 (April 2020): 11–27. Alta Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS.

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. London: Penguin Classics, 1995.

Periyakoil, Vyjeyanthi S. "Using Metaphors in Medicine." *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 11, no. 6 (July 2008): 842–44. https://doi.org/10.1089/jpm.2008.9885.

Plantinga, Cornelius, Jr. *Reading for Preaching: The Preacher in Conversation with Storytellers, Biographers, Poets, and Journalists*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013.

Richardson, Rick. *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith.* Chicago, IL: Downers Grove, 2019. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

Rishmawy, Derek. "Ministering to Millennials in a Secular Age." The Gospel Coalition. Accessed June 4, 2021. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ministering-to-millennials-in-a-secular-age/.

Roberts, Kyle. *Emerging Prophet: Kierkegaard and the Postmodern People of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013.

Root, Andrew. *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.

———. *Pastor in a Secular Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019.

Ryken, Leland. *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*. Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2002.

Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Sayers, Mark. *Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016.

Searle, Alison. *The Eyes of Your Heart: Literary and Theological Trajectories of Imagining Biblically*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009.

Siegelman, Ellen Y. *Metaphor and Meaning in Psychotherapy*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1993.

Sire, James W. *Apologetics Beyond Reason: Why Seeing Really Is Believing*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014.

Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.

———. *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.

———. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.

Smuts, Aaron. "The Paradox of Suspense." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2021. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/paradox-suspense/.

Springer, Craig, and David Kinnaman. *How to Revive Evangelism: 7 Vital Shifts in How We Share Our Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021.

Stark, Rodney, and Byron Johnson. "Religion and the Bad News Bearers." *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition* 258, no. 48 (August 26, 2011): A11.

Storms, Sam. *Signs of the Spirit: An Interpretation of Jonathan Edwards's "Religious Affections."* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.

Stuart Murray. *Post-Christendom : Church and Mission in a Strange New World.* 2nd ed. After Christendom Series. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

Swedberg, Richard, and Ola Agevall. *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*. 2nd edition. Stanford, CA: Stanford Social Sciences, 2016.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2018.

Til, Cornelius Van. *The Defense of the Faith*. Edited by K. Scott Oliphint. 4th ed. Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2008.

Tim Keller. "Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs." Effectual Grace. July 19, 2011. https://effectualgrace.com/2011/07/19/deconstructing-defeater-beliefs-by-tim-keller/.

Treier, Daniel J., and Walter A. Elwell, eds. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.

Trueman, Carl R., and Rod Dreher. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine*. 35th ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

Warner, Michael, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds. *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*. Repr. ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Wenham, David. *The Parables of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989.

Wiersbe, Warren. *Preaching And Teaching With Imagination: The Quest For Biblical Ministry*. Repr. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1997.

Williams, Paul S. *Exiles on Mission: How Christians Can Thrive in a Post-Christian World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020.

Wlodkowski, Raymond J. *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*. 3rd ed. Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, 2008.

Wooddell, Joseph D. *The Beauty of the Faith: Using Aesthetics for Christian Apologetics*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010.

Wright, David F., Sinclair B. Ferguson, and J. I. Packer, eds. *New Dictionary of Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988.