CREATIVE PREACHING: HOW MULTI-SENSORY PREACHING CONNECTS
THE WORD OF GOD TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CULTURE

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The privilege of being adopted into God’s family through Jesus Christ leaves me breathless, access to God through prayer and scriptures lends me confidence, the mentoring of Dr. Schmitt, Dr. Lovett, Dr. Kauffman and Dr. Falwell loan me wisdom, the insights of Dr. Joanne Washington lifts me to victory, tutelage from Trish Dixon liberates my writing skills, and the privilege of leading the staff, deacons and congregation at Zion Baptist Church in “Taking Jesus as He is to people as they are, becoming the permanent solution for the pain of sin” removes all limits to what can be done in a local church. To all I am thankful; your presence in my life makes this project possible.

I’m amazed that, out of all the men in the world, God chose me to be “Daddy” to Emily and Katie. Your laughter loosens the pressure of life. Thank you for going on the journey with me. I love you both…meet me on the beach…with lots of lotion of course.

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ABSTRACT

CREATIVE PREACHING: USING MULTISENSORY PREACHING TO CONNECT THE WORD OF GOD WITH THE 21ST CENTURY

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The purpose of this project is to identify the benefits of creative preaching for the purpose of connecting the 21st century to the Word of God. The project will reveal the media reformation that brought about a cultural shift from hearing words to seeing words. By examining the scriptures, the reader will discover that creative preaching through multiple sensory inputs is not a new idea. Finally, research-based practical advice and transitional resources will be given to help today’s preachers creatively connect the Word of God with the 21st century.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Project

The past forty years have been witness to a revolution in technology and information systems. Today, communication is instant. It travels in digital form throughout a wide variety of media. Communication has shifted from passive to active - no longer is the path linear from talker to hearer. The pattern is best defined by active media whereby experiencing the communication is as important as the communication itself. Forty years ago audiences viewed communication as the use of telephones for one-to-one communication and the occasional use of television and film as entertainment devices. With the increase of technology and the dependence on it for communication, the shift has moved towards more interaction, increased expectation and a desire for speed and immediacy of feedback from the mediated source.

The author was trained primarily through a traditional expositional approach in communicating the timeless principles of God’s Word. Systematic theology, principles of Biblical hermeneutics, exegetical priority and an orderly presentation of a text from preacher to audience was deeply imbedded into his educational process. The above mentioned process provided a rich heritage of powerful communication style from the twentieth century foundation. However, as the author transitioned into the twenty-first century, a breakdown in the communication between preacher and audience was present.
This study is not intended to replace nor minimize the advantage of a homiletical style of expositional delivery of God’s Word. On the contrary, the basis of strong accurate Biblical interpretation is in deed more important in this post modern world than ever before. Introducing fresh creativity to preaching the timeless truths of God’s Word by embracing a multi-sensory approach to delivery will help bridge the gap between the preacher and the audience. The challenges of preaching the timeless truths of God’s Word in a culture with minimized attention spans and a growing cynicism for absolute truth will require a renewed focus on connecting the central truths of God’s Word with creative approaches. The author, while serving as pastor in a rural community with diminishing demographics, has experienced the influence of the twenty-first culture in the church from creative preaching that connects the Word of God with one or more of the five senses. The multi-sensory approach connects the truths of God’s Word to the senses of a person producing short term stimuli and long term obedience.

For years we have known that a message experienced is more powerful than the words simply spoken. If the intent is for the message to be retained and learned, the experiences must be made ‘real’ to the listener. The more abstract the media (i.e. printed words on paper or hearing words), the more difficult it is for people in the twenty-first century to engage in the experience. The best means to get a message across is by the use of direct and concrete experiences. However, research shows that if an individual can become an observer of a mediated event, this experience would be more profitable than simply hearing or listening to a description of the event.¹ This concept is not new and has been manipulated for various purposes (some perverse) throughout the centuries. We

have now moved into the twenty-first century where this phenomenon is known as “experience commerce.” The culture longs to interact with its communications and the communicator. The culture has shifted from linear to non-linear, one-way communication to a multi-sensory based communication. What then encompasses multi-sensory communication?

Cultures use several communication systems to decipher and create messages. These systems are:

- Verbal – speech
- Written – symbols representing speech
- Numeric – numbers and number systems
- Pictorial – two-dimensional representations
- Artifactual – three-dimensional representations and objects, the ‘things’ used in living
- Audio – use of nonverbal sounds, and silence
- Kinetic – body motions, facial expressions, posture
- Optical – light and color
- Tactile – touch, the sense or ‘feel’
- Spatial – utilization of space
- Temporal – utilization of time
- Olfactory – taste and smell

These multi-sensory communication systems use signals and when communicating, the represented signals are used to ascertain the message’s meaning. The ability to interpret and successfully use these systems across cultures is the goal of any effective communicator. This fact has not gone unnoticed as several of the world’s most ruthless dictators have utilized the power of multi-sensory to influence people often for evil. Through sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell people have been enticed to do wrong. However, this technique of combining multiple sensory entrances for evil influence did not originate with man.

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In Genesis three, the serpent (Satan) combined the sense of sound, sight, touch, taste, and perhaps smells to tempt Eve to disobey God. It is no different today. People are influenced and can be ultimately deceived through multiple sensory entrances. However, we must also remember that God created all of our senses to experience Him fully and therefore it is imperative that we study the signal systems that make up multi-sensory communication to achieve this goal. Multi-sensory learning is the process of using as many of the senses as possible in the learning process. In short, multi-sensory communication is not a compromise or in violation to scriptures, rather it is a tool to connect people to Jesus Christ. One of the tools most often used in churches to accomplish this goal is preaching using the multi-sensory verbal communication system.

Most churches (preachers in particular) emphasize this signal system in the communication of most messages to its members. John A. Broadus stated “Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No other religion has made the regular and frequent assembling of groups of people, to hear religious instruction and exhortation, an integral part of divine worship”. Yet, while preaching (the speaking of the message) remains the most often means of communicating and is an integral part of today’s worship service, it is often sited as the most ineffective means of reaching the masses (or the captive audience that gathers on Sunday mornings). Studies have shown that church attendance is down. Hadaway and Marler reported that only “22 percent of Protestants and 26 percent of Roman Catholics in the USA are in church at least once a month.” These studies concluded that the decline is accelerating and that churches are “not speaking a language

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that makes sense to a culture asking spiritual questions.⁴ People rarely receive
information or communication in a linear fashion today except in church. Speaking or
communicating the gospel utilizing only one sensory entrance is foreign to the twenty-
first century culture.

Today’s masses interact with touch screen order menus, DVD’s, multiple channel
satellites and are multi-linked to the internet. They can participate live on line and can
interact with actors on the screen thereby allowing the communication process to be
shaped by the viewer.

Slaughter states:

> We live in a post-modern, post-Christian, post-literate world. The prefix “post”
> means after. The timing of our human experience comes after the age of
> modernity, Christendom and literacy but it is not yet something else. Post-
> modernity is an in-between time; a “not yet” time, or a hinge point in history. We
> stand between two different periods in God’s creative purposes. Modernity is
> over, but we don’t know what is coming next.⁵

It appears that, if we are going to effectively connect the timeless truths of Jesus
Christ with the rapidly changing culture, we will need to take the twenty-first century
perspective on multi-sensory communication.

While cultures may change, the core values and truth of God’s Word and the message
of Jesus Christ do not. Jesus was known as a master storyteller weaving His message
through the world around Him. In Troeger’s *Imagining a Sermon*, the author cites Jesus’
use of the events and things around Him as a source of revelation and a way of making
the message understood by the receiver. Troeger refers to the passage in Amos where the

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⁴ Kirk Hadaway and David Roozen, *Church and Denominational Growth* (Abingdon Press,
1993), quoted in Michael Slaughter, *Out On the Edge: A Wake-Up Call for Church Leaders on the

⁵ Ibid., 31.
Lord asks the prophet to look around him. The prophet rightly points out a plumb line and later a basket of summer fruit (Amos 7:8, 8:2). These objects are used to drive the message home. Interestingly, storytelling is one of the main methods used in today’s media to capture the attention of its audiences. From video games to reality games to movie sequels, the audience is compelled to watch and then engaged by the plot and identification (albeit vicariously experienced) with the major characters of the mediated event. However, is not that also the goal of a church’s worship service?

William Temple described worship as follows:

“To worship is to:
Quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,
Feed the mind with the truth of God,
Purge the imagination by the beauty of God.
Open the heart to the love of God.
Devote the will to the purpose of God.”

As a communicator of the gospel of Jesus Christ, this writer desires to influence people to live Christ-centered lives. The purpose of this thesis is to draw attention to the import of the multi-sensory worship experience to the twenty-first century church in hopes of increasing the reach and power of the body of Christ.

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Statement of the Problem

As stated in the introduction, the challenge of today’s pastors is to reach the masses without compromising the substance of the word of God. Graham Johnston describes the church listeners as moving targets. He also states “You can no longer assume, for example, that your regular church listeners subscribe to a Christian worldview.”

The methods of reaching church listeners have also changed over the centuries. Jesus used storytelling as His primary method of communicating and it continued throughout the first three centuries. After Christianity became the state religion under Constantine in the fourth century, the Bible although written down, was limited to only the religious hierarchy. The common man was illiterate and therefore still depended on the oral word as interpreted by the religious authority. However, he still had nature (being an agricultural culture and society), his objects, and the physical demands of life itself to connect and experience God’s truths. When the printing press was invented by Johannes Gutenberg (1440-1456), this allowed the Bible to be made more readily available to the masses. However, it also made God’s Word more abstract (use of written word). While the masses were still mostly illiterate, a shift did begin towards the abstract reasoning of the principles learned instead of the practical application of those principles. However, as long as society and the culture experienced turmoil and changes that reached into the homes of the masses (industrial revolution, slavery, civil and world wars, etc.) the masses could connect with the Gospel truths. It is only now in the electronic age, where the masses

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can experience their world with the click of a mouse or remote that the church is now facing the dilemma of how to reach the masses for Jesus Christ.

Many pastors also struggle with defining preaching for a post-modern generation. Remaining a linear systemic preacher might meet the needs of a segment of established church attendees. However, this pastor may be ignoring the communication revolution that has taken place from print to screen - from linear to non-linear. A dilemma for the twenty-first century preacher is how to find a balance between trying to please the “crowd” while establishing deeply entrenched traditions of polity and procedure. Should a pastor cater to the crowd or should he remain in church tradition? Morgenthaler states that for many, worship is “a market-driven activity, shaped and defined exclusively by the perceived desires of the progressive church going consumer. In these churches, worship in the 90’s [equals] whatever works, and what works on Sunday or Wednesday night is what fills the pews”.\(^\text{10}\) This perspective may be common among those who unwittingly take this approach believing an attitude of ‘anything goes’ will prevent the inevitable member exodus.

On the other hand, there are those who see any use of creative devices as ‘unholy’ or an attempt to upstage the leadership of the pulpit.

A typical transition for a pastor, preacher, or church leader into electronic media initially means continuing to compose sermons without brainstorming groups or electronic media input, then finally tacking on AV support to a completed message. . . .Unfortunately, many leaders never get beyond the first step because it means sharing responsibility of this creative process with others. It means forming creative teams. This is the second reason, giving up control of the most powerful icon of a pastor’s leadership, the pulpit. The problem is compounded in the

Protestant tradition because the sermon is the core element of the worship experience.\(^{11}\)

These two extremes describe the current state of worship in North American churches with the vast majority falling somewhat in the middle of this continuum. The problem addressed by this study is to determine what factors or characteristics are present in a multi-sensory worship experience that first honors God and increases the experience of the worshippers and ultimate retention of the message. Specifically, this study will address the following questions:

1. Why has the church and her pastors failed in understanding the electronic and technical reformation?

2. What factors contribute to pastors’ apprehension of creative approaches to preaching? Why are churches and pastors apprehensive in embracing the benefits of creative preaching?

3. What are the existing fears and or obstacles to creating a multi-sensory preaching experience? Negative perceptions?

4. What challenges face churches who want to shift from traditional worship to a multi-sensory worship service?

5. What type of strategy is needed to transition a church or pastor towards creating a multi-sensory preaching experience?

Multi-sensory worship is more than using Microsoft’s PowerPoint software so people can see a point on the big screen. Multi-sensory worship connects the truths of God’s Word to the senses of a person producing not only short term obedience but also stimulating long term adherence to God’s timeless truths.

Definition of Terms

*Transparency/Authenticity* – It is important that the preacher reflects truth concerning his own journey and struggles. This allows listeners to feel secure in bringing their own struggles to the process so they can identify with the words that are being communicated for life change.

*Allegiance to the Word of God* - multi-sensory preaching starts with the reality of God's Word which never changes. The goal is to connect the transient listener with the secure truths of God's Word.

*Cognitive* – This mental process revolves around the cognitions (mental representations of the world stored in a person’s mind). Activity in this area remains abstract because it cannot be seen. When individuals interact with God’s Word on a cognitive level only, there is no evidence that can be observed to indicate the *experience* of knowing Jesus Christ.

*Creativity* - God is creative. Therefore, preaching must reflect the creativity that goes into the planning, preparation and execution of a meaningful message. The goal must be to keep a fresh experience, not simply to add ‘bells and whistles’ for entertainment sake.

*Excellence* - Multi-sensory preaching strives towards excellence. To effectively preach in this manner, one must begin study with preparation believing that on the platform, all the proclaiming will be done for the glory of God. We glorify God by putting forth the best possible effort with the greatest amount of excellence that a person has to offer.

*Experience* - Multi-sensory preaching must go beyond the cognitive towards experiential learning infusing God's Holy Spirit. This will result in the stimulation of people’s hearts towards following Christ in all the actions and attitudes of their lives.
**Multi-sensory** – Multi-sensory is the process of connecting the text to a person’s five senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch).

**Relationships** - In the context of creating understanding there must be a relationship of trust between the preacher and the audience.

**Relevance** – While our first allegiance is given to the Word of God, multi-sensory preaching does use elements such as communicate in music, message, and methods to remain relevant to this contemporary culture.

**Simplicity** - Preaching is not more effective because the speaker uses complicated words in his communication. Preaching is most when the message is clear. Illustrations must reach the listener with clarity so that people can easily follow the message not only during the worship service but remember its points so they can courageously follow the message when they leave the church confines.

**Statement of Limitation**

Because the quest for technology and the personal attainment of that technology is more readily obtainable in the United States than any other nation, this study will only examine churches in the United States. In addition, this study will focus primarily on the role of preaching in the worship context. The process of song selection and implementation of music, announcements, prayers, ordinances and other worship elements all play a role in creating a multi-sensory worship experience. At times reference to a particular segment other than preaching will be given only to the point the reader can see the connection to creative preaching. Resources will be provided to help the reader in planning for a comprehensive multi-sensory worship
experience. Perhaps at a later date a study encompassing in detail all aspects of the worship service will be accomplished.

Cursory observation has concluded that very few churches provide multi-sensory worship experiences. Additionally, the literature on this subject is also limited given the quickened pace of technological advancements in society. This survey and potential interviews will be limited to churches connected to Southern Baptists and Liberty Fellowship Churches. While questions will be asked in reference to worship planning and helping the reader see how the entire worship service creates a multi-sensory experience, much attention will be directed towards the preaching portion of the worship service.

**Biblical Theological Base**

Multi-sensory preaching is not new; rather it was the style of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus taught His disciples and converted people using the following multiple sensory entrances:

1. **Tactile** – Woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9:20)
2. **Audio** – Wind in the storms – Silence (Mark 4:32-41)
3. **Olfactory** – Peter – Fish cooking on a coal fire (John 21:9)
4. **Artifactual** – Feeding of the 5,000 (Luke 9:14-17)
5. **Optical** – Multiple miracles (John 2:1-11)
6. **Multiple Senses** – The Last Supper (Mark 14:12-26)

The vast variety of parables taught by Jesus and the multi-sensory event of Pentecost (Acts 2) demonstrates this experience through optical and audio
communication. The communication style of Jesus was never intended to satisfy a knowledge base. He communicated to prompt action from His listeners. Multi-sensory communication invites the listener to live the experience through God given sensory outlets. Perhaps some of the strongest evidence of the continuation of this communication style is Pentecost (Acts 2).

Dr. James Dobson and Gary Bauer in their book *Children at Risk* state “just as the medium of communication that is multi-sensory has been used to influence for what is wrong, it can also be used to influence for what is right.”\(^\text{12}\) This can be illustrated by using the most common terms for our senses:

- **Smell** has a very lasting effect on the human mind and can be a strong memory enhancement when intersected with sharing of the gospel.
- **Sight** is perhaps the one sense used most often to learn about the world. Sight brings confidence and when sight becomes faith in the Lord Jesus, one’s faith is realized.
- **Touch** is often not used as much to communicate although there are more nerve endings in the hand than any other region of the body. Authentic experiences of the love of Christ can often be stimulated through the sense of touch.
- **Hearing** is what most people use to receive information. However, it is often confused with *listening* which is the ultimate goal because listening allows us to process and always receive God’s perspective in any matter.
- **Taste** represents a sense of vulnerability and intimacy. Taking the time to “break bread” was an important time in the Jewish calendar and also gives us one of the last pictures of Jesus with His disciples.

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Description of Methodology

The author will demonstrate the benefits of multi-sensory worship for impacting the culture with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This project will consist of seven distinct chapters covering the following topics:

1. Introduction
2. Current conditions of culture both in the church and with the unchurched.
3. Communication and media use as an applied science—producing benefits for creative preaching through a multi-sensory experience.
5. Cautions and concerns, avoiding pitfalls from using creativity to connect with culture without becoming a part of the culture. This chapter includes the results of a survey of preachers.
6. Transitioning and implementing creative preaching through multi-sensory experience for the twenty first century.
7. Conclusion.

The cultural landscape has changed drastically over the past twenty years. The church and her pastors continue to primarily communicate in a language that is no longer spoken by the culture. Effective preaching in the twenty-first century will need a missiologist approach. The pastor and church must re-learn the language of the culture. Leonard Sweet spoke the words of Voltaire in Len Wilson’s book, the Wired Church stating “If you want to speak with me, you must first learn my language.”

This study will identify the language of the culture and then build bridges for pastors and churches to clearly communicate the timeless truths of God’s Word for life change. To do this, the church

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must be like the sons of Isshachar (1 Chronicles 12:32 KJV) who had a clear understanding of the times knowing what Israel should do. Today, the church and pastors need to also understand the times in which we live and need to know how to speak the language of the people living in these times. In speaking the language of the people in the twenty-first century, the truths of God’s Word will not change. The apprehensions of some churches and pastors to preach with creativity or imagery that is in addition to the traditional linear systemic preaching style of the past century will be addressed. Caution will be given to the reader to keep the Word of God central to preaching, while embracing our God given gift of creativity to stimulate the senses in order to connect the Word of God to obedient lifestyle decisions.

In addition, the applied science of communication will establish a foundation for the benefits of multi-sensory communication. Biblical examples from the Old Testament, New Testament and the life of Christ will be given to establish the fact that creative preaching through multi-sensory experiences is not new to the twenty-first century, rather it was initiated by our great Creator, God.

Lastly, a plan for transitioning a church or pastor towards implementing creativity into the preaching experience will be shared with the reader. A resource guide will be presented to help further guide the churches and pastors towards stimulating their own creativity as leaders in their local church context. This study will be a comprehensive exploration of the approaches used by churches to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ (via the interpretation of the survey findings) and thereby demonstrating the importance of multi-sensory worship as a tested means of impacting people through video, drama, object lessons, movement, lighting, music, smell, and sound.
Review of Literature

Perhaps the most powerful and revealing discussion and research will identify how the Lord Jesus Christ utilized all the senses to impact people during His three year sphere of earthly influence and how his methods are not only biblically sound but are endorsed and supported by modern communication theory. Jesus created the five senses for a higher purpose. Our senses are spiritual points of entrance that help our cognitive processes work towards conclusions of truth. These concepts will be explored in the following areas of the literature review:

Literature on preaching – style, historical, scriptural, and expository premises. Warren W. Wiersbe’s book, *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination, the Quest for Biblical Ministry* provides a strong foundation for expanding the art of preaching beyond the mere expression of facts in order to reach the imaginative and creative design of each listener. Too often preaching becomes a mechanical left brain exercise. However, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, preaching in the twenty-first century can expand into the right side of the brain where images can be planted that create illustrations for lasting life change. Another author, Michael Duduit, editor for the *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* provides a book full of the wealth of knowledge of leading preachers from around the world. A variety of preaching methods are discussed, formulating a healthy recipe for substantive preaching in the twenty-first century. Donald K. Smith’s book *Creating Understanding, A Handbook for Christian Communication across Cultural Landscapes* establishes the point of needing more than the preacher’s voice to communicate God’s Word. Preaching, at its core is not about how much knowledge the preacher has. It is about his ability and desire to give to his listeners more than his
knowledge. He must give a message that connects to their very souls. The preacher must capture the heart of the listener compelling him not only towards the message but more importantly, to embrace and implement the message in his life.

**Literature on worship – definitions of, historical and current practices including perspectives on style and substances.** Sally Morgenthaler’s book, *Worship Evangelism* helps the reader discover and design new patterns for worship especially where unbelievers are invited into the presence of God. Morgenthaler is a tour guide through the dense jungle of worship philosophy and practice within the local church and provides a biblical compass that points towards a better understanding of worship in the context of winning people to Jesus Christ. Jack Hayford's book, *Worship His Majesty, How Praising the King of Kings will Change your Life* reshapes modern thought about worship. Hayford believes preaching is not a separate entity but an integral part of the whole worship experience. Seeing the flow and foundation of the entire worship service in a unified perspective helps connect the listener to the Word of God which will ultimately result in life change.

**Literature on communication, media and culture – theory, practice, application, and future trends.** Leonard Sweet’s book, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* paints a crystal clear picture of where the church has been and where it needs adjustments to impact people in the twenty-first century. Sweet’s book is a source of encouragement, revealing the condition of the culture while providing proactive steps to influence and impact the culture for evangelism. Another insightful perspective is Michael Slaughter’s book, *Out on the Edge A Wake-Up Call for Church Leaders on the Edge of the media Reformation*. Revolutionary and highly informative, Slaughter invites
the reader to see the shift in America’s information processing form reading resources to viewing their information. The post modern world is evolving from a culture dominated by one communicative modality to a multimedia standard of information processing using all available means of communication. Lastly, Jolyn P. Mitchell’s book *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching* reveals the current crisis that exists in preaching. The term itself, “preach” is now commonly known as negative religious jargon that hinders people from anticipating hearing something that will be invigorating, encouraging and life changing. Mitchell also helps the reader envision preaching beyond the verbal ‘talking head’ to the life pictures in which they can envision Jesus as an integral part.

Sources also include several dissertations, articles, and current web sites. This latter resource has almost, in itself, created a thirst for interactive communication on the internet. For example, in 1993 there were 55 web sites but in 2001, that figured rose to 25 million. As stated earlier in “*Visually Speaking,*” Mitchell asks a critical question for worship leaders today “How do you communicate orally and effectively in a society where a whole range of audiovisual stimuli competes for your audience’s attention?”14 Indeed the global culture is virtually unchallenged in its creative, technological, marketing and artistic know-how. This literature review will give a picture of the technological electronic media driven society in which our technological toddlers may soon redefine the very notion of life as we know it in this twenty-first century.

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CHAPTER TWO
CULTURAL SHIFT AND ITS IMPACT ON PREACHING

In Mark Buchanan’s book, *Your God is Too Safe*, he depicts the despondent life of a person caught between two worlds. On the border between Kenya and Uganda rests a little town, Busia. This little world wedged between two powerful countries will most likely not be among the vacation destinations at your local travel agents office. “Busia is not a place of crossing; it is actually a place of double crossing.”¹ You go through Uganda customs – and prior to entering into the country of Kenya, you must travel through “borderland – a no mans land, claimed and defended by neither country.”² Busia is the result of an ancient rift between the world according to Uganda and the world according to Kenya. This land has all the makings of a country - identifiable geographical territory - but is a place where the uncharted territory of what was and what is are unable to cohabitate. So, they exist under the banner of nothingness.

Borderland is a political and geographical reality. There are two borders that give you the sense that you are stuck in between the two countries while you walk through borderland. Yes, you have left one country but you have yet to enter the other. Buchanan poses this question. "Why would anyone choose to be stuck?” His answer is “because actually it’s safe. It’s familiar. It’s ground that can be staked out and marked off holding some things in and as well as keeping some things out. It may take endurance to live there, but not much else. It’s the endurance of inertia that requires no discipline yet falls into neat routines. It’s lawlessness - a chaotic and predictable borderland that might be dangerous. But, its predictability also makes it somehow safe.”³

¹ Mark Buchanan, *Your God is Too Safe* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), 19.
² Ibid., 20.
³ Ibid., 20.
The task of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century is much like the borderland between Uganda and Kenya. The post modern world represents the space we are in when we leave the modern age. Yet, the new age has yet to be identifiable. Therefore, we call this age, ‘post modern’. Seminaries understood in the last century how to prepare preachers to communicate the timeless truths of the Word of God for their generation. However, in this new post modern twenty-first century generation, the culture has shifted and the landscape of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ is no longer clearly marked. You might say we have left one country, or in other words - we have left the geography that needed a linear verbal communication navigational style. However, although we have left that familiar geography, we have yet to walk into and embrace the new communication style of nonlinear or multi-sensory communication. That has left us in Borderland - a space inhabited by those who do not understand the missions context in which the twenty-first century preacher now finds himself.

Pastors, as they communicate, can find themselves in Borderland. This is because they have graduated from seminaries and while understanding the challenges of preaching the gospel to this twenty-first century they are most often overwhelmed by the perception of the difficulties that may arise in attempting to surmount these challenges. (as will be seen in Chapter 5). It requires a new paradigm shift to embrace this generation and attempt to connect them to the Word of God. Instead of forging full force into this new territory, they remain in Borderland. To move out of Borderland and into the new territory, the concept of multi-sensory preaching utilizing the five senses needs to be embraced. This paradigm shift requires the pastor to garner enough courage to move
beyond the pulpit to communicate with people who receive their information from a nonlinear input such as television, the Internet and a potpourri of audio sounds from MP3 radios and CD players. Recently, a local pastor in this author's community labeled the use of multi-sensory preaching and the churches who sit under this preaching as “Churches-R-Us”. The criticism was that multi-sensory preaching actually promoted a consumer driven gospel. The idea is that churches who embrace a multi-sensory approach blend consumerism with superficial sentimental religion which ultimately causes a person to abandon his or her faith or denominational distinction. The pastor felt that churches who are incorporating technology into their worship services are stepping over the line. In essence, the critique concluded that when the body of Christ becomes the audience of the Sunday show, those who preach, preach a type of consumer driven theology that teaches seekers and believers alike. It is preaching that says that we can live in a worry free world on a cushion of material blessings that most of the world does not have. A lack of understanding of how to clearly communicate the gospel according to the Word of God to people in the twenty-first century culture is a large hurdle. In a later chapter, we will clearly identify the road less traveled. Recognizing the cultural shift is not done to create a consumer driven market for the church or a slick marketing opportunity for a Sunday show. Rather it is so that pastors across this country can connect with the cultural shift that is happening. They can understand communication as an applied science and the benefits of seeing how clear communication connects the listener with the subject, reflecting a Biblical basis that will show how both in the Old Testament and the New Testament a multi-sensory approach was given for communicating the Word of God to the culture of the day.

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4 Tom Roswick, Churches –R-Us, Clarion News, 9 August 2003, 9
Recently while watching television with my family, a stunning and energetic automobile commercial portrayed a young man driving throughout the coastal regions of highway five in control of a shiny exciting sport sedan. At the end of the commercial the words ‘This is not your father's Buick’ appeared on the screen. We are not living in a generation that looks like or drives like the generation that preceded us. Even attending church today you will quickly notice how the audio and video digital lighting screens have changed the’ look’ of the local church. Churches that care to impact the people around them are embracing the technologies of the new millennium and using them to spread the gospel of Christ. It has been said that the generation of children born after 1982 embrace technology the same way in which the previous generation embraced the radio or the printed page. Today's children have internet capable cell phones and their backpacks are stuffed with laptop computers, PDA’s, and MP3 players. Technology is used everywhere in our culture – computers, sound systems, audio and video systems are used in schools. Many cars are coming equipped with their own personal computer devices that give them instantaneous communication to hotels and restaurants and direct driving directions. Some of our own church members have questioned whether church leadership has become too prideful to ask for direction. If they would, then leadership would see the new and emerging technologies as a help rather than a hindrance so that the culture might be impacted with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This writer is concerned that many churches have looked at the postmodern culture as an enemy rather than a friend. Admittedly, it is difficult to lead and connect people to God while we are in this season of ambiguity. In understanding culture, one does not have to become a member of that culture and practice its mores, virtues and values. We
focus first on our role as missionologists studying the culture first as we strive to understand how to connect this generation to the truths of God's Word.

Leonard Sweet puts it succinctly, "the Dick and Jane world of my fifties childhood is over with, washed away by a tsunami of change. While the world is rethinking its entire cultural formation it is time to find new ways of being the church that are true to our postmodern context. It is time for a postmodern Reformation." Sweet has identified two key areas for reflection:

1. To consider that the church is home asleep and
2. that the church has chosen not to engage the cultural shift which has taken place in these most recent years.

Engaging the cultural shift does not require a magic formula to achieve the ‘future ideal’ - church growth through more baptisms, bigger buildings or larger budgets. Rather, the goal is to challenge one to see the cultural shift and reevaluate the privilege of preaching to a postmodern society. Sweet says "the seismic events that have happened in the aftermath of the postmodern earthquake have generated tidal waves that have created a whole new world out there." Culture is in transition. The twenty-first century transition has taken place. The transformational changes are no longer an option or merely suggestions. The birth of a whole new world with a whole new set of ways of doing church is quickly becoming a toddler.

As we embrace this new cultural mindset, Sweet suggests the church has a decision to make. As the cultural waters rise around the church, as the tidal wave of post modern

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5 Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 17.

6 Ibid., 17.
change floods the banks of American tradition the church can “hunker in a bunker”\(^7\) or venture out into the holy wilderness of a complex changing world with the intention of connecting people to the great God of the universe, no response to the post modern cultural change is not an option. Sweet offers several options: "The first and by far most prevalent response to the tidal wave is denial or the ‘not noticing syndrome’; the second response to the tidal wave is to say that it has not hit yet. People say it is a tidal wave, it really is. I can smell the storm in the air. I can see the rain clouds coming; I can feel it in my bones. I am out of here. Shields up; the third response is the focus Sweet encouraged. ‘Hoist the sails - catch God's wave’."\(^8\) The church unfortunately has little understanding of how to connect with our culture.

The author serves as the chaplain for Clarion University’s football team. After teaching a Bible lesson from the book of Esther, several of the young athletes asked if that story was really in the Bible. We live in an age where we cannot assume that our hearers have a clear understanding of the Biblical stories that the church holds dear and common. I agree with Thomas H. Troeger in his book *Imagining a Sermon*. "The whole theological frame of reference, concretely expressed in Scripture that once provided the coherence for Western culture and imagination no longer exists."\(^9\) The rich use of Biblical illustrations which earlier generations of preachers employed to give their sermons a holy resonance is no longer available. There is a burden now on the preacher to carry the weight of the scriptural witness without help from the culture. There is an enormous gap between the gospel and the culture. The incessant tide of images, fads and

\(^7\) Ibid., 20.
\(^8\) Ibid., 18-21.
fashion threatens to wash away the church witness. Into this context, the modern preacher of the gospel must determine to set sail with the power of the Holy Spirit, helping new tribes, and people groups of the twenty-first century connect with the Word of God. To isolate the church out of fear and insulate her methodology by embracing a "just gimme’ that old-time religion” attitude will leave the culture impoverished and destined for a Christless eternity. The previous generation examined the written and spoken word as a truth standard in which days were lived and futures formed. However, the church no longer stands on common ground with the culture. The author believes a primary reason for pastoral burnout is not the physical or mental work of the pastor but rather the emotional strain of conveying the God's Word to a generation that does not use the spoken and written word in the traditional sense. Troeger speaks of this frustration by posing the question “What are words? We do not cut, carve or even write them. We process them. Words have become blips on the screen that vanish into blackness when the power is shut off. Words are the jingle that accompanies the commercial words in a 15 second sound bite from a political candidate on the evening news.”

Bob Record, the president of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention writes a column entitled Answering His Call. He asked a provocative (and perhaps rhetorical) question - “Is Hollywood Today's Mars Hill.” The disciples in John, Chapter 21 had hid themselves for fear of the Jews and fear of the culture in which they found themselves called to reach. Now, understandably the culture had turned drastically against Christ. The stench of the crucifixion lingered in the air. So, the disciples gathered themselves in an upper room where they locked the door, because of

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10 Ibid., 43.

11 Bob Record, On Mission Magazine (Atlanta, Georgia: May/June 2003), 44.
their fear of the culture. Today, many churches on Sunday mornings represent that picture as they have locked and insulated themselves from society. The apostle Paul in Acts, Chapter 17 visited the Areopagos (what we call Mars Hill) where the leading shapers of culture were gathered. Record compares the cultural elite of Mars Hill with the cultural elite of Hollywood. Interestingly, the Apostle Paul did not avoid the elite, but invaded their cultural dynamic with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He involved himself for the express purpose of connecting the Word of God to this specific cultural dynamic. "Paul seized the opportunity to tell them more of the gospel. He did not insult his listeners. But he was direct; he saw a need to influence the ‘movers and shakers’ of Athens with the gospel of Jesus Christ and saw that there was no one else to do it. Paul took on the task."12

Now, oftentimes, these ‘movers and shakers’ are often uninfluenced by the church. Record commented on this phenomenon by asking, "Is Hollywood, a daunting mission field?” The answer is a resounding “Yes” – and so are the other purveyors of culture: print and broadcast media, our national and local politicians, the education establishment, top leaders in business and industry, and many more. We must reach them with God's help. Some would say it would be easier to curse the darkness than to shine the light. The result could only be that studio heads or directors could become Christ followers?"13

Because the relationship between the church and the cultural gatekeepers seems to be between spiritual and carnal, any attempt to communicate using the tools and technology of the gatekeeper’s trade is seen as unspiritual and even unscriptural. The cultural gatekeepers understand that people today long to be part of an experience that goes

12 Ibid., 44.

13 Ibid., 44.
beyond the cognitive norm. Even television programming has made the shift noting that television viewers are no longer willing to simply watch television shows. They now desire to participate and to become a part out the story line by use of the Internet. Viewers at home are invited to vote for particular contestants or to choose which actor or actors giving them power over their choices.

As mentioned earlier, multi-sensory programming has negatively influenced our children. But just as this multi-sensory medium of communication has been used to influence for what is wrong, they can also be used to influence for what is right.

When President Bill Clinton was running for reelection, he agreed to become a guest on the popular American show that targets audiences ages 35 and younger – MTV, also known as music television.\textsuperscript{14} The president recognized the influence of this leading multi-sensory program as being one of the greatest influencers of our day. His reason for attending and participating was pure strategic reasoning. President Clinton understood that people today generally have short attention spans. A short attention span does not mean that people have become less intellectual. It does mean however, that our ability to stay focused on one particular item at one particular time has lessened. Today's culture wants its information in a relevant, real time fashion. President Clinton’s strategy was to use a medium and program (MTV) that did exactly that. This explains the shift from people obtaining their news source from printed newspapers to now obtaining their news from Internet television cable companies, satellite and radio.

Pastors must negotiate the different cultural landscapes as they move from one church to the other. Not only is there a cultural dynamic at work within the church but also one

\textsuperscript{14} This concept of \textit{watching} music is a phenomenon began almost twenty years ago as the television industry realized young people no longer just \textit{listen} to music. They want to \textit{watch} the music and thereby raise the multi-sensory experience to a new level.
within the community in which they live and the region in which they serve. Defining the relationship between culture and Christianity is not an easy task. After the 11 September terrorist attacks, the perception was that our culture embraced the God of the Bible. However, recently, that same culture that called upon all Americans to pray in the face of evil, stood silent as a federal judge ordered the removal of The Ten Commandments from the Alabama Supreme Court House.15 Looking cautiously (and at times critically) at culture is to examine, who we are individually while realizing that all people are part of the same cultural dynamic in which they live. Although the culture of following Christ and the culture of the world are in opposition to the one other, Mark Chapter 16, requires us to clearly communicate the Word of God to everyone. We are responsible because God desires that not one man or one woman miss out on His redemptive plan, through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2).

This postmodern world also stands in opposition to the message of God. Our society does not appear to desire to know and to believe the eternal truths that will set a man free. The gospel is clear: "The preaching of the cross to those who are lost is foolishness, but to us who believe it is the power of God"(1 Corinthians 1:18). Sally Morgenthaler included this quote from an audio tape of John Smith in her bestseller, Worship Evangelism "the principle of incarnation is to acculturate the truth into the vernacular of a broken world."16 Today’s language that is disconnected from personal experience has little or no meaning for this very reason. The language of God's love was sent in the form of a human soul to every man and woman born. God took the initiative in approaching the culture dynamic. God adjusted by coming to us, "God commended His love towards

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us, in fact, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). And today, many church leaders, and denominations have done the complete opposite. We have failed to model God's plan of taking the initiative in approaching the culture. We expect people to leave the twenty-first century in order to attend our nineteenth and twentieth century worship services. Unfortunately, today the church has lost cultural relevance and authority because her message no longer answers the questions our society is asking. Even when the church attempts to venture into the twenty-first century it uses the language of linear presentations that fall short of today's cultural listener. It is a mistake to believe that that this culture is not “ripe for the harvest.” They are ripe and ready – profusely bleeding from the wounds of their cultural dynamic. Pastors often find themselves in quite a different scenario than their seminary training had prepared them. The struggle for many pastors is to accept, assimilate and accommodate this dynamic. Instead they accuse the culture dynamic of not doing things right. It is important that the Pastor understand that embracing the cultural dynamic does not infringe upon the direct preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Instead, the result will be a deeper understanding of the will of God as this generation sees His Word as a sign of love. Most seminary education is primarily focused on the cognitive development of its students. Pastors are often are unprepared for the emotional demands and cultural adjustments. They can become blindsided by periods of depression and emotional exhaustion. The challenge of exporting a denominational or seminary value and imposing the Christian worldview onto this generation has left the church anemic and often disconnected with culture as a whole.
In later chapters, we discuss the Biblical basis for multi-sensory preaching, however, it is important to understand that we need to ask God to correct a pastoral mindset that does not center on Him less the gospel continue to be perpetuated according to our finite understanding and cognitive abilities. The apostle Paul followed after this example as we learn in Philippians Chapter 2, verse 7 which states that Jesus Christ came as "the form of the servant." In other words, the incarnation of the ministry of Jesus Christ was that He left His cultural dynamic as God, in heaven and was fashioned and formed as a man for our culture. He did this so that it could not be said that we have a high priest who is unable to feel as we feel. Today we are able to connect people with Jesus Christ in a multi-sensory manner modeling the intent of the incarnation of Jesus’ presence when He was here on Earth. We can follow this example in our preaching approach just as Paul followed Jesus’ example in I Corinthians 9:20-22

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

Paul identifies with believers of all cultures - both Gentiles and Jews and is able to discern such conscionable issues at stake such as the Corinthians cultural practices of the eating of meat sacrificed for idols. Like Paul, we should seek to respect and accept the cultural diversity in which we find ourselves in every way that does not violate scripture. We must, as pastors, be moved to have an incarnation of all ministries where people can experience the Word of God in such a way that they truly know the Word of God. If we do not then we could become guilty of violating the call upon us to impart the blessed
truths into the cultural content context by which we find ourselves born into. All multisensory preaching is an expression of the love for the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself so that all men and all women might hear the good news in every generation as we take the love of Jesus and His Word to people just as they are.

The author understands the ambivalence that many will feel towards these ideas. Yes, we are called to live in the world but not to be a part of the world. We live in the world and must be aware of the cultural shifts yet we are called to become identifiable as Christians. We must be used by God to change the culture around us even as the contemporary postmodern society promotes moral relativism; it is not enough to condemn the culture. We must combat the societal values with a strategy that connects them to the Word of God which changes the hearts of men and women. Rex M. Rogers, the president of Cornerstone University, said

"This is the ‘in the world not of the world tension.’ We must learn to live with this tension in order for Christians to fulfill God's command to be salt and light in the world, we must learn God's Word, learn about God's world, and then apply the Word to the world. Spiritual discernment, developed within us by the Holy Spirit, enables us to clearly define and differentiate truth from error. Christian spiritual discernment is based upon the Bible, which is written for all times, countries and cultures. The Bible is forever relevant and includes God's moral absolutes – His unchanging principles defining right and wrong. If Christians are going to fulfill their cultural mandate and great commission responsibility, they must understand contemporary culture in their countries and mission fields. In North America for example, we need to know how postmodern culture is influencing us and then we need to develop our ability to influence it. Postmodern culture may be ‘current’ but like all other periods of history that have gone before it postmodern culture can and will change too. The question is how will it change? And will Christians be faithful sharing biblical truth in this time? Christians are too often confused when they should be confident - not triumphant or arrogant, but confident. Redeeming culture not fearing culture or cultural change is and should be the Christians modus operandi."

In Chapter 3 we will discuss in detail the benefits of communication and examine communication as an applied art and science. However, as we look at the culture dynamic, we need to have a clear understanding of the utilization of multi-sensory preaching. The idea is not to become clever and cute to the point where polish, production and performance impress people to respond to the gospel. Rather we embrace the fundamental purpose of communication which is to aid understanding. The preacher of the twenty-first century must take time to assimilate the imagery and reality of this culture through connection to the Word of God. Initially, it may seem like a journey to an unfamiliar place which can bring frustration and confusion to the traveler. However, as the road is traveled more frequently it becomes clear that ‘truth,’ shared through a range of clearly communicated multi-sensory messages, will enhance the listener’s ability to connect with the truth. This is what Donald Smith proposed in his book, *Creating Understanding: A Handbook for Christian Communication across Cultural Landscapes*.

"Understanding is the purpose of communicating. Communication tries to build a commonness of understanding without manipulating a person into artificial agreement. Agreement may not result in genuine understanding; genuine understanding may lead to total and perhaps violent rejection. What the message recipient does with the new understanding is his or her decision and responsibility. It is the communicator’s obligation to create understanding of a message, nothing more and nothing less. Too frequently we are satisfied with some behavioral response as proof that ‘God is at work’. We aim for the wrong thing and consequently use the wrong methods – methods appropriate for that wrong goal but not suited to the goal of achieving understanding of God’s message."\(^{18}\)

The pressure is simply that as we have looked to an immediate response within the dynamic of a worship service or preaching environment. We look for a man or woman walking to an altar to make a decision as our sole source of affirmation. Multiple

thousands have made public affirmations within the walls of our local churches yet our
culture continues to grow more displaced from God than any other time in the history of
North America. Perhaps the reason for this as what Donald Smith alluded to. Is it that
we do not have a clear understanding of who our Guide is and what His design for our
lives has truly been but rather we have constructed an environment whereby people learn
what to say, what to wear, what to do but they do not know how to walk out into the
cultural dynamic that has rejected God and the Holy Scriptures? Communication is more
the transfer of information from one person to another. God, the person, wants the culture
to be impacted by His Word. Paul says that a person who is connected to the Lord Jesus
Christ becomes a new creature. We have not understood the full import of
‘communication’ in declaring the gospel. Communication has not fully occurred until
both communicator and recipient have been apprehended by the gospel. They then must
embrace it in its entirety and move towards application.

The author agrees with Richard Jensen’s thoughts on communicating the gospel
story with today’s culture; “the rise of print through the invention of the printing press
gave shape to a new form of preaching. Gutenberg hermeneutics created Gutenberg
homiletics. Gutenberg homiletics is the linear massage of print to help create a linear
approach to the task of proclamation. Those characteristics are as follows:

1. The goal of preaching is to teach lessons from the text.
2. In order to teach the lessons or meaning of the text, the points to be made are
   usually abstracted from the text.
3. the sermon is aimed primarily at the hearers mind
4. the sermon is developed in a logical sequential and linear manner
5. the sermon is prepared under the criteria for written material
6. The faith engendered in the hearer is “faith” that the ideas are true”.

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Many seminaries continue to use this model. The author who attended Bible College and seminary more than a decade ago was trained under the above mentioned theory of practice. Jensen, who has taught students using the afore-mentioned techniques, recently re-entered the world of practitioner as a communicator. Jensen found the culture has greatly shifted, sighting three distinct eras in of proclamation: “first an era of oral communication; second era began with writing and continue with print; and the third era of electronic communication which is now coming to birth. The uniqueness of our generation is that we are living on the forefront of a shift from one communication era to another. We are living in the boundary between the print era and the electronic era.”20

These are revolutionary times. The transformational power of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ has not lost its ability to influence cultural. However, the astute communicator in every generation has studied the culture not to be influenced by the culture rather to influence contemporary culture with the timeless truths of God’s Word. Today we must seriously re-think how we communicate with the culture. We do not gather a crowd to offer a message that will appease the pagan desires of mankind. The cultural shift requires we re-investigate preaching in our time.

This is the tension that also explains why we must understand the importance and the validation of communication as a science and how to interact with that science. This is the impetus behind using creative multi-sensory entrances into the lives of men and women. When we begin to reflect that prior to the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg communication was primarily oral and then radically shifted to print, we begin to understand the seismic tremors we feel now as we move from print to electronics. Replacing words on a page with words on a screen does not lose the validity of the

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20 Ibid., 8.
thought or truth behind those words. What we are doing now is using other sensory entrances to support and highlight the validation of God's Word knowing it is eternal and transferable to all generations. God's Word says that nothing shall be able to destroy the commonality of Jesus as God in the flesh as we understand that He was both created before the foundation of the earth, as well as He is in the Spirit. Therefore Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. We do not violate our allegiance to theology by embracing a methodology that corresponds with the cultural dynamic in which we now find ourselves.

One of today's leading actors, Mel Gibson, (commenting about his film depicting the crucifixion entitled, *The Passion*) was quoted in *Out Reach* magazine. "Jesus died for all mankind. He suffered for all of us. It is time to get back to the basic message. The world has gone nuts. We could use a little more love, faith, hope and forgiveness."  

We live in a culture that promotes relativism, individualism, and pluralism yet still finds the need to insert their story into a grand story that is larger than their own. People today want to be a part of a grand story of epic proportions. That is why people want to be part of a national football league game. As they sit in their seats after paying several hundred dollars and sometimes sitting in rain and snow to cheer on athletes that they do not know by name, they are buying into the idea that they are a part of a movement that is larger than them. They are inserting their story into the great and grand adventure which is the passion of this twenty-first century society. Multi-sensory preaching can also take people into the passion of the resurrection in the same manner. We can connect them with more than cognitive understanding by helping them place themselves within this story for ultimate life change.

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The recognition of this culture is not of itself immoral. The Bible does not condemn human culture altogether even though the culture often violates God's Word. We may say that God deeply loved the world. Or, you might understand the passage to say that God loved the culture and inserted His Son into the midst of the culture dynamic of humanity. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ was given to the culture so it could experience how wonderful God is. Jesus often addressed and confronted the cultural mores of the masses He encountered. However, His greatest messages were directed toward the hypocrisy practiced by the Pharisees who refused to effectively (for the kingdom) engage their own culture. As Jesus brought forth a Cultural Revolution preaching that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” they were unable to make the required paradigm shift. The Word of God does not take place in a cultural vacuum. The preacher must understand the cultural context and its relevance similar to the way Jesus understood the culture in which he lived more than 2000 years ago. A mandate for multisensory preaching was set forth in a project by Su Kim Young stating

"The Christian minister must be faithful to the Bible but at the same time present the message in a relevant context. Leighton Ford says ‘the gospel of Jesus Christ should be translated, though of must not be transformed. While we must be careful not to embrace sinful and corrupt aspects of our culture, we need to engage ourselves in conversing with our culture more actively in order to promote the name of our Lord Jesus more effectively. Evangelical Christians do not need to be afraid of the word contextualization. Contextualization does not have to end up with syncretism if its goal is clearly defined.’"\(^{22}\)

Yung went on to discuss the need for cultural contextualization by quoting Dean Gilliland,

"The goal is to enable, insofar as is humanly possible an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in the each and every

\(^{22}\) Jae Kee Lee, *Leadership Characteristics of the Apostle Paul that can provide Model to Today’s BBFK Pastors* (Liberty University, Lynchburg, Va., August 2003), 111f.
human situation. Contextualization means that the Word must dwell among all families of humankind today as truly as Jesus lived amongst his own can. The gospel is good news when it provides answers for a particular people living in a particular place at a particular time. This means that the world view of people provides a framework for communication. The questions and needs of the people guide the emphasis of the message and the cultural gifts of people become the medium of expression.23

The issue of cultural relevance is important to the preacher and the twenty-first century soul he is trying to reach. The message must communicate that Christ did not come to condemn the culture but rather Christ to redeem it. Too often today's pastors present a negative proclamation, rather than a positive one. Multi-sensory preaching can help the preacher focus on declaring what is positive, loving and affirming from God's Word. When taking an experiential path, the human responds with greater allegiance to those affirming experiences rather than those demeaning and negative experiences. Dealing with the vast amount of changes in culture today often creates a negative response from the preacher as he attempts to make sense out of all that has taken place in this society over recent history. While change is not new, It is important to understand that with technology, culture is now changing at a much more rapid pace. Understanding the speed of this change and accepting this paradigm shift helps the Pastor become more proactive in declaring the timeless truths of God's Word. As Dr. Elmer Towns has taught this author, "Methods are many, principles are a few. Methods may change, but principles never do." 24

This concept of changing methods in order to study today’s culture might seem to be in opposition to theological training. I understand in order to spot a counterfeit dollar bill that bank tellers spend their time not handling false currency, but rather handling real

23 Ibid., 112.

24 Elmer Towns, (Liberty University, June 26, 2002).
currency. As well, it might seem inappropriate to devote so much time to understanding the culture dynamic of this twenty-first century because of its counterfeit nature. However, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is an example of how God himself inserted himself into the culture. Jesus became relevant so that any and all excuses would be removed from accepting Him as our Savior. Jesus inserted himself into the culture dynamic so that the soul that appreciates it could be delivered to God, the Father. John 1:14 clearly states that Jesus came and lived amongst the culture and His greatest admonition was reserved not against the cultural practices of the day, but to the religious heresy present in the culture. Hebrews 11, (which is known as the chapter of faith) reveals the tremendous influence godly consecrated men and women made within their cultural dynamic. Hebrews 11:13 (KJV) clearly says “that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Yet, because their names are mentioned in Hebrews Chapter 11 clearly marks the influence they made in the culture of their day signifying their tremendous faith.

The gospel reveals that Jesus Christ was involved in many cultural activities. Jesus attended weddings (John 2:1-12). He had dinner with groups of different social and economic status in the community (Matthew 9:9-13, Luke 7:36-50). He openly conversed with people as they were busy going about their daily activities (John 4, Luke 19). Jesus also instructed His disciples to take the good news and spread it amongst all of the people groups (Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8). In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes the command to influence the culture by reminding his disciples that they are to be the “salt of the earth and the light of the world”. Matthew five from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible says:
Matthew 5:13-16 (MsgB) Let me tell you why you are here. You are here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. [14] Here's another way to put it: You are here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We are going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. [15] If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I am going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I am putting you on a light stand. [16] Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.  

Furthermore the scriptures reveal the apostle Paul also believed he could best influence people for the gospel by understanding the workings of his culture:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. [20] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. [21] To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. [23] I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Cor. 9:19-23 (NIV)

Paul reveals that he connected with people in their cultural context for the purpose of influencing them towards Christ (1 Cor 2:23). Paul was willing to adapt to the culture and practices of the people he was attempting to reach. It mattered not who they were as long as He could win them for Christ. The test of Paul's relevance to the culture is seen in Corinthians, Chapter 17. The culture dynamic of that day is similar to the twenty-first century culture. No one argued if there was a God - the question then (and now) was, which was the true God? Paul responded by first recognizing their cultural perspective in the belief of the multiplicity of gods. They even had one god who was anonymous and remained nameless. However Paul did not engage with the culture to argue concepts on

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an intellectual plane or attempt to fit in and be identified with the “Ivy Leaguers” of his
day. He engaged the culture so that all could connect and understand the truths of God
through their culture dynamic perspectives – the world in which they lived.

Today, multi-sensory preaching attempts to reach people in the same way that Paul
did – by embracing a creative approach to preaching not in order to entertain men but to
earn the right to be heard. These are souls that the communicator can link to the truths of
God. Paul carefully observed the culture around him and looked for points of entrance -
all for the purpose of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ.
In the twenty-first century, media and its effects greatly influence our culture. The connecting of God’s Word to this culture is also the challenge for preachers in this century. In the book *The Hip Hop Generation*, the author relates how 30 years ago culture was transmitted through the institutions of the family and church.1 Today, youth are influenced by media, music and fashion. These are the institutions that provide the cultural backdrop and immersion of cultural norms within society today. This section examines the field of communication and how leading theorists in this discipline analyze trends that not only affect our culture but also God’s church.

Communication may be defined as the sharing of a message between a sender and receiver through a channel. This definition assumes there is a relationship between the sender and receiver thereby emphasizing the Latin root of the word, *communis*, meaning “to share or partake.” It is from this root that we derive words such as *community*, *communion and commune*. Communication differs from the act of talking in that communication assumes a more direct and purposeful intent. From this definition, the goal of communication is to produce an ‘effect’ thereby negating unproductive talk or other information conveyance that has no foreseeable end. “The effects of any

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communication are subject to the conditions under which the communication occurs: the receptivity of listeners, readers, or viewers as well as numerous other factors."¹

Communication also must occur within a context which provides clues to a message’s meaning.

Understanding the processes and effects of communication can be made clearer through the use of models. One of the first models used to explain the communication process is the *Shannon and Weaver Model* (*Figure 1*).²

![Shannon and Weaver Model](image)

**Figure 1** Shannon and Weaver Model

Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, researchers at Bell Laboratories during the 1940’s, developed a model to depict the variables involved when placing a telephone call. The information source transmits a message to the receiver that in turns conveys it to its final destination. In this case, the source would be the origination of the message (for example, the preacher’s thoughts) which would be sent via a transmitter (the preacher’s mouth if speaking the message) which is received (via hearing) to the final destination.

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² Ibid.
(the listener’s thoughts). This model introduces the concept of ‘noise’ which is defined as anything that interferes with the signal or message.

We can see from the model that the process is linear (i.e. one-way) and does not provide a means of feedback. This model assumes the information source has a dominant role and is responsible for formulating and sending the message. The destination (ultimately the listener on the other end) is passive and does not have opportunity to interact with the message. As well, the model seems to suggest that the originator has no responsibility or means to insure the message has been received as intended. Sadly, this model illustrates the communication pattern that many of our churches use. The communication (in many areas) is one-way from the pulpit. The congregation has little opportunity to process or interact with the message or decisions that emulate from the seat of authority (podium on Sunday mornings). This sense of control and power are exemplified in this model. The Shannon-Weaver model however was discarded with the advance of technology that has allowed for two-way interactive and transactional communication. The two-way and transactional nature of communication is demonstrated by the Osgood and Schramm Model of Communication (Figure 2)³ and the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) Transactional Model (Figure 3).⁴

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³ Ibid., 8.
⁴ Ibid., 9.
Osgood and Schramm emphasize the sharing of information between communicators and describe the process as circular with communicators almost simultaneously sending and receiving messages. This model demonstrates the acts of sending (encoding) and receiving (decoding) as separate from the interpretation of the message. This is important in understanding the process of communication as many preachers tend to assume that a message heard is a message understood. However, the continuous, circular process of communication allows for immediate feedback and subsequent readjustment of the message to insure its intended interpretation.
The OTA model looks at the micro analytical and macro analytical levels of communication. Each component in the model illustrates the analyses occurring on the micro (smaller) level as well as the macro (larger and more inclusive) level as the transactional and interdependencies of the process of message formulation, exchange and interpretation or illustrated. As in a business transaction where the goal is to move the communication forward until the transaction is completed, the OTA model demonstrates the same process and goal in communication. Each element in the process builds open the message until the desired goal is achieved. This latter model works in contexts where there are multiple receivers and multiple messages as it forces the message formulator to constantly reevaluate and refocus the message because of the interactivity of the exchange. This model more typifies the average worship service where on the micro level the preacher attempts to send a message to a congregation who may be listening, attending to their children’s needs or talking to a neighbor. On a macro level, it is in the spiritual domain (including the Holy Spirit who is trying to work in the mind [heart] of the listener and any other spirit that is attempting to distort or interfere with the message) that these factors must be considered.

**Media Effects**

In addition to models of the communication process, researchers have also depicted the effects that may occur as the result of media use. The Comstock Psychological Model (*Figure 4*)\(^5\) describes the various mental processes that occur while an individual watches television or other temporal media. This model purports that an individual’s

\(^{5}\) Ibid., 10.
behavior may be influenced by televised actions depending on the viewer’s perception of the reality and consequences of the viewed activity.

Figure 4  The Comstock Psychological Model

While this model may caution the reader about using mediated sources during church services to reinforce or enhance the message note that this model does not differentiate the type of viewed televised act. The literature on media use for instructional purposes is replete with studies that support this use (especially film) for illustrational and instructional purposes. One of the earliest studies of learning from films was conducted in 1919 when Lashley and Watson investigated the adaptation of World War I training films for civilian use. Recent studies by Kozma, Clark and Clark, et al have concluded that “the capabilities of a particular medium, in conjunction with methods that take advantage of these capabilities, interact with and influence the ways learners [substitute

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congregation] represent and process information.” In Dale’s Cone of Experiences, the individual in the audience (congregation) is a participant in the learning experience. The individual can be a participant in the actual experience (enactive), then move to being an observer of the actual event, to the observer of a mediated event (an event presented through some medium –

![Dale's Cone of Experiences](image)

Figure 5  Dale’s Cone of Experiences

[iconic]), and finally, observing symbols that represent an event (abstract). Dale contended that the individual makes use of more abstract activities (i.e. reading or hearing a lecture) only to the extent that they had built up a stock of more concrete

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experiences. Learning occurs from direct, purposeful experiences. The next most relevant experience is the observer of the mediated experience. It is in this level that the listener has the opportunity to share the experience without actual participation. This is the next best thing to a direct experience. As well, because we as humans learn from vicarious (observed) experiences,\(^9\) this is the level of communication that would best serve the preacher’s communication. The abstract level (i.e. use of words spoken or written) provides the least effective method to insure the message is understood as intended. It is at this level that several misinterpretations may be construed due to the lack of concreteness. Many spiritual concepts have little worldly counterparts. That was one reason Jesus taught in parables (stories) and used illustrations from the culture around Him. Warren Wiersbe in his book *Preaching and Teaching with Imaginations*, gives an example from 2 Samuel where Absalom turns to his counselor Ahithophel for advice on whether or not to pursue his father, David into the wilderness. Wiersbe contends that Ahithophel gives Absalom a classic left-brain (rational, linear - abstract) response.\(^{10}\) While some researchers are skeptical of using left-brain/right-brain psychology for analyzing modes of communication and cognitive processes, others have found an understanding of these ideas important for distinguishing between individuals who perceive the world in scientific terms (i.e. the scientific method) and those who take a more heuristic approach (i.e. the more speculative).

Science requires a “left-brained,” or rational, approach. Science places considerable emphasis on such issues as cause and effect analysis, empirical evaluation, logical progression, scientific and mathematical laws, and statistical significance; it involves rigorous demands for validity, reliability, and

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replicability in experimentation. It is highly, if not solely, cognitive. Leadership [my italics], on the other hand, is not a science; it is an art. Like most art forms, it is primarily a “right-brained” function. To be effective as a leader, one must be able to deal on the emotional as well as the cognitive level. The effective leader must be able to function in ambiguity, develop a personal style, recognize that no two situations are the same, respond effectively to conflict, and deal with diversity. The approach is highly experiential [my italics].

Along with this concept of a left brain approach, note also that the focus is on the sender (Shannon and Weaver model) and assumes the hearer has understood and will be persuaded to follow the directive given in the message (using words as abstract symbols of events). However, Absalom was not convinced. This type of reaction from our listeners occurs much more often then we would like to admit. The assumption is that the power and authority and the source and position (preacher in the pulpit) of the speaker is sufficient to motivate and insure that the receiver (listener-congregant) will follow the directive. However, as we know, after giving out the counsel of God’s Word, other advice/opinion is many times sought. Now, in the biblical account, David turns to another adviser, Hushai because “David had prayed that God would turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness (2 Samuel 15:31). This account reads:

The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time. You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops. Even now, he is hidden in a cave or some other place. If he should attack your troops first, whoever hears about it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.’” Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave. So I advise you: Let all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba – as numerous as the sand on the seashore – be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle. Then we will attack him wherever he may be found, and we will fall on him as dew settles on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. If he withdraws into a city,

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then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley until not even a piece of it can be found (2 Sam. 17:7-13)\textsuperscript{12}

Wiersbe further comments that Hushai’s advise speaks to the right side of the brain which specializes in things creative and unframed (as well as emotive and speculative) while the left side of the brain deals with logical and framed concepts (calculated).\textsuperscript{13} One can see his use of word pictures such as the following phrases utilizing metaphors and similes: ‘bear robbed of her cubs’, ‘heart is like the heart of a lion’, numerous as the sand on the seashore, and ‘fall on him as dew settles on the ground.’ While we have these word pictures to analyze, we do not have the picture of Hushai delivering the message. Did he draw pictures to illustrate his point? Did he use emotion in his delivery? Were non-verbals attended to (use of facial expression or hand motions)? Given the media (application and availability of modalities to communicate messages) of the time, the best means of communication was orally. This modality could only be maximized by the choice of words. So in this case, Hushai used iconic symbols (observation of the event) through word pictures. This approach appealed to the right side of Absalom’s brain and created a vivid image of the perceived victory. ‘Seeing the impending reward’ and the social approval that would accomplish the victory increased the motivation for Absalom to act in the desired manner. One of the major theories of persuasive communication states that “influence will be greatest when individuals can sense the possibility of personal rewards as well as the approval of those persons closest to them.”\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, messages that can help the listener believe that making certain choices will satisfy their

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Wiersbe, \textit{Preaching and Teaching}, 51.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, \textit{Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An introduction to theory and research} (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley, 1975).
\end{itemize}
greatest needs (in this application – receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior) as well as increase their influence among others (The Great Commission), will be more readily heard and accepted by the listener. Research would also suggest that the likelihood of acceptance will increase *if* the message is also targeted towards the right brain hemisphere *and* contains experiences in which the receiver (listener/congregant) can observe or participate. Now, is not that what our Lord, Jesus told us would happen if we but preach the Word?
CHAPTER FOUR
CREATIVE PREACHING ROOTED IN HOMILETICAL THEORY

Homiletics is the art of preaching. The homiletical branch of theology deals with the delivery of sermons. The preparation of sermons and the delivery of sermons through preaching is perhaps one of the most important responsibilities in a pastor’s life. Well-known author and preacher John MacArthur, Jr. put it this way “The faithful preaching of the Word is the most important element of pastoral ministry.” The study of homiletics seeks to prepare preachers to respond faithfully and effectively to the responsibility of preaching in their generation. Preaching is God’s ordained means to “save, sanctify and strengthen His Church”.

Although often overlooked in many seminaries, creative preaching using a multi-sensory approach is not new. It is as old as the Old and New Testaments. There is a false dichotomy in preaching methodologies that regards expositional preaching and creativity as mutually exclusive. The idea that using modern technological advances in a homiletical approach to preaching violates expositional exegesis of the text is

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1 The preparation of sermons is known as hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the Bible. The author assumes the reader is grounded in an inspired, infallible perspective of the scriptures that believes that the Canon of scripture consists of 66 books divided into two testaments, known as old and new. Creative preaching is rooted in a proper hermeneutical interpretation. Creativity in preaching and violation of biblical interpretations of the text will fail to connect the twenty-first century listener with the Word of God and ultimately cause the preacher to fail.


3 Ibid., 250.
unsubstantiated. Framing the homiletical debate between which style of preaching is best or how much modern technical creative advances may be used misses the point and is irrelevant to homiletical theory. By definition homiletics is an “art form”, and therefore the delivery of God’s Word by homiletical theory *should* have certain creative elements.

Homiletics simply rooted in a historical or traditional approach will fail to connect the timeless truths of God’s Word with the ever-changing culture in this contemporary world. A truer homiletic approach maintains allegiance to the scriptures while embracing creative, multi-sensory techniques to connect with the current cultural context. Creative preaching using multi-sensory entrances into the listener are an extension of the established homiletical approach to preaching.

Throughout history, great leaders have understood that they can impact their culture. These leaders had the ability to "read" the times and speak in such a way that life change for God was evident. In the Old Testament, the sons of Issachar were able to discern the needs of the culture and had the courage to implement plans that moved the nation forward. 1 Chronicles 12:32 (NIV) says the men of Issachar “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”

This approach is seen both in the Old and New Testaments. Beginning with the Old Testament and moving through the New Testament the author will demonstrate several instances from scripture where a creative, multi-sensory approach to homiletics was adopted to connect the God’s Word to the contemporary listener of that particular culture.
Old Testament Examples

Creation

The book of Genesis begins with a formless and empty dark universe (Genesis 1:2). As God begins to create the world, he uses the word "saw" many times to communicate the sense used to access the environment. In verse nine it states God "saw that it was good." As God saw what He was creating, He was pleased. The visible presence of God's creation brought pleasure to God, the Creator. In Chapter 1:31, God makes his final conclusion and says “that it was very good.” As we too are made in His image, our eyes also have the power to perceive pleasurable sights. Because we live in a visual world that has become magnified through the power of mediated communication, our eyes have become the primary entry point of communication in the twenty-first century. Today, “see and not read”\(^4\) is the way many North Americans receive their daily news. Media from print to computer screens has dominated our lives. Consider the fact that “99.9 percent of Americans have televisions while only 97 percent have plumbing.”\(^5\) We can see that the use of our eyes as sensory instruments to evaluate our surroundings began at Creation.

In Genesis, chapter two, God saw that no suitable helper was found for Adam (Genesis 2:20). After seeing evidence of Adam’s interaction with His environment (or culture) it was evident that Adam needed someone. The visual sight of Adam without a suitable helper prompted God to create woman as a companion for Adam. The reader can only imagine what Adam's response was upon waking up from the sleep that God had

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\(^5\) Ibid., 23.
brought in order to take the rib from his side and create woman. When Adam saw
woman, he said “this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called
the woman, for she was taken out of a man (Genesis 2:23). In essence, Adam saw
himself in Eve.

The same ability or need to ‘see’ was used by the devil for destructive purposes. Not
having the ability to create life, his energies were directed towards destroying life. God
saw what He had created and it brought pleasure. The devil saw what he was unable to
create making him less than God. Consequently, his pride and desire to become greater
than God became his greatest motivation for destroying God’s creation (Isaiah 14:12-14).
The very Word that God used for revealing His pleasure and creating the world the
adversary sought to corrupt it and use it as temptation to bring destruction. By
questioning God’s Word, the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food,
pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom. She took some, ate it and also
gave some to her husband who was with her (Genesis 3:6). The adversary used a multi-
sensory experience to tempt and thereby turned Adam and Eve from God's Word. This
same type of multi-sensory experience still has the power to either lead a person away
from God or towards Him. However, the twenty-first century preacher must understand
that using imagery to connect people to the Word of God it can also be a catalyst for
positive change.

The creation account brings to light what before was not seen. The creative process of
bringing God's Word into the light must be at the very core of twenty-first century
preaching. Too often, preachers fear rejection by the congregation. If they bring a
message through creative means, fear of how the congregation may react stifles
creativity. Chapter 5 addresses many of these concerns. One must remember that creativity starts with God and ends with God. Using creativity is our opportunity as the creation to give back to the Creator. In essence, the best way to glorify God is allowing His gift of creativity to work through us.

Moses

When God connected with Moses, prior to calling him and commissioning him to lead the children out of Egypt, God communicated with Moses. God, who possesses perfect communication skills, used a creative multi-sensory approach:

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. [2] And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. [4] And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. [5] And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Exodus 3:1-5 (KJV)

God used the sensory portals of sight, sound and even perhaps - smell to capture Moses’ attention. After Moses became captivated with the burning bush, his attention was directed towards God and therefore, he was prepared to hear God’s words. Moses first “saw” the bush burning, noticing that the bush was on fire but not consumed by the flames. The visual presence of fire, the sound of the fire consuming oxygen, perhaps even the smell of the fire propelled Moses towards the direction of the burning bush. Having been captivated by the visual, Moses was motivated to become attentive as God spoke. The command by God, “to put off thy shoes” allowed Moses to feel the vulnerability of being in God’s presence. Perhaps the heat from the fire on Moses’ skin
conveyed the awesome power that God possessed. Here in this Old Testament story, creative multi-sensory communication by God Himself connected His Word to one of the world’s greatest leaders.

Today, creative preaching using a multi-sensory\textsuperscript{6} approach will also capture the contemporary listener, preparing and priming him to hear the words of God. Much like Moses, until the listener is in a place where his attention is captured, he will not be prepared to listen to God. Southern Baptist churches and other churches are filled with thousands of people every weekend, but how many of them are captivated by the presence of a burning bush environment where they turn from their cluttered hectic life and truly encounter the presence of God? Creative preaching using a multi-sensory approach will help connect the timeless truths of God’s Word with today’s culture.

\textbf{Potters House}

Jeremiah, chapter 18 depicts the Word of the Lord coming to Jeremiah:

\begin{quote}
This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: [2] "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." [3] So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. [4] But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Jeremiah 18:1-4 (NIV)
\end{quote}

This Old Testament scripture is full of rich examples of multi-sensory entrances into the prophet’s life preparing Jeremiah to understand the God’s Word. The author finds it

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{6} The author means by multi-sensory an intentional communication approach to connect with the listener senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste) to captivate attention for conveying the Word of God. The use of multi-sensory or creative preaching for entertainment value, or to impress the audience does not fulfill the intention of creative preaching. Creative preaching uses multi-sensory media in order to connect the Word of God with the twenty-first century culture.
\end{footnote}
interesting that God uses a piece of modern technology (for that era) \(^7\) to communicate with Jeremiah. At the Potter’s house there is no mention of an exchange of words between Jeremiah and the Potter. The Potter’s “wheel” became the medium for God to capture Jeremiah’s attention. God says to Jeremiah:

> Then the word of the Lord came to me: [6] "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel." Jeremiah 18:5-6 (NIV)

Prior to this passage, a creative multi-sensory application preceded God’s message. Instead of simply “talking to Jeremiah” about the potter’s wheel, God directed Jeremiah to go to the potter’s house and observe the potter at work. One can picture Jeremiah standing in the shadow of the doorway, watching the craftsman at work. Jeremiah can see the clay in the potter’s hand and observes the clay yielding to the potter’s hands. Jeremiah can see the focus in the eye of the potter as he carefully inspects the pot only to discover there is a flaw. The process begins again as Jeremiah takes in the smell of the shop, the clay, the water, the sweat, the fire that has been prepared to complete the masterpiece. The sound of the potter’s wheel turning comes together stimulating all of Jeremiah’s senses.

Just as Jeremiah experienced, creative preaching, using multi-sensory applications moves the communication process beyond just talking about God’s Word. God’s Word begins to connect with the contemporary culture allowing for personal application. The author agrees with Jay Akkerman, who stated “by wedding sight with sound the

\(^7\) By modern the author refers to an appropriate tool in Jeremiah’s time for completing work or use in a personal hobby etc.
communicator broadens his preaching bandwidth.”

Art is creativity at work. God used the potter’s artistic work to motivate Jeremiah (through a multi-sensory approach) to speak truths about the house of Israel.

God connected through the technology of a potter’s wheel to teach the eternal truths of God’s Words. Today’s preachers may also utilize technology as a medium to connect people to God’s eternal truths. The strategies and examples of how to use modern technologies creating a fresh experience with God’s Word and people will be discussed in Chapter 6. Preaching in the twenty-first century must move beyond informing people about God Word, to transforming people through an experience with God’s Word.

New Testament Examples

The serious Bible student will discover quickly in the New Testament the tremendous creative and multi-sensory approach that Jesus used in connecting His words with the New Testament culture. The responsibility of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ takes us to the present times. The communicator must communicate the timeless truths of the God’s Word to today’s culture by knowing and studying the culture as they did in Paul’s time. This generation hears with their eyes.

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Examples from the Life of Christ

His Presence

In the New Testament, God preordained a specific time in history that Jesus Christ, His Son would be born.

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”. Galatians 4:4

God inserted His Son into the cultural dynamic for the purpose of connecting with the fallen humanity. As communicators, the task of connecting finite human beings with an infinite God is a challenging leadership endeavor. Cognitively, this task is impossible to conceive. To presuppose that a finite being can understand and articulate the infinite is preposterous. If a finite human being could understand and articulate all the truths and depths of the infinite creator God, the question becomes, who then, is God? Today, we understand and know who God is through the revelation of His work towards us. The task of connecting people in contemporary culture is no different than in the days in which Jesus and the disciples walked the earth.

When God put in place His plan to reconcile with His creation, he did not set in motion a cognitive plan but rather an experiential plan. Although we have the Word of God today to instruct and guide first and foremost, God sent His Son to the earth so that life would be experienced beyond a book. In John 1:14 (NIV) the text reads, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” God set in motion the salvation of the universe through His Son, the Lord Jesus. Jesus, being His own creation, became multi-sensory by taking on the form of a human. He too had the five senses of
sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. Knowing Christ is far more than a two-dimensional revelation although the church and preaching at times has limited Jesus Christ to this representation. Knowing Jesus Christ is a non-linear, three-dimensional experience.

John said in 1 John 1:1 (NIV)

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”

In Him, the early church was able to verify the very existence of which God was by hearing, seeing, and touching (and even smelling Him)⁹. Remember, the woman with the blood disease? All she needed that day was a “touch”. She had heard all the sermons and been to the religious rallies and functions. This woman needed to experience who Jesus was so she could be who God created her to be.

God communicates His passion to us through the presence of his Son, the Lord Jesus. Knowing Jesus is experiencing Jesus. Many people today suffer because they lack a relationship with Jesus Christ. Their cognitive understanding of who Jesus is has yet to measure up with their personal experience.

So how did Jesus prove that He was authentic? He did this by taking on human flesh, by becoming a man and letting people hear, see, look upon, and handle Him. John and the early believers heard the Son of God. The Son of God actually took on flesh and blood, became a man and spoke to men. Hebrews 2:14-15 (NIV)

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by His death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—[15] and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

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⁹ Note that the scripture also bids us to come “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trust in Him!” Psalm 34:8.
They heard Him teach and share the glorious news that God loves man that man can be delivered from sin and death and live forever with God. The twelve apostles and thousands of others not only heard about Him, they actually saw and heard Him proclaim the words of life. They heard Him deal with individuals and heard Him teach audiences of thousands. They themselves spoke to Him and heard Him speak to them. For three years John and the apostles and many others were in constant conversation with Him, listening and hanging on to every word He said.

People today need to see and experience Jesus in the same way. With every discipline or knowledge there is always a beginning point. John and the early believers looked upon the Son of God. This means more than just seeing Jesus Christ in a human body. The Greek word for “looked upon” (etheasametha) means to gaze and look upon for a long time in order to study, understand and grasp. It means to look intensely and earnestly; to grasp the meaning and significance of a person. John is testifying that he and the other apostles and believers looked and gazed upon Jesus Christ in order to

- study and understand Him
- seek and grasp the meaning and significance of His person.

A person will never see and understand who Christ is by just glancing at Him. If a person wants to know Christ, he has to look intensely and seriously; he has to seek to understand if Christ really is who John and other believers claim He is. Now the author sees another truth: Jesus Christ identified himself as a man and He gave men the opportunity to see Him and the life, which He was bringing to man. As covered in 1 John 1:1, men heard, saw, looked upon, and touched Christ. He made Himself available to men, allowed them to use all of their physical senses in order to prove that He was indeed
the Son of God, the very embodiment of life eternal. He allowed men to use all of their physical senses so they could have perfect proof and never have to question whether or not the Son of God had come to earth.

Note the testimony of John: “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:2). There is a compulsory edict here: the witnesses to the Son of God must proclaim the truth. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, has come to earth.

His Miracles

The miracles of Jesus present further insights into God’s creative approach using a multi-sensory experience to connect the culture with God’s Word. Christ’s first miracle of turning water into wine capitalizes on the sense of taste (John 2). One can imagine the astonishment of the host and his guests when they tasted the wine towards the end of the ceremony. Expecting the wine to be bitter and fermented from sitting in the heat, the wine was fresh pure and sweet to the taste. In another instance, the sense of touch is highlighted as Jesus heals a woman from a history of internal bleeding (Matthew 9). The experience of sight is also evident in all the miracles as Jesus interacts with what was broken and restores it to its original purpose. The most noteworthy visible miracle was the resurrection of Jesus’ friend, Lazarus.

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. [39] "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." [40] Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" [41] So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. [42] I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." [43] When he had said
this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" [44] The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." John 11:38-44 (NIV)

Two senses are used in this miracle. Most prevalent was the sense of smell. The sisters and others close to Lazarus were hesitant to open the tomb where Lazarus was buried because he had been dead four days. Knowing that the body would begin to decay they feared further embarrassment because they knew the stench of death. Coupled with the sight of Lazarus stepping out of the tomb still wrapped in his grave linens must of deepened Mary and Martha’s passion and excitement for Jesus as well as encouraged their faith.

On another occasion, the ferocious storms that whipped across the bow of the disciples’ boat spread fear among them all. Jesus spoke peace into the wind and immediately the seas were calm. The violent winds that sent laser sharp drops of water and perhaps hail across the bodies of the disciples was now gone. Instantly, the disciples through the creative miraculous presence of Jesus Christ experienced (through their senses) His power and provisions as God.

**The Last Supper**

The setting Jesus chose for His final instructions to the disciples was a dinner. While casually reclining in close proximity to one another during a meal, Jesus connects His words with the disciples. The sense of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste were all also employed to help the disciples listen to the instructions of God in the flesh prior to the crucifixion. The revelation that one of the disciples would betray Jesus Christ sent shock
waves through these men. Again, Jesus used as an example, a sensory portal - this time it was the sense of touch to reveal who would betray the Lord.

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." [22] His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. [23] One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. [24] Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." [25] Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" [26] Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. [27] As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him, "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him.” John 13:21-27 (NIV)

While viewing Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion of the Christ*, the author become even more aware of the multi-sensory event communion represents. Gibson’s creative use of cinematography to capture the flashback sequences permitted the viewers to more fully experience the rich symbolism and meaning of communion and later – the crucifixion.

**The Cross**

The cross bears the miracle of redemption as a symbol of the sinful nature of mankind. During the redemptive act of purchasing freedom by the shedding of His own blood, God preached perhaps the most multi-sensory and creative message of all time from the cross. If Jesus simply had to die, or if it was just that He had to die by bleeding to death, there were other ways that the substitutionary payment for sin could have been purchased. The use of the cross was a creative device conceived by God. The creative message, the multi-sensory message of the cross, impacted every sense given by God to man. It was as though God chose to connect with man through every sensory portal, revealing the depth and height of His love for mankind.
The cross communicates through sight, sound, smell, touch, and yes- even taste. Those who are redeemed see the cross as their point of entrance into God’s family. They see the image of the suffering Messiah paying their own penalty in their behalf. The crowd sees the darkness at noonday as God sends darkness over the earth. They sense the smell of the cross, the mixture of sweat, blood and human waste. The texture of the cross, the pain of the nails, the thorns is also experienced. The sound of men screaming in agony is heard as they push against their nail impaled feet pulling up on hands pierced with nails for one more breath of air. The gargling of fluids in the lungs, the raspy voice of Jesus as He speaks from the cross are also auditory sounds. When the sponge soaked in vinegar and wine is presented, the bitter taste is experienced. The vividness of the cross is the creative measure that God took to connect His love to mankind. Utilizing every sensory port to speak His Word into the lives of people in every generation, the twenty-first century preacher must not settle for any less of an example. Through every sense, the preacher must look for and even agonize over creative ways to connect the timeless truths of God’s Word with the culture that he is invariably attempting to reveal God’s Word.

**Examples from the Apostle Paul**

The Apostle Paul, one of the primary writers of the New Testament, reveals preaching as an essential delivery system of God’s Word to people. Paul commented:

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” 1 Cor. 1:21
The “foolishness of preaching” is neither the actions of a preacher nor the delivery of the message. God does not ask the preacher to be foolish in communicating His Word to the world. It is just the opposite. We are “to do all things as unto the Lord” (Colossians 3:23). The Apostle Paul calls for a regiment of study that “approves” (2 Timothy 2:15) that the communicator is fluent in his understanding and application of God’s Word.

Furthermore, Paul understood the importance of “connecting” with the culture:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 1 Cor. 9:20-22 (NIV)

Paul understood the massive highway system of delivery opportunities that was before him and the uniqueness of the times in which he was born. Remember that this man had been trained in a rigid, monotheistic culture with religious clichés proclaimed by the people rooted and established in religiosity. Only after Paul's encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ was he willing to make a paradigm shift so that he now saw the enormous responsibility given to him to connect his culture to Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul went on to say in I Corinthians 9:23, “I do all for the sake of the Gospel, that I might share in its blessings.”

The Apostle Paul used creative approaches and a multi-sensory approach to connecting the Word of God with the contemporary culture of the day. Even the French philosopher Voltaire, quoted in The Wired Church Making Media Ministry revealed his
understanding of the culture of his time by saying, “if you wish to speak with me, speak
my language.”10

The imagery in 1 Corinthians 9 connects the human experience of athletics to the role
of Christian discipleship.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?
Run in such a way as to get the prize. [25] Everyone who competes in the games
goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to
get a crown that will last forever. [26] Therefore I do not run like a man running
aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. [27] No, I beat my body and
make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be
disqualified for the prize. 1 Cor. 9:24-27 (NIV)

Paul paints a vivid picture of an athlete running the race to win emphasizing the need
for training and development before the race begins. The athlete does not waste his
energy or efforts on frivolous activity. That would be like a boxer who aimlessly throws
punches into the air. Paul seems to thrive on narrative preaching. He brings the listener
into an experience with Christ through the power of the story. Moving beyond stagnate
linear words of the mundane; Paul invites the listener to imagine the experience.

Pentecost

Perhaps one of the most powerful examples outside of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ
is found in Acts 2:1-11. Shortly after the ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:9), the
followers (120 men and women) of Jesus Christ assembled as Jesus had instructed them
in Jerusalem. These disciples had seen Jesus and had heard his words. They had
experienced Jesus through smell and touched Him through embrace and the multiple

10 Len Wilson, *The Wired Church Making Media Ministry* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon
Press, 1999).
meals that they shared together. Now Jesus was in heaven, fulfilling the plan of God the Father, to make intercession for His followers. The miracle of God's empowerment, through the presence of the Holy Spirit would equip this early church to connect the eternal truths of Jesus Christ to the contemporary culture. Less than two months after the ascension of Jesus when the day at Pentecost had fully come, his disciples gathered together. While gathered, their physical senses experienced the new presence and promise of God's Holy Spirit:

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Amazed-ed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Acts 2:2-13 NIV

Often overlooked but nonetheless powerful, this portion of God’s Word mentions the multi-sensory presence in the Pentecost experience of the early church. Notice how the early believers in Jesus Christ experienced the birth of the Holy Spirit within them. Through the wind they heard His presence and the felt His presence. They saw the physical presence of what seemed to be tongues of fire, the presence of fire as well as the heightened sense of smell. This was an authenticated experience through a multi-sensory connection between God and the disciples. The Holy Spirit and one hundred and twenty Christ followers created the framework for changing the world for Christ. As these early believers experienced God through their senses, their behavior changed to the point that the people of the culture became amazed (Acts 2:7). Through the empowerment of the
Holy Spirit the Galileans began to speak the language that was understood by every cultural, geographical and national group that was present in the crowd at Jerusalem that day. The people became so utterly amazed that they responded that they were hearing the followers of Christ speak "the clarion of the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed they asked one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:11b-12).

The multi-sensory event of Pentecost captured the attention of the cultural dynamic. The presence of the senses that God embedded within the human life prepared that culture to hear Peter's message. Michael Slaughter explains it this way. "God empowers small churches to speak the language of ultimate reality and ultimate love to unchurched people all around us. This is what the miracle of Pentecost is about." In verse 12 Peter’s contemporaries asked the Christ follower, “what does this wonder from God mean”? And, nineteen verses later, 3000 people accepted and believed the eternal words of God, and were baptized and then added to the church. The multi-sensory experience of Pentecost connected God’s Word to the contemporary culture in an unbelievable fashion.

Prior to Pentecost and the ascension of Jesus Christ, we learn that Jesus instructed His followers not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the gift that God, the Father had promised - the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). Now, one would think that the personal eyewitness account of the disciples seeing Jesus Christ alive after His crucifixion would have been sufficient to empower individuals to accomplish the ‘Great Commission’. However, the logical understanding of the facts would not sustain the disciples as they encountered the hardships of the world without the presence of Jesus Christ. God

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promised the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit to bring the power necessary to influence the culture with the gospel. God used a multi-sensory experience to capture the attention of the disciples and to propel them forward in sharing the gospel with great courage and boldness.

Later, in Acts Chapter 2:42 it says the people "devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Again the author wants to highlight the multi-sensory experience that is linked with the teaching of the fellowship and the breaking of bread, signifying sight, sound, smell, and taste. As the people were hearing God’s Word, they were also validating their experiences through their senses. The apostle James teaches us that it is not enough just to hear the God’s Word; there needs to be action accompanying the hearing. (James 1:22)

**Final Thoughts**

The Old Testament and New Testament are filled with examples of multi-sensory communication too numerous to be covered in this chapter - from how God communicated to the people through cultural metaphors appropriate for those times (deliverance from Egypt, frogs, locusts – even the destruction of the first born males) to Paul eating with Gentiles while communicating that salvation was meant for us all. We even see cloths being used to heal in the book of Acts. Perhaps a good summary may be found in a conversation held with Dr. Dan Mitchell, a professor at Liberty University. Dr. Mitchell made the following remarks as he gave an interesting insight into the life of Peter:
Peter who was a fisherman, swam to the shore because he was excited to see Jesus Christ, who was cooking fish. (John 21) While eating a mouth full of fish, (which was Peter’s livelihood and life passion) Jesus asked Peter the question “Do you love me more than these?” Jesus was asking Peter if he was willing to love the Lord and do his will. The multi-sensory experience of taste was powerful. Dr. Dan Mitchell believes (and the author tends to agree) that every time Peter ate fish after that episode, it was a remembrance of that conversation with Jesus.12 It reminded him of his confession that he loved the Lord Jesus more than a fish that he'd spent a lifetime learning how to catch. Peter understood that people needed more in life than a pursuit of money, career or a hobby. They need to be connected to the timeless truth of Jesus Christ. It is important to connect people with the life that’s offered through Jesus Christ. So often preachers try to make a connection with death – a state in which no senses are present. Preachers try to make their listeners ‘see’ their need for Christ by preaching words that convey they will “die without Him.” However, people resist this attempt preachers make to ‘experience’ death without Christ. When we are hurting we disconnect from the cognitive experience. It is hard for us to ‘feel’ anything. It is better to use multi-sensory experiences to connect the life saving power and grace of Jesus Christ to this generation. The message for this generation is Jesus is alive. People seek life, not death.

12 Dr. Mitchell’s office, July 11, 2003, 9:30am.
CHAPTER FIVE

CAUTIONS AND CONCERNS

The implementation of multi-sensory preaching in a local church that has a long-standing heritage of presenting God’s Word via a linear, more traditional preaching approach may be challenging to say the least. Inviting people to experience God in this manner may indeed take them out of their comfort zone as they begin to ‘experience truth.’ John Calvin warns that the conceptions people have towards God "are formed, not according to the representations he gives of himself, but by the inventions of their own presumptuous imaginations. This gulf being opened, whatever course they take they must be rushing forward to destruction. None of their subsequent attempts at the worship or service of God can be considered as rendered to him, because they worship not him but a figment of their own brains in his stead."1

The author’s survey of 103 preachers of the gospel resulted in 43 returned and completed surveys. As a whole, these respondents offered key insights to several critical areas for understanding the climate and conditions in which preachers are called to preach the Word of God. Although not a scientific instrument, the survey instrument, used by the author revealed the challenges and sometimes ambivalence shown by preachers as they grappled with the topic of creative preaching. Participants reflected their desire to reach people with the gospel in the twenty-first century by noting

contemporary methods such as multimedia, drama and the use of PowerPoint presentations. However, they also ranked these same methods low as important components of the worship services that are deemed significant elements for reaching the twenty-first century culture.

The highest scoring category for the question, “What is the average age of your congregation?” was 35-44. Interesting, even though the responding preachers indicated that the average age of congregants were youthful, those same pastors in response to the question, “What are major reasons pastors are reluctant to use media and other multi-sensory message enhancements (drama, video clips, dance, sounds, objects, smells etc.) in their worship services?” cited ‘tradition and fear of upsetting the older congregants’ as a top reason why multi-sensory message enhancements are not used. ‘Fear’ is created in the mind of an individual and is stimulated by a vivid imagination. Calvin’s quote, “None of their subsequent attempts at the worship or service of God can be considered as rendered to him, because they worship not him but a figment of their own brains in his stead”2 is again echoed in this observation.

The average age of preachers responding to the survey was one age category older than the average age of the congregants, 45-54. The data suggests that in some cases perhaps it is not the congregation who fears change but it is the preacher’s misperception of the congregants’ potential reactions to the change. Again, this ‘figment of their own brains’ may be a result of seminary training rather than what God has revealed through His Spirit. John Maxwell, through much of his work, suggests that congregations desperately want change. He believes it is often the leaders of congregations who are the ones that fear change. Several respondents concluded that it would be additional work

2 Ibid.
for the preacher to implement a multi-media or multi-sensory approach to preaching God’s Word. Furthermore, a lack of training, stemming back to seminary leaves the modern preacher ill equipped for connecting the timeless truths of God’s Word to the twenty-first century. One further observation from these questions might reveal, that although the average age of respondents churches is 35-44, the influence base of the church, (although in the minority) is represented by the traditional, older aged church member.

Another observation was the inconsistency between question seven (Please rank the following worship components in order of importance) and question thirteen (On a scale of 1 to 10 {one being the least and ten the most} how has multimedia helped connect people to God’s Word?). Nearly 50 percent of respondents said that multimedia was important (7-8) and 25 percent said it was very important (9-10). Seventy five percent of respondents stated that multimedia is helping connect people to God’s Word; however the same respondents when asked to rank worship components in order of importance overwhelmingly ranked multimedia components of low importance. The data seems to reflect that preachers believe that multimedia does help connect people to God’s Word, but they are reluctant to use multimedia due to fear, time constraints, lack of know how, and tradition. For this very reason this thesis project was undertaken - to bridge the gap between what we know to be true and how we use that truth to connect the culture to the Word of God.

Another observation that reinforces the overall ambivalence towards the “media reformation,”3 is found in comparing question seven where respondents were asked to

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rank worship components in order of importance and question ten where respondents were asked their opinion on the best method(s) of connecting the Word of God to the twenty-first century culture.” In question seven the respondents consistently and overwhelmingly reported multi-sensory tools such as drama and lighting to be least important as a component for worship. In question ten when asked for their opinion on the best method(s) of connecting the Word of God to the twenty-first century the responses were opposite to what the preachers valued as important components in worship. The following methods were listed by the same group that cited drama and lighting as least important: “multi-sensory (three different respondents said multi-sensory), expository preaching through the five senses, speaking their language through music, media and drama, be aware of current events, use all five senses.

Following are the findings from the survey and the interpretation of the results:

**Connecting God’s Word to the twenty-first Century Culture**

1. **What is your approximate age?**

![Age Chart]

The survey was sent to preachers in the Pennsylvania South Jersey Baptist Convention, as well to Liberty Fellowship preachers, who for the most part are independent Baptists who fellowship and lead in a similar fashion to Southern Baptist preachers. It was interesting to discover that the average age of the preachers is about a decade older than the average age of the reporting churches.
2. Please select no more than three (3) descriptions of your educational experience.

- Technical degree 0
- No college 1
- Some college 0
- College graduate 27
- Seminary 35
- Postgraduate/professional 25
- Military 0

The author should have been more specific in this category. In particular, the “Postgraduate/professional column needed further clarification. The word “professional” could lead the respondent to believe that attending a conference or seminar qualified him for this category. The author desired to see how many preachers had moved beyond the average college/seminary course of training towards the completion of a Doctorate to determine if those who had been exposed to additional training were utilizing multi-sensory and multimedia tools to a greater degree than others or if those who had received additional degrees were more open to change and the introduction of creative preaching techniques. The respondents who reported “postgraduate/professional training” were evenly scattered throughout the different sizes of churches. However, those who had received additional training beyond the seminary level were far more open and in many cases already utilizing some type of multi-sensory format in communicating the Word of God to their people. As one respondent said, “the introduction of the PowerPoint projection is one of the most effective tools in modern technologies for the presentation of the Word of God in church services.”
3. Indicate your church size.

The original intent of this question was to collect data from a cross section of churches in order to ascertain if preachers who were leading larger churches were more open to creative preaching through multi-sensory expressions. The same sense of ambivalence towards preaching creatively was viewed irrespective of church size. The embracing of multi-sensory preaching and creativity did not appear to be related to church size. Further on in the survey, an interesting finding was made that seems to suggest a pastor’s attitude and willingness to change has more of an impact.

4. What is the average age of your congregation?

- 34 and under 3
- 35-44 25
- 45-54 13
- 55-64 5
- 65+ 1

The author was surprised to see the youthful age of the responding churches. Approximately 50 percent of the surveys were returned which could indicate that those who read the topic matter felt the survey was not relevant given their older congregations.
From this question a conclusion could be drawn that multi-sensory preaching would be prevalent given the youthful makeup of the surveyed congregations. However this was not the result. Although the average age might be relatively young, the influencers (decision makers/opinion leaders/traditionists) in the church might indeed be in a different age category and may be less in number.

5. Please indicate the approximate yearly household income of the average family in your church membership.

- Under $25,000  1
- $25,002 - $49,999  16
- $50,000 - $74,999  16
- $75,000 - $99,999  6
- $100,000 - $125,999  3
- $126,000+  1

The majority of reporting churches appear to have lower to middle class congregations. This income range would indicate working middle class with perhaps a smaller percentage of advanced and professional educational degrees.

6. Please indicate which of the following best describes your worship service.

- Traditional  3
- Contemporary  7
- Blended – a mixture of traditional and contemporary  27
- Multiple services with different styles  6
- Other  1

Although only three churches were willing to label themselves as “traditional” when compared to question seven where contemporary components were ranked according to importance, contemporary components were identified as being less important than traditional components. This further highlights the inconsistency among preachers’ interpretation of the term ‘contemporary.’ Components like ‘choruses’ and ‘PowerPoint projection’ are no longer regarded as ‘contemporary.’ They are now the standard. A
better definition of what the terms “traditional and contemporary” mean may have clarified the interpretation of this question further.

7. Please rank the following worship components in order of importance.
   Rank Values must be between 1 and 5. (1 being least important 5 being most important.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Rank Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special music (solos choir selections, etc.)</td>
<td>2 6 11 11 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>9 1 0 2 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate prayer</td>
<td>5 3 14 12 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate singing</td>
<td>5 7 5 11 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinances</td>
<td>6 6 10 11 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>5 10 10 3 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of PowerPoint or other presentation software</td>
<td>4 2 6 13 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting to create atmosphere or mood</td>
<td>5 6 9 7 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Stories from congregation</td>
<td>3 2 13 8 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching outline for note taking</td>
<td>4 4 8 7 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing rankings of worship components](chart.png)
Findings from this question were discussed in the introductory paragraph of this section. I do find it particularly troubling that one third of respondents said that the ordinances (Baptism and Communion) had little importance in worship. The power of the ego is seen in this question as preachers in response to what they thought was the most important worship component responded almost in unison . . . preaching.

8. Please rank in order from 1-4 the preaching techniques/style you use most often.

☐ Narrative – using 'stories' to communicate the text
☐ Expository – message is extracted through exegesis and delivered succinctly
☐ Topical – subject centered approach that is supported by scripture
☐ Multi-sensory – Connecting the text to the five senses of a person (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch)
☐ Textual – using short text as a gateway to any subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>No answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expository</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topical</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-sensory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answer to this question could indicate a causal relationship between seminary training and preaching technique/style. Although the culture has shifted dramatically, the seminarian still emphasizes the importance of expository preaching. Expository preaching ranks first in respect to how a preacher imparts God’s Word to the people. Given the twenty-first century cultural dynamics it would appear that the best approach would be to fully utilize the senses God gave to each person so that they can connect and then follow the tested truths found in obedience to God’s Word.
9. Please indicate your preaching schedule during a typical week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3+</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of services preached on Sunday.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of services preached on Saturday</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of services preached on Wednesday?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other days? ________________</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The energy that goes into preaching is often not understood by the congregation. A significant number of preachers are preaching multiple times on Sundays. At the same time, few preachers have seen the need to use Saturday night as a viable alternative. Nearly half of the preachers no longer preach on Wednesday nights however Thursday night has appeared as an alternative opportunity. This would permit an individual to hear God’s Word on Thursday night, go to work on Friday and then enjoy the weekend out of town or involved in activities that would otherwise conflict with the traditional Sunday service schedule.

10. In this question we are looking for your opinion on the best method(s) of connecting the Word of God to the twenty-first century culture.

Respondent #1: Narrative and Multi-sensory
Respondent #2: None
Respondent #3: None
Respondent #4: Combination of praise/worship in blended music and preaching with aid of Power Point/printed outline.
Respondent #5: None
Respondent #6: None
Respondent #7: Expository preaching through the 5 senses.
Respondent #8: Expository -> Application -> Response 46 – 60 minutes.
Respondent #9: Practical applications to real life instances using a variety of methods to become routine.
Respondent #10: Expository sermons with the use of media such as Power Point, Video, etc.
Respondent #11: Living it instead of speaking it.
Speaking their language (music, media, drama)

Respondent #12: Preach to where people are at, encourage and motivate them to where they need to be.

Respondent #13: Use an accurate modern translation of the Bible (I use the NIV)
Be real and transparent in presentation.

Respondent #14: None

Respondent #15: What is the question?

Respondent #16: The use of movie clips on DVD – drama

Respondent #17: Know your culture
Be aware of current events

Respondent #18: Good preaching
Lives live out in the real world
Connections/ life on life

Respondent #19: I think that power point projection is one of the most effective tools that modern technology had provided for the presentation of the Word of God in Church Services.

Respondent #20: Relational: connect with audience via stories, humor, video, etc.

Respondent #21: Congregation needs to feel involved through all senses.

Respondent #22: Multi-media – Power Point
Drama
Inspiring music

Respondent #23: Local church creative ministry w/passion

Respondent #24: Stick with scripture it is timeless

Respondent #25: Heart & life practical – people need to feel & see it!

Respondent #26: ?

Respondent #27: I believe the best definition of a rut is a grave with both ends knocked out! I feel that preaching/teaching needs to be kept fresh. I try to add elements (video clips, drama, props, humor, interactive requests, etc.) to keep the listener “plugged in”. I use listening sheets, power point and other tools to connect the changeless message of Jesus to a changing world.

Respondent #28: Video, power point, drama, practical applications

Respondent #29: None

Respondent #30: Be open minded, be confident, stay up to date with new ideas and ways to get God’s word out.
Respondent #31: Multiple reinforcements; preaching, testimony, drama, media, object lesson, etc.

Respondent #32: I endeavor to use a biblical text (or story account) in relating the truths to the present generation also using power point and a handout outline to keep both preacher and listener on course.

Respondent #33: Narrative and multi-sensory.

Respondent #34: None

Respondent #35: Technology

Respondent #36: ?

Respondent #37: The best method is to do what you do well, to do it with excellence. We have grown from 300 (1980) to over 1,000 now. We still sing out of the hymnal on Sunday mornings.

Respondent #38: Expository with narrative

Respondent #39: Regardless of the century or the culture all people of all times have a strong need for love and acceptance. The best connection to reach people is through the personal touch connecting God’s truth to their needs.

Respondent #40: Inductive preaching
Storytelling (i.e. experience sharing)
Participatory encounters with the divine as well as the community of faith.

Respondent #41: Conversational, relational, multimedia.

Respondent #42: Visuals

Respondent #43: Drama
Multi-sensory
Faith Stories
Contemporary Christian Music
Praise worship
The responses summarized above also indicate some uncertainty in terminology. ‘Multimedia’ tends to be a ‘catch-all’ term somewhat like ‘contemporary.’ However, it is not clear from these responses how media is being used. As well, there is some ambiguity in what exactly is ‘good preaching’ and how one would measure its (preaching) effectiveness in reaching the ‘unchurched.’

11. What is the most effective preaching style for attracting unchurched people to your worship services?

Respondent #1: There is not one.
Respondent #2: None
Respondent #3: Evangelistic
Respondent #4: When I was pastoring, I used topical outline. Today I would use a multi-sensory approach.
Respondent #5: That which grabs their attention and can hold it long enough for them to hear the gospel.
Respondent #6: None
Respondent #7: I do not know
Respondent #8: ?
Respondent #9: Topical preaching addressed to practical daily life.
Respondent #10: Expository. People today desire to know what God has to say. The best way is not to confuse but to allow God to.
Respondent #11: Combination of many as long as they understand and get what you are trying to communicate.
Respondent #12: From the heart and to the heart, relevant, expository. “I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.” 1 Cor 9:22
Respondent #13: Topical series on a relevant topic such as marriage.
Respondent #14: None
Respondent #15: Most remembered is expository with live illustrations.
Respondent #16: Casual, relational – Saddleback/Willow style
Respondent #17: Not sure I understand this question
Respondent #18: Stories
Clear exposition of a transcendent God

Respondent #19: I am not sure that one preaching style (expository or topical) is most effective in attracting unchurched people to the worship. Whatever style is used, the message should be clear, biblically based and relevant.

Respondent #20: The total package:
1. Warm environment
2. Friendly people
3. Contemporary worship music experience
4. Relational preaching, regardless of style

Respondent #21: I would like to use more visual oriented approach but people are too tradition bound. Hope to introduce this gradually maybe when we start a second service.

Respondent #22: Probably narrative

Respondent #23: Expository

Respondent #24: Expositional God’s word

Respondent #25: See above (Answer for #10: Heart & life practical – people need to feel and see it)

Respondent #26: ?

Respondent #27: Huh? If you are asking which “type” the world (unchurched) need – It is solid biblical preaching. If you are asking what they want, I think it is the same – Biblical preaching! They are tired of empty feel good sermons – they want the truth.

Respondent #28: Topical – expositional combined

Respondent #29: None

Respondent #30: Expository

Respondent #31: Illustrate object lesson mixed with testimony.

Respondent #32: Topical messages

Respondent #33: Multi-sensory

Respondent #34: Confessional, utilizing humor

Respondent #35: Mixture of expository and topical

Respondent #36: None

Respondent #37: All I know to do is “preach the word”. God has blessed this approach here.

Respondent #38: Narrative
Respondent #39: Regardless of the style the preacher must have the ability to reach the heart. The Word of God must prove to be relevant to the listener’s needs and personal situations. Can they apply God’s truth to their lives. How does this affect me?

Respondent #40: Inductive

Respondent #41: Same as 10 (Answer to #10 – Conversational, relational, multi-media)

Respondent #42: Relational

This question is especially troubling because nine respondents said that there is not a most effective preaching style and one respondent even said, “I don’t know.” Is it possible that our seminaries have prepared men to preach to the aquarium and not know how to preach to the world?

12. On a scale of 1 to 10 (one being the least and ten most) how has technology helped to connect people to God’s Word? Please circle.

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13. On a scale of 1 to 10 (one being the least and ten being the most) how has multimedia helped connect people to God’s Word? Please circle.

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Again, both questions 12 and 13 would seem to indicate that most pastors believe that technology and multimedia are important tools for connecting people to God’s Word. However, the responses to the following questions seem to suggest a low correlation between pastors’ general beliefs and their attitudes and practices regarding multi-sensory approaches to communicating God’s Word in their own congregations.
14. What do you believe are the major reasons pastors are reluctant to use media and other multi-sensory message enhancements (drama, video clips, dance, sounds, objects, smell etc.) in their worship services?

Respondent #1: Pride, fear of becoming worldly, fear of de-emphasizing propositional truth at the expense of feelings/emotions.

Respondent #2: None

Respondent #3: None

Respondent #4: 1. Difficulty in producing 1st rate quality enhancements.  
2. Reluctance of some congregation to “approve” of the approach.  
3. Lack of knowledge or information in reference to the various possibilities.

Respondent #5: They’re stuck in their old ruts.  
Fear of being associated with the charismatic movement.  
Fear of being too close to “worldly” things (i.e. music, dance).  
They’re too lazy to put forth the effort to make it happen.

Respondent #6: None

Respondent #7: Tradition  
Church members who express concerns  
Lack of understanding  
Lack of awareness

Respondent #8: Fear of unknown, congregation’s response, poor “delivery”, “Because we have always done it that way.”

Respondent #9: Tradition! – We have never done it like that  
Fear of congregation’s rejection  
Unsure of how

Respondent #10: Transitions from the art of proclaiming to video to preaching.

Respondent #11: 1. Competence. Because they don’t understand it they decide to have a conviction about not using it.  
2. Lazy leadership  
3. Some really and purely believe it is unnecessary.

Respondent #12: Fear of moving out of the “tradition” box  
Fear of the technology itself

Respondent #13: 1. Availability of equipment and volunteers to utilize it.  
2. It takes a lot more advanced planning and preparation.

Respondent #14: Outside their comfort zone

Respondent #15: They are not trained in using these things. It takes much more work and coordination of people to pull this service type off.

Respondent #16: I don’t know. They must be foolish? Traditional, rigid thinking.

Respondent #17: 1. Time to get it all together.
2. Dance – could be offensive to some.

Respondent #18: It requires more time and energy. It is another step in planning. It can, sometimes, be overused and become a distraction. Sometimes pastors don’t know what’s available.

Respondent #19: Many pastors are not competent in their skills related to the use of media technology and do not have staff to prepare this for them. Many congregations would not be comfortable with dance in the worship. Often pastors do not do the advanced planning and preparation required for using multi-sensory message enhancements.

Respondent #20: 1. Lack of exposure to these options
2. Lack of expertise in using them
3. Fear of failure
4. Comfort with the tried & true

Respondent #21: Reluctance and resistance from congregation due to perceived cost and resistance to change in general.

Respondent #22: 1. Fear of offending the “old guard”
2. Lack of knowledge of how to use
3. Unfamiliarity with certain technologies
4. Lack of budget

Respondent #23: 1. People are resistant to change
2. Laziness
3. Lack of passion
4. Lack of creativity

Respondent #24: Incompetence

Respondent #25: Scared, out of date or touch, lazy

Respondent #26: Time to plan, cost of equipment, lack of creativity

Respondent #27: Fear! Not understanding how the technology works – not having the guts to try/trust the Holy Spirit to speak – I see corporate America using technology every day to sell things people don’t need – It is high time we use every option available to tell them about the only thing they need – Jesus.

Respondent #28: 1. Never used them before
2. Don’t want to sensationalize the gospel and make it a production
3. Traditions

Respondent #29: $

Respondent #30: The people don’t like it or they are not use to it. This depends on the age of the people at the church.

Respondent #31: They’re viewed as gimmicks or worldly.

Respondent #32: Added expenses; the learning curve; people to be dependable in operation of equipment; older members often reluctant to see changes; added time commitment to the pastor’s schedule in preparing media that goes along with the message.
Respondent #33: They are unfamiliar with it, and are used to preaching traditional methods.

Respondent #34: Don’t have much experience with it.

Respondent #35: Turning off old folks.

Respondent #36: 1. There may be fear of offense to some members  
2. It takes more work for those who may be overworked  
3. Preachers may not be gifted personally in those areas and have to rely on others more

Respondent #37: Tradition

Respondent #38: Tradition – Peer pressure

Respondent #39: Many are trapped in tradition and are fearful to try anything new and different. Some are in different and ?? about the use of new methods. Many pastors simply are not creative enough to know how to pull it off.

Respondent #40: 1. Lack of “know-how”  
2. Fear of innovation  
3. Don’t see the point

Respondent #41: 1. Conviction that we must not incorporate the culture of the world into God’s worship.  
2. Lack of finances, knowledge or resources to use these effectively.  
3. Generational disconnect between the church leaders and younger congregants.

Respondent #42: Think it is a fad or entertainment, compromise.

Respondent #43: Most worship areas are not technology friendly and most older congregations are not either.

This could be regarded as a powerful commentary on a pastor’s tendency to ‘please’ men rather than God as the charts indicate below. The most frequently mentioned reasons why pastors are reluctant to use media and other multi-sensory message enhancements fall in the following categories:

- Lack of knowledge – know how
- Traditional mindset or resistance from the congregation
- Use would be unspiritual or worldly
- Pastors are unmotivated or it would require increased effort
Many pastors would like to use more media and other multi-sensory message enhancements but are ‘fearful’ of the reactions of people in their congregations. As well, some are simply overwhelmed with the possibility of adding ‘one more thing’ onto their workloads. However, one would have to ask about the cost of ‘not’ doing all that we can - to ‘save one more for Jesus Christ.’

Large churches (1200-1800+) tend to have more staff and tend to rate technology/multimedia use highly. Given their size, it is logical to conclude that they are
using some type of projection software (i.e. PowerPoint). Their comments emphasize lack of knowledge and are therefore presumably referring to other pastors and not themselves. With congregations of this size we can also assume there is other staff to share the ministry load. However, medium sized churches (300-1200) cite tradition and increased effort (on the part of the pastor) as reasons for their non-use of multimedia.

These respondents’ comments appear to describe their particular scenarios. In churches of 300 or less, effort and tradition are their biggest factors for multimedia nonuse. There is a definite correlation between size, attitude and application with the pastor’s attitude towards the use of media and other multi-sensory message enhancements as being the strongest determinant of the use of creative preaching techniques.

15. How many times a month does you use drama during your worship services?

Please circle.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+
17 19 10 2 1 0 0 0 0

These responses would indicate an unawareness of the importance of drama as an important illustrative device to reach the current culture given their high involvement in media (specifically television and film).

16. How many times a month do you use dance during your worship services?

0 1 2 3 4+
36 7 0 0 1

This response reflects hesitancy on the part of pastors to try a form of worship that appears to be new. While dance is mentioned several times in the scripture it appears that
pastors connect dance to its worst cultural manifestations instead of the original use of dance as a form of praise and worship pleasing to God as described in the Bible.

17. How many times a month do you use video clips during your worship services?

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Again, these responses are inconsistent with previous responses in the other questions in which pastors see the importance in using technology and media to reach the masses. As well, pastors are ignoring one of the most effective means of communicating their message to people living in this twenty-first century.

18. How many times a month does you use personal interviews of people who have experienced life change through Jesus Christ?

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One wonders by this response if preachers simply don’t want to share “pulpit” space or there are few people in the ‘audience’ who are experiencing life change in Jesus Christ. I believe that many Southern Baptist Pastors and Liberty Fellowship pastors know cognitively what is right to do. However in reality they continue to do what they were trained to do or are comfortable in doing. Liberty University has a tremendous opportunity to step out and lead other seminaries in re-tooling seminary training. Our goal should not be to reach the culture of fifty years ago, but rather to teach young seminarians to “Take Jesus as He is to people as they are, becoming the permanent solution for the pain of sin,” in the cultural context that God has placed them.
CHAPTER SIX
TRANSITIONS AND STRATEGIES

Today, many of our churches have become predictable and unfortunately at times, boring. The mundane religious ceremonial routine leaves listeners restless and detached from knowing God through the supernatural occurrences of the birth, life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Moving towards a creative/multi-sensory preaching approach will help combat the boredom that is too often synonymous with the word ‘preaching’. Howard Stevenson, in *Christianity Today*, states “the higher the predictability, the lower the impact.”¹ This ought not to be said of today’s preachers because the mission of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ is to compel people towards knowing and living for God.

There was a speaker who would deliver entertaining speeches using the contents of handbags to illustrate her messages. She would begin with a little girl's purse stuffed with hair barrettes, doll paraphernalia, and crackers. She would then continue by revealing the content of purses belonging to a teenager, a newlywed, a young mother, a career woman, and a grandmother. The communicator would delight audiences as she pulled items out of the purses that characterized the different seasons of a woman's life. Once she was invited by a missionary friend to Eastern Kentucky in the most rural part of the state, to speak to a group of women. She took her boxes of purses and made the

drive from the city to the mountains to address these ladies - and, she hoped - to bless them. When she got back home late that night her husband asked how things went.

“Terrible”, she replied with a dejected look. “They never laughed, cracked a smile, or even nodded with the slightest hint of enjoyment. It was just awful” “What happened”? her husband asked. “That talk always works. His wife responded dejectedly, “Those women don’t carry purses!”²

Perhaps we preachers experience similar problems with our preaching. For the last fifteen years, we have been speaking to people about purses and they don't carry purses. Our illustrations have not reached the audience. This can also be true even when we use mediated illustrations. Illustrative and multi-sensory preaching has to consider the target culture. Today’s preacher may be assuming that the audience will relate to obvious illustrations and use stories about Napoleon, Alexander the Great, or Fanny Crosby. However, Rick Warren calls these “dead Englishmen illustrations and says you just can not use many of them.”³ You actually end up speaking about purses to people who don't carry purses and your message falls flat.

On the other hand, creative preaching from a multi-sensory approach uses a variety of different media. The preacher using this approach may run the risk of criticism, may hear accusations of being a compromiser, and may be mislabeled as one who strives to put on a show rather than lead others to worship. Some will claim that creative preaching only seeks to satisfy modern culture's desires and wants rather than their spiritual needs. Granted, a fine line must be definitely drawn. Not only is it the responsibility of the church to meet the needs of people, but it is also the church’s responsibility to reveal

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² Preaching Magazine, 2 (26), 36
³ Ibid., 36.
needs that people have - needs they may not know about - apart from a witness that can be revealed by the Holy Spirit if we allow His creative power to work through us.

One of the creative concepts that *is* catching on throughout some of our churches today is experiential worship. It is worship that is not just seen or heard, but experienced through all of the senses. Bill Caroll defines it as "interactive, bringing ideas to life, and taking people to a place where they have never been."4 While a number of churches define their worship as ‘experiential,’ the following section contains illustrative examples of multi-sensory preaching, a hallmark of experiential worship. These examples are provided by the author while serving as senior pastor at Zion Baptist Church. This variegated approach truly facilitated the congregation’s response to God’s Word and was accomplished in a manner that motivated the fellowship to obey God and believe that He desired to do the impossible through them.

**Zion’s Transitional Story**

In 1996, the author inherited a good, strong Bible believing church in the rural countryside of Western Pennsylvania. There was a strong belief that Zion Baptist Church, a church nestled in the midst of diminishing demographics, had potential to impact the region for Jesus Christ. God began to write a fresh vision and innovative strategy to take Zion into the twenty-first century. For the most part, worship services centered around three basic components: announcements, songs and preaching. This service protocol was based on a model used by many churches over the past 50 years. While this approach to ministry was somewhat effective, the church was not radically changing the cultural dynamic in the community by challenging believers who had

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walked with God for years. In other words, worship had become safe. The people had a clear cognitive understanding of who God was but the ability to transfer ‘head knowledge’ into what He wanted to do through them had not come to pass. It became the author's aim to connect the cognitive understanding of who God was to the relational invitation that God had given to this church. The congregation would then be able to reach people all throughout Western Pennsylvania for the Lord Jesus Christ as well as grow deeper in Him.

Introducing a creative element to the art and science of preaching is a difficult process that not everyone is prepared to undertake. Therefore, it is important that the pastor take time to establish credibility within his congregation so that they believe a shift in preaching style is more than a fad. They must see that this change is simply a means whereby the preacher wishes to train, develop, equip, and point people to a better understanding of who God is and what He desires for their lives. Like all change strategies, it is important that the preacher exert strong leadership skills through this process. If the preacher fails to carefully lead people through this transition, the idea of multi-sensory preaching will be rejected - not because of the merits of whether multi-sensory preaching will be efficient or not, but on the grounds that the leadership failed to effectively lead the transition.

Although the intent of this section is not to spend the vast amount of time in discussing the dynamics of effective church leadership, it is important to understand the process of introducing multi-sensory preaching or for that matter, any change within the context of the local church. John C. Maxwell, noted author, has written numerous books on the subject of leadership. In his work, The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, Maxwell
admonishes his readers to follow these laws and in doing so, he asserts that people will in turn, follow you. This is an important factor for instituting change in the church context. If there is an attempt to introduce multi-sensory preaching into a church without taking the time to allow people to clearly understand or to buy into the experience, it might hamper the preacher's overall communication. Maxwell states "as a leader you don't earn any points for failing or for noble causes. You don't get credit for being right. Success is measured by your ability to actually take the people where they need to go but you can do that only if the people first buy into you as a leader. That's the reality of the law of buy in."\(^5\)

Prior to instituting creative techniques or change into the church the preacher must take the time to creatively show people how the change will effect them and for them to realize the change is for the good. At Zion, one of the first steps of introducing multi-sensory concepts of preaching was to communicate the upcoming changes to key leaders. This was accomplished through exposure to dynamic multi-sensory preaching videotapes as well as attendance at conferences where multi-sensory preaching was experienced. This was done because of the principle that states "leadership is developed daily not in a day."\(^6\) Leadership had to realize that the world in which we live has greatly changed and therefore, the way we communicate must change. The message must also be imparted in ways that the culture can embrace so they understand the totality of principles and concepts that are part and parcel of the whole Gospel. Howard G. Hendricks in *Color Outside the Lines: A Revolutionary Approach to Creative Leadership* highlights the


\(^6\) Ibid., 31.
dramatic changes in the world by quoting Eugene Peterson: "the world is protean: each
generation has the world to deal with in a new form."\(^7\) Our responsibility is not to
perpetuate ‘what was’ but to clarify ‘what is’ through methods that transcend the
contemporary cultural barriers. Hendricks goes on to say, “The ministry of the gospel
requires a tremendous amount of effort in this twenty-first century to extradite people
from the mania of mediocrity which is found within the walls of our churches today. This
will require prayer, courage and the power of God. The way the gospel is conveyed,
observed Eugene Peterson, is as much of the kingdom as the truth presented. Why are
pastors experts on the truth and dropouts on the way?”\(^8\)

One strategic principle that also must be considered is how to plan for the expected
challenge that inevitably occurs whenever innovative change is introduced within the
church body. As discussed in Chapter 5, the survey revealed that many pastors are
reluctant to bring innovative and creative changes to their preaching or worship services
(i.e. transitioning to a multi-sensory worship) because of the ‘challenge’ brought by the
members of the church politic. Many times these are individuals who have been
members for decades and still remember ‘how things were done back in the day’. There
desire is for control and to build a church upon the foundation of formalism and
ceremonialism notwithstanding the fact that scripture specifically warns against this
faction within the church:

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the
world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to
regulations – “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all
concern things which perish with the using-according to the

\(^7\) Howard G. Hendricks, *Color Outside The Lines: A Revolutionary Approach to Creative
\(^8\) Ibid., 190.
commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion . . . Colossians 2: 20-23a.”

Along with the predictable resistance from certain ‘camps’ comes the question “Why are these people so resistant to change?” Part of the answer comes in understanding how innovative ideas are generally accepted.

One way of looking at the question is through Everett M. Roger’s Model of Diffusion and Adoption. This model was developed in the 1960’s and is based on the work of Gabriel Tarde, a 19th –century French legal scholar and sociologist. One of the major concepts is the function of the ‘S-shaped curve’, which characterizes the rate of adoption over time. The point at which the incline begins is called ‘critical mass.’ This is where the innovative idea really begins to take off. Figure 1 illustrates this concept.

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9 This passage is also interesting because the warning would appear to specifically address those individuals in the church who criticize having a multi-sensory experience with Jesus Christ (i.e. “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle”).


11 Ibid., 115.
Another concept suggested by Rogers was adopter categories. The following categories describe the characteristics of individuals based on when they tend to adopt and are represented in Figure 2\textsuperscript{12} by percentage of the total adopter group (whatever community or group engaged in change):

**Innovators** – These are individuals who are the first to accept new ideas. They tend to have a more ‘cosmopolitan’ outlook and don’t let geographic distances get in the way of their communications.

**Early Adopters** – These individuals are known as the ‘locals’. This group contains the influencers – also known as ‘opinion leaders’ because people look to these individuals for advice. In a church setting, the change agent would be the pastor who then is also belongs to the innovator category. The early adopters would be church leaders. If your church leaders (deacons, trustees, and others who may not have ‘titles’ yet wield much influence) are not supportive of the innovation, the pastor may experience a roadblock early in his plans.

**Early Majority** – These individuals will not be the first on board but will take their time before deciding to adopt or reject the idea. The function of this group is to validate the innovation and by doing so, their adoption of the idea shows everyone else it is safe to adopt.

**Late Majority** – This group represents the skeptics. They (at first) reluctantly try the innovation and many times only do so because of peer or economic pressure. By this time, the most people have already adopted the innovation.

\footnote{Ibid., 115.}
**Laggards** – By the time this group adopts the innovation, it is no longer a new idea. People in this category are very traditional and hardly ever try anything new. As reported in the survey results, it is obvious that many of our preachers are faced with congregations made up of several individuals in this last group. And, as seen in Figure 2, this group (even in a ‘normative model) outruns the innovators and match, percentage wise, the innovators and early adopter’s categories combined. In a church setting, one can begin to see the lines of demarcation and the rivaling factions. Figure 3 more closely represents the dynamics of change within a church body where the battles range in the spiritual domain as we wrestle not “against flesh and blood” Ephesians 6:12.
One element of the church that pastors many times underestimate are the *Influencers of Discord*. They are purposely placed there by the adversary to stop the innovative ideas. These individuals are replete within scripture and are epitomized in the persons of Sanballat, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab who were named as enemies of Nehemiah as he led the initiative to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah: 4:1-6; 6).

One tactical error that many pastors meet is that they attempt to battle with the *Influencers of Discord* on their own. Many times they become mortally wounded and end up giving up the challenge. However, the group that should really go up and meet these agents of discord is the *Early Adopters*. As stated earlier, these are the opinion leaders and are regarded highly by others. In other words, these are the Joshuas and Calebs - the mighty men of valor. The most important position the pastor can take during this early onslaught is on his knees and in God’s Word. The battle is truly the Lord’s.

One of the greatest motivators for the preacher must be a strong belief that multi-sensory preaching can reach the culture by revealing truth in a relevant manner thereby connecting with people in such a way that life change is accomplished. When the culture is reached in like manner the result could be a halt in the devastating burnout and dropout syndrome that has plagued the church for the last 20 years. Helmut Thiekle said “Evangelicals tend to be long on revelation and short on relevance. The gospel must be preached in a fresh way and told in a new way to every generation. Since every generation has its own unique questions, the gospel must constantly be forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of residence.”

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If the contemporary church desires to stay connected, they also need a new coat of paint on a regular basis. “Christian organizations are the monument to a great work of God in another generation,”14 said John Warwick Montgomery. He went on to say “We need to give greater attention to both our content (the what) and our form (the how). People today are asking hard questions and demanding substantive answers”.15 Perhaps that is why Louis Sperry Chafer observed that “the art of preaching the Gospel is the art of saying the same thing over and over again in different ways.”16

The author took this mindset to heart while continuing to advocate the need for change at Zion. The outcome of this initiative is that this church (situated among a diminishing population as a result of economic downturn) has experienced growth both in numbers and in spiritual development. After introducing multi-sensory preaching, Zion has seen more than 400 men and women follow the Lord Jesus Christ in believer’s baptism in the last seven years. New buildings have been constructed to house the hundreds of people who are attending the weekend worship services and the Bible studies. Weekly tithes and offerings have increased from $4000/weekend to an average of $13,000/weekend. God's presence is anticipated with great expectation during the weekend worship celebration service. While a great commitment to expository preaching has been maintained, the author has infused the timeless principles of expository preaching with creative multi-sensory essentials by utilizing cutting edge methods and techniques. These methods include the use of video, art, computers and dance. The congregation also was treated to

14 Ibid., 190.
15 Ibid., 191.
16 Ibid., 190f.
the smell of popping popcorn and the taste of home baked cookies as an expression of our God given ability to use all of our senses. Sundays have become a multi-sensory experience connecting the Word of God to the twenty-first century culture. We have taken on the perspective demonstrated in Hendricks work on creative leadership. He states "I once saw a fascinating ad: ‘we could not improve our products so we improved the box.’"\(^\text{17}\) In other words, he is saying ‘let’s not tamper with the message (the gospel), but let’s vary the packaging’.

Before Zion built a larger worship center and had the budget to support innovative technologies, the author used simple props to create an environment so that people would not just hear God’s Word preached positively but also experience the Word of God through multi-sensory entrances. On one particular Sunday, the author was preaching on the necessity of experiencing new life (John 3). Jesus makes it clear in this passage that every man and woman needs to be born again. There is a point in each person’s life where the old life ceases and a new life is begun. The Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians “Therefore if any man is in Christ he is a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17). To help illustrate this principle and to demonstrate how often we violate God’s Word, the author set up the platform to resemble a kitchen (including multiple appliances). One appliance was a toaster. The author portrayed a typical morning with the rush of going to work including all the activities. While discussing the ‘hustle and bustle’ of the morning rush, the author placed bread in a toaster. Unbeknown to the congregation, the toaster had been turned to its highest setting. The author continued to explain the context surrounding John 3. Shortly thereafter, the bread began to burn. Smoke rose out of the toaster and into the

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 191.
little worship center\textsuperscript{18}. The smell of burned toast began to permeate the room. Now, the congregation became more intent on hearing the message as they attempted to connect the burned toast to the story. They connected not only with their ears, but also with their eyes and their noses. The author quickly removed the burned toast and began to expound on the principle of becoming a new creature. First, the author took a knife and attempted to scrape off the burned part of the toast. However, that really did make much of a difference because of the remaining residue. Then the author spread butter and jelly on the toast. Everyone however could see that underneath the butter and jelly the burned toast remained. It became evident that once the bread had become burned, there was nothing that a person could do but throw away the burned toast and begin again. The communicated message helped people see the symbolism of the burned toast. The burned toast represented wrong choices, failed marriages, their rebellious activities, and sinful addictions. People attempt throughout their lifetimes to scrape those sinful tendencies off or to cover up the sin (metaphorically represented by butter and jelly). That morning many people came forward to received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior because they were connected to the Word of God in a way that made them experience the message. This multi-sensory experience allowed them to connect their past experiences of burning toast with the truths of the Bible that were taught that day. Multi-sensory preaching communicates well with our cultural dynamics. People are looking for an experience they can insert into their lives so they can become part of a greater and grander story – a story that was preordained by God before time (Psalm 139:13, Romans 8:29-30).

\textsuperscript{18} This was prior to the construction when the facility seated approximately 250 people.
Another instance of multi-sensory preaching was the adoption of our mission statement *Taking Jesus as He is to People as They are Becoming the Permanent Solution for the Pain of Sin*. By faith, from I Corinthians 3:9 we learn that we are co-laborers together with Christ in order to build His church. As Christ followers, the local body of believers at Zion was/is also called and commissioned to take *Jesus as He is*. The edict is to take the consistent and unwavering Word of God, (who is Christ) to people as they are, connecting with the cultural mindset in which we live today. However, while it is important to understand that Jesus Christ has given us victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15), we know our world is still filled with pain. On one hand we have victory, while on the other hand we experience tremendous pain in our lives. Is it that God is cruel and wants us to suffer? Not in the least bit. The pain present in this world correlates to a life lived in misery apart from God. Pain has a purpose. It shows us that something is wrong.

In the field of medicine, physical pain in the body alerts doctors to a potential disease that might be present and need treatment. Pain helps doctors pinpoint the problem and administer the correct medicine and other procedures to begin the healing process. To help illustrate this point I asked our ushers, parking lot team, worship team and Sunday School teachers to wear a piece of duct tape on their clothing but not to explain why they were wearing it. Everyone on the greeting team had pre-cut pieces of duct-tape and handed a piece to all who entered the worship center. These items had now become an object of curiosity. The people had now become part of the story that would ensue. No longer were they just participants observing from a distance. They had become participants in the event. Because multi-sensory preaching had by now become an
integral part of the worship celebration and taught on a weekly basis people began thinking and wondering what the duct tape represented. They were primed to connect to the message. The author preached how the story of our Lord Jesus Christ who was born from a virgin was tempted in all points but yet was without sin; being innocent. However he was condemned by wretched mankind to death on the cross only to miraculously resurrect from the grave. Regretfully, this story has lost some of its power for many people because of the commercialization of Christmas and Easter. The power of the gospel of Jesus Christ no longer seems to invade people’s lives. This is in sharp contrast to the message of victory Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 15. However, that message may be difficult to connect to if you are experiencing the pain of a broken marriage, the pain of a child who was sexually abused by her uncle, the pain of a man who loses his job in his early fifties and is required to go on welfare, the pain of a terminal illness or the pain of a child living in rebellion and rejecting the faith of his family. When the church is called to get in the middle of this pain, many people ask the question, “Where is God?”

God is visible in His Word and in His church. The author said to his congregation that we are called and commissioned to get in the middle of pain. However, we have simply offered people temporary solutions. The church has not been a part of that “permanent solution.” The illustration used was the repair of the author’s repair 1991 Mercury convertible. When the ragtop tore it was fixed with duct tape. However, it was only a temporary solution. It worked for a while but during a torrential downpour it was obvious that the duct tape would not last. A new convertible top was needed. Likewise, the ‘church tape’ we give often times acts as ‘duct tape’ offering temporary solutions through programming, temporary counseling solutions and temporary solutions in the
preaching services. We have seen these solutions fail to provide the permanent solution. The duct tape represents the church’s feeble attempts to offer worldly, popular and ordinary solutions for the pain present in the human heart. The message delivered communicated that some people use duct tape to fix everything but God used nails.

Earlier that day, the creative team designed a duct tape pocket square for me that I wore on my suit jacket. Toward the end of the service - as the Holy Spirit was moving - the church was commissioned to take the power of God into the pain in people's lives. The author took the first step stating he was tired of offering temporary solutions and threw his duct tape on the platform. He then took a masonry nail (purchased in advanced at a local hardware store) out of his pocket and showed it to the congregation. The author then shared the T-shirt slogan “While Some People Use Tape God Used Nails.” Several hundred nails that had been purchased earlier were spread out on the platform. The author challenged the congregation stating if they were tired of offering temporary solutions and if they wanted to be a part of God’s initiative then “walk the aisle to exchange their duct tape for nails.” The Holy Spirit took over and hundreds upon hundreds came forward exchanging their duct tape for nails - no longer being part of a temporary solution but part of the permanent solution bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to change men and women’s lives.

About four months after preaching this message the author began seeing the eternal effects of that multi-sensory message. One such experience was visiting a funeral home where the brother of a church member was lying in state. Upon approaching the deceased brother, the author noticed his hands. Between the folded hands was one of the masonry nails that were handed out weeks beforehand. The church member approached
explaining (with tears in his eyes) that after the ‘duct tape and nail’ message he took the nail to his brother and was able to lead him to the Lord before he died of terminal cancer. This was a strong and moving testimony that further motivated the author to champion the cause of multi-sensory preaching. The twenty-first century preacher must throw out the old mold and cast a new vision to become connected to this cultural dynamic.

Using a multi-sensory approach does not mean that traditional symbols can not be used. In a recent message concerning how the body of Christ is made up of different parts, the author used a ‘cooking’ example to illustrate this point. The message, *You Were Formed for God’s Family*, was based on the biblical teaching of the church’s identification as not only the body of Christ but as a part of God’s family. Galatians 3:26 says “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” We have been inserted into a specific body (family) called the local church. A healthy body grows because it is ‘fitted together’ perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy, growing and full of love. (Ephesians 4:16). The author had the platform outfitted to resemble a kitchen counter with ingredients laid out as if chocolate chip cookies were to be baked. The illustration was to show that each separate ingredient (butter, flour, raw eggs, etc.) by itself was unappetizing and had not reached its ultimate purpose. The author emphasized this point by tasting each raw item. Finally the items were mixed together. To make the most efficient use of time, chocolate chip cookies were baked beforehand and the author asked the college student members of the fellowship to pass one out to each person in the congregation. However, they were not permitted to eat the cookie until directed by the author. As their senses were primed, the people were attentive and learned the life application (which would be reinforced by
the multi-sensory experience of ‘taste’). Part of the message dealt with conflict resolution, restoring broken relationships and protecting the church. God helps the church in these areas by allowing the church (as a body) to go through the ‘fire.’ Just like the cookies had to be baked to come out whole and fully prepared to accomplish their purpose, so must we (as the church) be placed in the fire so we can come out as one prepared for the purpose and destiny God prepared for us before the beginning of time. At this point, the congregation was permitted to ‘realize’ the cookie’s purpose by eating it. This pleasant experience emphasized the important message that we need every ingredient, ever person - the whole is no more than the sum of its parts. Although we become tested by fire in our relationships, we must remember that the refiner’s fire is bringing out a church worthy to be the spotless bride of Christ.

Some messages present unique challenges. Preaching innovative messages during the Advent season is an example of such a challenge. The common texts of Luke 2; Isaiah 7 and 9; and Matthew 1 gain in popularity during the month of December. One of the formidable tasks is to break through the sensory experiences created by the commercialism and busyness of the ‘holiday season.’ Preachers ask “How do we get people to experience Luke, Chapter 2 in a meaningful way?” While most people will admit to feeling stressed and too busy during the holidays, few rearrange their schedules in order to preserve a margin of their lives to search for an authentic experience of Christ. The following multi-sensory message was provided to bring the people closer to the true meaning of Christmas.

Prior to the service, the author folded fifty, twenty-dollar bills and strategically placed them throughout the worship center. They were placed in doorframes, under the seats, on
the platform furniture and sound equipment - yet all were partially visible. The money could only be found if a person focused and took the time to search carefully with their eyes. The author preached a message about busyness and explained to the congregation that ahead of time, $20 bills were placed throughout the worship center. Anyone who found a $20 bill could keep it. This was done in the middle of the message. Now, most church folks don’t like to move once they’re seated. An invitation to get up and move around was extremely disconcerting to the congregation. At first, no one moved. But they became eager once I emphasized the fact that they could use the $20 bill for Christmas shopping. Some of the children and youth moved first. Then it was like a catalyst – (this is an example of the s-shaped curve/critical mass) hundreds started searching throughout the worship center; however, it was apparent that they were not truly looking. After several minutes of walking around, not one person had found a $20 bill. With the use of a cordless microphone, the author walked throughout the worship center picking up the $20 bills and illustrating the point that during Christmas, we can walk right past the real meaning of this ‘Event’ and not even know that we have missed Christ. If one would slow down and look to the Word, spend time meditating, and knowing that God is God, they would then be able to recognize Christ. The author then went to a chair where there was a $20 bill and asked the person in the seat to retrieve it. The man’s face revealed a surprised look while the comment was made about how often people fail to realize how close Christ is to them and how he is ever ready to help, guide and direct us in our lives. One of those $20 bills was right on the front of the pulpit cleverly disguised but visible enough to the discerning eye. Again, the point was made that we can look at something and have it connect cognitively. Yet, it will not make a difference unless we reach out
and ‘touch it’ in some manner. The scriptures teach us that Jesus Christ must be reached through a multi-sensory personal experience. In this way He will remain within reach of the whole culture. That is the reality and challenge set forth for the preacher who truly desires to live out in Matthew 28:19:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The ministry of the gospel requires a tremendous amount of effort in this twenty-first century. The major challenge is to extradite people from the mania of mediocrity found within the walls of many of our churches today. This will require prayer, courage and the power of God. Preaching the timeless truths of God’s Word faces challenges in every generation. Successful preaching is not perpetuating the innovative methods of previous generations; rather it is seeking the Lord in one’s current generation. It is asking God to use the preacher as a means to connecting the God’s Word to this culture. Culture in North America has shifted from a linear, single entrance communication style to a non-linear multiple entrance style. Communication moves quickly today and pictures on screens have over shadowed print on a page in this new millennium.

As noted in chapter two, the multimedia revolution has taken place in North America and is now commonplace. Unfortunately, our seminaries and many of the graduates (we pastors) continue to embrace the calling of preaching as a science rather than an art. Leonard Sweet drives home the idea that people in the twenty-first century long to experience truth relationally in his quote, “For post moderns, participation and conversation come before conversion.”¹ Jesus understood this. That is why He spent His time with people relationally and then delivered spiritual guidance pointing people

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¹ Leonard Sweet, Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in the New Millennium Culture (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 55.
towards truth. This is seen when Jesus was with His disciples and taught them, “you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). The Truth is the necessary component for life change. The Truth, not Bible facts, it is what turns people towards experiencing God relationally. The five senses given to humans by God’s help articulate truth and then make appropriate responses in relation to the truths communicated. The truth is, much of preaching contains a lot of facts. While those Bible facts are important, it is through the use of multi-sensory experiences that a person experiences the truths of those facts. In turn, they become compelled to relationally connect with God in anticipation of His response.

According to Thom Rainer in his book, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, “when polled, Church attendance in America among adults is forty one percent.”2 Another way of looking at this is to say fifty nine percent of Americans do not attend church. In our Southern Baptist Churches and Liberty Baptist Fellowship churches “preaching” consumes a major portion of the time spent in church. Preachers must look not only at the responsibility of rightly dividing the Word God in order to present Him accurately and completely. Preachers need to also look at the culture and discern how to best deliver messages to this culture. It is the responsibility of the preacher to deliver God’s Word in a timely and inviting way for people in contemporary culture to understand and act upon in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Embracing a more multi-sensory approach to preaching God’s Word will create a bridge of communication to the twenty-first century where God’s Word will travel successfully

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into the hearts, minds and lives of people who are desperately looking for a spiritual connection with a God who longs to be with them relationally.

As evidenced in chapter five and through the survey’s completed by preachers in the Southern Baptist Convention, there is a definite correlation between the implementation of multi-sensory preaching and the preachers personal attitudes towards the use of multi-media and multi-sensory enhancements. The passion and confidence of the preacher is the single greatest proponent or detriment towards the use of creative preaching techniques. Too much is at stake in the twenty-first century for preachers to take straw polls on whether or not they should be innovative in taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to this culture. When the preacher’s passion is fueled by the Holy Spirit and supported by his own willingness to follow the Lord by faith, he will use whatever creative enhancement available in connecting the Word of God to the twenty-first century population.

This project does not seek to dim the light on established hermeneutical and homiletical training that preachers have received in the past and will continue to receive in the future. Knowing how to study the Word of God and the different approaches to delivering the Word of God are needful to any preacher who wishes to impact his generation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, this project was undertaken and pursued with diligence to encourage Southern Baptist and Liberty Baptist Fellowship preachers to expand their horizons by noting the culture shift away from linear delivery to non-linear message delivery. This may require a paradigmatic shift in the preacher’s perceptions to see this multi-media reformation no longer through negative lens, but to
see how the technological advances will enhance a preacher’s desire to connect the God’s Word to the current culture dynamic.

For certain, when it comes to creativity much has not been shared or revealed in this project. Our creator gives creativity to us, since we were made in His image. Because He is the creator, all of us have creative elements that the Holy Spirit will use when we avail ourselves to Him. As well, resources have been deposited in this project to help launch preachers into the exciting arena of connecting the Word of God with the twenty-first century culture.

As God leads and as preachers yield, a creative approach to preaching the timeless Words of God to a culture that is in desperate need will prevail. The author is confident that although much in culture has changed, and many no longer see Christianity as profitable, this only provides the twenty-first preacher with greater opportunities to see God work miraculously through him as he labors to connect the twenty-first culture to the Word of God through multi-sensory creative preaching.
Dear Pastor,

My name is Mark Cummins and I am Senior Pastor at Zion Baptist Church (www.zionlife.com) in Northwestern PA. I am currently working on my Doctor of Ministry degree at Liberty University.

Wait! . . . In 10 minutes (16 short questions) you will help thousands of preachers connect people to God’s Word . . .

Together we can win the culture to Christ . . . but I need your insights to help equip thousands of Pastors in . . . Multi-Sensory Preaching ~ connecting the Word of God and the twenty-first century culture.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact me toll free at 877.747.4463 or by email mark@zionlife.com

Please return in self addressed envelope. If you would like a copy of this cutting edge research please indicate in question 18.

Thank you for investing in this Kingdom building project!

Mark D. Cummins
Appendix B

Survey

Connecting God’s Word to the twenty-first Century Culture.

1. What is your approximate age?
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 and over

2. Please select no more than three (3) descriptions of your educational experience.
   - Technical degree
   - No college
   - Some college
   - College graduate
   - Seminary
   - Postgraduate/professional
   - Military

3. Please indicate your church size.
   - Less than 100
   - 100-300
   - 300-700
   - 700-1200
   - 1200-1800
   - 1800+

4. What is the average age of your congregation?
   - 34 and under
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65+
5. Please indicate the approximate yearly household income of the average family in your church membership.

- Under $25,000
- $25,002 - $49,999
- $50,000 - $74,999
- $75,000 - $99,999
- $100,000 - $125,999
- $126,000+

6. Please indicate which of the following best describes your worship service.

- Traditional
- Contemporary
- Blended – a mixture of traditional and contemporary
- Multiple services with different styles
- Other __________________________

7. Please rank the following worship components in order of importance.

Rank Values must be between 1 and 5. (1 being least important 5 being most important.)

1 2 3 4 5
- Special music (solos choir selections, etc.)
- Preaching
- Corporate prayer
- Corporate singing
- Ordinances
- Drama
- Use of PowerPoint or other presentation software
- Lighting to create atmosphere or mood
- Life stories from congregation
- Preaching outline for note taking

8. Please rank in order from 1-4 the preaching techniques/style you use most often.

- Narrative – using 'stories' to communicate the text
- Expository – message is extracted through exegesis and delivered succinctly
- Topical – subject centered approach that is supported by scripture
- Multi-sensory – Connecting the text to the five senses of a person (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch)
- Textual – using short text as a gateway to any subject
- Narrative
- Expository
- Topical
- Multi-sensory
9. Please indicate your preaching schedule during a typical week.
   Number of services preached on Sunday.
   Number of services preached in Saturday
   Number of services preached on Wednesday
   Other days ______________________
   1       2       3+      0

10. In this question we are looking for your opinion on the best method(s) of connecting the Word of God to the twenty-first century culture.

11. What is the most effective preaching style to attract unchurched people to your worship services?

12. On a scale of 1 to 10 (one being the least and ten being the most) how has technology helped connect people to God’s Word? Please circle.
   1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

13. On a scale of 1 to 10 (one being the least and ten being the most) how has multimedia helped connect people to God’s Word? Please circle.
   1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

14. What do you believe are the major reasons pastors are reluctant to use media and other multi-sensory message enhancements (drama, video clips, dance, sounds, objects, smell etc.) in their worship services?

15. How many times a month do you use drama during your worship services? Please circle.
   0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8+  

16. How many times a month do you use dance during your worship services?
   0   1   2   3   4+  

17. How many times a month do you use video clips during your worship services?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+

18. How many times a month do you use personal interviews of people who have experienced life change through Jesus Christ?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+
Appendix C

Using a Movie Clip

Don Pucik is the associate executive director for the Arkansas Baptist Convention. His article published in the September 2003 edition of Facts and Trends journal provides helpful insights for preachers wishing to use video clips into their messages. Pucik says, “why tell a story when you can show it?” The screen has become the master storyteller in the twenty-first century. It has been said, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Well then, how much is a “moving picture worth”? Sometimes the answer might be priceless. The author has used numerous video clips over the years to help connect the God’s Word to the twenty-first century culture. Remember Jesus was the master storyteller. Jesus painted a picture in words, illustration and imagery to call the disciples to the most exciting adventure in the world, followers of Jesus Christ. With the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit today, we too can call people to the adventure of a lifetime following Jesus Christ.

Finding the right video clip and how to insert that video clip into the message can be complicated and confusing. The following suggestions are given in order to help the twenty-first preacher use “moving pictures” to connect people to God’s Word:

1. **Plan your series of messages in advance.** This gives you time to know where you are going in the series and what images and or moving pictures you need to support your thoughts. Also it is important to begin with the message, get the Word of God in you and know what you need to communicate from God’s Word before you look for video clips.

2. **Recruit help in looking for video clips.** Finding video clips can be time consuming and if the preacher does not have and updated knowledge of the pool in which to draw from he will fall short. By recruiting others who have

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the time and know the shows and movies to pull clips from the preacher’s effectiveness will be greatly improved.

Resource Help: Movie Based Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching. Zondervan publishers 2003

3. **Decide what type of video clips you will use and will not use.** People listening to your message and seeing the video clip will become interested in seeing the movie in its entirety. The issue of content and rating needs to be addressed in advance, in order to provide a clear explanation why a particular clip was used. The author agrees with a Colorado based author, Ken Gire where he states, “I would rather be told an R-rated truth than a G rated lie”.  

4. **Make sure you are showing the video clip legally.** By subscribing to a video licensing service (www.mplc.com and or www.cvli.org) you can show video clips legally.

5. **Prepare the video clip in advance.** Have the video clip cued up to the exact spot that you want the clip to begin. Then now how long the clip should run before stopping the clip. Capturing the video digitally or by using a DVD (digital video display) player, a more exact beginning point and concluding point will be available. Today, DVD’s are a better tool for showing film clips than the standard VCR tape. DVD’s save time by allowing the preacher quicker access to the desired clip and a better transition into the ‘talking’ part of the message.

6. **Point and Play.** Some film clips will stand alone, easily making the desired point. However, due to the limited time afforded to preaching, a tape will need a brief introduction in order to provide a context for the viewer. The author calls this Point and Play. The preacher directs the audience’s attention to the film clip by giving a context for the clip. After the context is given, the tape is then played. Point and Play will allow the clip to be a part of the preaching message adding value to the focal points of the overall preaching message.

7. **Avoid over using video clips.** Routine is the enemy of communicating the gospel in the twenty-first century. Be creative with your video clips using them only to make a major point. If you use video clips every week they will use their effectiveness. Be creative!

8. **Consult these resources for finding, evaluating and selecting video clips:**

www.damaris.org – Click on “culture watch” section

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www.christaincritic.com – Discover movie parables

www.textweek.com/movies/themeindex.htm - Discover major movie themes

www.cmu.ca/library/faithfilm.html - Movie reviews and resources on movie theology

www.screenit.com – Full reviews almost word by word – very thorough site

www.hollywoodjesus.com – Full reviews and cultural insights
Appendix D

Resources

1. Church and Worship Technology - Published monthly by Workhorse publishing, 10040 E. Happy Valley Road, Scottsdale, Arizona 85255. Telephone 480.585.0455. A current and up to date expose on technology for churches. The magazine identifies and explores several area of multi-sensory communication. Articles are informative and practical. Stories from churches engaging creative technological are shared helping to encourage and inspire other churches.

2. Vision Ministering through Multimedia Magazine - P.O. Box 722786 Norman, Oklahoma, 73070 www.vision-mag.com. A new magazine that interviews churches using multimedia to win people to Jesus Christ. Their web page offers free down loads and other multimedia and communications ideas and insights. Articles are crisp and informative. Their web page offers video excerpts of leading church leaders being interviewed on how to implement multimedia into the preaching and worship context.

3. Creative Church Conference - Hosted annually in Dallas Texas by the Fellowship Church. Known as one of the most innovative churches in North America, this conference will stimulate creativity, demonstrating proven techniques for implementing creativity into the local church. Pastor Ed Young and the Fellowship church open up their doors for a behind the scenes look at a creative church in action. Perhaps one of the best conferences in the world for creative/creative ides for churches. Information can be reviewed at www.fellowshipchurch.com Pastors who are committed to communicating the life-changing message of Jesus Christ in the most creative, current and culturally relevant way will benefit greatly from this conference. Fellowship Church 2450 Hwy. 121 N. Grapevine, Texas 76051

4. Movie Based Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching -101 synopses of current movies to help communicate the Word of God. www.zondervan.com

5. www.highwayvideo.com - This web page has dynamic videos that can be bought that help make the point creatively in the twenty-first century.

6. www.next-wave.org - Offers creative insights and ideas for creative multi-sensory preaching. This site specializes in a hands-on approach to experiencing the communication.

7. www.creativepastors.com - A web site devoted to providing useful sermon-building tools, creative worship ideas and compelling church resources. This web site is based upon the culturally relevant and biblically accurate teaching by Ed Young.
8. www.pastors.com – Website created by Rick Warren from the sales of his book The Purpose Driven Life. Fantastic information to help today’s preacher connect with the culture at large as well the church culture. A weekly e-mail provides insights to creativity, leadership, resources, articles, and practical steps for impacting the culture for Christ. In particular the resource 5 Pastoral Helps includes thousands of practical helps for creating dynamic creative messages for reaching people for Christ including, an action verb list, Preaching Bibliography, Favorite websites. This resource can be found at: http://www.pastors.com/pcom/specials/5PastoralHelps.asp

9. www.willowcreek.com/resources/servicebuilder.asp - A part of the Willow Creek network, helping pastors plan preaching and worship services using a multi-sensory approach. Helpful insights on drama, video and song selection are a part of this web page.

10. http://www.ginghamsburg.org – A local church that has fully embraced the need for multi-sensory preaching. Site includes dates on upcoming conferences and resources.

11. www.leonardsweet.com – Beyond his books Leonard sweet identifies examples of modern church leaders who embrace creative multi-sensory outlets for communicating the gospels. Links, resources and mind stretching articles will propel the modern preacher into the future.

12. www.hollywoodjesus.com - Visual movie reviews, with explorations into the deeper more profound meaning behind film, music and pop culture.

13. Church on the Cutting Edge Conference – Sponsored annually by the North American Mission Board. This conference encourages pastors to look at the diverse approach of reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ through Cutting Edge technologies and approaches. Conference information may be obtained from www.namb.net or 770.410.6000

14. www.screenit.com – Offers detailed descriptions, almost line by line, on current movies and videos. Very helpful in deciding if a clip from a video should or should not be used in a corporate worship service.

15. http://home.ccci.org/mma/ - The Media In Ministry Association is a multi-media ministry dedicated to sharing the gospel using audio, video, lighting and staging in unique ways around the community. To bring together the technical and creative professionals in the entertainment industry in a Christian environment. To share experiences and a faith in Jesus Christ. Creative input that reaches out to the world with the message of Christ.
16. www.celebration.org – A church website with cool videos that work well in preaching to the twenty-first century culture.

17. www.wiredchurches.com – Loaded with insights and practical helps for creativity. Sponsored by Granger Community Church www.gccwired.com. This church is an excellent example of utilizing creativity in reaching the culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. As well they offer an annual conference in the fall to help equip and teach pastors how to lead and preach with creativity.

18. www.ministryandmedia.com - At Ministry and Media you'll discover practical and effective ways to use popular media in your ministry. Every week we add more biblical discussion starters based on videos, the latest CDs, breaking news, and the movies playing at your local theaters. We give you the tools to impact youth culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ because relevance to culture is a necessity, not an option.

19. www.gettyimages.com - Getty Images produces, preserves and markets the largest collection of imagery in the world. Excellent for creating a visual mood in preaching. Some photos are royalty free, others require the user to purchase them.

20. www.preaching.com – Provides illustrations, articles and reviews for today’s preacher.

21. http://teamsundays.gospelcom.net/lib/html/soundbytes.html - Mainstay Ministries' website, teamsundays.org. This site is designed to help pastors create Sunday sermons and services that have life-changing impact. It is also designed to help worshipers experience God in church on Sundays in life-transforming ways. Excellent resource for preaching effectively. They provide a weekly list of important news stories that help the Pastor connect with people where they are living through the news they are hearing and experiencing. A weekly e-mail subscription is available for free.

22. www.ccli.com – CCLI exists to establish a strong communication network serving the Body of Christ, which enables the dispensing of comprehensive and valuable informational, inspirational, and relational resources, both primary and secondary in origination. To encourage the spirit of worship through music to the local church collectively and to Christians individually, so that they may enhance their worship expression spontaneously, conveniently, affordably, and legally.

23. www.mplc.com – Similar to the more familiar music driven ccli, this license allows the preacher to use approved motion video clips in a corporate preaching environment. 800.462.8855

24. www.crosspointscripts.com – Excellent site for drama sketches and skits. 800.98.DRAMA

26. http://www.worshipmusic.com/4575704577.html - Creative Assistant software helping create powerful multi-sensory worship. Helps you overcome two of the greatest challenges facing church leaders today: limitations on time and meeting the constant need for creative resources. With Creative Assistant, you have at your fingertips a powerful, customizable and upgradeable database of references to scripture, video, drama, and music that will enable you to create and organize your worship service.


28. E-ssentials for the mission of the church – provides present day applications of biblical truths through visual material. NAMB 4200 North Point Parkway Alpharetta, Ga 30022-4176 or 800.634.2462 www.essentials.tv

29. www.mediashout.com – This may be the simplest most powerful media ministry presentation tool available. The dual screen allows you to create, modify and preview your presentation at anytime. It includes 18 different Bible translations with graphic backgrounds. There are awesome transition effects for smooth cross fades, animation, video and graphics.

30. avisualplanet.com – excellent source for worship images. Both movies and graphics are downloadable for a monthly fee.

31. sermoncentral.com – A sermon research tool with thousands of sermons, illustrations and dramas readily available.

32. bemorecreative.com - A portal for 36 websites to encourage thinking, working and living more creatively.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Primary Purpose: Making It Hard for People to Go to Hell From Your City. Lake Mary: Creation House, 1995.


______. *Preaching While the Church is Under Reconstruction: The Visionary Role of Preachers in a Fragmented World*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.


Audio Tapes


VITA

Mark David Cummins

Personal
  Born:   July 30, 1965
  Married:  Linda Beth Gibson, June 3, 1989
  Children:  Emily Beth, May 4, 1991
              Katie Beth, April 16, 1993

Militarily
  Corporal United States Marine Corps 1983-1987

Educational
  B.A. Midwestern Baptist College 1990
  M.A. Trinity Theological Seminary 1995
  D.Min. Liberty University 2004

Ministerial
  Ordained: Emmanuel Baptist Church, Pontiac Michigan

Professional
  Associate Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Brunswick Ohio 1990-1995
  Education Director, Riverdale Baptist Church, Marlboro Maryland 1995-1996
  Evangelism Director (Interim), PA/SJ Baptist Convention
  Senior Pastor, Zion Baptist Church, Reidsburg Pennsylvania 1996-present