

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

PREACHING TO MILLENNIALS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PREACHERS'
COMMUNICATION AS IT RELATES TO MILLENNIAL CONGREGANTS

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
by
Matthew Joel Hastings

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2020

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ABSTRACT

The American church is facing a decline in attendance (Barna, 2014). This truth is especially prevalent in the millennial generation, the largest yet also the least religious American generation. Many of whom describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. The church has a unique opportunity through the weekly sermon that other organizations do not have. This opportunity provides the ability to verbally communicate in person with the entire organization at one time. The purpose of this qualitative content analysis study was to better understand how preachers who led the fastest growing churches in the Southern Baptist Convention used communication tactics previously identified as important in communicating and leading millennials in their sermons. These identified tactics were authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue. The study involved an extensive review of recent sermons that these pastors had preached in their churches. Following the content analysis of the sermons, conclusions were made based upon the rate of usage and similarities of the three pastors. Applications were then derived from this information on how other pastors can incorporate these communication methods in their preaching ministry, such as, but not limited to, the need for personal stories, creating a positive tone in the sermon, and asking rhetorical questions.

Keywords: Preaching, communication, millennials, church, qualitative content analysis.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the love of my life Bethany. You are the best wife, mother, and partner in ministry I could ever imagine. Your faithful love and support for me every step of our journey is more than I deserve.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I hope that in this effort I came closer to completing “my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Small for his guidance and direction during this process. A professor with a pastor’s heart was a blessing to learn from during this process.

Lastly, my parents Don and Cheryl Hastings; it is an understatement to say that my mom taught me everything I know. Thank you for teaching me how to read and write, love the Lord, and telling me that I was a “smart kid” enough times that I actually believed it.

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List of Abbreviations

Content Analysis (CA)

English Standard Version (ESV)

Liberty University (LU)

Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count - 2015 version (LIWC2015)

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Overview

Communication is essential to any organization, so much so that one cannot lead others if they cannot communicate with them. While humans communicate in many ways, such as non-verbal, electronic, and written communication, the importance of verbal communication from the leader to their followers cannot be undervalued. It is a vitally important tool in providing direction to the organization and the individuals inside of it.

The church has a unique opportunity to capitalize on communication that other businesses or organizations do not have. This opportunity is the weekly sermon. Whereas many organizations struggle to find ways to communicate to the organization, relying on mass emails or diffusion of information through managers, the church has a time set aside each week where the entire organization can receive verbal communication from their leadership. This is no accident; it is divinely inspired. The church does well when it uses those tools which God provides. Despite this advantage, church attendance has declined over the past few decades, with many churches not seeming to connect with the current generations (Barna, 2016; Barna, 2014).

The sermon has been highly valued throughout church history, and it should not be thought of differently by this current millennial generation. The most significant times of growth and revival in church history can be traced back to a mighty work inside the pulpit (Dargon, 1905). Rainer shows this fact is still true today, stating that the most critical aspect of church growth is preaching, so much so that “90% of unchurched people choose a church based on the preaching” (2009, p. 21). Kim (2008) showed that out of all the functions of the church, preaching was the biggest factor in people changing churches, inviting others to church, and their faith maturing. It is still one of the most potent tools for simultaneous spiritual and numerical growth in the church. While some have argued that the sermon's time is over and the church

must embrace more relevant or modern communication methods, this study will attempt to show how preaching can still be effective today. This will be done by examining three preachers in growing churches and finding how they used communication techniques previously shown as effective for communication to millennials to advance God’s Kingdom and grow the local church. The study will showcase preachers who are using techniques to reach millennials and grow the church and provide helpful information on how this can be done in other churches as well.

Background to the Problem

Before discussing how a preacher can help grow the church through the sermon, a biblical understanding of church growth must be understood. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church” (English Standard Version, 2001/2016)¹. France (2007) states this statement is unique in its showing of “extraordinary boldness of “my ekklesia”—the unusual Greek word-order draws particular attention to the ‘my’” (p. 623). France goes onto state that the syntax shows Jesus’ ownership of the church and reiterates his work in growing the church. Therefore, it is imperative to remember that it is not the preacher’s responsibility for building the church, but rather God’s responsibility. Any discussion on growing the church must be kept in this context: God causes both spiritual and numerical growth in the church. This study is not suggesting that the advancement of God’s kingdom can happen through a human-made invention. Yet, when examining the context of this important statement, one finds that the immediately preceding statement in Matthew 16:18 of “you are Peter, and on this rock...” While the full meaning of this statement is debated among denominations, France (2007) shows that a clear indication of this passage is that Jesus also intended to use Peter in this mission.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (2001/2016).

When examining Scripture and church history, patterns emerge to show how God uses specific tools and methods to facilitate growth in his church. The evidence from both the Bible and also church history is clear: God uses preaching as one the primary tools to cause growth (Satterlee, 2006). Scripture does not indicate that growth happens without proactive believers; in fact, it is through the obedience of the saints that the church flourishes (Alawode, 2020). A pastor is proactive when he faithfully preaches God’s Word (1 Timothy 4:2), and when this happens, growth should follow. Therefore, the church would do well to discover the best ways to accomplish this.

An example of God using humans to work out his providential plan is found in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, when Paul stated, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” Paul recognized both Apollos, and he played a role in the growth; yet God was ultimately responsible. Preachers must continue to “plant and water” the flock of God in God-ordained methods. Devries (2016) states that while there is benefit in studying and understanding best practices for preaching, he contends,

The ultimate spiritual success of preaching lies 'not in plausible words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power' so that the faith of the audience 'might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God' (1 Cor 2:1-5).

While this paper acknowledges there are many causes for growth, one of the primary methods is teaching his Word. It is not the only way, but the Christian and the church would be lacking without it. This dissertation will highlight the benefit and ongoing necessity of preaching God’s Word. Isaiah 55:11 states, “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” God uses the proclamation of his Word to accomplish his plan. This happens through the Holy Spirit, as the Holy Spirit moves through the congregation, and people hear the

proclamation of God's Word. The Holy Spirit causes growth and spiritual health. The proclamation of God's Word, or preaching, is a divinely spiritual act. This verse is still relevant; God's Word does not return back empty. This "implies that whenever God speaks, the effect must follow" (Jamieson et al., 1984, n. p.). Therefore, if it does come back empty, scripture is not the problem but the speaker.

This study is not an attempt to formulate a scheme to draw people to God. The Apostle Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Paul showed what makes a good preacher is not a human-made mechanism or wisdom (Taylor, 2014). When a pastor pursues God's command in 1 Timothy 4:13 to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" with excellence, greater fruit will be possible as the pastor is more aligned with Scripture. God uses his pre-ordained methods to grow his church, including the preaching of his Word. This study is not chasing after "plausible words of wisdom" but rather a pursuit of godly excellence and precision. It is a recognition that the Holy Spirit is working during the preaching of God's Word. It was the Spirit who originally inspired the words to be written. It was the Spirit who guided the church through the canonization and translation process. It is the Spirit who draws people into fellowship and the desire to grow, and it is the same Spirit who opens the listeners' hearts and minds to the gospel being preached (Forbes, 2010). Therefore, this study is not an attempt to discover a "quick fix" for church growth; instead, it is a discovery of how to lead the church better through the combination of Scripture and communication themes. It is built on the belief that proper techniques combined with proper motivation will bring greater results for God's Kingdom. While the motivation of bringing glory to God and the mission of making

disciples has been consistent throughout church history, the techniques on how this can be done are constantly changing.

With these theological considerations in mind, other factors must also be considered as well. Even though God has promised to build his church, the church in America is facing a sharp decline (Barna, 2016). If God has promised to build it, yet no growth is happening, the church should examine itself to ensure it is not hindering God's work. While there are many reasons for this, this dissertation showcases the importance of preaching. While some advocate that there should not be such a high emphasis on preaching "These findings [of how much media is consumed] made me seriously question the value of spending half of my week crafting a Sunday sermon" (Jethani, 2019). In a discussion on whether preaching is still useful, Posey (2016) states

The practice of preaching should never be considered to be out dated or simply part of a bygone memory. Ineffective preaching should always be replaced by something better. Effective preaching will always have a vital role in the growth of believers, including those of the Millennial generation (p. 19).

The argument therefore is not that preaching is a problem, but ineffective preaching is a problem which must be addressed.

Each generation has unique communication methods including terms, mannerisms, idioms, and body language that can enhance or hinder one's communication ability. If a pastor can successfully communicate to the current generation, he will be able to more accurately and effectively communicate God's Word (Eswine, 2008). This study is not addressing the gospel message; that is the same since the New Testament was written. Rather it is a study on how to best communicate that message. This type of evaluation of communication methods of the gospel needs to happen frequently. Eswine provides a helpful illustration, stating it is like an English-speaking person would need to communicate in Spanish if he is preaching to Spanish speakers, a

preacher must be willing to use the communication designed for this generation to be the most impactful.

Statement of the Problem

The western church has continually declined in attendance and relevance over the past several decades (Barna, 2014). These trends show no sign of change as the millennial generation is the least religious generation in America (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016). Thus, the church needs to discover how to lead this generation. Historically, a way the church has been led into spiritual growth and attendance increase was through the preaching of God's Word. As a result the goal of the dissertation was to examine preachers who are currently experiencing significant numerical growth in their churches in an attempt to discover any commonalities in their communication tactics, and specifically, how these commonalities related to the millennial generation. Much of the previous research regarding millennials and the church was to discover why they left the church, not how to preach to them or lead them forward (Kinnaman, & Hawkins, 2016). Posey (2016) states, "Although much has been written on ministering to Millennials in general, the specific topic of preaching offers very few titles." Bredfeldt (2006) states, "maximum leadership is achieved through teaching" (p. 18-19). If the church is to lead people into spiritual vitality and grow numerically in the next decade, then it must discover leadership and communication methods needed to make this happen among the millennial generation. Bredfeldt adds, "the most powerful tool for leading the people of God is teaching them the Word of God" (p. 18). This truth has yet to be fully applied to the millennial generation. Pastors must learn to communicate effectively through preaching to this largely unchurched generation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this content analysis study was to better understand how preachers who led the fastest growing churches in the Southern Baptist Convention used communication tactics previously identified as important in communicating and leading millennials in their sermons. These identified tactics were authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue. The study involved extensive review of recent sermons that these pastors had preached in their churches.

Research Questions

RQ1. How often are pastors portraying authenticity by connecting personal experiences to objective truth in their sermons?

RQ2. How often are pastors portraying positive reinforcement by encouraging positive improvements versus chastisement of negative behavior?

RQ3. How often are pastors conveying an “open dialogue” theme in sermons by discussing verbalized or perceived questions and hindrances that the listener might have?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research assumptions and delimitations will now be discussed so that a framework for the rest of the research project may be established. Assumptions are commonly accepted truths that the paper assumed true and thus built research upon them. The assumptions allowed the study to advance without the need to prove an already accepted truth. Whereas the delimitations limited the research and population being studied. Without delimitations, proper and accurate conclusions could not be made.

Assumptions

The first research assumption was that preaching, or the proclamation of God’s Word, is essential to the life and growth of a church. While some have suggested preaching is no longer relevant, both the biblical and historical evidence is clear that preaching is essential. This

assumption is rooted in Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13, James 3:1) and also verified by the continued use of the sermon throughout the history of the church.

The second assumption was that a vast majority of churches use a sermon as the primary corporate teaching method. The dissertation did not attempt to prove the necessity of the sermon. Rather, by assuming the majority of churches incorporate the sermon each week, it instead sought to discover how pastors who were leading growing churches were using themes commonly recognized as effective in communicating to millennials.

A third assumption is that effective preaching is understood and accepted by the audience. If preaching is done, but the audience did not receive the message and did not change them, it was not effective preaching. Therefore, preaching must be more than a simple exegesis of the text; it must also be concerned with how the congregation receives the homily. This should motivate the preacher to not only know the biblical text, but also the congregation in which he is preaching. None of these assumptions assume that preaching is the primary conduit of growth, but rather it is one part of a healthy church growth plan.

Delimitations

The study applied certain delimitations to limit the scope of the research and provide more accurate conclusions. The first delimitation was regarding the church's denomination. The pastors studied were all in the Southern Baptist Convention. Sermons and communication styles often vary greatly between different denominations. Mainline versus evangelical churches differ widely on the purpose, goal, style, and length of the sermon; so much so that it would likely not produce worthwhile results. Therefore, the study was limited to like-minded churches in the same denomination.

Furthermore, the preaching and teaching ministry discussed was solely for pulpit preaching ministry. It did not determine the best styles for teaching in Sunday school or a small group setting. These other formats would likely have required a different teaching style, and while that might have been a worthwhile study, it was outside the scope of this dissertation.

Implicit in a study on sermons is that the communication studied will all be verbal communication. While the sermons were transcribed in order to categorize them, all the communication studied is verbal and does not necessarily reflect communication in written or any other fashion such as non-verbal communication.

Because of the study's specificity in the context of the church, the study could not be applied to leading millennials in a secular context. Though there might have been some parallel between the two contexts of church versus unchurch millennials, the church context rightfully stressed different components of communication. How to articulate authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue was potentially thought of differently inside the church.

As previously stated, the dissertation specifically studied millennials. While there were comparisons to other generations, conclusions only applied to the millennials. Communication practices varied between generations; therefore, the dissertation was limited to those specifically in the age group.

Lastly, the study did not attempt to confirm or discredit whether the themes found in the research questions of authenticity, positive reinforcement, or open dialogue were accurate. Rather it specifically sought to understand the usage of those themes by preachers who were leading fast growing churches. It specifically sought to observe trends and find similarities among the preachers studied.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and their specific definitions helped focus the study.

1. *Communication*: While broad in its scope, this term was used for verbal communication unless otherwise noted.
2. *Millennials*: This term was defined as young adults born between 1981 to 1998 (Pew Research, 2019). The study only spoke of American millennials, whereas traits of young adults of similar ages but with other cultures and languages would yield different results.
3. *Preaching*: For the purpose of this study, preaching was defined as the public proclamation of God's Word inside of a church setting. Aligning itself to the biblical definition of preaching, which is to herald or proclaim (Strong's Concordance, 2011).
4. *Communication methods*: This term referred to a communicator's personal communication techniques in direct verbal communication.
5. *Authenticity*: This was the art of being transparent and accurately displaying who one was without a contradiction or veneer. Authenticity happens when the audience's "perception that a speaker's words match his or her beliefs and actions" (Abrahams, n.d.).
6. *Positive Reinforcement*: This spoke to the act of encouraging someone through positive interactions and feedback of their previous actions. It is the principle which states, "desirable behavior, when reinforced, tends to be repeated" (Murphy, 2018).
7. *Open Dialogue*: This referred to when the leader allowed for and listened to others in the organization. The leader interacted with the followers instead of insisting on one-way communication. This was built on the fact that "Younger generations thrive on feedback and want it often" (Hamidullah, 2015).

Significance of the Study

"Leaders cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick et al., 1967). This statement is true for all leaders, but especially for pastors whose primary role is to "preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2). Communication is a worthwhile study based on the need for effective teaching of the Gospel and making new disciples. Romans 10:17 states, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." This follows Paul's words in Romans 10:14, "And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" Preaching is significant to the advancement of the Gospel and therefore, a worthwhile study.

While preaching is a spiritual act in which God brings forth the fruit of it (1 Cor. 3:6), an interesting paradox still emerges. Some preachers have more “fruit” brought forth from their ministry than others. Therefore, it stands to reason that some are better at communication than others. Furthermore, a preacher can enhance these communication skills. The more effective a person becomes at preaching God’s Word, the more effective they become at reaching the lost and training the flock of God. Therefore, the significance of the study came from the significance of the subject matter.

The study of effective preaching of God’s Word has always been important, but it arguably carries additional weight in our current age. Millennials are now the largest generation in America, but also the least religious of all generations in America (Barna, 2014). In the immediately preceding generations, there were large events such as the Billy Graham Crusades which would frequently fill large stadiums of both church and unchurched people. Yet the frequency and scope of those large preaching events have decreased as has regular church attendance in general (Barna, 2014). If the church does not discover a way to better reach and develop the millennial generation, it could lose the generation. While there are other methods and approaches in addition to communication that need to be addressed, Scripture is clear that preaching is essential to the life of church and therefore, must be at the forefront of any study regarding how to reach millennials.

In addition to the significance of this study biblically, the study had scholarly significance as well due to the lack of current research on this subject. As will be shown in the literature review, while the topic of ministering to millennials had been well researched, the majority of the previous research had studied the rationale and reasons for millennials dropping out of church upon entering adulthood (Kinnaman and Hawkins, 2016). These studies attempted to

discover millennial thought processes and rationale for leaving the church but provide little information on how to reach them and help them grow spiritually especially in the sermon. There have also been many books and papers written discussing the role and influence of preaching as it relates to spiritual formation as well as preaching to “postmoderns” (the millennial generation is normally considered to be a part of postmoderns-although they are not synonymous).

In the singular source that dealt with the idea of preaching to millennials, Posey (2016) concluded “the researcher recommends that there be more literature written specifically on the topic of preaching effectively to the millennial generation. Although much has been written on ministering to Millennials in general, the specific topic of preaching offers very few titles” (p. 203). While Posey addressed similar issues to this dissertation, this study went more in-depth in the specific area of discovering the frequency and scope of themes in sermons of those pastors who are bearing fruit. Therefore, this was a timely and needed study.

Summary of the Design

The qualitative study was a content analysis of sermons preached during their weekly worship services. Seven sermons from the past seven months were evaluated, and they were obtained through the church’s public websites and social media platforms. All the sermons were from the lead teaching pastor of the church, not from any guest speakers. This was done in an attempt to understand any trends and features of their sermons, which might correlate to their church’s growth. The sermon’s transcripts initially were auto generated through the social media sites on which the sermons were posted (YouTube and Facebook), but because of lack of accuracy, a program called Descript was used to transcribe the sermons. The transcripts were then analyzed for accuracy again. Those sermons were then reviewed in a detailed qualitative content analysis. This content analysis methodology was used to examine how the primary

teaching pastor used various traits including the three previously mentioned: authenticity, positive feedback, and open dialogue in his sermon. The type of content analysis of this study was conceptual, which sought to discover how often these themes were conveyed by the preachers and to what effect. Yet, the study went further than just simply counting keywords. Because the study was qualitative, it sought to understand the underlying context of what was being stated. The accuracy of the study was then triangulated through the literature review, the detailed personal content analysis, and the use of electronic analysis of the information. Observations and conclusions were then made concerning the findings. Special attention was given to those traits that were present in all three preachers. For instance, if certain traits were found frequently in all three of the preachers of the fastest growing churches, then it was likely other pastors who were seeking the same type of growth would benefit from the findings.

Chapter One provided a summary of the study's purpose, problem, question, and design. It showed how this topic was an important topic to research for the church. Preaching the Bible is an essential activity, and effective preaching, which is well received by the congregation, should be a goal of every preacher. Furthermore, it started the discussion of the need to apply the study to the millennial generation. The next step was to determine what, if any, information was already written through the literature review in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Preaching has been one of the most important practices in church history since Christ said in Mark 16:15, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation”. It has proven to be influential in the spiritual development of the individuals in the congregation as well as the development of the congregation itself (Pettit, 2008). In recent history there has also been a better understanding of the nuances of communication. This literature review will attempt to understand previous information and writings regarding communication and preaching.

This chapter examines current research and the popular methods in communicating, both historically and specifically to the millennial generation. This literature review analyzed pertinent books, articles, and other resources attempted to discover the preexisting research done on this topic of effective communication and preaching to discover what is most effective in leading the millennial generation in the church. A wide range of topics was reviewed regarding preaching, communication, communication from leaders to followers, and millennial preferences in both Christian and secular contexts.

Theological Framework for the Study

There were two major topics that were examined in this literature review. The first was preaching and the second was communication in general. Preaching would naturally fit into the realm of communication studies, but preaching is a significant enough topic by itself, especially for this study, that preaching was dealt with separately from communication. Both were examined in the theological section of the literature review; yet in order to address the specific topic of the dissertation, more references were made to preaching as compared to communication in this first theological section.

Biblical Definition

Before reviewing secondary sources about preaching, it was prudent to first understand what Scripture itself stated about it, since it is the primary source about preaching. There is not a clear definition of what preaching is in the Bible. However, the word most translated as “preach” in the English Bible is the Greek word *kérussó* which Strong defined as “to be a herald, proclaim” (Strong's Concordance, 2011). When this word was viewed in context, it gave a better understanding of what preaching means biblically.

The first item to be addressed from scripture was that preaching was to be expected. 1 Corinthians 9:16 states “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” Paul showed preaching was expected and normative. It was not something to be celebrated as much as it was something to be mourned if not present. This theme was not only carried out by Paul personally, but applied to other pastors as well. The pastoral epistles of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus have much to say regarding preaching. 1 Timothy 4:13 states “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” Once again, it shows a clear expectation for teaching and preaching. In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul commands the younger Timothy “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Not only does this verse show the command to preach, it also gives a good description on what preaching is when he states to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort”.

Preaching the word cannot be reduced to teaching it (in the sense of simply explaining the meaning of the word as a purely didactic activity); it involves the urgent call to respond that is signified by the imperatives ‘reprove, rebuke and exhort’. (Griffiths, 2018, Loc. 820)

Wall (2012) provides additional insight into this command:

The immediate purpose of Timothy's ministerial duty to "proclaim the word" is to refute falsehood (so 4:3– 4) and clarify the gospel (so 4:8; see above on 2:15), the latter agreeing with the normal sense of the verb used here, κηρύσσω (*kēryssō* , "proclaim"). Moreover, in this hortatory setting, both "refuting and rebuking" a congregation's bad theology and teaching it good theology (catechesis) are roles performed by Scripture (so 3:16b). (p. 235)

Preaching was viewed as a way to publicly lead the congregation away from erroneous doctrine into right doctrine. Therefore, preaching was a way to move and develop a congregation and clearly was expected to be performed in the church.

Another powerful passage concerning preaching was found in 1 Corinthians 1:17; it states, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." In the New Testament, preaching was not an exercise in eloquence or sophistication. It was not something that should be seen as a leadership tool which can be manipulated or a skill to bring oneself praise. Rather it was a clear statement of the gospel, namely Christ's work on the cross. Taylor (2014) states "Paul is attacking the use of rhetoric as a value system, not rhetoric per se" and then goes on to say "For Paul, the effectiveness of proclamation lay not in the manipulative rhetorical devices of the speaker but rather in the persuasive message of the cross proclaimed in the power of the Spirit (2:1– 5)" (p. 52). Preachers should not seek to put on a performance, but rather communicate in a natural way that glorifies God not himself.

Another trait of preaching that brings benefits to the church is that within a high view of preaching is also a high view of scripture (Ryken, & Wilson, 2007; Robinson, 2014; Myers, 2018). It centers the church around God's Word versus personal opinions. The proclamation is only as important as the message itself (Piper, 2018; Helm, 2014). It is through preaching that the congregation might be sanctified and brought up in the faith (Childers, 2004). Griffiths (2018) provides a helpful summary of preaching:

We can conclude that at least three things must occur in and through any ministry of the word: (1) God is speaking, because through the Bible and by his Spirit God speaks today those words he once spoke; (2) God is achieving his purposes, because God's word is living and active; and (3) God is encountering his people, because he characteristically meets and relates to his people through his word. (Loc. 370)

Satterlee (2006) in the *Purpose of Preaching* summarizes preaching in this way "Preaching ought to do what God is doing in the way that God does it". Ultimately preaching is an extension to what God is already doing. God promised that he will build the church (Matthew 16:18) so therefore, preaching should be seeking to accomplish this task spiritually and numerically.

Literary Definition of Preaching

There are unlimited definitions of what "good preaching" is, and they were largely subjective. Because many definitions tended to be vague or subjective, it was difficult to build a study off of these types of definitions. Therefore, the definition used for this study attempted to be as an objective as possible. A clear and concise definition of preaching was "A public proclamation of God's word" (Griffiths, 2018, Loc. 390). This was very similar to the definition of the word "preaching" itself (Strong's Concordance, 2011).

An important distinction needs to be addressed: preaching is not merely teaching God's Word. Rather, it is more than that. There are different words in the Greek language that speak of instruction and preaching (Strong's Concordance, 2011). So, while preaching involves teaching, the literature continuously reiterated that preaching required an emotional appeal as stated by Ryken and Wilson (2007),

[Preachers'] aim is more than to explain the Bible, however important that aim is. They want the proclamation of God's Word to be a revelatory event, a moment when God discloses himself afresh, a time when the people of God know that they have met with the living God. (p. 176)

Thus, preaching should be more than a simple reciting of factual statements, but rather an emotional appeal and connection with the audience. "No message can be effective unless it

touches emotion and unless it motivates the hearer” (Perry, 1997, p.179). This emotional appeal will supernaturally link the Biblical text with the God-given gifts, personality, and communication style of the pastor. This becomes holistic preaching that involves everything in the preacher, and it connects to intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually to the listener. Snyder (2018) adds, “This generation is hungry for something genuine. They don’t want to hear an empty, powerless message. Instead they long for someone to show them a passionate, powerful relationship with God is possible” (p. 17). As will be discussed later, this is of vital importance to the millennial listener.

Leader’s Communication to Followers

In defining communication for pastors, it is helpful to understand leadership communication in general. Henninger and Barth (2009) in *Communication and Leadership* defined leadership this way, “Leadership is a deliberate influence of persons on persons to fulfill their common tasks in the context of a structured work situation”, this is closely connected to the idea of preaching. There is more than one way to deliberately influence people, but one of the primary ways was through verbal communication or the use of spoken language (Charteris-Black, 2007, p. 1). Thus, as a pastor attempts to lead the church towards growth, he must understand how important verbal communication is. Luthra and Dahiya (2015) stated, “To become a great leader one should be a great communicator. Great leaders are always considered as first-class communicators; they have a clear set of values and they always believe in promoting and inculcating those values in others” (p. 43). Charteris-Black (2007) stated that transformational leadership and verbal communication are linked. The transformational leader attempts to pull others up through his or her speech. This thought aligns well with preaching,

since preaching is a proclamation of God's Word, a message that is transformational in its essence (Romans 12:1).

Modern View of Preaching

Both communication in general and preaching specifically, have undergone changes in the last century in both how it is accomplished and how it is perceived (Eswine, 2008). Kandish (2014) informs readers that many have said that there is no longer value in the traditional practice of preaching, and Jethani (2019) believes that pastors' time could be better spent elsewhere.

The Negative Perception of Preaching

Despite the historical and Biblical precedent for the need of preaching, preaching has undergone implicit and explicit attacks. Robinson (2014) showed some have accused the practice of being antiquated, unnecessary, and not relevant. Supporting this position is the fact that the millennial generation is the least religious generation in America today (Kinnaman, 2016). Many of these millennials grew up in the church, under theologically sound preaching but have still left the church (Barna, 2016). It is argued then, the methods which were used to train them are no longer beneficial; specifically, preaching is outdated and inefficient (Kandish, 2014). Pettit informed readers that the common prevailing view was of "preaching as an outdated, obsolete means of communicating spiritual truth to a postmodern world" (Pettit, 2008, p. 215). Others pointed to communication and education theories, suggesting that modern studies have shown this type of communication was no longer relevant (Kandiah, 2014). Pettit (2008) stated others have suggested that preaching was going to be replaced with other modes of teaching Scripture such as movies or group discussion. This study will not argue that these other methods do not have benefits; but rather it will show that the sermon still has relevance.

The Continued Relevance of Preaching

In considering the continual decline of church attendance, the reason for this decline should be discovered. A number of reasons could be blamed for this departure, Parrett (2013) remarked that because of the resources available, whether they be books, video, audio, or other online resources, “Some make the case that we do not need to gather at all to hear good preaching and teaching. Would we dismiss these practices because of our new technologies?” (p. 245). Parrett added, “Thankfully, most churches have not yet been inclined to do so (give up on preaching)” (p. 245). Some of the resources that are becoming more common are from theologically sound churches and well-respected pastors, but many of these resources are coming from people and organizations that do not place a high emphasis on staying true to God’s Word. The problem has been that there was little to no accountability for the teachers when they were not connected to the local congregation.

The question should be asked though considering current trends, is preaching dead or can it still find usefulness if done properly and with the millennial generation in mind? Posey (2016) attempted to answer these questions by stating “preaching the Word has been a primary means of communicating God’s Word from the beginning and the evidence does not present any reason to believe that a particular generation will be without the need for oral communication of the Word of God” (p. 202). His point was this, that while the millennial generation and post-modern culture is unique and presents new challenges not yet faced, there have been other generations in church history that have faced other challenges, and yet preaching survived. There is no credible reason to believe this situation is different.

While there have been many reasons why millennials have dropped out of church, it can be summarized this way, “The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to

use religious language; it's a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.” (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016, p. 21) Therefore, this is not strictly a problem with preaching, but if there is a proper understanding of the nature of preaching and how it influences the corporate discipleship shaping process, one will see how the two are inseparably linked. This idea is further explored in the following sections.

Abandoning preaching would be abandoning one of the key components of spiritual formation. Preaching has been an essential part of the church since the time of the apostles (Robinson, 2014). Expository preaching has proven to be a successful method for church growth in difficult and post Christian cultures (Pettit, 2008, p. 219). Many of the greatest figures in church history were preachers. From Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon, Moody, King, and Graham, the history of the church has been shaped by preachers who not only taught believers the Bible but inspired them to obey it. It was through the avenue of preaching that the church has been led (Edwards, 2004). The sermon was a God ordained idea allowing the leaders of the church to communicate God's wisdom to the people. It was not a human invention, but God's idea (Robinson, 2014).

Preaching's Effects on Spiritual Formation

Much has been written regarding the definition of spiritual formation; therefore, it would not be possible to fully explore the definition of spiritual formation in this literature review. Pettit (2008) states “Spiritual formation then, is the ongoing process of the triune God transforming the believer's life and character toward the life and character of Jesus Christ—accomplished by the ministry of the Spirit in the context of biblical community” (p. xxv). This was the working

definition for the dissertation regarding spiritual formation and growth. Spiritual formation is the ultimate goal of preaching; preaching is not the only factor, but it is an important one.

Personal Spiritual Formation. Though preaching was not mentioned in the above definition. Pettit clarified how preaching is related to the idea of spiritual formation. He stated, “But what does preaching have to do with spiritual formation? It has everything to do with it, especially if we understand the place of preaching in the context of a local church, and if we understand what is meant by ‘spiritual formation.’” (2008, p. 216). This idea originated in the beginning of the church, as explained by Robinson (2014), “To the New Testament writers, preaching stood as the event through which God works” (p. 2). This was not an invention in church or a tradition that had been passed down, but it stood as “one of God’s primary means of bringing about spiritual transformation” (Pettit, 2008, p. 220). Preaching was an integral part of the early church. Acts 2:42 states that immediately following Pentecost, the early church, “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.” This was one of the primary activities of the early church so that they might be trained.

The Apostle Paul clearly saw preaching as part of the maturing process as well. Samra (2006) stated, “In this case, “preach the gospel” will refer to the ongoing work of teaching and discipleship that builds on initial evangelism” (p. 46). Fulmer (1966) added, “Expository preaching—preaching that moves through entire biblical books from beginning to end and that accurately explains the biblical text—can be a great help in this regard, as it models for the congregational members how they should read and study the Bible (p.128).” This was reiterated by his following statement, “preaching has as a primary function in the total aspect of Christian education” (1966, p. 128). Preaching should be seen as essential to the Christian’s development.

Mcquilkin (2011) built on this premise of preaching being an important influence on spiritual formation and took it one step further arguing that preaching was not only a contributing factor of spiritual formation; it was a primary factor. He said that “Holy Spirit preaching is the means that seems best designed to aid spiritual formation”. Mcquilkin went on to suggest that there were four key principles that had to be present for preaching to result in spiritual formation without distinguishing between generations, giving the impression that it would be accurate regardless of all other circumstances. These principles were that the preaching should be Bible based, Spirit energized, verdict demanding, and audience connected. If these components were there, then preaching should connect with the congregation and encourage further spiritual formation. How these principles were utilized varied depending on one’s audience. Obviously preaching to millennials, the focus of this paper, was unique for a plethora of reasons ranging from practical small preferences to differences in worldviews.

Corporate Spiritual Formation. Childers (2004) stated that one of the primary purposes of preaching was calling Christians to live out their God ordained mission and then uniting them to accomplish that mission. This mission involves growing in faithful witness together. A key passage which combined the ideas of teaching or preaching with spiritual formation was 1 Timothy 4:13-16. It states

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Verse fifteen was often cited in many of the works mentioned above in the literature review on spiritual formation. This verse aligns with what many of the authors argued when they stated that spiritual formation was an immersing process that impacted all parts of an individual’s life

(Beagles, 2012). When viewing this verse in context, Paul instructs Timothy in verse thirteen to devote himself to “public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” Following this instruction is verse fourteen to fifteen, which is a warning to give himself over to these things, and then in verse sixteen Paul again advises Timothy to watch over his teaching for the sake of saving himself and the hearers of his teaching. Following the logic of Paul in this very important passage, it can be surmised that teaching God’s Word is essential to the spiritual formation of Christians (Pettit, 2008). Without God’s Word, believers would have no understanding of spiritual formation at all.

Summary

The importance of preaching in the development and formation of a congregation should be clearly seen as biblical. The biblical authors did not see leading the congregation into spiritual and numerical growth as something that should be separated from the act of preaching. Instead, it was a primary avenue for the elders to lead the congregation to maturity. The modern preacher would do well to hold that same biblical viewpoint.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Having established that preaching was biblical and needed, a theoretical analysis is now formed from current communication theories. This section’s primary goal is to discover how communication and preaching styles impact the organizational development of preaching. Preaching has a unique ability to cause both personal and organizational growth simultaneously.

Verbal Communication and Organizational Development.

Verbal communication is essential in any organization and especially for the leader of that organization. This type of communication is uniquely designed to build trust and clarity that other forms of communication cannot. Men (2014) said of verbal communication, “As the richest

medium, face-to-face communication allows nonverbal communication and immediate feedback and reflects the willingness of the management to listen to employees”. There should be no doubt that verbal communication is essential to leadership (Solaja, 2016). If done well, a pastor should see his sermon as a tool that can lead the congregation forward in multiple avenues.

Weick (2001) while discussing verbal communication stated, “Organizations are built, maintained, and activated through the medium of communication. If that communication is misunderstood, the existence of the organization itself becomes more tenuous” (p. 136). Studies have also shown that employees tended to feel more satisfied with the organization when their managers used more face-to-face communication as compared to other types (Men, 2014). This satisfaction felt by the employees often translated into the organization reaching their shared goals as well. While these studies were performed in business settings, there was no indication that they could not be applied to non-profit organizations as well. In addition, Solaja (2016) showed leaders must not be content with verbal communication in and of itself; but rather it must be “good” leadership communication. “The managers must employ good leadership communication style when disseminating information that will positively affect productivity in the organization” (p. 114). When this was done, it had the potential to dramatically enhance the organization. As shown in this literature review, the sermon has the unique opportunity to provide this positive experience for the church. Therefore, it is wise to understand what this “good” communication is, so that it can be employed from the pulpit. The pastor should realize that there are near limitless applications to the sermon.

Millennial Communication and Preaching

Having discussed the theological rationale for preaching and seeing how it has an opportunity for leading an organization or church, and having examined communication style, these two topics were next examined together to understand how they impacted each other.

Eswine (2008) suggested in *Preaching to a Post-everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with our Culture* that proper communication included knowing the cultural grammar, which he defined as “the way that a particular person or region accounts for God, people, place, and self. These people interpreted the sound bites and snapshots of life without the Bible. They walked by the light of what they presently knew” (p. 148). A preacher, therefore, must be proficient in scripture and in the culture to allow him to communicate effectively. Therefore, Eswine added the sermon must enter this cacophony of ideas and “speak the biblical reply clearly and with passion so that the sermon comes off not just as an answer but the answer” (p. 148). Ultimately the preacher is tasked with showing that a sermon not only still has relevance today, but in fact has the potential to be more important than it ever has been in church history.

Though there was an abundance of ideas and concepts mentioned in the literature, there were a few key ideas which were continually addressed. First, preferred communication style varied immensely based on racial and age demographics. Both of these demographics had a profound impact on communication style (Brandt & Uusi-Kakkuri, 2016). Just as one does not go into a Spanish speaking church and preach in English hoping to communicate the Gospel, one should not speak the same way to an older, rural, southern church as they would to a northern, millennial, urban church, and expect good results. In each one of those situations the preacher must account for his audience and communicate in such a way that they understand and accept.

This is not only a wise communication tactic, but also a biblical thought as well. Paul accounted for his audience when preaching to those in Athens at the Areopagus stating in Acts 17:22-23:

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Since communication styles vary greatly, one study cannot determine the best communication tactics for everyone, rather it must be narrowed down. Therefore, the communication style this dissertation examined was that of evangelical millennials.

When reviewing the literature concerning communicating to millennials, three major components were observed. They were authenticity, positivity, and open dialogue. These traits consistently allowed people to effectively communicate to millennials, whether they were teachers, employers, speakers, or caregivers. Therefore, these were the traits that were reviewed for how they impacted preaching to millennials.

Authenticity

The first key attribute was authenticity, a trait that has continually gained favor among young adults. Millennials consistently said they wanted a leader who was authentic; this was true for the secular workplace and the church (Williams, 2011). Quantified Communicators discovered that “Compared to the average leader in our analysis, we found that the 20 most authentic CEOs stood out in several ways: They were 50 percent more passionate. Their visual delivery (body language, gestures, eye contact) was 34 percent more effective. Their messages were 29 percent clearer” (Abrahams, n.d.). Kinnaman (2016) remarked specifically about the church saying,

Young people are looking for answers and for authenticity. When they see a church or Christians seemingly more concerned with appearances than with truth, more concerned

about rules than love, and more concerned with money and success than poverty and justice, is it any surprise that they flee? (p. 226)

This meant they did not want someone who was pretending to be something he was not or was disingenuous in his communication and actions. Kinnaman made the argument that these individuals grew up under the attractional church model which put a high emphasis on performance and programs. The millennials and younger generations do not seek after this like their parents did, they instead are seeking genuine relationships. This makes authenticity even more important for the church as compared to secular organizations. Stetzer (2009) showed that the church has unfortunately been perceived by a lack of integrity and authenticity. It has frequently been labeled as more self-serving than genuine and authentic. Kinnaman (2016) stated that of all the important traits to have as a leader, being honest and open were the top two traits a leader must possess to win back millennials in the church.

Pastors must work hard at providing authentic communication; it does not always come naturally. Stetzer (2009) advised

A big part of transparency is not just the struggle during preparation of content, but the presentation of that struggle itself. A pastor or teacher can go a long way in cultivating an atmosphere of depth, as well as authenticity and community, by simply acknowledging that he or she doesn't have it all figured out. By including not only the informative content but also the personal content, including questions and struggles, people have the sense that they are truly encountering something of quality—a moment of true, deep, and honest content. And that's what connects.

Abrahams (n.d.) stated that authenticity happens when the audience's "perception that a speaker's words match his or her beliefs and actions." He goes on to explain the benefits of authenticity:

Authentic people seem genuine and sincere; they are confident in who they are and what they believe. In a word, they are perceived as *real*. Further, there exists a quiet certitude in an authentic person's demeanor and communication style. That is, they are able to express their ideas and feelings in a connected, conversational way that not only relays their message but also conveys a sense that "this is the way it is from my perspective.

Eswine (2008) put it this way, “Every preacher comes from somewhere. This means that preaching is an ethnic endeavor. Preaching requires us to account for our expository ethnicity, which refers to the cultural grammar and backtalk that I bring to the biblical text as a local preacher” (p. 148). The preacher must understand not only the text but himself and the audience as well. This may seem daunting, but it can be seen as a relief as well. In one sense, it takes the pressure off the preacher because he does not need to pretend to be something he is not.

Abrahams (n.d.) remarked when a leader is authentic,

It is far easier to be yourself than it is to take on a persona you think others want to see. Authentic leaders can spend less time worrying about external perceptions and more time focused on their jobs and their communication goals.

He goes on to explain some of the benefits of being an authentic communicator as a leader:

Research suggests authentic leaders are more trusted and believable. That trust builds up the leader’s credibility and breeds confidence in her capability and intentions, which motivates greater engagement and effort from her audience members, peers, and subordinates.

Besides being more trustworthy, authentic leaders are more likable “than someone who is disingenuous, overly polished, or putting on airs.” This is true, even if one disagrees with the point the speaker is trying to make. This truth “lays a foundation for constructive dialogue”, which is significant for the third research question. “Additionally, authentic leaders put their audiences at ease... The result is that audiences are more likely to focus on and remember what an authentic leader says”.

This information is true for various age groups, but it appears that millennials value this trait even more significantly than other generations. “Millennials appreciate authenticity. But unlike you, they expect diversity almost to the point of taking it for granted. They do not expect everyone to be like them... What they want is for you to be who you are, and for you to like them” (Espinoza, et al., 2010, p.83). The millennials in the church do not want another millennial

who holds the same viewpoints as they do. Rather they want each person to be true to himself while accepting others. This has implications for the next point.

While some might infer this is a postmodern approach to preaching, because it is highly dependent on the preacher's personal traits; ultimately, it still aligned with Scripture because authenticity is a form of honesty while inauthenticity is a form of dishonesty. Stetzer (2009) remarked following a survey about sermons that "The result of our survey seems to indicate that people are not so much interested in the method of delivery as they are in the delivery of TRUTH that is relevant to their lives. Authentic preaching that presents God's Word as the answer will draw many people." (p. 171-172). Therefore, this trait of organizational communication should naturally be built into preaching as well.

Positive Reinforcement.

The second trait was positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is a teaching tool that "addresses the well documented psychological principle that says desirable behavior, when reinforced, tends to be repeated" (Murphy, 2018). Studies have continually shown that people respond better to positivity than negativity (Men & Yue, 2019). When a preferred future for an organization was established, positivity was crucial in having people buy in and commit to the vision (Williams, 2011). This information was true even in the medical fields; positive communication towards patients had a dramatic positive effect on patients' wellbeing and their chances of improvement (Reinout 2010). If this was true for the physical body, it had a greater potential for improvement in organizations. The benefits of positive reinforcement were true for all people, but especially true for millennials. Ferri-Reed (2010) noted "Millennials expect to do well and receive recognition for their contributions." Ferri-Reed went on to say, "It seemed that no matter how much feedback and positive reinforcement she provided, they expected even

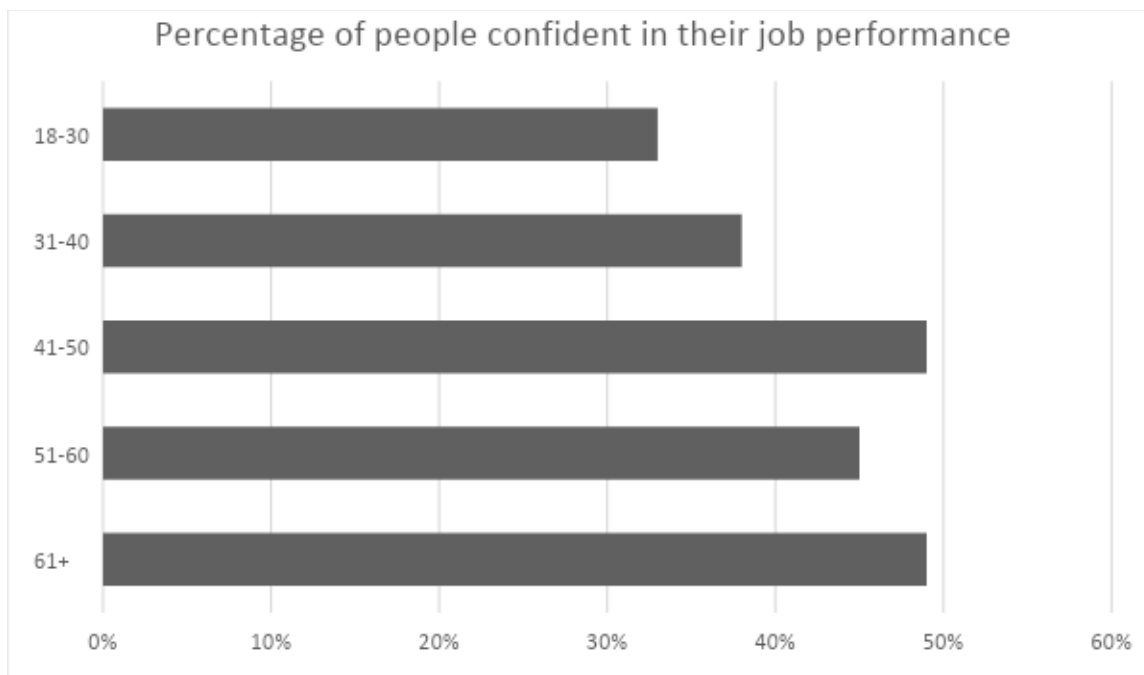
more.” Thus, positive reinforcement was determined to be a key trait when working with millennials. Generally speaking, it was not possible to give them too much positive reinforcement. Furthermore, much of the conversation about millennials in the church have been centered around their desire for a therapeutic experience (Smith & Denton, 2009). One of the key ideas they sought from religion was to feel good about themselves.

The question should be asked, why was positive reinforcement so important to millennials. Espinoza, et al. (2010) offered a suggestion, “One explanation for millennial preoccupation with positive attention is the result of a subtle shift in parenting style” from training to nurturing causing them to expect nurturing language (p. 83). Many millennials have been positively reinforced since early childhood. “Their high expectations stem from the high volume of positive feedback and encouragement they received as children. Some observers have nicknamed them the "trophy kids" because parents and teachers inundated them with awards and trophies” Ferri-Reed (2010). Therefore, they expected it from others as well. Furthermore, if they were not receiving this type of praise, they naturally assumed it was because one was not pleased with them. As previously discussed, when people feel valued, they respond better. This history was partially to blame for the “entitled” stereotype that was given to this generation; yet it must also be understood and utilized for anyone attempting to lead and communicate to them as well (Rainer, 2011). One can either bemoan their constant need for positive reinforcement or accept and lead them effectively through it.

Another contributing factor for their need for positive reinforcement was their lack of self-confidence. While one might expect that since millennials have received such nurturing support their whole life, they would naturally have a strong sense of self confidence. Yet that did not appear to be the case. In fact, it seemed as though it might be the opposite. “Millennial

employees expect feedback and to be told how to approach projects” (Nolan, 2015). If millennials were not receiving positive reinforcement or acknowledgment, they were unsure if they were doing a good job and lacked confidence in their work. This was compounded by the fact that many millennials were still in the early stages of their career, marriages, and families and thus also lacked full life experiences needed to give them confidence. As evidence of this, Murphy’s (Leadership IQ, 2017) survey revealed that 18-30 years old (youngest millennials at that time) had the highest percentage of individuals who were not confident in their job performance (Figure 1). This fact likely translated to other parts of their life as well. He (2018) stated elsewhere that positive reinforcement was the “top thing millennials want”.

Figure 1



Millennials and Gen Z are longing for positive reinforcement. The more a leader can provide this for them the stronger their relationship with the leader will become. Men and Yue (2019) asserted leaders must be concerned with promoting and communication in a positive manner. They explained, “Nurturing a positive emotional culture is just as important as building a healthy

cognitive culture given that emotional culture can directly affect employees' behavior" (p. 9). They went on to state the benefits this type of communication had on a workforce. "Employees working in a positive emotional culture can be altruistic in helping coworkers, respectful to organizational members, concerned about the welfare of their company, and can engage in extra-role activities" (p. 9). It was not hard to see the potential impact that the same type of communication could have on a church.

For the preacher, it can be difficult to be positive since certain passages invoke a lamenting emotion. However, the gospel means "good news". If the gospel message is presented properly, there is always a reason for hope. This is implied in 1 Peter 3:15 which states, "always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,". It does not mean that the preacher should lie or be disingenuous, thus undoing any authenticity he might have, rather understanding there is always a reason for hope and positivity for the Christian, even in the darkest of days.

Open Dialogue

The last attribute was open dialogue, which will be defined as giving the opportunity to be heard. Millennials have stated continually they want to interact with the leaders. Millennials "preferred more intense discussions." They desired an "endless craving for feedback" (Ferri-Reed, 2010). "Many of the millennials we interviewed told us that the primary authority figures in their life are their most trusted friends." This was reiterated by Williams (2011) "Millennials are more likely to construct their own opinion rather than be instructed on the 'correct way of thinking.' They tend to view teachers as experts and mentors, rather than as their master and commander" (p. 16). Espinoza, et al. (2010) went on to say their closest friends were their parents, showing millennials desired leadership whom they could engage with and interact with

on a personal level (p. 109). They wanted genuine, authentic relationships and they saw that as a two-way street. In their mind it was a relationship that gave the best opportunity to be heard.

It was also shown that “Younger generations thrive on feedback and want it often.” (Hamidullah, 2015). They long for personal connection and dialogue. Connecting this to the spiritual, Thomas (2018) went as far to say that personal relationships caused greater spiritual growth than any other spiritual activity. Thus, there appeared to be a connection between dialogue and spiritual development which is formed through the avenue of relationships.

Pettit (2008) said many have suggested the sermon should be abandoned for an open discourse type of teaching, which overall aligned well with the literature showing the importance of open dialogue. However, millennials have stated they do not mind listening and being in a more traditional atmosphere of teaching; they just wanted to be able to receive and also give feedback (Rainer, 2011). They were seeking a mentor-type relationship, not a boss who just stated orders. A pastor should attempt to discover how he can model this in all walks of his ministry.

Open dialogue was likely the hardest trait discussed to incorporate in the sermon because generally the sermon is thought of as one-way communication. Usually, there is no allotted time for back and forth. Yet, there are ways to still incorporate this or at the least mimic it in the sermon. Some pastors have allowed questions to be texted to them at the end of the sermon. Other pastors have asked for congregants to write out questions beforehand so messages could be more directly applied to where they are (Rouse, 2018). The most likely option for pastors though would be to involve “perceived interaction” instead of direct interaction. This would involve a pastor thinking through questions the congregation might have had beforehand and stating, “You might be asking yourself...” during the sermon. This would allow the pastor to verbalize what he

thought those in the congregation might be asking themselves. If he was involved with the congregation on a close basis, these questions should come naturally to him. By answering the questions, the pastor believed they were internally wrestling with, the millennial could feel heard and understood by the pastor.

Leading Millennials Through Communication

Because millennials are unique, the methods used to lead millennials must also be unique. Posey (2016) stated, “Millennials are unique, and it cannot be assumed that they can be treated like any other generation. They are postmodern and post-Christian. Unlike previous generations, they grew up without the Bible” (p. 202). Therefore, clear communication of basic Christian tenets is needed. There cannot be an assumption that they understand or appreciate the message, which makes communication all the more important.

Beagles (2012) also showed that intentional teaching is more important than the actual curriculum for young people’s spiritual formation. Intentional teaching can mask curriculum faults if done well or create issues even when the curriculum is acceptable. Norton stated (1981) that the most authentic and intentional communication method is the one most natural to the teacher. Regardless of the curriculum or subject matter being taught, the intentional and natural teaching of the teacher is the most effective communication tactic.

Canaday and Galindo (2010) took the idea of authenticity one step further by stating that authentic teaching must also be authentically Christian when in the church context. Authentic teaching cannot simply have the purpose of getting to know people, but rather through connections it points people to Christ. This is the purpose of preaching and spiritual formation, and it correlates with Scripture as well. 1 Corinthians 1:17 states, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ

be emptied of its power.” Paul’s ministry was not about preaching for eloquence, but a genuine and truthful message about the cross. Paul’s lifestyle and message were authentic in every way. Remarking about the need for authenticity and relationships Pazmino (2008) stated, “In a postmodern world it may well be that some persons must first read the truth of the gospel in the lives of Christians before they can hear our words witnessing to the truth” (p. 205) which aligned with what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 11:1 “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” This in no way diminishes the sermon or spoken word, but reiterates that the sermon’s power comes through a life that is surrendered.

Thomas (2018) suggested a key to leading millennials was the idea of mentorship, linking it to Christ’s example, “To Jesus, leadership was best accomplished through mentoring” (p. 110). Thomas believed that leadership was best practiced in a close community and with a strong relationship. This was directly related to the fact that millennials value closer relationships between leaders and followers where they can dialogue with them. After a qualitative study of millennials in Christian schools, Horan (2017) discovered that students advised they did not grow as much spiritually in a chapel service, theology class, or other structured approaches. Rather spiritual development happened more when they had a close relationship with the faculty. Therefore, the better the pastor knows the church members, the better at communicating to them he will be. As will be examined in the next chapters, good communicators can mimic this in their communication. This is done through authentic presentations and open dialogue, allowing them to feel heard and valued. If a preacher presented himself in such a way that promoted authenticity, clarity, positivity, along with emotional depth, as discussed previously, he had the ability to deeply connect with the millennial generation. Furthermore, in Acts 20:18-21 Paul practiced both mentoring with preaching:

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul reinforced the idea of close relationships with that of a teaching ministry when he stated, “I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia” (Acts 20:18) as well as “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house”. In the same way for the millennial generation, close relationships do not negate the public teaching ministry but rather strengthens it. This thought was repeated frequently in the literature; communication was better received when there was a strong relationship between the speaker and the individuals (Espinoza, et al., 2010).

Rainer and Rainer (2011) also believed that leading millennials was enhanced by having a relationship with them. This did not mean it negated the other aspects of leadership, but rather when the leader cultivated a relationship with the followers, they were more prone to follow. Couch (2009) repeated this finding that millennials value genuine relationships and authenticity. Therefore, personal relationships have become all the more important to this generation. Adiprasetya (2018) went as far as to say that leadership models that do not account for relationships will not be as effective. Therefore, the better the pastor knows his congregation, the better he will be able to teach them the Word of God. The preacher must then discover how he can model this even in his preaching. A good pastor will build relationships with the congregation throughout the week. However, in each sermon it is also likely that the pastor must preach to people whom he does not know; therefore, it would be of great benefit to discover how building relationships can be mimicked even when the pastor does not know everyone in the congregation on a given Sunday.

Price (2012) stated that millennials prefer learning in a relaxed atmosphere where people know each other. The less formal the environment, the more it was preferred. In that same vein, millennials preferred teachers who related to them personally and were willing to dialogue with them. This grew out of their desire for genuine relationships. “They seem to care more about who we are and how we interact with them, than they care about what we know” (Price, 2012, p. 4) Stetzer (2009) supported this by stating millennials desired authentic leaders. In a business example, it was discovered that “the more often that millennial employees perceived their managers to be interested in them and in their personal development, the harder they worked for their managers” (Espinoza, et al., 2010, p. 11). Eswine (2008) suggested that preachers could do this by being an authentic leader who was dedicated to honesty and clarity, while also understanding the culture in which he was called to minister.

An important aspect of communicating to millennials is understanding their desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves and to make an impact. In fact, “72% of millennials say having a job which they can make an impact is essential to their happiness” (Barna, 2014, p. 55). Furthermore, Barna went on to state the majority of millennials said they would take a job making less money if they felt as though it was making a difference. They wanted to know that they can help create a positive impact on the world. Barna (2014) stated millennials have a can-do spirit, an optimistic view of what is possible. While they want their teachers to be “real” and “relevant,” they also want someone who is positive and upbeat. It is reasonable to expect their desire to make an impact was also present in their choice of churches. An effective preacher of God’s Word can and should be able to connect that desire in the millennial generation to the church's mission and resulting in greater involvement in the church.

Communicating with Millennials

“Millennials communicate in a different way than previous generations. Communication is changing “from traditional (“transmission”) style to collaborative (“constructive”) style” (Williams, 2011, p.16). Williams argued that traditional “boring” lectures would no longer work in communicating to millennials. Rather there needed to be a fresh approach to educating them.

The older traditional approach has proven to be a major problem in reaching the millennial generation.

Nearly one-third (31 percent) described the church as boring. One-quarter indicated that faith is not relevant to their career or interests (24 percent), that the church does not prepare them for real life (23 percent), that the church does not help them find their purpose (23 percent), and that the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough (23 percent). One out of five young people (20 percent) expressed that God seems missing from their experience of church. These may not seem like large percentages, but they represent millions of young prodigals, nomads, and exiles. (Kinnaman, 2016, p. 116)

These statistics showed a disconnect between the way the church often understands and communicates with the upcoming generations. If the teaching ministry inside the church is not connecting people to God and his mission, it is broken.

Open dialogue and asking questions have been shown to enhance relationships with the leader (Britton, 2009). This practice assists in building relationships and allows others to enter into leadership. As previously discussed, there should be opportunities for millennials to question and dialogue with the leader, where the millennial follower feels validated and appreciated. This could be done in various ways in the church setting, from allowing time to ask questions at the end of the service or allowing people to text or email in questions during the message, thus allowing the preacher to respond in real time. This practiced was used for a time by the popular preacher Mark Driscoll in his evening services (Real Faith, 2020).

This practice is also beneficial for another reason. Since the default worldview for many millennials is post-modern, they believe there is no absolute truth. Therefore, the claims to authority will not resonate with them because they do not accept absolute truth. “Unlike any other generation before them, Millennials are the first generation that can access information without an authority figure” (Espinoza, et al., 2010). Because of this “Millennials are more likely to construct their own opinion rather than be instructed on the “correct way of thinking” (Williams, 2011, p. 16). As a result, connection to a personal story and/or relationship will be much more of an impactful way to communicate (Couch, 2009).

Because of these issues and more, communication towards millennials in the traditional sense has been difficult. Posey (2016) however stated, “those seeking to preach more effectively to the Millennial generation can gain greater levels of confidence and desire through a greater understanding of Millennials and the acquisition of practical methods to reach them” (p. 199). The desire then to preach to millennials is the first essential ingredient, and if aligned with effective resources, then the quality and results of preaching will be increased according to the research.

One of those effective methods would be to “Be authentic and wisely transparent; they respect it, and they can tell very quickly when someone is being insincere” (Barna, 2014, p. 57). Barna stated this could be accomplished through being “willing to admit your faults and blind spots and be[ing] open to how you can improve” (p. 57). This is a potential shift from pastoral ministry in the past as some expected the pastor to appear functionally perfect. Today, however, the millennials desire real and honest leaders. Kinnaman (2016) listed honesty as the first trait of good communication to millennials (p. 214).

In addition, studies find that leaders and communicators should “not exert your position or authority to motivate or lead millennials. They don’t respect authority for authority’s sake, because they’ve experienced many reasons to distrust authority figures. Offer the reasons behind your request and be willing to hear their perspectives” (Barna, 2014, p. 57). Finzel (2010) adds “I encourage leaders to spell out their purposes, key goals, and core values, and to proclaim it from the rooftops” (p. 142). Establishing a clear expectation and definition of the organizational reality will help in relating to the naturally skeptical millennial. Kotter (1996) reiterates this saying “Communication seems to work best when it is so direct and so simple that it has a sort of elegance” (p. 89).

When this practice is done through verbal communication, it exponentially helps the communication to be more effective. Bennis states (2012) “Leading through voice, inspiring through trust and empathy, does more than get people on your side. It can change the climate enough to give people elbow room to do right things” (p. 159). This quality helps in communication for any demographic, but especially millennials, which will now be examined.

Contextualizing Preaching for Millennials

Millennials are a distinct and complicated group of approximately 101 million people. (Horan, 2017). Knoetze, (2017) showed millennials exhibit similar traits to previous generations such as church involvement while in their youth, but after that the distinctions become so great that it puts them in a separate class altogether. While some might say the gospel message should never be contextualized, the biblical evidence seems clear that Paul was willing to go to great personal lengths to accommodate the gospel message for some people (Morris, 2008). Pazmino helped clarify this by stating that, “Christian truth can be contextualized but never

accommodated to the world that rejects its ultimate significance” (2008, p. 208). It is appropriate for the pastor to discover how to present biblical truth in the most effective way.

Contextualizing preaching is needed because, as previously stated, the millennial generation has seen a substantial decrease in church attendance. Anything that can help connect this generation back to the Lord is beneficial to the church as a whole. When asked why they left the church, some of the most common reasons millennials listed were “I find God elsewhere”, “It’s not relevant to me”, and “Church is boring” (Barna, 2014, p. 40). All three of these top reasons could be addressed through relevant preaching. The sermon should have the ability to help people find God while being relevant and exciting. Conversely, the top reasons Barna gave on why other millennials said they go to church were “I go to be closer to God”, “I learn about God there”, and “The Bible says to go”. While it is not the only function that can accomplish this, effective preaching can accomplish and teach these things.

The popularity of the seeker-sensitive movement in the past decades has experienced some success in attracting baby-boomers and generation Xers back to the church. Those attractional gimmicks of light shows, rock bands, and special events have not had the same impact on the millennial generation (Evans, 2013). Evans stated, “In fact, I would argue that church-as-performance is just one more thing driving us away from the church, and evangelicalism in particular... What millennials really want from the church is not a change in style but a change in substance.” Therefore, to reach the millennial generation, a church must not continue in doing things that worked for their parents, but not for their generation. “Millennial Christians are serious in their approach to the Bible and their faith. They are not content with their parents' lukewarm faith” (Rainer, 2011, p. 262). Ironically then, the trendy and effective growth strategy is no different than how the church has consistently grown throughout church

history: grounded teaching. Rainer reiterated this and specifically applied the idea to the teaching ministry by stating that churches ought to go deep in their biblical teaching:

Millennial Christians are seeking to move as close to New Testament Christianity as possible. They have a deep hunger to learn more about Scripture. They understand that they are a relatively small minority in their generation, and they want to be unwavering about their beliefs and convictions. Diluted doctrine and anemic biblical teaching and preaching are huge turnoffs for most Millennial Christians (p. 261).

Evans pointed to the current trend of millennials joining “high churches” such as Episcopal, Catholic, etc. as supporting their desire for something deeper. These churches were offering something uniquely different than the world. This was substantiated through Barna’s (2014) research which found millennials preferred traditional style buildings and services over modern flashy experiences. Yet providing some complexity in their response, they also preferred a “laid back” atmosphere over a formal experience. They desired the traditional style giving them the feeling of being connected to something bigger than themselves, while also having the freedom to be themselves while in attendance. All this information was summarized by Stetzer (2009) who stated that evidence showed this millennial generation desired depth, but not simply depth in biblical knowledge, but depth emotionally, spiritually, and biblically. The teaching ministry's goal was spiritual maturity (Bredfeldt, 2006, p. 13), and spiritual maturity involved all facets of life. One cannot lead others into spiritual maturity without accounting for all walks of life. Further remarking on this Stetzer (2009) said, “People are not so much interested in the method of delivery as they are in the delivery of TRUTH that is relevant to their lives. Authentic preaching that presents God's Word as the answer will draw many people” (p. 171-172).

Therefore, millennials want leaders and preachers who can connect deeply with them on a spiritual level. The millennial generation is very quick to determine if someone is acting disingenuously so intentionality about this from the preacher is a must. They desire authenticity

in their preacher (Stetzer, 2009). “Millennials want a church to be open and honest about what it is and about what it is trying to accomplish” (Barna, 2014, p. 62).

While it is important to teach biblical truth, Couch (2009) showed it was still appropriate and useful for the preacher to use personal anecdotes and stories. Since millennials most often hold a postmodern world view, when a preacher can connect spiritual truths to personal stories, he connects much more effectively with his audience. It should also be remembered that this spiritual depth is frequently connected to community. They highly value others whether that is family, friends, or mentors (Rainer, 2011).

Summary

The theoretical viewpoint centered on communication style, showing the importance of communication to the organization and how it was effectively done with millennials in mind. The traits discussed have truth for all organizations whether they are churches or businesses. The church should not be seen as an aberration to this truth, but rather a key illustration of it. The theoretical portion did not change the definition or purpose of preaching presented in the theological section. Rather the presented ideas helped to clarify the preacher's impact on the church.

Related Literature and Rationale

The literature review has focused on the biblical idea of communication and preaching, and the theoretical review of communication style for millennials. Attention will be given to the rationale for the study and a review of additional literature concerning communication and preaching to the millennial generation. Once completed, the literature review will show the need for additional study in preaching to millennials.

The Need for Studying Preaching's Role in Growing the Church

The church has consistently faced declining attendance in the western world (Barna, 2016). There were many different reasons why this was the case; yet one constant theme found throughout this literature review was a lack of strong leadership and clear communication. When preaching was performed properly, it had extraordinary potential to lead the church in both spiritual and numerical growth as it spiritually formed the congregation (Quicke, 2006).

Bredfeldt, (2006) stated, "The most powerful means of leading the people of God is by teaching them the Word of God" (p. 18). God himself established this idea of teaching to lead the church.

Not only was preaching instrumental in the spiritual development of the church, but it was a key to growing the church numerically as well. Rainer (2009) advised that "90% of unchurched people choose a church based on the preaching" (p. 21). Furthermore, Fulmer (1966) noted that preaching is an essential component of spiritual development. Since it helped the church grow numerically and spiritually, it was therefore well suited to also help lead the church to reach its ultimate goal of seeing more people believe in Jesus and grow in their relationship with him. All of this can be accomplished within the same sermon. The spiritual development of the congregation is the main goal of the sermon, yet when done well that spiritual growth will lead to numerical growth and organizational strength. (Quicke, 2006, p. 11).

An influential book in this discussion was Bredfeldt's *Great leader, great teacher: Recovering the biblical vision for leadership*. In it he stated "The greatest of leaders among us are not powerful senior executives commanding military strategists, celebrated athletic coaches, or respected political figures. No, the greatest leaders among us are the great teachers among us" (2006, p. 13). He went on to say, "Great teachers are leaders, and conversely, great leaders must be teachers" (p. 13). Bredfeldt (2006) also stated three reasons why teachers make great leaders.

They were: “Because they have great influence (2) they can bring about great organization and social change, (3) teachers can invoke the highest levels of follower development” (p. 25). Thus, not only can teachers be leaders, there is in fact no way to separate them from being leaders. This act of teaching helps to accomplish the very things that a pastor is attempting to happen within his congregation. The pastor should see the sermon as an important function in leading his church well.

This truth of teaching as a key function of leading people toward Christ is seen in the gospels as well. The most common name others called Jesus during his time on earth was teacher or rabbi. Thus, the conclusion that “the biblical leader is first and foremost a Bible teacher” (Bredfeldt, 2006, p. 13). While teaching can be done in different ways, one-on-one, small groups, or Sunday school, throughout church history the teaching ministry of the church was linked to the preaching ministry. This, then, should be seen as a vital part of the pastor’s job in leading the church into conformity with Christ.

The Need for Studying Communication Tactics in Preaching

“Communication must be the passionate obsession of leadership” (Finzel, 2000, p. 129). Having shown that preaching was a primary way to lead the church, it was therefore appropriate to treat it as such when studying communication tactics in preaching. Whether it is business, education, or ministry, communication is essential to running a successful organization (Reinout, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010). The church should not be treated any differently in this regard, in fact it is likely more important than in other contexts as will be shown.

There are different ways to communicate in the twenty-first century. Face-to-face is no longer the only way, much of the communication done is over email, text, phone or video calls. Yet “face-to-face talk score highest in channel richness because it provides the maximum

amount of information to be transmitted during a communication episode” (Robbins, 2012, p. 115). Preaching is face-to-face communication with a large number of people at once. It allows the speaker to convey a wide range of emotions and truth to the entire organization at one time. Thus, the preacher exercises a tremendous amount of influence over the entire congregation at one time which bonds the preacher to congregation as well as individual congregants to each other as they are creating shared experiences of growth.

The Need to Focus on the Millennial Generation

The reason for focusing on the millennial generation was two-fold. As previously discussed, communication style and definitions of effective preaching varied widely based on the demographics such as age, race, and religious background (Brandt & Uusi-Kakkuri, 2016). Because of this, it would not have been possible to fully and accurately describe communication preference for the church in general. It would need to be limited in scope to accurately study the topic. Self-described evangelical millennials were a limitation for the study based on religion and age. It created a more manageable population to study. This provided the proper limits to create an accurate result.

The second reason for selecting the millennial generation was that they were the largest generation in America (Horan, 2017) and will be for some time. The birth rate is lower than previous generations and if current trends continue, (not counting potential changes in immigration laws), the population will decrease (Center for Disease Control, 2019). The spiritual formation of this generation will have lasting impacts on the American church as it could be the largest generation of the century. Anyone entering church ministry will need to understand how to grow the church through millennials. This is especially true considering the current state of religion and faith among the millennial generation.

The research confirmed what we had already been piecing together from other data: 59 percent of young people with a Christian background report that they had or have “dropped out of attending church, after going regularly.” A majority (57 percent) say they are less active in church today compared to when they were age fifteen. Nearly two-fifths (38 percent) say they have gone through a period when they significantly doubted their faith. Another one-third (32 percent) describe a period when they felt like rejecting their parents’ faith. (Kinnaman, & Hawkins, 2016, Loc. 235)

This is not happening in a vacuum without any cause or hope. Rather there were reasons given by the millennial generation which helped explain the rationale for walking away from the faith.

Barna (2014) provided a helpful study of the first reason given by millennials:

The largest difference maker between millennials who dropped out of church and those who still remain active is those who have a better understanding of their purpose of life through church. 45% of millennials who stayed active said they understood their purpose, whereas only 12% of dropouts understood this. This 33% difference is the largest difference of any items surveyed. (p. 67)

The assumption of this paper was that the sermon is one of the best ways to teach people about finding purpose in life. It provides an opportunity for the pastor to address the very issues which are causing the millennial generation to walk away and to help fight back against the exodus from the church.

Furthermore, another reason for the need to study the millennial generation was that technology has made this generation unique from all previous generations. They are not as different to subsequent generations, only previous in this regard. Because of the prevalence of social media, people of this age group often form their identity through a community of peers. “The Church is not the only actor in the forming of identity (or disciples), because the identity represents the relationship between an individual and ‘others’ whether real or symbolic, individuals or groups” (Knoetze, 2017, p. 2). This is different than what has traditionally been the major influence—that of the family. This is not to say that family does not matter; on the contrary, the family is still an important factor in the training of young people (Smith, 2009). Yet

they are not the only influence on them and their spiritual development. The connections therefore formed in non-family groups become all the more important.

Research Gap

This literature review has examined the biblical perspective of preaching and communication towards millennials. It then examined the theoretical connection between communication style and spiritual leadership of individuals in the millennial age range. It should be evident that much has been written about preaching and communication in general, but very few works have attempted to connect the dots between communication tactics in preaching and its relevance to millennials. A helpful study was produced by Kim (2008) who determined that preaching, out of all the functions of the church, was the biggest factor in people changing churches, inviting others to church, and their faith maturing. This information proved true for all age groups, including millennials. While it was able to show that preaching was important, it did not show how to perform the function of preaching as it relates to millennials. This was a continual theme in the literature, a high emphasis on both preaching and millennials, but few that focused on the intricacies of preaching to millennials. Lakies (2013) stated “There is not much help for getting a grasp on how the church and Millennials have come to have such a complicated and tenuous relationship” (p. 27). Preaching to millennials is important topic though, Wright (2007) recounted that he learned by personal experience that one can preach biblical faithful messages, but still be ineffective if one does not account for the culture. While Wright bemoans some of mindsets of millennials in the church such as moralistic therapeutic deism, he still sees an imperative to preach in a way that is understood. Wright stated,

Preaching to fuse the horizon of the text within the horizon of the hearers addresses tensions that already exist in life but works through them. The tension-release allows people to feel challenged from the fact that the tension was addressed, but confident that

it can be surmounted. The sermon successfully seals the text as an answer to the question that already exists in the horizon of the hearer. (p. 37)

He goes on to say that the sermon should not stop at fusing the horizon, but that the sermon must confront the hearer's horizons as well. The first step though is that these "horizons" must be brought together. If focus is not given on how to do this, preaching will continue to not engage millennials and younger age groups. This study is not an embrace of post-modernism or moralistic therapeutic deism, but it is an attempt to understand how to communicate to those who already have this worldview.

Lastly, there was much information regarding the millennial generation, yet there was very little connecting preaching and/or communication style to the millennial generation. So, while each individual aspect of this literature review had an abundance of information written about it, there has not been a work dedicated to discovering how communication style in preaching affects the growth of the church in the millennial generation. In one of the few works on leading through preaching Quicke (2006) remarked,

Many books have described the role of pastor as leader, and others have taught the practices of effective preaching. What is lacking, however, are resources that integrate the practical aspects of pastoral leadership with a theological understanding of the office of "pastor and teacher. (p. 9)

He went on to say, "There are few resources to advise how preaching well can help the preacher lead well" (p. 153). Likewise, Posey, while writing about preaching to millennials, stated, "Not much study or writing has been done on the issue. Much has been written concerning attempts to reach this generation of declining faith, but the particular question of effectively preaching as a standard of communicating the gospel has been largely ignored" (p. 4). He continued saying "Explanations of how preachers might lead seem exasperatingly vague". Lastly, he added,

Although much has been written on ministering to Millennials in general, the specific topic of preaching offers very few titles. There are well-known speakers and other

practitioners of the ministry of the Word that have great success in communicating the Word to the Millennial generation. A book featuring interviews with these preachers, identifying the common threads in their presentations (i.e., What is their appeal to Millennials?) and boiling down those common threads into transferrable concepts for preachers seeking to be more effective would be a helpful tool (p. 203).

As can be seen in assessments above, aspects of this study have been written about in depth, but there are very few if any works which connect the dots from preaching to millennials with respect to communication tactics.

This study provides a resource for pastors and biblical teachers on the best way to use the most valuable hour of the week towards shaping and growing the local church. It is a study that may be beneficial for anyone who is going to be ministering to the millennial generation. It has the ability to equip them with the tools to preach effectively to the largest generation in America. While the research will continue to focus on younger generations, millennials will be the largest generation for many decades and thus an important study.

Profile of the Current Study

This literature review has examined the theological aspects of preaching, showing that it is biblically mandated and essential for the spiritual development of believers. Preaching is a God ordained function that should not be abandoned if the church wishes to remain biblically obedient. In addition to that, it was also shown that effective preaching takes into account the hearers. Preaching that is not received, is not effective preaching.

The review also discussed the theoretical aspect of preaching which linked communication style showing the importance of communication in leading the church to growth spiritually and numerically. Finally, it showed the need for the study and current literature on these subjects as it relates to millennials. As the research gap portion stated, there were many resources on the various parts that were addressed in the dissertation, yet there are not any major

resources addressing how the communication style of a preaching impacts the church's growth for the millennial generation.

The study will now address the areas where the research is currently lacking by examining the sermons from three preachers who are leading fast-growing churches. The pastors were chosen based on an extreme purposive method based upon their growth. Using the themes mentioned of authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue, their sermons will now be evaluated using the qualitative content analysis method. Once the individual sermons have been analyzed, similarities will be established so that conclusions can be made.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Having discussed the research problem and reviewed appropriate literature, attention will now be given to the research methodology. The overview of the research methodology given in chapter one was expanded to show why a qualitative study was appropriate. It also discussed how the “content analysis” method was to be implemented. This information was to show how pastors of the fastest growing Southern Baptist churches displayed certain communication characteristics in their sermons that previously had been proven to be consequential in communicating to millennials. The information discussed in this chapter attempted to show how the results of the study are trustworthy as proper research methods were followed.

Research Design Synopsis

Before an appropriate research methodology could be designed, the problem has to first be defined. Therefore, the research problem, purpose, and questions will first be discussed. Once this information has been reviewed, it should be apparent that a qualitative content analysis approach was an appropriate form of research for the problem at hand.

Research Problem

As discussed in previous chapters, church attendance is down, especially among the millennial generation, which includes people born between 1981 and 1996 (Pew Research Center, 2019). Young adults in this age group have generally expressed disdain for the institutional church. Many of them are now describing themselves as not religious at all (Barna Group, 2014). Frequently, members of this generational cohort say they are spiritual without being religious (Kinnaman, & Hawkins, 2016). There were many well documented reasons for this decline, and one single reason cannot be identified by itself. Yet, studies have also proven

that the sermon is still very important to growing the church spiritually as well as numerically through attendance growth.

Therefore, the church should not feel hopeless in its mission to reach millennials. The practice of preaching, which is one of the most standard practice of nearly every church, is still the single greatest factor in selecting a church (Gallup, 2017). Over 76% of churchgoers said having a church that preached scripture was a major factor in choosing where to go, and 75% said finding a church that teaches relevant messages was a major factor. Those two factors were both higher than all other aspects including kids' programs, making friends, and service opportunities (Gallup, 2017) There has been research already completed showing what works best in communicating to millennials. Therefore, a preacher who desires to communicate effectively should use methods that work well for his intended audience.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this content analysis study was to better understand how preachers who led the fastest growing churches in the Southern Baptist Convention used communication tactics previously identified as important in communicating and leading millennials in their sermons. These identified tactics were authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue. The study involved extensive review of recent sermons that these pastors had preached in their churches.

Research Questions

RQ1. How often are pastors portraying authenticity by connecting personal experiences to objective truth in their sermons?

RQ2. How often are pastors portraying positive reinforcement by encouraging positive improvements versus chastisement of negative behavior?

RQ3. How often are pastors conveying an "open dialogue" theme in sermons by discussing verbalized or perceived questions and hindrances that the listener might have?

As will be discussed in following sections, using the subsumption method in a qualitative content analysis approach meant that more specific information was designated. One example was designating subcategories. In addition, a clear definition and understanding of what was meant by a preacher communicating authenticity, using positive reinforcement, and employing open dialogue in his sermon was made.

Research Design and Methodology

The preferred research methodology for this study was a qualitative content analysis. First qualitative research will be discussed, before narrowing the focus to content analysis so that a full explanation can be made.

This approach was beneficial in providing a more robust understanding of this issue beyond simple numbers and instead delved into the ideology and context of what was being said.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined qualitative research as

a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants' setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible writing structure (p.249).

It should be noted sermon analysis is rarely objective, but rather subjective. As long as the sermon is biblical, a good sermon is largely dependent on the intended audience. What might have been a wonderful message to teenagers, would likely miss the mark if given to retirees. Therefore, it is difficult to quantify a good sermon.

As a result, a qualitative over a quantitative approach was better utilized in the study on sermons to discover the internal message of each sermon. Yet, some quantitative information was still collected in the study in order to better categorize the qualitative information. The study started with examining the frequency of the various themes in the sermons. It kept records of the number of occurrences as well as total word count usage of each designation. Once that

information was collected, it allowed the coding and analysis to happen in order that practical information could be gleaned. Upon completion of the study, a full scope of how these themes shape the sermons could be seen.

Narrowing down from a general qualitative study, a more specific content analysis approach was then employed. Leedy and Ormond (2013) described this approach as “Qualitative research design in which a body of material is systematically examined in order to detect general patterns, themes, or biases; the material typically involves some form of human communication” (p. 376). Content analysis is especially useful for analyzing written and spoken material. In this study, themes or trends between the three different preachers were especially noted.

While interviews with pastors about preaching could have been done, it likely would not have been as effective. The most direct and accurate way to understand how a pastor preaches is by studying their preaching. Among qualitative content analysis studies, one of two different approaches are generally used: relational or conceptual. For this study, a conceptual approach was chosen. A conceptual analysis attempts to choose “a concept...for examination and the analysis involves quantifying and counting its presence” (Columbia University, n.d.). The frequency of usage was a major factor in understanding the information in this type of study.

Setting

A benefit of studying since the advent of the internet was that observing sermons no longer had to be inside a church building on Sunday morning. All three of the pastors had their weekly sermons posted online. The research was done through publicly available online sermons through the church’s websites and social media pages. This allowed the researcher to study in more depth than traveling to individual sites where a limited amount of time could be spent.

Furthermore, watching the sermon electronically provided an additional benefit, especially helpful when analyzing the sermon. It was possible to analyze the electronic recording of each sermon, with the added benefit of being able to rewind and re-review the sermon instantaneously. The sermons were transcribed into a full manuscript, and those sermon transcriptions are kept securely in the researcher's file.

Even though the sermons were observed completely online, it is still beneficial to understand the churches being studied. Sandals Church is a very large church with 12 physical campuses (Sandals Church, 2020), mostly in large California cities, their overall attendance was 9,559. 5 Point Church has one physical campus located in Easley, South Carolina (population: 22,000), that averaged 2,352 in attendance (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Finally, Mercy Hill Church, which was averaging 2,671, falls in the middle of the other two churches in size, locations, and campuses (Outreach Magazine, 2019).

Each of the three churches were chosen for the study based on "extreme purposive" sampling procedures. The three churches showed exceptional growth in the previous calendar year having been identified as the three fastest growing Southern Baptist churches. Because they were all Southern Baptist churches, there was built in consistency in their beliefs, structure, and much of their practices.

There are key differences though as well which also shape some of the data discovered. Whereas Mercy Hill (North Carolina) and 5 Point (South Carolina) are located in the East Coast and borderline Bible belt demographics, Sandals Church is in California. Of the three, Sandals Church is by far the largest of the churches at the time of the survey.

Participants

The participants in the study were the sermons from the pastors of the three fastest growing Southern Baptist Churches as reported by Outreach Magazine and Lifeway Research (2019). These churches were:

1. Lead Pastor: Andrew Hopper. Mercy Hill Church in Greensboro, NC. Attendance: 2,671. Growth in last year: +632 (31%).
2. Lead Pastor: Dean Herman. 5 Point Church in Easley, SC. Attendance: 2,352. Growth in last year: +489 (26%).
3. Lead Pastor: Matt Brown. Sandals Church in Riverside, CA. Attendance: 9,559, Growth in last year: +1,174 (14%).

The purpose of this selection was in line with the research methodology of conducting a qualitative content analysis with an extreme sampling type. This sampling focused on extreme individuals and participants. “Focus on unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Guest, et al., 2013). These particular pastors were deemed as “extreme” since they lead the fastest growing Southern Baptist Churches out of 47,456 total churches (Pew, 2020). Therefore, these were outliers and not normative.

Sampling

Concerning which pastors were chosen, a sampling method known as “extreme purposive” (Emmel, 2013) was employed. “A purposive sample, also referred to as a *judgmental* or *expert sample*, is a type of nonprobability sample” (Lavrakas, 2008). Therefore, the researcher hand selected the participants for a specific reason. The second part of the sampling type of purposive sampling is that it will be done using “extreme cases”, hence the “extreme purposive” name. These cases were selected because they were extreme and thus not normal situations. A helpful definition of this sampling was defined by Laerd:

Extreme (or deviant) case sampling is a type of purposive sampling that is used to focus on cases that are special or unusual, typically in the sense that the cases highlight notable outcomes, failures or successes. These extreme (or deviant) cases are useful because they often provide significant insight into a particular phenomenon, which can act as lessons (or cases of best practice) that guide future research and practice. In some cases, extreme (or deviant) case sampling is thought to reflect the purest form of insight into the phenomenon being studied (n.d.).

This sampling allowed the researcher to study certain extreme cases of growth in churches. The study followed Laerd's definition by attempting to discover "significant insight into a particular phenomenon,". This phenomenon was the preaching at the fastest growing Southern Baptist Churches. Each of these churches grew well over 10% of their average weekly attendance in the previous year; furthermore, all of them had their attendance grow by several hundred attendees in the calendar year. Therefore, if new information could be learned from them on how they were growing their congregation, it could help other pastors as well. As stated before, preaching was not the only factor, but given the sermon's ongoing importance in the church, discovering trends among churches that are growing fast likely would be beneficial to the vast majority of churches who are stagnant or declining. As trends were discovered among these churches, it provided "lessons (or cases of best practices) that guide future research and practice." Pastors can study these methods and approaches and apply them to various contexts.

Role of the Researcher

"Good qualitative researchers take certain precautions to enhance the validity and credibility of their findings" (Leedy and Ormand, 2013, p. 301). Leedy and Ormand went on to say that the qualitative researcher must strive for fairness, carefully document information, and openly discuss biases. Since the researcher was a millennial pastor who regularly preaches to a local congregation, special consideration was required to ensure personal biases did not impact the content analysis. Care had to be given to ensure the personal style and preferences of the

researcher did not inappropriately impact how the information was processed. It should be noted, however, that some of the personal perspective was helpful in the analysis, since it was a discussion on preaching to millennials and the researcher himself was a millennial. Without some sort of quantitative data tracking the information based on objective standards, the study would be a personal reflection instead of objective analysis.

The role of the researcher in this content analysis study was to collect the public sermons from online; all the churches placed their sermons video and audio available for streaming and downloading. The researcher collected seven sermons from each church. The researcher then used the transcribing program “Describe” to transcribe the sermons, so a textual analysis was able to be made. This particular program was used because it has been shown to be the most accurate automatic transcription service. Across all forms of audio transcription, it ranked highest among competitors at 93.3%. When evaluating audio recordings similar to that of a sermon, such as a graduation speech or large speech recordings, the accuracy rose to 96-98%, which is higher than the general standard for human transcription of 95% (Mason, 2017).

Following the collection of the transcripts, the information was saved electronically and also placed inside the data analysis program ATLAS.ti to assist in objective analysis. The proper collection of data, with assistance from electronic recording tools to record information, helped ensure fairness.

Ethical Considerations

Because no direct human was made in the study, the risks involved were minimal. Since the study involved published material such as publicly available sermons, the institutional review board (IRB) at Liberty University did not require approval.

The only foreseeable negative was if a preacher did not appreciate the review of his sermon. Yet this seemed unlikely since the point of the study was to understand what the preacher was doing well, instead of what he was doing poorly. Furthermore, the researcher took care to not include information that could be deemed as inappropriate. This was negligible though since the sermons being evaluated were preached in front of thousands of people and then streamed online with hundreds to thousands of additional views. It is assumed that if information was not meant to be public the church would have removed it in the months following the sermon.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Collection Methods

The collection methods for the data was through online review. The researcher read the transcripts and watched or listened to the sermons. This information was collected through their public website or social media sites. All the churches studied had their sermons posted online, or which seven sermons per pastor were selected. All the sermons were reviewed, and the transcriptions checked for accuracy by the researcher.

Instruments and Protocols

The first instrument used was Outreach.com and Lifeway Research listing of the fastest growing and largest churches in America. They described their selection process in choosing the fastest growing churches:

In preparation for the Fastest-Growing Church report, we solicit participation from about 30,000 churches. Through the process, they are contacted by fax, email, letter, phone and certified mail. The Outreach 100 is a self-reported survey, based on attendance averages, not membership. Churches that participate provide weekend attendance averages for February and March, excluding Easter weekend. These figures are then compared with the previous year's averages for the same months. The final rankings reflect an average of numerical gain and percentage gain. Although we go to great lengths to confirm data, the information is reported by pastors, staff or church officers, and as such, reflects their

perception—their churches as they see them. The 2019 Fastest-Growing list includes surveyed churches with attendance greater than 1,025, a numerical gain of 176 or more, and a percentage gain of at least 3%. The Largest list includes all churches participating in the survey with attendance of 4,328 or more. (Outreach Magazine, 2019)

Through their filtering options available on the website, the researcher selected the three fastest growing Southern Baptist Churches. This instrumentation was key in the sampling procedures.

The second instrument that was highly influential in the study was the content analysis research method. The study followed basic guidelines for content analysis studies. Many general guidelines and practices had been established in other works which were helpful for the study.

Schreier (2012) stated, “In most general terms, the aim of QCA is to systematically describe the meaning of your material”. Leedy and Ormond (2015) said QCA is beneficial for “forms of human communication, including books, newspapers, personal journals, legal documents, films, television, art, music, videotapes of human interactions, transcripts of conversations, and Internet blog and bulletin board entries” (p.256). Likewise, Williams and Johanson (2017) explained, “Although it is most often applied to text, qualitative content analysis can be applied to any type of media – textual, verbal or visual” (n.p.). This study analyzed written text through the transcripts of the sermons, but it was also helpful to remember that the sermons being preached were originally spoken not written. Fortunately, content analysis can evaluate both. Columbia University resources gave a helpful definition of content analysis:

Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e. text). Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts. Researchers can then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of surrounding the text. (n.d.)

For this research project the content analysis reviewed the sermon transcripts with the aim of answering the three research questions, both directly and indirectly. The study primarily sought to understand the wording and implications as it related to the research questions. “The main

goal [of conceptual content analysis] is to examine the occurrence of selected terms in the data” (Columbia University, n.d.). Yet, because the project used qualitative information instead of quantitative information, the researcher attempted to discover deeper meanings and implications in the data and not simply count the number of occurrences of the themes or words.

The transcripts were reviewed to discover how the themes mentioned in the research questions are directly addressed. They were also evaluated to discover how it is being used implicitly as well. For example, when considering the first research question on authenticity a pastor likely would not state “Let me be authentic right now”, rather he would share a story that is authentic in nature. It was up to the researcher to understand this and include it in the research findings.

This is described in the coding frame. The coding frame is a very important part of the QCA as it helps standardize the results. Schreier states (2012) “This frame is at the heart of QCA, and it covers all those meanings that feature in the description and interpretation of your material.”

Procedures

The process for collecting the necessary information will now be discussed.

1. Seven sermons from each pastor were selected from the last seven months.
2. The researcher selected the first time each pastor preached in that month (generally this will be the first week, but if the pastor has the week off, then their next sermon preached will be used). This is done to give variance based on their current sermon series. A series on doctrine might produce different results than a series on relationships. Therefore, sermons will be taken from various times.
3. The individual URL or files were kept in the researcher’s files. Video files were preferred so that body language could be observed.
4. Each sermon was transcribed using a transcribing program “Descript”. The video files were uploaded to the program so that the transcription could be generated.

5. The twenty-one sermons were then analyzed based on how each pastor incorporated the aspects of the research questions both directly and implicitly. This was done by reducing the categories to words or patterns.
6. Coding was then completed to determine the frequency of the themes in the research questions as they are mentioned in the sermons.
7. Following the analysis, the researcher mapped out representations.
8. A full report was then made giving observations about each specific preacher as well as the group as a whole.

Data Analysis

The methods and procedures for analysis will now be discussed. This portion assisted in giving credibility to the study and allows future research to build upon this information. Every study has a certain level of ambiguity to it; nevertheless, every effort was made to establish clear protocol, so the study was as valid as possible.

Analysis Methods

The data analysis for the qualitative portion will roughly follow Leedy and Ormond (2013) steps of data analysis and adapt to the needs of this study. Therefore, after the work being studied was selected, the data was converted into something that was easy to organize and analyze. While qualitative content analysis can be done on video and audio files directly without the transcript the tracking and grouping of information is much more difficult. Therefore, this will be completed by transcribing the sermons. Next, the data was organized in a preliminary method for easy location. This was done using the ATLAS.ti program and allowed the sermons to be grouped together by preacher. Once the initial categorization was complete, the data was able to be divided into meaningful units, and to “apply the initial coding scheme to a subset of the data” (p. 292). This coding was directly formulated from the research questions. Each coding section corresponded to a research question. For example, when information was determined to be “authentic” either by its word usage or intrinsic meaning the researcher would place it under

the primary code for research question 1, which dealt with authenticity. Once that was done, it would then be labeled more specifically under one of the sub-coding options for authenticity so that a property understanding could be established. All of this was done through the qualitative content analysis method, as each portion of the sermon was coded identifying the number of communication methods used, which determined the number of usages, total time spent on each research question. It also helped discover the implicit meaning which was the primary focus of the QCA study. Every code that was used in the study directly corresponded to one of the research questions or to the “not relevant” The codes were then finalized so that noteworthy patterns and relationships could be identified. This process generally follows in the footsteps in a well-established tradition of content analysis studies for sermons (Pansler, 1970; Carter, 1979; Schmidt 1974). Special attention was given to the similarities and trends in order to recognize the most common traits. The final step was then taking that information and interpreting back through the research problem, in an attempt to discover if this information solved the research problem involving communicating to millennials in light of the research questions.

Trustworthiness

A major factor for qualitative research is the need for “trustworthiness” or validity because it has the ability to be manipulated. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state trustworthiness “is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (p. 199). There are several strategies that make up trustworthiness, which will now be discussed.

Credibility

The first aspect of trustworthiness is credibility. In content analysis, this involves stability, reproducibility, and accuracy. Stability speaks to how consistently other researchers

would recode the information the same as the researcher. Reproducibility would be a “tendency for a group of coders to classify categories membership in the same way”. Lastly, accuracy speaks of the classification of the text corresponding to a standard or norm statistically (Columbia University, n.d.).

The researcher attempted to create a clear coding frame, in which if it were followed similar results would be found. Despite this effort it should be noted that in terms of content analysis, Gottschalk (1995) advised that coding error can be minimized, but never eliminated because of the human factor in research. Therefore, 80% is considered an acceptable margin of reliability (Columbia University, n.d.) Measures were taken to ensure that information is as accurate as possible including clarifying the researcher’s biases, and providing rich, thick descriptions during the process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Dependability

The next aspect of trustworthiness is dependability. The study is dependable based upon the validity of research tools, procedures, and instrumentation. While complete dependability is virtually impossible, every effort towards dependability was made nonetheless (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013). A complete and detailed description of the tools, procedures, and instrumentation used is given in the paper.

One of the most basic ways to increase dependability is to establish multiple categories for the same research question (University of Missouri–St. Louis, 2004). For example, while studying authenticity, it is not enough to simply look for the word “authentic” in the transcript, but rather have a wide range of terms that will also indicate authenticity such as “personal story” or “honesty”. Furthermore, understanding the context of the information is of vital importance.

Confirmability

This speaks of the ability for other researchers to confirm the information. A major aspect of confirmability is also transparency. To promote transparency and thus confirmability, the sermon transcripts will be available upon request so the readers will be able to review the actual sermons. The sermon video files can also be viewed at any time as long as the churches keep the information online, and all the sermons, which were allowed to be downloaded, are kept securely by the researcher.

Furthermore, the researcher will attempt to provide answers in which a second study would produce those same answers, if an additional study was done (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013). While it is not possible to guarantee this perfectly, there are certain measures that can be taken to help ensure consistency in confirmability. First, is the “closeness of categories”. The goal of the researcher is to use many classifiers to verify the definition of each category. With the additional classifiers the concept can be broadened and include implicit variables and synonyms (Columbia University, n.d.). Another way to enhance confirmability would be to standardize the conclusions as much as possible. The conclusions should logically follow the data. There must also be consideration about if other factors are not included in the conclusions (Columbia University, n.d.).

The researcher will also attempt to confirm the results through triangulation. This will happen based on Renz, Carrington, and Badger “Two Strategies for Qualitative Content Analysis: An Intramethod Approach to Triangulation”. The traditional qualitative content analysis will be cross referenced to electronic analysis of the information. This information was especially helpful in the second and third research questions. This electronic analysis will be done utilizing the LIWC2015 program. Categories will first be established through the traditional

content analysis approach by the researcher and then cross referenced to data collected through the electronic program.

Transferability

As stated in the limitation portion, there are certain restrictions on the study, and thus on the transferability as well. The information will be most accurate when applied to similar demographics to that being studied. Therefore, Southern Baptist pastors, especially those trying to reach the millennial generation will find this the most helpful; but other evangelical churches, especially evangelical churches who are likeminded in beliefs and practice, would also find the information beneficial. The greater the variance from that model, the less transferability there will be. While some information might be helpful to non-ministerial context, the information cannot be transferred to a secular context.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the research problem and questions and chronicled how these issues can be addressed. It was determined that the qualitative content analysis is appropriate for this study and it created a plan for how this study can be completed while upholding a strict standard for trustworthiness. The study is now able to progress into the data collection stage which is described in chapter four. Upon completion, this should provide helpful information in understanding how a preacher's communication tactics, as it relates to millennials, impact the church's growth. It will be particularly helpful for churches and church leaders who wish to better understand the millennial generation and communicate with them in such a way that it will be well received.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

In chapter four, the collection of data is discussed. First, the specific steps taken by the researcher in compiling the information and how it was analyzed is reviewed so the reader understands the research methodology that was implemented in the study. After this, the data will be analyzed, specifically studying the content of each preacher as well identifying specific examples of commonality in the sermons. The information was categorized based on the research questions and further breakdown. Special attention was given to discussing the similarities between the three preachers, before final conclusions are made in chapter five.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

Each of the churches had publicly posted sermons available on their websites available for both audio and video download. The sermons were also posted on their public social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook. Closed captions for the sermons were automatically made available through their social media sites. Upon review, many of the sermons were not very accurate when compared to the actual audio of the sermon. Therefore, a program called “Descript” was used to transcribe the sermons. The program boasts 95% accuracy and is especially accurate for audio and video files with only one speaker and good sound quality. This was the case for the files used in the study. To help limit error and create more accurate results, the researcher watched each sermon with the transcripts open multiple times and would then correct any errors found in the automatic transcript, so the accuracy rate is expected to be higher than 95%.

The transcripts were then uploaded to the program Atlas.ti. This program specifically helped in the coding and organizing process. It allowed the researcher to code and recode the information as more information was discovered. Multiple viewings of each sermon were

completed. First, the videos were viewed by the researcher obtaining a general sense of the sermon. A second viewing was made coding the transcript line by line, designating various code and sub-codes. Finally, there were additional viewings of certain sermons especially when examining the sermons for identifiable trends. Because QCA involves more than just recording the number of times a word or phrase is used, detailed attention is needed for analyzing the information in the sermons.

An important part of qualitative content analysis is the coding frame that is selected. The coding frame is the way in which information is determined as relevant to the study. The coding frame which was employed was a “data-driven strategy” (Schreier, 2012, p. 85). This will “work inductively...to create categories in a data-driven way. This is especially useful if you want to describe your material in depth” (Schreier, 2012, p. 99), and already have an idea of the pertinent information being studied. Since not all information in the sermons will be relevant to the study, but rather only those in the research questions, this method was selected.

The specific strategy used was subsumption. This strategy “consists of the following steps: examine relevant passages for pertinent concepts; decide whether the concept is new: if it is new it is turned into a category; if you have already generated a (subcategory) that covers it, you will simply pass it over.” Schreiner (2012) also stated that “You can use subsumption only if you have already decided on a main category, i.e. if you already have some idea of what you are looking for” (p. 127). The study already has three well defined themes within the research questions. The other major coding frame was simply “Not Relevant”, which was used for all the information that did not plainly fit into the first three categories.

The coding will have four major sections:

1. Authenticity (Research Question #1).

2. Positive reinforcement (Research Questions #2).
3. Open dialogue (Research Questions #3).
4. Not relevant.

Before the various categories can be set, there must be a clear definition of each of the sections. Authenticity refers to the art of being transparent and accurately displaying who one is without a contradiction or veneer (Abrahams, n.d.). The primary idea behind this category is when a pastor shares details in his life which do not shed a positive light on himself. In a subcategory under authenticity, the researcher also marked when the pastor is appealing to authenticity in other people as well and speaking in a forthright way. The second primary code is for positive reinforcement. This section looks for the encouragement of people through positive interactions and feedback. An example would be when a pastor uses phrases such as “you can do this!” or “you are enough!”; statements like these are meant to build up the listener. The primary purpose of this coding is to discover how the pastor is encouraging the congregation towards good works. Theologically, it could be labeled as edification, if done correctly. However, if there is not any substance or it is not rooted in scripture, it would be aligned with empty flattery. The third grouping is open dialogue. Both implicit and explicit statements of listening and responding to stated and perceived questions the listeners might have are included in this category. An example of this would be when the preacher says, “you might be asking yourself...”. While this is not a new tactic for speakers to use, this type of dialogue is especially useful in speaking to millennials.

It should be noted there were situations where the same illustration or remark could be labeled in more than one category. It was a frequent occurrence, for example, statements in the authentic section would closely lead into or overlap with positive reinforcement coding. Per

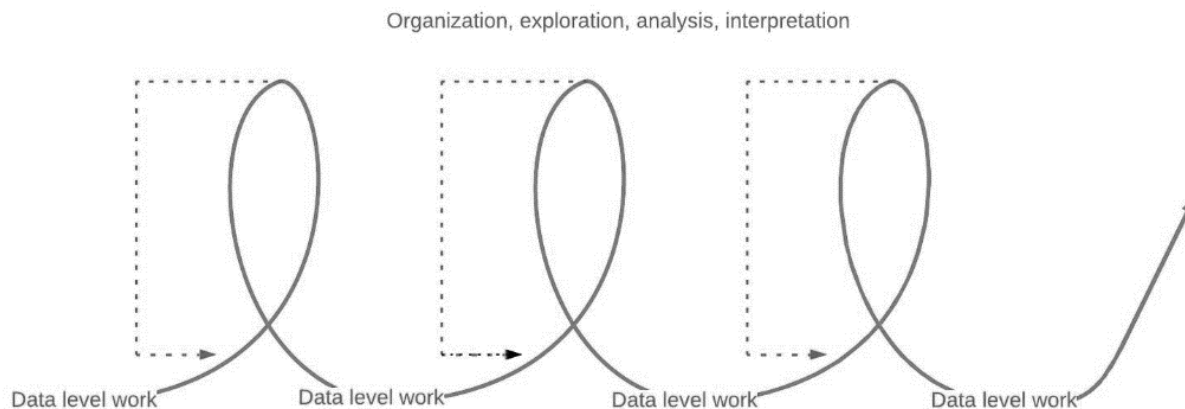
subsumption protocol (Schreier, 2012), each portion of the transcript should have only one coding. Whenever possible the researcher would label the portion with the code that it most closely aligned to, instead of multiple codes overlapping.

The determination of the subcategories is found through the subsumption theory approach. According to Schreier (2012) this involves:

1. Reviewing the material until reaching a part that is pertinent.
2. Checking to see whether it is similar or different from previous subcategories.
3. If it is similar, placing it in one of the existing subcategories.
4. Creating a new subcategory if it is new.
5. Continuing this until reaching the end of the material.

The researcher utilized this approach while also incorporating the Atlas.ti program to keep track of categories. Once all the sermons were coded. The sermons were then rereviewed considering the additional coding frames and recorded with the new information. Atlas.ti provided a way to easily track and categorize the information. They utilized a helpful illustration showcasing the recurring order of data collection and analysis. The initial data level work happens first, then the organization, exploration, analysis, and interpretation are done. Then the process happens again.

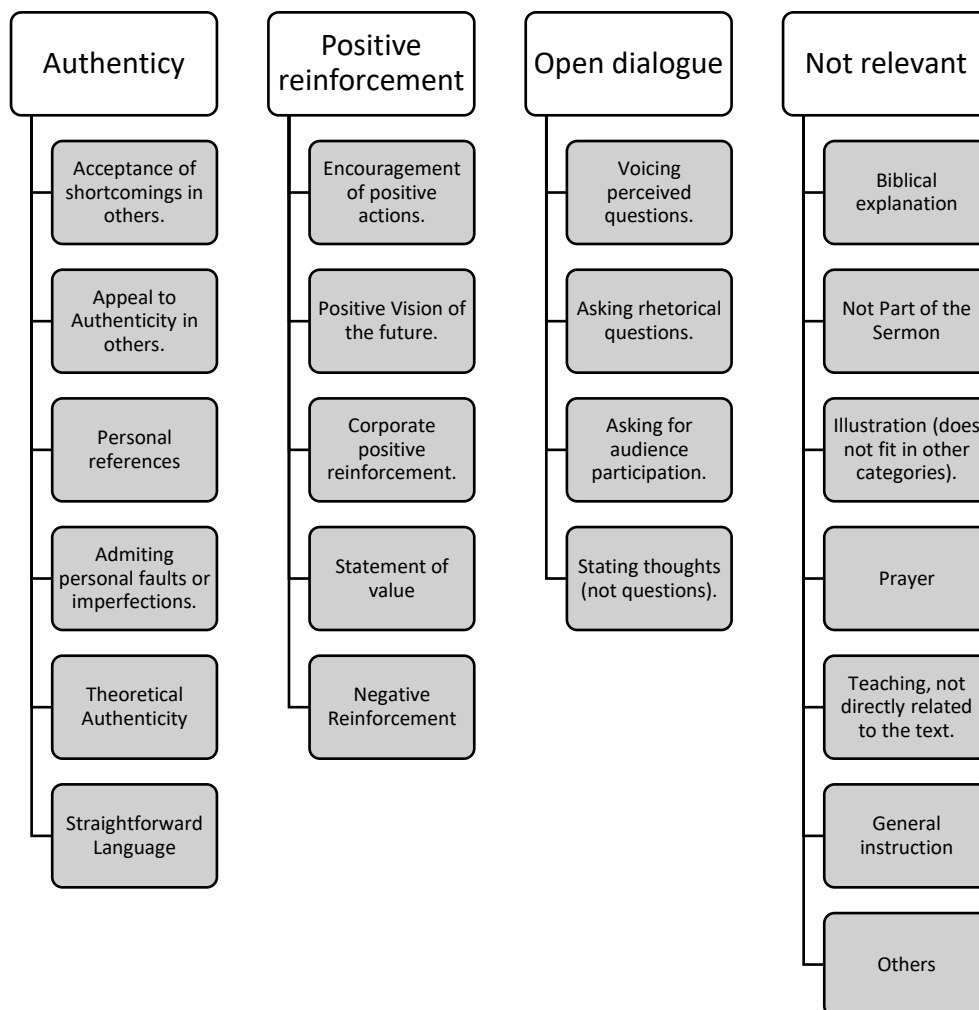
Figure 2 (Contreras, 2019):



Specifically, for this project, the researcher started with the main categories, as previously determined by the research questions and then discovered the subsections as the study progressed. Within these first three main categories there were many different subsections. The fourth section was the largest and all the information that did not pertain to study was coded there. This “not relevant” section still has various subcategories to better understand the sermon as a whole. For instance, this last section kept track of items such as biblical explanation, prayer, and unrelated illustrations.

Each new subcategory that was discovered in a sermon was placed inside the Atlas.ti coding software, and then the other 20 sermons were reevaluated based on that information and automatically coded. The subsumption approach contained similar aspects to a grounded theory approach as well because items were reviewed then added and reviewed (Creswell, & Creswell, 2017). The only significant difference was subsumption started with categories pre-determined, in this case from the research questions. Therefore, each sermon was coded individually by the researcher as well as automatically through the Atlas.ti system.

Figure 3



Descriptions of Codes

Authenticity

1. *Acceptance of shortcomings in others.* This coding was used for statements such as “It’s ok to not be perfect.” It creates a safe place and acceptance for the listeners. It lets the listener know that the preacher does not expect perfection, but instead encourages authenticity.
2. *Appeal to Authenticity in others.* This code includes statements of calling people to authenticity. Whereas the previous coding was an affirmation, this is a request such as “Why can’t we be honest with ourselves.” There is a yearning for others to show the authenticity that the pastor is also portraying.

3. *Straightforward Language* – This term was a designation used when the Pastor was speaking frankly to the congregation. The previously used definition of *Authenticity* was the art of being transparent and accurately displaying who one is without a contradiction or veneer. The straightforward language code was the act of this, even when it was not directly speaking about oneself. The straightforward language designation is the act of speaking forthrightly about one’s personal opinions or biblical convictions.
4. *Personal References* – This is the least nuanced of the codes. It is simply a tally of the times the preacher refers to himself (I, me, myself, etc.). It does not indicate authenticity in and of itself but gives an overall understanding in how many personal stories and references are used in the sermons.
5. *Admitting personal faults or imperfections*. This is the primary code of the authentic grouping. It was used when the preacher shared personal details from his life, past, or family. It is important to note that this designation does not necessarily mean an admittance of wrongdoing or sinful behavior. Rather, it is a personal reflection that shows the pastor as a normal imperfect Christian, instead of someone who does not struggle.
6. *Theoretical Authenticity*. A rare coding that was used when the pastor spoke in an authentic way but used a theoretical example or person instead of his personal experience. Stating things such as “Let’s say a man named John decided to come clean about his habits...”

Positive Reinforcement

1. *Encouragement of positive actions*. As the name suggest, these were statements that would acknowledge and or encourage positive actions. This was the most popular coding under the positive reinforcement section. These types of statements would include “I want to encourage you to get involved in a small group” or “I think it is great that so many of you went on a mission trip this summer.”
2. *Positive Vision of the future*. This code was used when the preacher was promoting a positive future, especially as a result of good actions. For example, the pastor would frequently mention the church member’s place in heaven or how positive actions could lead to a better marriage by obeying biblical principles.
3. *Corporate positive reinforcement*. This code describes when the pastor used positive reinforcement for the church as a whole. It was often used when describing the unusual growth of the church. They would tell the story of the church and then encourage the congregation to keep doing the things which led to the growth. A statement like this would be “our church did an amazing job at the outreach!”

4. *Statement of value.* This code was used when the preacher described the listeners' worth, often linking their worth to their positional value in Christ. There were also general statements of value such as "You are more than enough!".
5. *Negative Reinforcement.* Implicit in the second research question was a comparison of positive versus negative reinforcement. The negative reinforcement thus needed to be tracked as well to properly answer the question. These types of statements were chastisements against sinful or poor behavior, and statements of condemnation against people.

Open Dialogue

1. *Voicing perceived questions.* This designation was used the preacher would state questions that he believes the audience might be asking. He would often state "You might be asking yourself..." or "why is this the case, you ask?"
2. *Asking rhetorical questions.* This was the most common coding used in the open dialogue category. It was used when the preacher would ask questions from the audience that were rhetorical or that he wanted the audience to answer for themselves non-verbally.
3. *Asking for audience participation.* Used mostly by just one pastor, this designation was used when he would ask the audience to repeat after him or to perform some type of action such as raising their hand or reading aloud. This gave the sermon a feeling of a two-way dialogue.
4. *Stating thoughts (not questions).* The preachers would sometimes state things such as "You might be thinking..." and engage in mock conversation with what they perceive the thoughts of the audience to be. It was not question based, but it was an attempt by the preacher to dialogue with the congregation.

Not relevant

1. *Biblical explanation.* This covers both the reading of the Bible as well as the explanation or exegesis of the passage. This was rightfully the most common of the all the codes in any of the main categories.
2. *Not Part of the Sermon.* This code was used sparingly. Many of the YouTube videos or podcasts would have buffer videos or announcements at the start or finish of the sermon which would be covered in this code.
3. *Illustration (does not fit in other categories).* Many of the illustrations would display information that would be a part of the other codes, especially authenticity, but on other occasions an illustration was used, and it did not display any authenticity, positive reinforcement, or open dialogue.

4. *Prayer*. This was used when the preacher was praying. While there were times when a prayer displayed the other categories, the main purpose of the prayer was not to display those categories. Thus, it was labeled under the not pertinent section.
5. *Teaching not directly related to the text*. This code was similar to the biblical explanation coding, but it was a teaching that did not directly relate back to the biblical passage.
6. *General instruction*. This was not a teaching portion, but general directions such as “visit the welcome desk in the lobby after the service.” This coding was used very sparingly.
7. *Others*. This is the final coding that was used for several miscellaneous minor codes that were only used once or twice. The researcher consolidated those codes since individually they were statistically insignificant.

Demographic and Sample Data

As stated in the previous chapter, three churches were chosen for the study based on “extreme purposive” sampling procedures. The three churches showed exceptional growth in the previous calendar year having been identified as the three fastest growing Southern Baptist churches. Seven sermons from each lead pastor were chosen. The individual sermons selected were the first sermon of each month preached by the lead pastor. Generally, that meant it was the first Sunday of the month with only a few exceptions. This approach was used instead of selecting seven straight sermons in a row because different sermon topics and series lent themselves to higher rates of coding categories. For instance, a series on romance usually showed higher authenticity as preachers share personal stories from their marriage.

Evaluating the sermons from churches experiencing exceptional growth has provided helpful information as to how these pastors incorporate the themes of authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue into their sermons. This is not to say this is the only reason why these churches have seen such phenomenal growth. However, individual insights from each

pastor and especially identifiable trends between all three pastors should give some indication on what works well in connecting to millennial congregants in the sermon.

As to be expected, there are both similarities and differences between the three churches. The main similarities are their association with the Southern Baptist Convention and their openly evangelical teachings. In addition, all three of the pastors are Caucasian and led contemporary or modern churches.

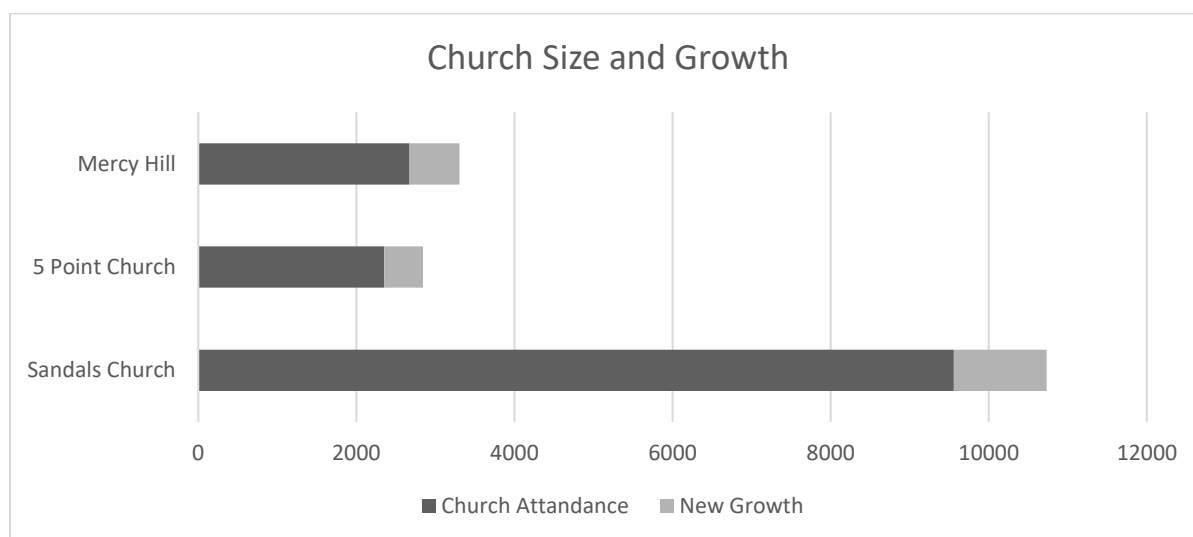
There are key differences though as well which also shape some of the data discovered. Whereas Mercy Hill (North Carolina) and 5 Point (South Carolina) are located in the East Coast and borderline Bible belt demographics, Sandals Church is in California. Of the three, Sandals Church is by far the largest of the churches at the time of the survey.

It is important to note that the study was unable to verify the statistics of millennials in the church, yet the size of their children's programs did give some indication of the demographics. Each of the churches were reaching people with young children, which typically would mean their parents are within the millennial age range of 20-40. In their yearend report, Sandals Church averaged "9,845" in attendance in 2019. The children's ministry (5th grade and under) averaged 2,098. Therefore, according to the national average of children per family (1.93 per household), then the number of millennials in the church would likely make up almost half of the church attenders (Duffin, 2020). This rate was similar to the other two churches as well: Mercy Hill had 18% of their attendance were children and 5 Point Church had 17% attendance from their children's ministry (Mercy Hill, 2019; 5 Point Church 2019).

Concerning the total attendance, the numbers were: Mercy Hill had an average attendance of 2,671. 5 Point's attendance was 2,352 and Sandals Church averaged 9,559

(Outreach Magazine, 2019). A significant number of the members had recently joined the church. As shown in the following table each of the churches experienced exponential growth, which is the key similarity and the reason for the selection in this study.

Figure 4



Because of the growth they have experienced, the similarities shared have the potential to teach other pastors effective modern communication tactics. The study will not attempt to prove this is the only factor in their growth, but rather to discover how these pastors are using the various traits in question.

Data Analysis and Findings

Having discussed the compilation protocols, measures, demographics, and sample data, the data analysis and findings will now be reviewed. This information was organized based on the research questions. Under each research question, a content analysis of each of the pastor's sermons was presented along with certain key statistics. The analysis was listed based on who Outreach Magazine (2019) listed as the fastest growing to the least fastest of the three churches. Based on their information of each church's percentage of growth, the order of the churches was

Mercy Hill Church, 5 Point Church, and then Sandals Church. Following the content analysis of each of the pastor's sermons, there was an additional section noting the similarities between the three pastors' sermons in relation to the three research questions. It was through the similarities of the pastors that applications were made in the following chapter.

Research Question #1 - How often are pastors portraying authenticity by connecting personal experiences to objective truth in their sermons?

As the research question eluded to, the first question was heavily built on personal references and illustrations from the preacher. While personal references were counted in a quantitative way, this was not the only information tracked. It attempted, through studying the transcript and watching the sermons, to also understand the meaning behind the words spoken. As the research showed, there were times the preacher showed authenticity even when they did not directly reference themselves through a personal pronoun in the transcript. Thus, this research question attempted to track all the times the pastor preached in an authentic way.

Authenticity was tracked in various ways to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the pastor's usage. As will be seen in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3, five items were tracked and labeled. The first line was simply the total word count in all seven sermons. The second line, which was the most significant for this part of the study, tracked when the preacher used authentic dialogue as determined by this study's coding frame. Portions of the sermons were only labeled as authentic if they fit within one sub-coding of authenticity. Therefore, if a preacher simply referred to himself, that was not necessarily labeled as authentic. Line three was the overall percentage of usage as determined by dividing the total word count by the authentic word count of line two. The last two-line items of Tables 1-3 tracked the information more quantitatively to provide an overall tone of language. Line four tracked the total number of personal references both in total and per sermon, indicating how often the preacher referred to

himself. Line five tracked the overall tone of authenticity in the sermon based upon LIWC 2015 determination. This percentage was determined based on individual words, regardless of context such as “greater use of I-words, present-tense verbs, and relativity words (e.g. old, far, here) and fewer she-he words and discrepancy words (e.g. could, should)” (Jordan, 2019). The main distinction which needs to be understood between line three and line five is that line three attempts to define authenticity through larger portions (sentences to paragraphs) of the text per the coding frame as determined by the context. Whereas line five simply counts the overall usage of words generally considered more authentic.

Included were all the categories mentioned in the description of codes section above: Acceptance of shortcomings in others, Appeal to authenticity in others, Straightforward language, Personal references, Admitting personal faults or imperfections, and Theoretical authenticity. While personal references were the basis for much of the coding, authenticity was tracked through other ways such as appealing to authenticity in others and accepting shortcomings in others.

This category proved to be the most nuanced as each pastor displayed authenticity in a unique way. This was understandable since “authenticity” would be different for each person. If authenticity were identical among the three pastors, it would not actually have been authentic. In addition, this question also had the most variance between the sermons of each individual preacher. In the other two categories, each pastor showed more consistency in the amount of each category portrayed in the sermons, but authenticity varied widely based on the preacher. There was also wide variance based on the topic being discussed. The more personal the topic the more authenticity was generally displayed. Despite the differences between the preachers, similarities still emerged from the data. Each individual pastor will be reviewed, then the

similarities between the three pastors will be discussed. Any applications from the data will be reserved for chapter five.

Mercy Hill Church

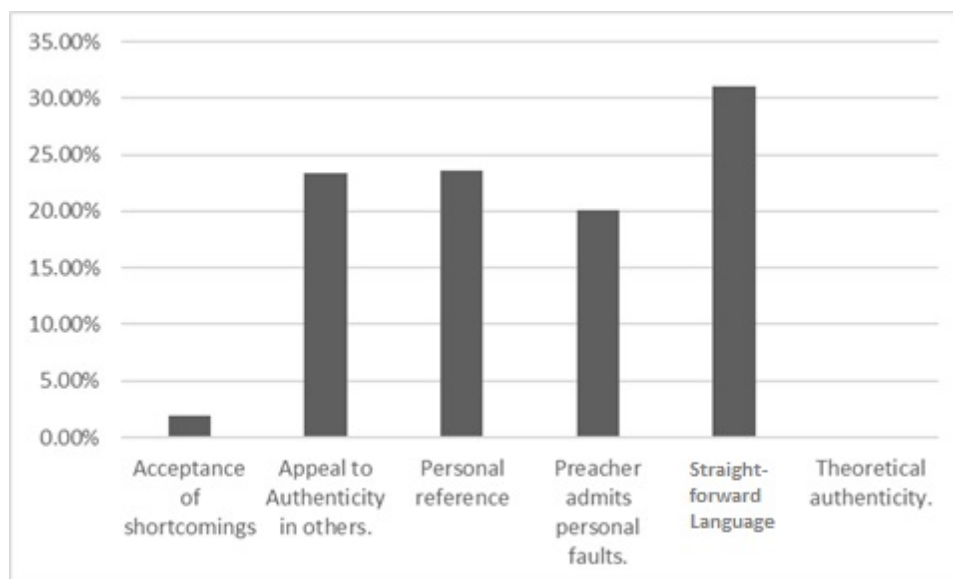
Total Usage across all seven sermons:

Table 1

Mercy Hill Church – Andrew Hopper	Total “Authenticity” usage
Total word count	64,421
Total authentic dialogue	6000
% of authentic dialogue	9.31%
Personal references	1,288 – (184 per sermon)
Authentic tone	35.56%

Breakdown of authentic dialogue coding across all Mercy Hill sermons:

Figure 5



Content Analysis

Out of the three preachers, Andrew Hopper, of Mercy Hill ranked the lowest in authenticity. Yet, even with the lowest ranking, nearly 10% of his sermons were still directly authentic in nature. One of the primary reasons for the lower results of Pastor Hopper was his highest ranking in the biblical explanation category, averaging 26.9% as opposed to 23.0%. The greater amount of time the preacher spent on the exegeting the passage, the less he would refer to himself and thus display the authentic language. The point of preaching is to explain the Bible so the fact that a good portion of the sermon went to this was a good thing. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Two, preaching is more than just biblical lecture and millennials will better receive the truth when it is presented in an authentic and personal way (Stetzer, 2009).

When evaluating the sermon's language through a quantitative word and theme analysis program LIWC2015, it showed that the overall authentic tone of the sermon was 35.56%. This was the highest of the three pastors, which is significant since Hopper was rated as the lowest in authentic dialogue as determined by the coding frame. Pastor Hopper therefore still gave an impression of authenticity even though he used larger authentic stories and examples the least frequently. Even when Pastor Hopper was not directly sharing an authentic story the overall tone was still authentic over one-third of the time. This was confirmed by the fact that Pastor Hopper referenced himself an average of 184 times in each sermon, more than the other two preachers. These references would frequently be grouped together in one story, but these types of references gave the sermon more of an authentic and personal feel.

Throughout all of Hopper's sermons there was a common theme of justice and practically living out one faith. Thus, it made sense that the most pertinent and stark examples of authenticity in Hopper's sermons were during a series on adoption and foster care. Hopper

preached through a series (which included two sermons studied) on foster care and adoption. He attempted to get as many of the church members as possible to go through the adoption process or support those who did. Pastor Hopper's family has adopted children themselves, which allowed him to speak very personally and authentically to the audience—giving the impression that he believed and behaved in a way consistent with what he was preaching, which is the sign of authenticity. While he continually showed authenticity throughout all sermons, these personal examples were some of the greatest examples. These illustrations gave him credibility as he was not asking them to do something that he had not done himself. Hopper stated,

Listen, this is an indictment if you've thought this or said this, because I've had some of these thoughts myself. I understand we just got to work through it, but if you've ever thought to yourself or said out loud, man, 'I don't know if I could ever adopt.' Why? Cause I don't think I could love that child in a way that I love a biological child that is not a small misunderstanding. This ends up getting to the very heart of our relationship with God. Like what we understand about the atonement for sin, what we understand about how God has brought us into his family. (2020, *Fully in the family – Galatians 4:1-7*)

In this statement, he showed that his message was consistent with his actions. He went one step further by admitting what could be considered a weakness as well. In this statement, he admitted to having “some of these thoughts myself”. He then went on to quote perceived thoughts, which is discussed in the third research question. He stated thoughts such as “I don't think I could love that child in a way that I love a biological child that is not a small misunderstanding” (2020, *Fully in the family – Galatians 4:1-7*). Many parents might be scared to admit those thoughts, but when Hopper admitted to those thoughts, he was essentially stating, “It's ok to think these things”. He created a space allowing imperfections to be admitted and progress to occur.

Hopper also framed things in a way that made him appear to be more accessible. One such instance was when he was speaking about family devotions. He stated,

I was just thinking about our family and what our family does. I've told you this before, we do our devotion in the morning before people get off to school before all that kind of

stuff, and it's totally accessible. I know you think as a pastor that we're probably doing communion and one hour of Bible study and that no, it's [a] 15 minutes Bible story. (2020, *"The new self – Ephesians 4:17-32"*)

In reality, only 31 percent of families do any religious devotionals even once a month (Wilson et al., 2009). Therefore, if Hopper was having spiritual devotions with his family several times a week, they were among the highest performing families in this area. However, the way in which he approached this topic was not a condescending approach or in a way that was seeking to make him and his family as spiritually advance. Rather he shared how it was nothing extraordinary, but rather a fifteen-minute Bible story, making his family seem familiar and relatable.

In the examples already shown, Pastor Hopper used examples that related well to millennials. Family devotions and foster care could apply to people in other age groups, yet it would be most applicable for the millennial generation. Relating to millennials was common throughout all of Hopper's preaching. This was likely due to the fact he was in the millennial age range himself. While he was being authentic, he was also naturally displaying the millennial perspective because he was one himself. He consistently shared illustrations from his family which included young children, along with references and lingo that was within the millennial vernacular. It appeared it was easier to be authentic if one is similar to the audience, and so in this case, it helped to be in the same generation. Even though Pastor Hopper had this natural connecting point of being a similar age, he still included direct references to the millennials in the congregation, knowing that a significant church point fell into this group.

One thing I will say about this, especially for maybe our young adults in here and even millennials and all that. When I'm saying, hey, the world's pushing on you or God's pushing on you. Some of us in here are inclined to think: not me. Some of us are inclined to think, not me. I'm totally autonomous. Like nothing's shaping me. (2019, *Transformed Not Conformed - Romans 12:2*)

Hopper's effective practice does not necessarily mean those in other generations could not relate through personal examples. There were still opportunities for pastors of other generations to

accomplish the same thing, but they needed to be more intentional in finding those examples.

This was seen in the following church.

5 Point Church

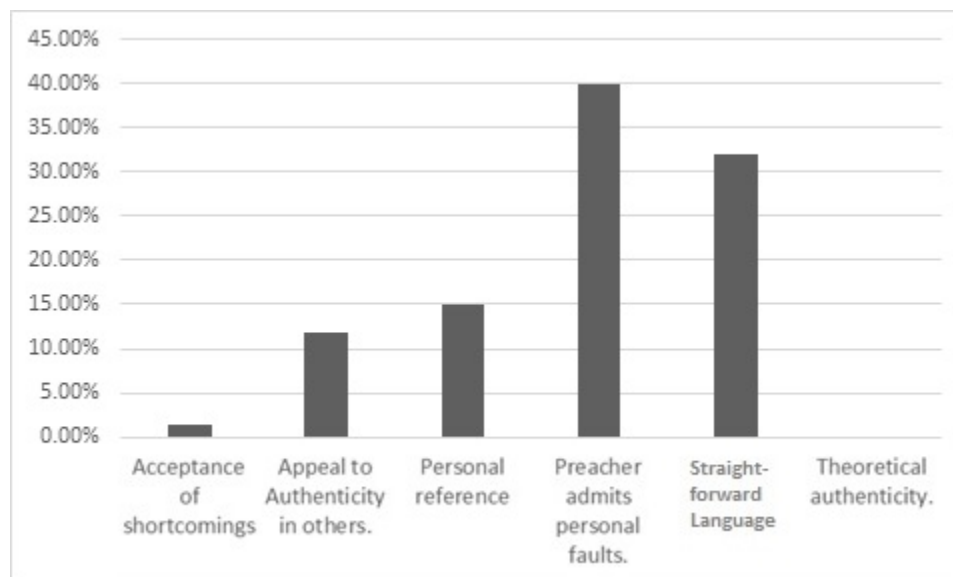
Total authenticity usage across all seven sermons:

Table 2

5 Point Church – Dean Herman	Total “Authenticity” usage
Total word count	53,832
Total authentic dialogue	8284
% of authentic dialogue	15.39%
Personal references	1,050 – (150 per sermon)
Authentic tone	33.12%

Breakdown of authentic dialogue coding across all 5 Point Church sermons:

Figure 6



Content Analysis

Pastor Dean Herman portrayed authentic dialogue an average of 15.39% in his sermons. This average had a wide range among the sermons depending on the topic, ranging from the lowest of 8% all the way up to 27%. Certain topics lent themselves more to authenticity than others. The sermon on biblical manuscripts showed significantly less authenticity than one of the sermons in a marriage series. Since the sermons had different focuses, authenticity was in part based on the overall goal of the sermon. Thus, authenticity was a tool that was employed by the preacher when it served his goal.

As can be seen in the above chart, the most common sub-coding used by Herman was the “preacher admits personal faults”. The second highest was the sub-coding “straightforward language”. As stated earlier, the straightforward language code was the act of speaking authentically and openly to the congregation, even when the speaker was not directly speaking about himself. “The linguistic hallmark of authentic speakers is that, when you listen to them address a large audience, you get the impression that they’d speak the same way over coffee” (Zandan, n.d.). In preaching, it was speaking forthrightly about one’s personal opinions or biblical convictions. All three of the pastors ranked high in the subcategory. As a southern preacher it seemed that Herman embraced the role of speaking honestly to people and stating whether he agreed with them or not. Stating things bluntly such as

I'm going to just call it the way it is. Ain't nobody in here perfect. You may think ya'll poop don't stink, but it does. This is called the way that it is. All right. So there are times in our life that the sinful desire is going to draw us into doing the things that we [don't] want to do. Can I have an amen? (2019, *Evaluation*)

This type of statement was repeated frequently in his sermons, and it is not what one normally expects to hear in a sermon. Yet, when listening to Hermon, one gets the impression that he speaks in the same way he speaks in private, which aligns with the aforementioned definition of

authenticity. The millennial that is weary of a religious experience that feels fake or disingenuous will not likely feel this way after hearing Pastor Herman speak.

One of the most likely places Pastor Herman would use authentic dialogue was at the start with a lengthy personal illustration. These stories generally rated high in personal references. Not every introductory story was marked as authentic, but some of the lengthy stories were authentic in nature and seemingly was shared to connect to the audience at the start of the sermon. One of the starkest examples of this type of personal illustration, showing authenticity was when he told a lengthy story of his life from the ages of 16 to 28. In the story he stated personal details such as

When I turned 17, Deb came and told me she was pregnant. When I was 18, we got married and now I had a family. And for the first time in my life, I cared about what a gallon of milk cost...Now, one of the most humiliating, no, no, probably the most humiliating moment of my entire life was [when] my dad made me go to the food stamp office and get food stamps. (2020, *Priority Change*)

This was shared in a discussion about establishing priorities, and how his priorities changed when he became a father and then a husband. Later in the sermon, he encouraged the congregation to re-evaluate their priorities in this life. Since he started out with being honest and authentic, it allowed his message to be better conveyed.

Another trait of authenticity displayed by Pastor Herman was that he frequently used embarrassing personal anecdotes for comedic relief in his sermons. Many of these occurrences were labeled under authenticity. They often came in the form of stories and varied in length. They did not necessarily advance the sermon other than making Herman look more relatable. For example, he once stated, "Last week, my son, Andrew, he's my encourager. He said, Dad, I don't know who picked out what you wore yesterday, but you have to go back to mom or one of us doing it." He went on to say that his wife had gone back to picking out his clothes. There would

be frequent short anecdotes such as this one in his sermons. At the onset, these types of statements might seem inconsequential, yet when they were woven throughout the sermons, it showcased the pastor was trying to be real and approachable. In effect, he was presenting an authentic version of himself and presenting himself in a way that attracted millennials. Authenticity helps the audience let its guard down, and when it is combined with humor, it seemingly maximizes that impact. Wright (2007) states that comedic preaching increases preaching's "relevance by translating the biblical text into the [interpretive] horizon, convictions and experiences that each member possesses" (p. 35). It helped give the sermon less of a feeling of being talked down to, but rather personal wisdom from someone who has made some mistakes and came out better for it. It created an informal, personal tone, which is what authenticity is seeking.

The smallest amount of authentic dialogue was shown in the sermon on the manuscripts that made up scripture. This sermon was not directly citing a portion of scripture, and it was one of the most unique sermons of the study. Because of this topic, the sermon resembled a lecture more than a sermon. The personal stories were limited compared to Pastor Herman's other sermons. It only displayed 8% authenticity. Yet, there was authenticity showed in another unique way which was not fully conveyed in the statistics. While he did not share as many personal stories, he instead discussed various issues with Bible translations and textual criticism. By all accounts, he holds to a conservative view of scripture, and one that aligns with the Baptist Faith and Message, and in the sermon, he showed how accurate the scripture and the manuscripts were. However, he did not avoid difficult subjects about the inaccuracy, which was generally labelled as straightforward language. As mentioned in the literature review, people view a communicator as authentic when they speak forthrightly, and so he was showcasing authenticity

even when personal stories were limited. For example, at one point, he spoke about how the King James Version has additional verses compared to other versions. Saying, “I’m not going to be scared about talking about controversial things. How come some people say King James Version only, or it’s not a Bible. Say that verse ain’t there. That’s why it’s gotta be King James only” (2019, *Manuscripts*). Pastor Herman could have avoided the topic or other topics that had the potential to increase questions, but instead, he pursued the questions that many people wanted to be answered. He would also share important but difficult truths with the congregation

As the shepherd of a flock, is it the shepherd’s responsibility to take the sheep to the right where it’s safe, even if the sheep want to go to the left? My job is not to be your best friend. My job is not to comfort you and just make you feel good about yourself. My job is to take you to a place that God wants you to be, so he can use you to build his kingdom. (2020, *Priority change*)

In this example, he was speaking forthrightly about how, as a pastor, he must speak forthrightly. A difference between this and the negative chastisement sub-code in question two is the negative chastisement is for a specific action or attitude, the speaking forthrightly is stating a fact not related to a particular action.

In this way, he was still speaking effectively to the millennials, even when the sermon itself did not lend itself to an excessive number of personal stories. It should be noted, this was a benefit of a qualitative study. Information such as this could not be picked up in a simple word count, but only understood when viewing the information in context and understanding what the preacher was trying to do.

Sandals Church

Total Usage across all seven sermons:

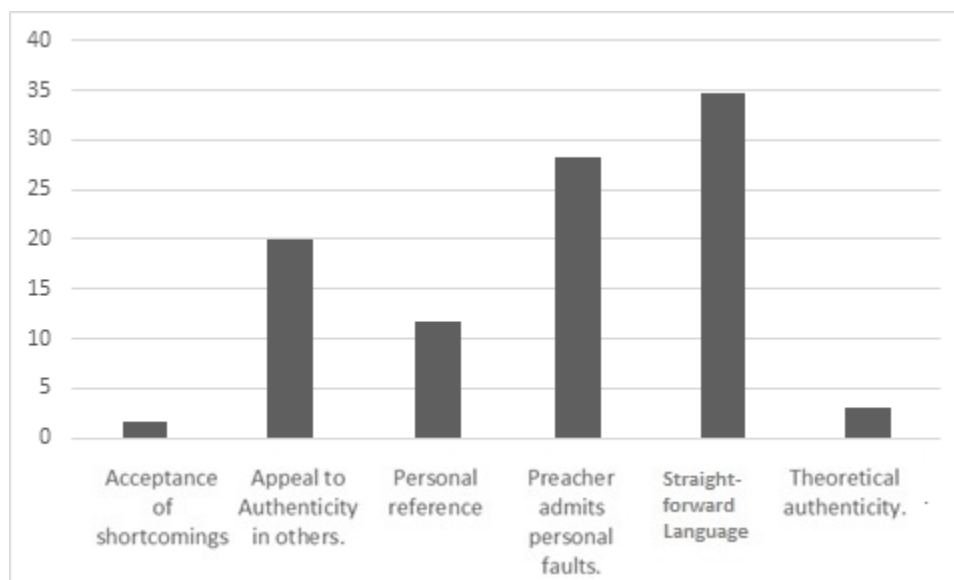
Table 3

Sandals Church – Matt Brown	Total “Authenticity” usage
Total word count	55,252

Table 3 (continued)

Total authentic dialogue	13,753
% of authentic dialogue	18.33%
Personal references	1,169 - (167 per sermon)
Authentic tone	26.33%

Breakdown of authentic dialogue coding across all Sandals Church sermons:

Figure 7

Content Analysis

Sandals Church placed a high emphasis on authenticity. It was even referenced in the church vision statement, “We are all about being real with ourselves, God and others” (Sandals, 2019). In today’s vernacular, being “real” is commonly thought of as synonymous with authentic. The idea of being “real” was present in each sermon. Pastor Matt Brown was quick to discuss his shortcomings and mistakes with the church. Even the church name, Sandals Church, was built on this premise. Brown explained the name in one of his sermons

[I was] ashamed of my toenails, I would only wear sandals around somebody I was totally comfortable with and felt safe with, and so I thought, that's the kind of church I want to be a part of. I want to be a part of a church where if somebody sees something that's ugly about me, that they're not gonna run away, but they're gonna love me and help me through it, and so, thank you, that's where the name Sandals Church comes from. (2019, *Dealing with discouragement, depression, and anxiety*)

The church's whole premise was built on this idea, knowing that it was especially relevant for the people the church is trying to reach, which is why he had the highest ranking of authentic dialogue. He was intentional in creating times when he was being authentic or calling others to authenticity.

Pastor Brown used authenticity in a comedic way to help break down barriers on more than one occasion. He did this frequently and effectively, even remarking that he was known as the “funny pastor”. However, while he consistently called others to authenticity, he portrayed the least “admitting personal failure”. There could be multiple reasons for this, including the demographic location of Sandals Church in Southern California. He used statements such as, “Let me be real with you...” and then proceeded to tell about a hypothetical situation such as men not liking to go to parties. In these situations, there was very little authenticity being verbalized, yet he portrayed it as such, using it to connect to the audience. He would then also ask rhetorical questions to further engage the congregation. This will be further discussed in the third research question.

Pastor Brown used authenticity at several key points in his sermon “To change what needs to change”. One of the premises of the sermon was regarding how to leave bad habits behind. In each of the major points, Pastor Brown provided a personal example on ways in which he could have done better to break the habit. For instance, the first point was to listen to better music, and so Pastor Brown acknowledged, in a humorous way, that his teenage son listened to more sophisticated and encouraging music than he did, stating:

He said, what's your favorite kind of instrument? And I thought, “well that's a random question.” I was like, “the drums, 'cause I just want to bang on stuff”, and he said, “I think I would play the violin.” I was just like, wow, that's interesting, and we just began this conversation, and he told me he's been listening to classical music before the games. So my 16 year old son is listening to classical music before games, and I'm listening to God knows what. And he told me it was soothing, it was relaxing, and it helped take away the stress. Let me just ask you this question. Does the music you listen to take away your stress?

Next, he spoke about the need to lessen political influence in his life, stating

Some of us, man, we've let politics invade every area of our life, and one of the ways I've had to monitor is talk radio. It just gets me so upset and so angry, and I'm already ready to road rage, and so I've just had to get rid of that.

Another time, speaking about having a positive attitude, he stated, “This one's, let me just be honest, this is personally convicting for me in 2020. I've gotta change my negative attitude” (2020, *To change what needs to change*). Acknowledging this was a struggle for him in his current stage of life. In this sermon he continually showed practical personal examples that were authentic and willing to show him as a normal Christian with similar struggles.

As with each pastor, there was a wide variance between the individual sermons. To say that Pastor Brown was completely authentic at every opportunity would not be accurate. Pastor Brown preached on the qualifications of elders from 1 Timothy 3. He discussed himself in greater detail than in many of the other sermons, yet there was still some reservation on sharing details. This was likely due to whether sharing too much personal detail could result in him disqualifying himself from ministry. Therefore, most of the discussion on authenticity was labeled under the subcategory of “appeal to authenticity in others”. In this case, he shared stories of other pastors being disingenuous. This sermon was the most indistinguishable of all his sermons for the authenticity coding. For instance, when speaking of the qualification of an elder not being a recent convert, he stated:

I didn't realize this at first, but a lot of people think this position is powerful and it goes to their head. Look, when God called me into ministry I went kicking and screaming! Look,

some people get really arrogant real quick and the devil messes them up. (2019, *Into God's House*)

While there was an indication of authenticity when he stated he became a pastor “kicking and screaming” he quickly turned it around by stating that was a better option because many other pastors become “really arrogant real quick.” While this at first appeared to be showcasing authenticity, he instead was appealing for authenticity in other pastors when examined in the proper context.

In other situations, Pastor Brown went out of his way to show authenticity himself, especially to show care for the congregation. Sandals Church is a large megachurch in Southern California, and this particular sermon was the first since the passing of Kobe Bryant, a former Las Angeles Laker basketball player. He used a very familiar event, that of Bryant’s untimely death, to motivate the congregation to change their lives before it was too late. Pastor Brown was wearing a Kobe Bryant jersey when preaching and appeared to be genuinely upset over the passing. This likely connected well with the audience, who some of them undoubtedly were feeling similar emotions. By so doing, he showed he cared about the same thing that they cared about.

What was unique about Pastor Brown was that the highest sub-coding of authenticity was straightforward language. As previously discussed, this coding was used when the pastor was speaking in such a open and honest way, regardless of whether it was about himself or not. It gave the impression that what the preacher was saying in public was the same as what they would say in private. An example of this was when Pastor Brown was encouraging the church to become involved in small groups.

And that's why you need to be in community group where people can go, "Bro, you're full of crap," and people can challenge you and talk to you. And so when you say stupid things like, "I hate singing," people can confront that. 'Cause your wife can't confront that, she's gotta go home with you, I don't, I'll confront it (audience laughs).

We all need that, we all need people who say, "What did you hear that you didn't understand?" "What did you see that you're not obedient to?" Everything Isaiah is preaching is meant to be discussed. Here's the thing, listen to me, if you enjoyed the message today, which I hope you did, you're gonna forgot 90% of what I said, 10 minutes after you leave. You know what that means? You listened carefully, but you didn't understand. Here's what the research shows if you discuss it. You have 10 times more likely to remember what was said and change your life. Look, here's the challenge, get real. Get in a group and pray for what God is doing in our church. Man, we're reaching thousands but that breaks my heart if thousands of people get their life right with God but we miss you. I don't want to miss you, I want you to make it. I want you to get your life right with God and some of you need to do that today, today. (2019, *Finding God's Will for My Life*)

In this example, Pastor Brown was not using personal stories, and only limited personal references at all, yet he was still showcasing authenticity by speaking authentically and speaking forthrightly. With the passion and context in which he said this information, the audience likely felt that Pastor Brown meant what he said and that he had their best interest in mind.

Brown used a different device that allowed for authenticity. This was the use of a popular personality tool, the Enneagram (2019, *Dealing with discouragement, depression and anxiety*). This tool is especially popular with millennials. He used this device in a series of messages to showcase that each person was different and unique. This sermon was especially difficult to code because it was unlike any other sermons from the other preachers. It had as its primary content the Enneagram and not a biblical text. It highlighted the desire and the need to have relational depth. A significant portion of the sermon was the pastor speaking on emotionally difficult topics in an authentic way. It also reiterates a point that has been previously discussed that millennials desire emotional and relational depth from their leaders, and leaders must uniquely display authenticity.

Similarities in Authenticity

While there were the widest levels of variance in this coding category, at the same time both the general tone and vocabulary used still had high levels of authenticity regardless, as

shown in the LIWC2015 program. Also, direct statements of authenticity were present in all the sermons. In fact, most of the sermons still had authenticity at a significant rate. Pastor Brown at Sandals Church had the highest average of authenticity 18.33% which is nearly double of Pastor Hopper at 9.31%. The main conclusion then was not that a consistent rate of authenticity could be determined, but rather each pastor used authenticity frequently but also uniquely to fit his style and the needs of the sermon being preached.

The overall usage of authenticity varied greatly depending on the topic being discussed in the sermon. This was not unique for one pastor, but all three of the pastors' authenticity usage varied greatly between the sermons as low as 4% of the sermon to as high as 35% sermon. This insight regarding similar yet wide variance had a few implications concerning their view of authenticity. First, it showed that the authenticity was genuine. As stated previously, for authenticity to be genuine it must be varied. In addition, certain topics naturally lent themselves to better showcase authenticity than others. If each sermon showed similar percentages, it would have pointed to a formulaic approach with the pastor feeling like he needed to meet a quota of personal stories in each sermon. Rather each pastor used authenticity as a tool as the topic dictated. Authenticity most frequently appeared when the preacher was using personal stories including relationships with others. This was probably due to the fact it gave the pastor an opportunity to speak of his own experience. This area thus made it very easy to speak authentically.

The levels of authenticity also led to each pastor having a conversational and personal tone in their preaching while they incorporated authenticity in differing ways. When the sermon was infused with personal stories and was directed to the audience in an authentic way, it created less of a lecture feel and more of a conversational tone. This was strengthened by the authentic

tone from the overall word usage, creating a conversational tone, which will be discussed in more detail in the third research question.

Another implicit component in the authentic portions of the sermons was the high rate of humor that was used. Much of the authentic portion of the sermons were presented humorously when observing the video. The pastors would frequently tell personal stories in a humorous and self-deprecating ways. Frequently this was used right before presenting an uncomfortable truth. The use of humor seemingly had the purpose of removing hindrances from accepting the uncomfortable truth or chastisement which was to follow in the sermon. Additionally, most of the time humor was used by the pastor, it was in reference to himself or his family. Though on occasion the pastor would make jokes about other individuals or topics, the pastor most frequently turned the joke toward himself, which aligned well with the overall goal of authenticity.

Authenticity by each pastor was most frequently found in the introduction of the sermon. This was especially true when considering the sub-coding of “preacher admits personal faults”. These personal antidotes were frequently used to set up the rest of the sermon. Authenticity was still used at later times, but the type of authenticity was changed. As the sermon continued, “Straightforward language” sub-coding increased in usage along with “appealing to authenticity in others”, especially while making applications. The pastor would tell the congregation what they needed to do with the information they had been given, encouraging them to live and display authenticity in their normal day to day interactions with others.

Each subcategory was inversely proportional to the other categories as higher percentages in one area led to lower levels in another category. The clearest example of this was in biblical explanation versus authenticity. The more time a pastor spent in reading and explaining the

Bible, the less authenticity was found in the sermon. In general, the more biblical explanation there was, the more focus there was on teaching verses relating to the audience. This was simply a result of the limited ability to show personal authenticity while also explaining a passage. For this reason, Pastor Hopper who had the highest level of biblical explanation also had the lowest in authenticity. Despite this, the pastors still attempted to infuse authenticity and personal reflections during the teaching portions of the sermon. The pastors would also tell personal authentic stories when making an application on biblical truth with the purpose of showing how the biblical truth could be applied to modern-day life. Thus, they were being authentic as they made an application.

Research Question #2: How often are pastors portraying positive reinforcement by encouraging positive improvements versus chastisement of negative behavior?

The second question measured how positive reinforcement was used in the sermon. Based largely on their upbringing, millennials respond especially well to positive reinforcement, and thus this trait plays a large role in how to attract millennials to the church (or whatever you think). The research gathered information based on the overall tone of the sermon and at what rate the positive reinforcement was used as compared to negative chastisement. Tracking all this information provided the most significant observations regarding the second research question: how much positive reinforcement as compared to negative chastisement was found in each sermon.

This was measured in different ways in order that a full representation could be seen. For those portions of the sermon listed under positive reinforcement, the sub-codings were: Encouragement of positive actions, Positive Vision of the future, Corporate positive reinforcement, Statement of value, and Negative Reinforcement. The negative reinforcement was compared to the composite of all the other sub-codes in order to gain the accurate rate of positive

versus negative reinforcement. The positive reinforcement was divided more fully to better understand how the preachers used positive reinforcement in the sermon. To help triangulate the findings LIWC2015 was used to calculate the overall tone of sermon as well as the use of positive versus negative emotional words as defined through its dictionary. After the calculations, it was observed that each pastor had an overall positive tone and used positive reinforcement at a much higher rate than negative chastisement. As with each research question there were both similarities and differences among the church which will now be discussed.

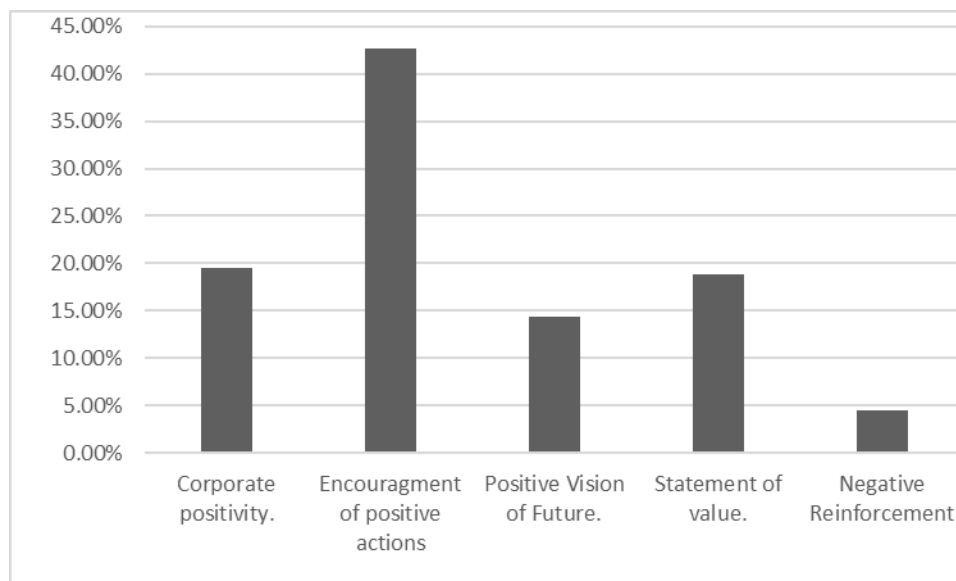
Mercy Hill Church

Total usage across all seven sermons:

Table 4

Mercy Hill Church – Andrew Hopper	Total “Positive Reinforcement” Usage
Total Word Count	64,421
Positive Reinforcement word count.	12,858
% of positive reinforcement words.	19.96%
Overall Positive Tone	60.98%
Positive vs. Negative Words comparison	2.76% vs .89%

Breakdown of positive reinforcement coding across all Mercy Hill Church sermons:

Figure 8***Content Analysis***

In both the researcher's study and LIWC 2015, the sermons had a significantly higher portion of positive tone versus a negative tone. The way in which each pastor displayed this positive emotion was through encouragement of positive actions. Encouragement of positive actions was clearly the highest percentage for Pastor Hopper, as it was for each of the preachers. However, Hopper also included a diverse array of positive reinforcement which the others did not.

One area that was significantly higher for Pastor Hopper than the other pastors was the coding for the "statement of value". The rationale for this was that Mercy Hill also had the highest portion of the "biblical explanation" coding. Much of the statements of value for Pastor Hopper came directly from scripture. This was especially true in his two sermons on adoption and foster care. He frequently pulled out scripture showcasing that Christians had value because they were adopted by God. They had intrinsic value because of that fact, which would serve as motivation to conduct themselves as children of God.

What Paul is trying to say to the Gentiles is don't go back and live that life no more. Cause that ain't who you are, son [or] daughter of mine. That ain't who you are. And when you start acting that way, you are acting contrary to the new identity that I have given you. What Paul was going to try to get them to see is there is an absurdity to becoming new in Christ and then continuing to try to live out that old futile darkened, calloused life. In the gospel, he broke through those calluses in order that you wouldn't have to go back and live that life no more. (Hopper, 2019, *The New Self*)

These statements relate well to what millennials have been told most of their life. They have valued and are important. Hopper presented an accurate biblical truth, but when combined with their internal desire for this affirmation, it has the potential to be received very well.

The second highest area for Pastor Hopper in positive reinforcement was the “corporate positive reinforcement” coding. He used stories for the church as a whole to showcase good actions and encourage others to follow suit. In one example, he used the following story:

For Mercy Hill Church to grow, our leadership must grow. We want to be the type of church [where] God sends us people, we disciple them, raise them up and then send them out. By the way, 25 people already signed up to go with the church plant in Roanoke. Can you believe that? I know just a couple of months when had all the campuses [here]. We could celebrate that 25 folks that includes kids. (2019, *God's plan – Ephesians 1:5-10, 20-23*)

He specifically mentioned the 25 people who were leaving their church to go plant another church. Thus, true to the positive reinforcement method, he pointed out something that was done well and highlighted it. He used this as an encouragement to others to take the same step. He capitalized on the desire in many people, especially millennials, to be a part of something bigger than themselves. He offered them an opportunity to do something adventurous and risky in the pursuit of obedience. By so doing, he also gave the impression that the church was moving forward and doing many positive things.

Encouragement of positive actions was the most common usage by Pastor Hopper. This sub-coding was used frequently in all three of the preachers, but he was unique in his approach in that he was specific in his encouragement. There were two primary ways this coding was used by

the preachers; most often, it was general encouragement towards positive actions. An example of this more generic encouragement was found in *Jacob has a problem – Genesis 27:1-28:9* in which he said

The life that we are meant to live can be lived in any circumstance because that lived that life is actually a relationship with God. It's that void in us that has God-sized being filled by God. That's the blessed life and while, and when he looks at circumstances, a blessed life, you will lie, cheat and steal to get there or other things. The application for this weekend y'all is very simple. Trust God's definition of the blessed life.

This type of more generic application and encouragement to “trust God” was used by Hopper and the other two preachers as well. Yet, he would often go further by encouraging the congregation to do a highly specific positive action. Two of the sermons were on foster care and adoption, and he frequently told both personal stories as well as stories from others in the church to highlight his topic. He would then encourage the church to the specific action of fostering, adoption, or supporting those who are doing it. The overall tone of these calls for action was not chastisement for not doing it already, but rather a hopeful call towards this action today. It was a subtle change but gave the sermon a different focus and feel.

Hey, if you're trying to live that lone ranger, Christian life, man, the world gets into you. It will crumple you. You will implode you need people in your life. And I pray that if you haven't or maybe it did, maybe you fell out. Maybe you tried community group. It didn't work for you, whatever it was. Hey, come to start our groups this week, March 4th, it's a four week deal. On Wednesday nights here, it's a little bit of a bigger group, a little easier to get into. It's a chance for you to take a step in terms of community and not be a lone ranger. Christian, you can find out more about that online. All right.

In this example, he gave a specific call to action to the congregation; in this case, it was to get involved with community groups. He then addressed those who were not currently connected to any group by suggesting they become involved in the group for new people. This was a very specific call to action. Also present in this example was the fact that he did rebuke those who were not involved, even though he showed sadness. He also showed sympathy for people who

were not connected, creating a sense of general care. Instead of ostracizing them for not being as involved as they could be, he showed care for them. In this way, he addressed the people that needed encouragement to become involved without them feeling negative chastisement.

5 Point Church

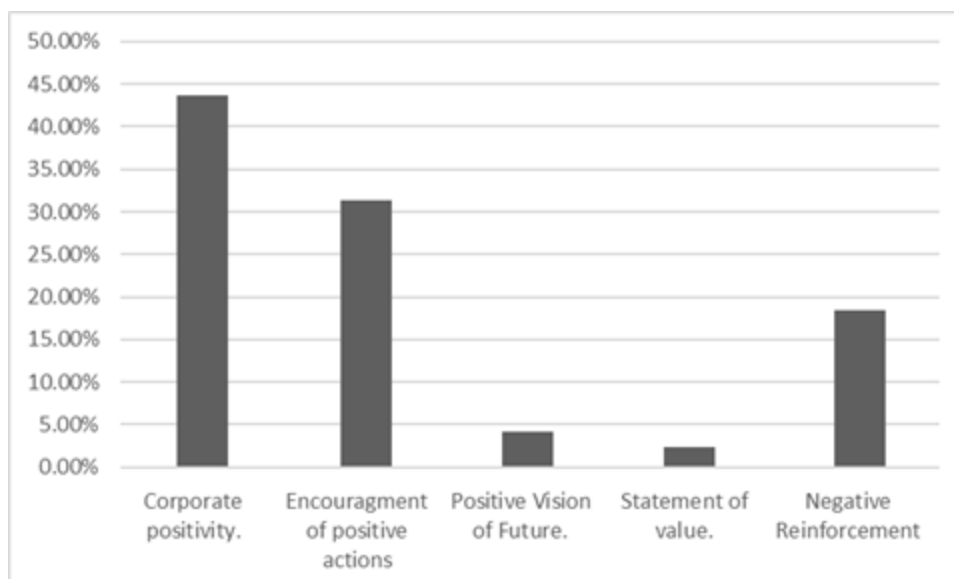
Total usage across all seven sermons:

Table 5

5 Point Church – Dean Herman	Total “Positive Reinforcement” Usage
Total Word Count	53,832
Positive Reinforcement word count.	9,039
% of positive reinforcement words.	16.79%
Overall Positive Tone	60.91%
Positive vs. Negative Words comparison	2.94% vs 1.87%

Breakdown of positive reinforcement coding across all 5 Point Church sermons:

Figure 9



Content Analysis

Pastor Herman did not shy away from speaking about difficult topics. He had a persona of being an honest “tell it as it is” type preacher. He spoke about the consequence of one’s actions and advised them to stay away from sinful actions. This was reinforced by the fact that he was clearly the highest of the three preachers in the usage of negative reinforcement. An example of what this looked like was in his *Priority Change* sermon. In under two minutes of speaking time he rebuked some of the congregation’s mindsets on two different items saying, “Some of you could care less about the sex slave trade. You could care less about abortions, but you let somebody mess with your dang dog and you're ready to kill somebody” A few moments later he changed the subject and stated:

Here's the problem in the American church we call on God is the last resort, not on the first resort. You depend on your money and your pocket book more than you do on God. You bet God for a miracle. When it's the last resort, why don't you bet God for the first resort? Oh, that's because he's not your God.

However, even though Pastor Hermon used negative reinforcement the most often and he was not shy of stating honest truths if his people were not living as they should, the positive reinforcement still outweighed the negative five to one. Clearly showing that positive reinforcement was more highly valued than the negative.

Yet upon careful examination, Pastor Herman often portrayed these hard truths in such a way that did not confront the congregation itself. Rather he would place the blame or negative attitudes on a different generic audience. He frequently complained about the “American Church” and the consumerism or pacifism in their faith. One example of this came in his sermon, “The Foundation”, in which he said, “The American church, you get up in the morning and you don't say, Lord Jesus, what can I do for you today? You say, Lord Jesus, what you going to do for me today? And it's the wrong mindset.” He could have directly applied it to his church but

instead kept blaming the American Church instead. Pastor Herman used the “American Church” term a total of twenty-nine times across all seven sermons. In this way, he was speaking about a difficult and hard truth, but yet at the same time, it was not a direct confrontation with the listener. Furthermore, it gave the listener an opportunity to agree with him that others in the church should get more serious about their faith.

The most unique thing about Pastor Herman’s take on Positive Reinforcement was the high rate of church wide corporate positivity. On two different occasions in the seven sermons reviewed, Pastor Herman spent a considerable amount of time recounting the story and the growth of 5 Point Church. He used the story to encourage the audience members to not only get involved in the church, but also set up a future vision of the church. Both of these were coded “Church Wide Positive Reinforcement”, and these two occurrences made up the majority of the total usage of this coding. These occurrences were close to thousand words per each occurrence, which was especially significant since the sermons were under ten thousand words as a whole. The church wide examples were nearly 10% of the overall sermon, and thus clearly showed a significant reliance on building up the church through the telling of the story.

During one of the occurrences, Pastor Herman concluded this portion of the message by showing multiple photos of previous locations and meetings, and chronicling attendance of their kid ministry, small groups, and Sunday mornings. He also compared their church to other churches nationwide. At the conclusion of this lengthy dialogue, he made the following statement,

I never want this church to be about you, I want this church to be about reaching the world for Him and you gotta get it away from the mindset. Is my parking spot, or my chair, it's not, it's about us being used to reach them for him. It's not yours! You had the some people say “Why [do] you need to build a 1200 seat auditorium, well now we got over 1400 people in here. This church has something to celebrate, right church?
(2020, *To change what needs to change*)

This portion of the sermon showed people they had the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than themselves. He was encouraging the listeners not to be passive participants, but instead to be dedicated to its mission and values. Herman then came back at the end of the sermon and reiterated his positive reinforcement for the church,

This is one of the greatest churches in America; it's amazing what God is doing. People tell me all the time. I can't believe what God's doing through you. And through Five Point Church...So my question, my challenge to you this morning, goes with me who says I don't wanna be here anymore, because God says, "I want you here," I don't wanna be where I am now. I wanna be where God wants to take me, to do the things he's called me to do.

In this example from Pastor Hermon, it supported the idea that building up the church also built the individuals. Pastor Herman would seem to believe that the two ideas were intrinsically linked and when the individual connected with the church, they were better off as well.

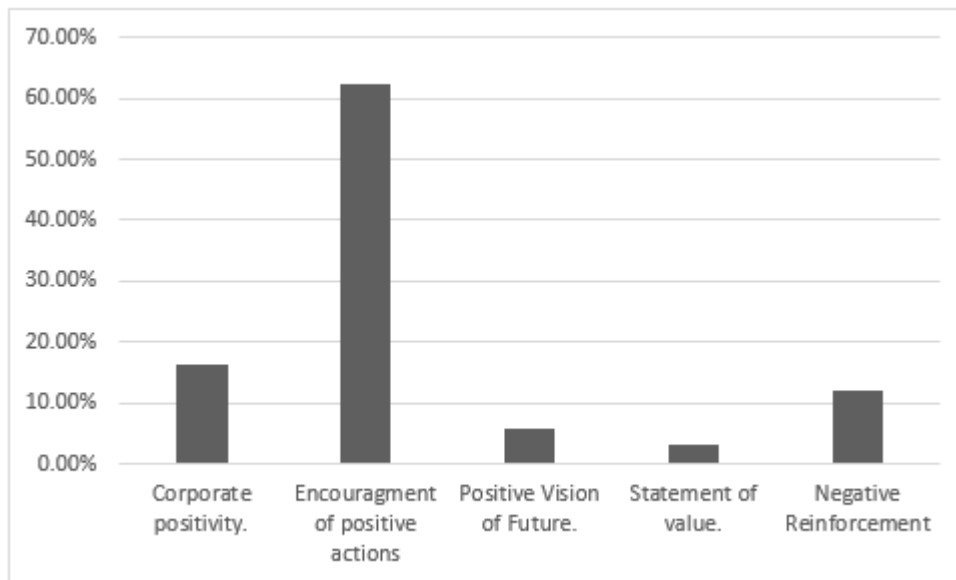
Sandals Church

Total usage across all seven sermons:

Table 6

Sandals Church – Matt Brown	Total “Positive Reinforcement” Usage
Total Word Count	55,252
Positive Reinforcement word count.	10,556
% of positive reinforcement words.	22.09%
Overall Positive Tone	46.32%
Positive vs. Negative Words comparison	3.18% vs. 2.13%

Breakdown of positive reinforcement coding across all Sandals Church sermons:

Figure 10

Content Analysis

As showcased in Table 6 above, the percentage of positive reinforcement was highest in Pastor Brown's sermons at 22.09%. Interestingly though, the LIWC2015 tone was the lowest at 46.32% indicating a more negative tone than the other two preachers. This apparent discrepancy was better understood when examining the positive and negative emotional word percentage and discovering that Pastor Brown used a higher percentage of both positive and negative emotional words. Thus, Pastor Brown spoke in an emotional fashion about both positive and negative topics.

As with the other pastors, the sub-coding for encouragement of positive actions was high. This coding was used when the Pastors would encourage their congregants to pursue positive actions and not include negative chastisement. An example of this was in the Dealing with discouragement, depression and anxiety:

So what do I need to do? What do I need to do? I need to recognize this might be a spiritual attack. I need to think about how I'm being attacked, and I need to recognize my need for authentic relationships. Authentic relationships, look, the University of

California-Riverside just released a study this week that says even introverts, even introverts are better off in community.

In this example, one can see the crossover between the various codings. He started it asking perceived questions from the open dialogue coding. He then showed them what they are to do, stating they need authentic relationships. Therefore all three major codings are present in this short example, but the main point of the statements was an encouragement for people, even introverts, to pursue relationships.

Pastor Brown frequently expressed a positive reinforcement purpose at the start of the sermon, stating, “I wanna talk today about how God can help you overcome your loneliness. And one of the things God does to help us overcome our loneliness, I want you to write this in your notes, is ‘he gives you purpose’” (2019, *Finding God’s will for my life*). The sermon was built on this principle of purpose for your life, which created an overall positive tone for the sermon. So while the rest of the sermon had both positive and negative reinforcement, it was essentially built on a positive premise. If Pastor Brown would have started out with a statement such as, “Your life is purposeless without God,” instead of “He gives you purpose,” it would have changed the whole scope of the sermon and created a much more negative tone. The positive reinforcement then naturally fit into this positive tone, as he was able to continually encourage the congregants to live out this truth in their life.

The introductions and conclusions were the most common locations for positive reinforcement in Pastor Brown’s sermons. In another sermon (Brown, 2019, *Invited to give*), one of the first things Pastor Brown said was to remind the audience that God loves them and has a plan for them. The conclusion finished with this idea as well, but the conclusion was centered more on corporate positive reinforcement, instead of personal. It was a plea both to get involved

in the church and give to the church, with a strong push on what could be accomplished together. He used both locations to introduce and conclude with something positive.

As noted earlier, Pastor Brown had a higher percentage of positive and negative emotional words. For example, he frequently mentioned bad actions that should be avoided. Yet they were preceded and succeeded by positive actions and reinforcements. It was difficult to distinguish between the two of them.

“Let me challenge you. I want you to be generous, but I don't want you to be stupid. Don't give your money away to someone that's gonna waste it, because you know why? You just wasted your money. Give your money to people who really could use it and will really do something with it. That's why you need to be in community group, because anybody can give you a story”. (Brown, 2019, *Invited to give*)

In these few sentences, he gave a warning against a foolish action of giving money to people who would waste it, but it was nestled between an encouragement to be generous and get involved in a lifegroup. The effect was that when listening to this statement in real time, one did not feel like they had been confronted with a negative chastisement against giving money away, but rather encouraged to be generous and getting involved in lifegroup for accountability purposes. This went to the heart of the issue of positive reinforcement. It does not mean that negative warnings can't be used, but instead the overall attitude should be positive.

Another example of negative chastisement wrapped in positive reinforcement was found in *Finding God's will for my life* when he stated,

And so God helps us overcome our loneliness when we have a sense of purpose. Many of you guys have no sense of purpose in your life. And the world's not helping, the world's just saying, "Well, be happy." "Well, that doesn't help "'cause I don't know what makes me happy." Well, I got good news, I know what makes you happy and his name is God and he loves you and he wants to bless you and give you purpose.

He made the negative statements of “Many of you guys have no sense of purpose in your life.”

But then he immediately elevated some of the blame by mentioning “the world's not helping.”

Then moving quickly to a positive conclusion, "Well, I got good news, I know what makes you

happy and his name is God and he loves you and he wants to bless you and give you purpose.” These examples showcase how Pastor Brown spoke truth, even if not positive, in a positive way.

A good example was found in his sermon on the Enneagram. As stated in the previous research question, there was much authenticity in the sermon because of the Enneagram focus. Interestingly, after he made these uncomfortable statements, he would frequently follow it up with positive reinforcement statements. Once again showing that negative statements still happen, but the overall tone was bent towards the positive.

Generally, Sandals Church was generic in its approach to positive reinforcement, but Pastor Brown became very specific on occasion. One such time was when he encouraged the congregation to go through an online reading program. He listed the number of people who had been participating, but then encouraged those who had not yet participated to get involved. Pastor Brown frequently encouraged his listeners to establish new habits for the coming year including removing negative influences in their life and reaching out to others in the church.

Similarities in Positive Reinforcement

The three pastors showed significant similarities in how they portrayed positive reinforcement in their sermons, especially when compared to negative chastisement. Each pastor used positive reinforcement five to twenty times more than negative chastisement. As shown in the examples listed above, even when negative chastisement was discussed, it was usually done in such a way that promoted the positive instead of focusing on the negative.

The most widely used subcategory under positive reinforcement for two of the preachers was the “encouragement of positive actions.” In fact, for Pastor Hermon it was the second most common. Because it was difficult to do in a large group setting, there was little in the traditional sense of positive reinforcement, where the leader is reinforcing positive action that he or she has

seen. Despite that not being present, the overall focus and tone of the sermons from all three preachers were positive as they frequently encouraged their congregations to partake in positive actions that would enhance their life or the church. Clearly the preachers used most of the application time encouraging them to positive actions.

Another interesting similarity was that each of the pastors gave extended time to chronicle the story of their church and its incredible growth. Each pastor used the “corporate positive reinforcement” in five of their seven sermons. In this sampling of seven sermons from the last year, each of them gave an extended dialogue about the church's growth at least once, with the 5 Points Church pastor doing it twice. This was, in fact, the most common used subcategory of Pastor Herman at 5 Points Church. This included giving extended stories of the church’s growth in attendance, baptisms, etc. and many smaller incidences throughout the sermon. These types of statements were coded under Corporate Positivity because they were building the congregation up as a whole based on previous actions. Considering the relatively small sample size of this study as compared to their overall sermons preached throughout the year, the amount of time still dedicated to this topic indicated it was an ongoing theme.

Millennials will frequently state they desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Each one of the pastors used the practice of telling the organization’s story to give their people the sense of being a part of something bigger than themselves.

Research Question #3: How often are pastors conveying an “open dialogue” theme in their sermons by discussing verbalized or perceived questions and hindrances that the listener might have?

As shown in this paper, millennials desire to be able to speak with, ask questions of, and dialogue with their leaders. The paper next addressed if and how the preachers incorporated

these traits in their sermons. As with the previous questions, more than just the direct question was tracked in order to gain a fuller understanding.

While the third research question addressed how frequently the pastors would field questions or openly discuss issues with the congregation, that type of direct dialogue was virtually non-existent in the sermons. There were likely different reasons for this, but the most likely reason was due to the logistics of trying to facilitate direct dialogue in such large churches. Despite this, upon completing the research, it was discovered that there was a heavy dependence on mimicking the conversational approach through rhetorical and perceived questions. Each pastor asked rhetorical questions throughout the sermon, and unlike the areas of authenticity and positive reinforcement, their approach regarding open dialogue was more diversified throughout the sermon. Besides the rhetorical questions, each pastor showcased various ways that promoted open dialogue inside their sermon.

As with the previous two questions, the primary way to determine the overall frequency of usage in the sermons, was based on the researcher's analysis. To strengthen the results and provide a more robust understanding, an additional tool was also employed; LIWC2015 was used which counted the words per sentence and percentage of integrative sentences. This additional information was especially helpful for the third research question as the percentage of interrogative sentences used in a sermon was able to be calculated. This information helped show the rate the preachers used rhetorical questions and mimicked dialogue in their sermons. It proved to be a significant portion of the time in each pastor's sermons. Once the information was collected through LIWC2015, the total usage of interrogative sentences was calculated. As shown in the following section, each pastor's number of interrogative sentences was a significant portion of the sermon.

This was a noteworthy similarity between the pastors, which will be revisited in the conclusion section. This information was also the most significant information discovered for the third research question.

Mercy Hill

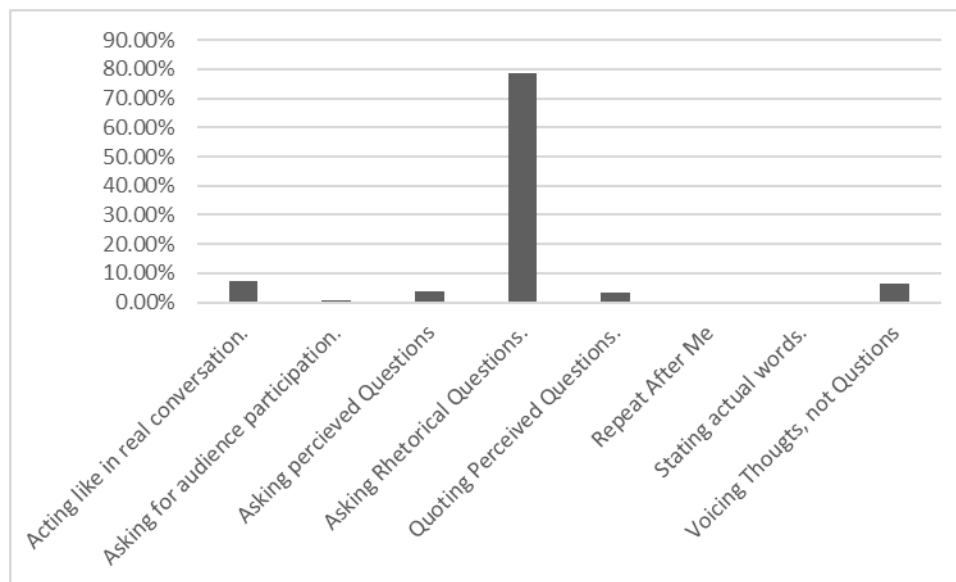
Total Usage across all seven sermons:

Table 7

Mercy Hill Church – Andrew Hopper	Total “Open Dialogue” Usage
Total Word Count	64,421
Open dialogue word count.	9,212
% of open dialogue words.	14.30%
% of words in interrogative sentences	8.34%

Figure 11

Breakdown of open dialogue coding across all Mercy Hill Church sermons:



Content Analysis

Mercy Hill employed open dialogue 14.30% of its time in the sermons. This was primarily done, not by answering direct questions, but through the pastor's conversational approach. Pastor Hopper would ask questions, most frequently coded as "rhetorical questions", since he did not expect an audible answer to be spoken back to him. The sermons were filled with these types of questions. He would frequently use these questions one after the other as he attempted to engage the congregation. Here is a short example of these rhetorical questions being used in the sermon.

And I gotta, I gotta move here, but I wanna make sure that we understand this. What are the nuts and bolts of the plan? Like the plan is to reap glory. Okay. We got that, but what are the nuts and bolts? Like? What does it look like for God to do so at 30,000 feet? What is he trying to do? And it has to keep saying, trying to do, what is he going to do in the world? Okay. What is God actually going to do? Well, what we see here is right in front of us. Number one, the plan is set forth in Christ. (2020, *Jacob has a problem*)

In this short example Pastor Hopper used seven questions to engage the audience. This sequence was for the expressed purpose of "mak[ing] sure that we understand this." To help the congregation understand the spiritual principle being taught, he listed multiple questions to think for themselves.

One of the most significant differences between this research question and the previous two is how they were used. Positive reinforcement and, to a lesser degree, authenticity were most commonly used during the introduction and conclusion; open dialogue was spread throughout the sermon. It was especially common in the Bible teaching portion of the sermon as was the case listed above. Pastor Hopper used questions, not to illustrate the point or explain it further, but rather as an attempt to have the listener think deeply about the subject and answer questions about the text themselves. It was normal for him and the other pastors to use these questions to engage the audience during the biblical teaching time. The researcher assumed that open

dialogue would be most heavily involved in the application portion of the sermon. Though it was present there, it was also heavily used in the sermon's biblical explanation portion. He would frequently ask questions to help explain and encourage the congregation to think deeply about the text and then closely follow a question to help them apply the text.

My question for you is, are you living as elementary principals? Are you living in the family? I would call you at all of our locations today. Hey, come forth and step into this invitation to be adopted into the family of God. Let's move on to verse five. Here's what it says now. Why did he do this? Remember what he comes born of a woman born under the law, listen to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive the adoption as sons. (2020, *Fully in the family – Galatians 4:1-7*)

In this short snippet from the transcript, he asked the audience a question and to contemplate and apply it in their life when he stated, “Are you living as elementary principals? Are you living in the family?” He then went on to ask another question almost immediately after with a different purpose “Why did he do this?” This question was an attempt to have them think deeply about the text. These two rhetorical questions were frequently placed together as Pastor Hopper would draw the congregation back to the text.

Nearly 80% of the open dialogue coding was sub-coded to rhetorical questions. The other codings were then divided among the remaining twenty percent. This was primarily dedicated to creating a conversational approach. Throughout the seven sermons, there were seven times of quoting perceived questions, ten occurrences of acting like a real conversation, thirteen times of asking perceived questions, and nine times of voicing thoughts, not questions. In total, there were 39 occurrences of these lesser-used sub-codings that specifically helped create a conversation approach. It averaged 5.57 times per sermon. This was not something that inundated the sermon like the rhetorical question usage but still was significant enough to shape the sermon in a conversational way. Furthermore, Pastor Hopper would include perceived questions in his

teaching as well. He would verbalize questions that he thought the audience might be thinking.

An example of this was:

And many times what we think about is, man, what job am I supposed to take? Or what school am I supposed to go to? And you've heard me say this before, but the bulk of what we see in the Bible about the will of God is not about where you are. It's about who you are. It's not about me. What job am I supposed to take? (2020, *Jacob has a problem*).

As shown here he was voicing what he perceived to be the questions that the audience might be asking themselves during the sermon. By doing this, he was creating an internal dialogue with the listeners where he was voicing their thoughts and then giving answers to their questions.

While Pastor Hopper was not actually answering questions directly from the millennials, he was mimicking a possible conversation. This particular teaching trait, answering questions the audience might have, has been present for a long time, but as the literature review stated, this was especially beneficial for the millennials.

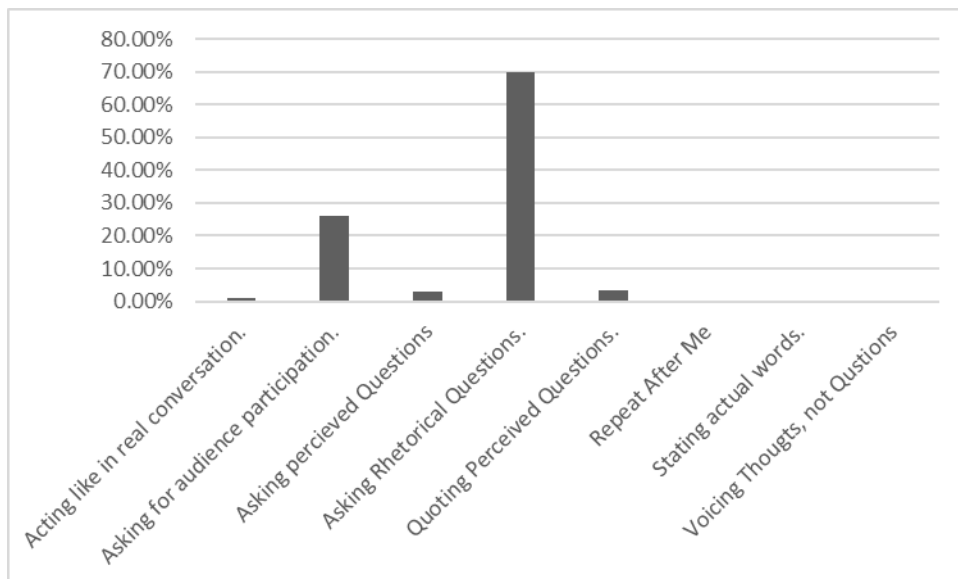
5 Point Church

Total usage across all seven sermons:

Table 8

5 Point Church – Dean Herman	Total “Open Dialogue” Usage
Total Word Count	53,832
Open dialogue word count.	10,556
% of open dialogue words.	19.61%
% of words in interrogative sentences	10.72%

Breakdown of open dialogue coding across all 5 Point Church sermons:

Figure 12

Content Analysis

Pastor Herman used an aspect of open dialogue which the other pastors did not, and this trait displayed the most direct open dialogue among all the sermons studied. He frequently asked the congregation questions that he expected them to respond to. These statements were labeled under “Asking for Audience Participation”. At the start of every sermon he asked the congregation to raise their hand if they had read their Bible every day the previous week. This would also crossover to the authenticity coding of “Appealing to Authenticity in Others”. After asking the question, the congregation would raise their hands, and then Pastor Herman would either commend them or correct them depending on the overall answers.

In addition, throughout the sermons as a whole, Pastor Herman frequently asked the congregation to repeat after him. This created a higher than normal rate of dialogue between the speaker and the congregation; this was then reflected in the fact that he had the highest of the three pastors in open dialogue at 19.61% total. In addition to the question on Bible reading, the

pastor would also ask them if they were ready to get started. Then he would ask them to repeat after him.

Now, here we go. How many of you ready to hear a word about dating and relationships? Buckle up guys. Cause I'm coming at you. Here we go. Repeat after me. Holy Spirit. Allow me to hear this word. Come on now, so I can receive this word so I can live this word. And everybody said [amen]. (2020, *Priority Change*)

The congregation no doubt grew to expect this each week. This practice, along with a high emphasis on open dialogue in general, created a feeling of personal involvement by the congregation. They were no longer simply being talked to by an expert, but they were participants on a journey together with a part to play.

In addition, many of the questions that Herman asked had less of a feel of simply being rhetorical, as in the case of the other pastors, and instead seemingly wanting people to actually answer him. He would wait longer, for example, before he would continue, leaving a few seconds of silence for people to contemplate or answer the question. He also asked follow up questions to the original questions to have the congregation continue to think deeply on the subject. This also tied in with the other research question of authenticity. When asking for audience participation he was appealing for authenticity and honesty in their answers. He also went out of his way to not ostracize his listeners, but to show they were all facing similar challenges. In “The Foundation” sermon, Herman stated

What I mean by that is this. My parents got divorced. My sister has been divorced. I'm not talking about a friend or some family tree way down the line. I'm talking about divorce has affected you. Such as your parents getting divorced, you've been divorced, something in that nature. How many of you have been affected by divorce? Raise your hand. Whoa, look around, look around wholly stinking, cow. That's more than 50% inside the walls of the church.

In this quote, he asked the question, “How many of you have been affected by divorce? Raise your hand.” He, in effect, engaged the audience and asked them to be involved in the sermon. In

addition, the question had the potential to be a difficult question for some in the congregation. Hence, he spoke first of the divorce in his own family, and thereby creating a bond between himself and the congregation. This allowed for a more open and robust response.

As with the other pastors, Herman also used rhetorical questions in the teaching section, usually employing the tactic when the information was not easily applicable to daily life. It was Pastor Herman's way of keeping the audience engaged. This was seen most easily in his sermon in the series, "How We Got the Bible." Its entire goal was to answer questions involving the origins of the Bible. For this reason, there was the only limited reading of the Scripture itself. The sermon had more qualities of a lecture rather than a sermon. The sermons in this series took time to answer commonly asked questions and concerns people had with Christianity. Throughout the sermon, he asked perceived questions and verbalized perceived conversations. One such example was when he said, "So then how did it get from God's heart in the man into our hand? The way we hold it today? Glad you asked. Number one. The Bible, when was first spoken, was that very thing? It was spoken." (Herman, 2019, *Manuscripts*) In this example, he was engaging with and answering perceived questions from the audience-questions the audience had about the subject matter. He even on occasion said, "Glad you asked". Other times he used this same phrase more for comedic value. However, it was used, Herman was attempting to voice and answer questions that the listener might have and thus allowing for an appearance of open dialogue between the two.

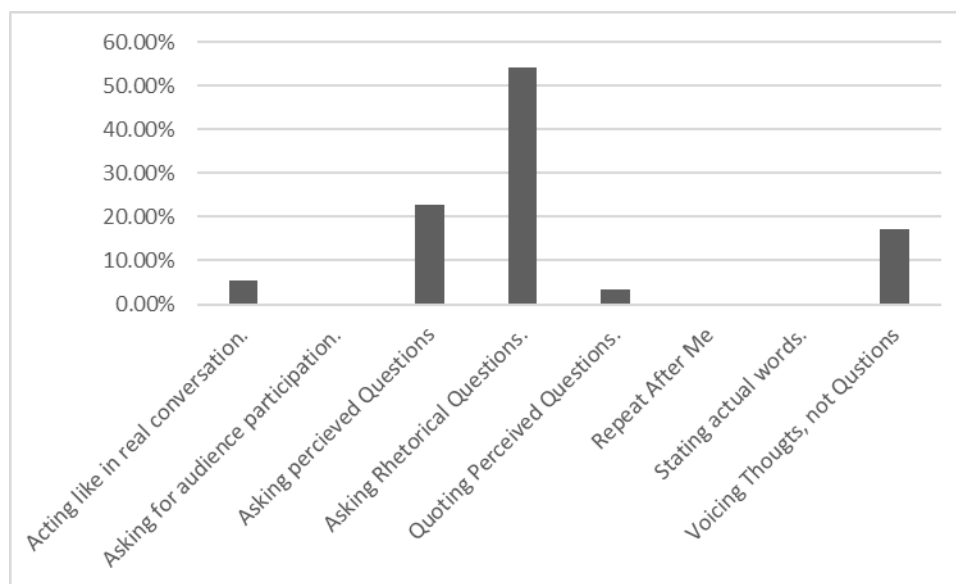
Sandals Church

Total usage across all seven sermons:

Table 9

Sandals Church – Matt Brown	Total “Open Dialogue” Usage
Total Word Count	55,252
Open dialogue word count.	7,274
% of open dialogue words.	13.99%
% of words in interrogative sentences	13.67%

Breakdown of open dialogue coding across all Sandals Church sermons:

Figure 13

Content Analysis

As with the other pastors, Pastor Matt Brown of Sandals Church relied heavily on asking rhetorical questions while teaching the Bible, and once again, the usage was diversified throughout the whole sermon. Though Pastor Brown used it during the teaching time, which was similar to the other two pastors-especially Pastor Hopper, the types of questions asked were different. Whereas Pastor Hopper asked more substantive questions about the meaning of texts, Pastor Brown used the questions as quick check-ins with the audience. His use of questions

frequently were found within the “Not Relevant” section, under the subcategory, “Biblical Explanation.” During the times when he was explaining the Bible, he frequently asked simple questions such as, “Do you understand what I'm saying?” or “Do you know why that is?” (Brown, 2019, *Finding God's will for my life*). When he would spend lengthier times teaching the Bible, these types of questions were asked as a way to draw the congregation back into the sermon. Like the other pastors, especially Hopper, he used this tool much more frequently while teaching scripture and only used it sparingly in illustrations or applications. This insight was proven by the fact that the sermons with the highest levels of rhetorical questions also had the highest levels of biblical explanation. For example, this can be seen in the third sermon, “*Dealing with Discouragement, Depression and Anxiety*”. This sermon was part of a sermon series on the Enneagram, a popular personality tool. This sermon had significantly less Biblical teaching in it than any other sermon studied, and Pastor Brown used the open dialogue coding less frequently in this sermon than any other sermon. This is especially true when compared to the previous sermon which had a high level of biblical teaching (13.50% versus 7.29% respectively).

Another type of open dialogue that Pastor Brown used frequently was asking a contemplative question at the start or end of the sermon; this was sometimes the same question. He asked questions such as, “Who in your life is checking up on you?”, (2019, *Into God's house*) and he asked it in such a way that demanded an internal response from the listener. Another example was when he opened a sermon with the question, “What are you gonna be doing on the last day of your life?” (2020, *Motivated to change my life before it falls apart*) and thus inviting the audience into this dialogue. By so doing, he created a general conversational atmosphere throughout his sermons.

Pastor Brown also incorporated another common feature in open dialogue. He would ask a question such as, “Now I'm gonna ask the guys, cuz only the guys will be honest. How many of you have ever been to a party you didn't want to go to, raise your hands. Come on look at the hands!” (Brown, 2019, *Invited to give*). He incorporated two research aspects in this short quote. First, there was an appeal for honesty or authenticity. He was also asking for a direct response by having them raise their hands. This was effective because Brown already had established a good rapport with the congregation. They trusted that his next line was not going to be chastised or calling them sinners. Therefore, he had a very good response to that question, further allowing him to connect to the audience. Besides connecting with the preacher, the audience also had a sense of unity and bonding since they could see the other people's response as well.

Pastor Brown only used the non-rhetorical question coding sparingly. The sermon that contained the largest section of the rarely used “Quoting perceived questions” was his fifth sermon, “*How to change what needs to change.*” which he preached on the first Sunday of 2020. He attempted to give voice to questions he perceived the congregants might be asking themselves. One example was, “What person am I gonna be in 2020?” He then went one step further, not only asking the questions that might be on their mind but then asking the questions they should be asking themselves. One such question would be, “Am I gonna be a person that follows my own wicked desires, my own path, or am I gonna be a person who follows the path of the Lord?” This was giving voice to and simulating an internal dialogue between the speaker and congregants, and ultimately it attempted to engage the audience to answer the questions posed in the sermon. When a preacher does this, it shows the congregations that he understands their thinking by asking questions that they might be asking themselves.

Similarities in Open Dialogue

The third research question exhibited close similarities between the three preachers. In fact, it was the closest of the three categories between them. The usage rates of the three preachers were 13.99%, 19.61%, and 14.30%. Among all the preachers, the overwhelming usage in this research question occurred in the sub-category asking rhetorical questions. As stated earlier, this was when the preacher asked a question, not anticipating that the audience would directly answer him. The high usage among all three preachers showcased how the preachers prioritized asking these types of questions. They mimicked the conversational style of leadership and communication that millennials desire. This was not used in just one area, but rather it was present in all parts of the sermons, including the introduction, biblical teaching, and application. In fact, it was very common in all three of the preachers to use it in the direct teaching portion of the sermon seemingly as a way to draw the audience back into dialogue and the teaching. Therefore, it was not just a tool for application, but rather a tool the preachers used for bringing the audience into the sermon. As stated earlier, generally speaking, all the sermons were inversely proportional; but biblical explanation and rhetorical questions were directly proportional. The higher the amount of biblical explanation in the sermon, the higher amount of rhetorical questioning was used. These two sub-groupings did not appear to be linked before starting the study, yet this information was confirmed throughout all three sermons.

The original research questions sought to discover the amount of direct communication employed by the pastors. Surprisingly, the pastors had virtually no direct conversations. None of the preachers during the sermons observed brought anyone on stage to converse with them, nor did they take questions from the audience, or respond to previous questions that had been asked of them. This was likely because of the difficulty of doing this in large venues. Despite the fact

there was no direct dialogue in the sermons, the statistics and information showed that each one used the communication skill of asking rhetorical questions at a high rate. Besides the rhetorical question usage, the other features of the research question were used sparingly and differently among the three pastors. Pastor Brown used “quoting perceived thoughts”, Pastor Herman asked frequently for audience participation, and Pastor Hopper would discuss “potential questions” that they had. While all these actions had the potential to benefit other preachers, no patterns arose from all three pastors besides that of the very common rhetorical questions.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This study used was a qualitative content analysis of sermons preached during their weekly worship services.

QCA is a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way. You do this by assigning successive parts of your material to the categories of your coding frame. This frame is at the heart of QCA, and it covers all those meanings that feature in the description and interpretation of your material (Schreier, 2012, p.12).

The primary purpose was to discover how the pastors of three fast growing churches used the traits of authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue in their sermons. These traits were selected because they had previously been shown to be effective while communicating with millennials. Seven sermons from the past seven months were evaluated, and they were obtained through the church’s public websites and social media platforms. All the sermons were from the lead teaching pastor of the church, not from any guest speakers. This was done to understand any trends and features of their sermons that might correlate to their growth. The study collected this information by observing and reviewing the sermon videos and transcripts of the sermons. The sermons transcripts initially were auto-generated through the social media sites on which the sermons were posted (YouTube and Facebook), but because of lack of accuracy, a program called Descript was used to transcribe the sermons. The transcripts were then analyzed for

accuracy again. The sermons were then reviewed in a detailed qualitative content analysis. This content analysis methodology was used to examine how the primary teaching pastor used various traits including the three previously mentioned: authenticity, positive feedback, and open dialogue in his sermon. This study's type of content analysis was conceptual; it sought to discover how often these themes were conveyed by the preachers and to what effect. Yet, the study went further than just simply counting keywords. Because the study is qualitative, it sought to understand the underlying context of what was being stated. The study's accuracy was then triangulated through the literature review, the detailed personal content analysis, and the use of electronic analysis of the information. Observations and conclusions were then made concerning the findings. Special attention was given to those traits that were present in all three preachers. This was because certain traits were found frequently in all three of the fastest growing churches' preachers, then there would likely be findings that could benefit other pastors who are seeking the same type of growth.

The study's setting was the sermons from the lead pastors of the fastest growing Southern Baptist Churches in America in 2018. The sermons were collected through their publicly posted content. The sermons were transcribed through the program Descript, and the content analysis was performed through ATLAS.ti.

An aspect that would have made the study stronger would have been if a control group or baseline rate were established for the average preacher. A sampling from pastors across the country was beyond the scope of this study. Because the average usage was unable to be determined. Therefore, how much the three pastors used authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue was observed, but how much more these pastors used these traits compared to other pastors could also not be determined.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four has shown the study's findings, both through statistics of usage and qualitative content analysis. It reviewed the compilation protocol and measures regarding how the study was processed. Special attention was given to establishing the coding frame, since the coding frame was significant for a QCA study. It also clearly defined each coding's meaning, including category and sub-category (For more detailed breakdown of codes, see Appendix). It was shown how a QCA approach was appropriate for the study. It provided statistical information concerning the sermons themselves and allowed further understanding of the sermons on a qualitative level as it attempted to understand and label the information accurately. The reader should have an understanding of each preacher's style and usage of the key areas in their sermons. The content analysis portion gave highlights which showcased special and common occurrences. Special attention was given to discussion of the similarities between the three different preachers. Having analyzed the information, Chapter Five will now draw conclusions on the information, the primary source for the conclusions, implications, and applications. The conclusions in Chapter Five are largely based on the similarities found between the three pastors. After this information is discussed, limitations and suggestions for further research are also given.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study aimed to determine if and how much the pastors of the three fastest-growing Southern Baptist Churches used authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue in their sermons, as it related to communicating to millennials. Chapter one gave an overview of the study. Chapter two reviewed pertinent literature which informed the study and discovered a gap in the research. Chapter three defined how the study was completed and what tools were implemented. Chapter four specifically reviewed the data findings and discovered how these preachers of fast-growing churches used the communication tactics of effective communication towards millennials. Having completed the data findings, it is appropriate to conclude the data in this final chapter. First, the study's purpose and research questions will be reviewed. Then the conclusions, implications, and applications from the collected information will be made. Finally, further research opportunities will be discussed and a discussion of the limitations of this study. The primary purpose of this chapter is to assist in applying the information to current situations.

Research Purpose

In order to understand if the study accomplished its goal, the research purpose and questions must be reviewed. The purpose of this content analysis study was to understand better how preachers who led the fastest growing churches in the Southern Baptist Convention used communication tactics previously identified as important in communicating and leading millennials in their sermons. These tactics were identified as authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue. The study involved extensive qualitative content analysis of recent sermons these pastors have preached in their churches.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. How often are pastors portraying authenticity by connecting personal experiences to objective truth in their sermons?

RQ2. How often are pastors portraying positive reinforcement by encouraging positive improvements versus chastisement of negative behavior?

RQ3. How often are pastors conveying an “open dialogue” theme in sermons by discussing verbalized or perceived questions and hindrances that the listener might have?

Research Conclusions, Implications, Applications

The study was designed to be a practical help for the minister attempting to preach in a way that was appealing to millennials. The information collected gave practical information for other preachers and leaders who practice mass verbal communication, especially to millennials. Research conclusions, implications, applications will now be discussed; this will be primarily drawn from the “similarities” portions of chapter four, showing the actions that were present among all three of the preachers. In this way, the study was not built on various traits from a specific pastor, but rather on common themes. This built on the assumption that if actions were repeated by all three of the fastest-growing churches in the SBC, it likely would have practical applications for other churches as well.

Conclusions

Each pastor had a unique style that distinguished them from the others. Additionally, each sermon was unique, as well. Despite that, they all displayed certain characteristics in their sermons on multiple occasions, and upon completion of the content analysis, there arose several themes present in all of the preachers’ sermons. This was especially significant when one considered the differences between the three churches. Sandals Church is a very large church with 12 physical campuses (Sandals Church, 2020), mostly in large California cities.

On the other hand, 5 Point Church has one physical campus located in Easley, South Carolina, which has a population under 22,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Finally, Mercy Hill Church falls in the middle of the other two churches in size, locations, and campuses. While these differences in context resulted in different ministry and speaking approaches, several of the findings were consistent among all three of the churches, giving further credence to how these themes are important to growing churches today. Through these similarities, conclusions could be made, and applications could be applied to other churches.

There was also a wide range in the number of themes in the sermons. There were various reasons for this. One of the most common sub-codings in the “Non-Relevant” primary coding was “Biblical Explanation”. The higher the biblical explanation levels were in the sermon, the less the other codings were present. Since each sermon had an approximate time limit, the themes were inversely dependent on each other. With 21 sub-codings, when used at a high rate in a sermon, it drastically impacted the other codings. So different sermons by the same preacher showed variance.

Conclusions for Research Question #1

The subject of the sermon frequently dictated which of the three themes were most present in the sermon. In fact, this was the most important factor in each sermon. When personal matters such as relationships were discussed, it would shape the rest of the sermon. This point had more significance than the general rate of authenticity among an individual preacher. For instance, Pastor Herman had a low authenticity rate of 8.97% in his sermons “Manuscripts” speaking of how the Bible was transcribed throughout history, and a much higher rate during the “Priority Change” message, 26.72%, which spoke about relationships. Therefore, the topic being discussed was a significant factor in the rate of authenticity.

All of the pastors referenced themselves frequently throughout their sermons. This was foundational information in understanding the first research question. Pastor Hopper referenced himself an average 184 times per sermon, Pastor Herman 150 times per sermon, and Pastor Brown 167 times per sermon. These references were woven throughout the sermons, occurring in the introduction, body, and conclusion. There were not any perceived trends concerning when they mentioned themselves in the sermon, just the frequency.

Even though they frequently spoke about themselves, the sermon's focus was not on them but on Scripture. The biblical explanation portion, the most direct teaching time in the sermon, sought to explain the main text and held a prominent position in each sermon. Overall, the sermons averaged 24.35% of biblical explanation in the sermon. Other subcategories of teaching such as teaching not directly related to the text, were used 6.21%. The personal references were often mentioned to support the goal of effective communication of God's Word. A short illustration of this was when Pastor Hopper referenced himself three times simply to point back to Scripture, "I could go on and on. All I'm trying to get you to see is this, listen, if Abraham gave a 10th over God's victory in his life, what does that mean for us?" (2019, A generous response – Genesis 14). He made this appeal to look at the Bible more personal by including quick references to himself. By itself, these references seem inconsequential, but when this happens over 150 times per the sermon it gives it a much more personal tone. The preacher was the conduit for the Word of God to be proclaimed to His people. When the preacher goes one step further by not only referencing himself but using personal examples helps exhibit the biblical truths even more. They connect the objective spiritual truth of Scripture with life in the 21st century and make applications. An illustration of this was used by Pastor Hermon in his *Manuscript* (2019) sermon:

Isaiah 38 says this “and now go write it before them on a tablet,” not a stone tablet. Now this is a wooden tablet. Well Pastor, [it] doesn't say wood. How do we know this was a wooden tablet?

If I said, I'm going to write a book. In fact, I'm in the process of it. If I'm going to write a book in the year 2020. Would I write it on wood or would I be writing with a typewriter? Sorry, wrong showing my age. Would I be writing it with a computer, a computer? Why it's the culture of the day? I used to write with a typewriter because that's the way we did.

This sermon's basis was Scripture, but it was often seen through the lens of personal reflection.

In fairness this practice is not new, yet it is especially pertinent now. Because the postmodern worldview of millennials illustrations carry more significance (Couch, 2009). This was reflected by the high priority placed on personal references by each of the three preachers.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that pastors should not avoid personal examples and stories as these personal stories are uniquely suited to help attain the goal of effective communication in the sermon. Instead, they should look for opportunities to provide personal examples of the biblical truth (Couch, 2009). This insight is not new or significant, what is significant though is simply at how often the preachers were doing it. Their personal references were not limited to a story in the introduction and conclusion, but it was consistently woven throughout the sermon.

Pastors may feel the need to just show personal strengths and thus be an example to the congregation; however, these three pastors, on many occasions, used themselves as examples of human failure. Pastor Hopper illustrated this when he spoke of his inability to make a decision after graduation.

I didn't know if we were supposed to go overseas. I didn't know if we were supposed to become a pastor. I didn't know if I was supposed to plant a church. All of that was on the table and it created a bunch of anxiety in me. Honestly, it was a lot of agony. Why? Because I had a fundamental misunderstanding that God doesn't have to always speak in the “Red Sea Moment”, but he can line up a thousand mundane things in your life and he is still moving and he is still working.

Noticeable in this section is Hopper's use of personal illustration, but not in a sense which made him appear as a hero, but rather as one struggling with anxiety and agony. This is something that especially pertinent to millennials as many of them are still in a stage of life in which they are deciding career choices.

Learning from these pastors, a pastor should attempt to use himself as an example that his church can relate with; an example that shows he is not perfect, but rather a person who has struggles and yet has found the truth that can change one's life (Stetzer, 2009). This is how authenticity was most clearly and commonly shown throughout the sermons, letting the congregation see the pastor struggle and overcome.

Another way authenticity was present in the sermons, besides personal stories, was when the preachers would appeal for the congregants to live a more authentic life. They would challenge the audience to live the life God had called them to. This trait was most noticeable in the preaching of Pastor Brown of Sandals Church in California. He was attempting to call people out of "Instagram" life in his sermons, where they are concerned with everything looking perfect for other people online. He also specifically mentioned the Southern California lifestyle as one that promotes inauthentic living. While Brown used this tactic the most frequently, all of them had high numbers in the sub-coding of "Straightforward language", the sub-coding for when the pastor uses authentic language, without speaking directly of himself. For each pastor, more attention was given to the Scripture than himself, but even when speaking about topics other than himself each preacher went out of his way to call for authentic living in others and speak directly to the congregation. This idea of straightforward language aligns itself with the authenticity and transparency that millennials crave. "To reach millennials you have to be clear and compelling." Walker and Lorianni (2016) go onto say "Plain language speak to millennial values. You can

engage millennials with plain language by making sure your content reflects and shares authentic and transparent voice.”

Lastly, it was observed that all the pastors frequently used humor in their sermons. Pastor Brown even remarked that he was known as the “funny pastor”. Humor has historically been a way to for preachers to connect with the congregation, but it has taken much more prevalence with the increase moralistic therapeutic deism prevalent in millennial age range (Walker, 2007). Frequently the three pastors studied would use themselves for self-deprecating humor. It was especially prevalent in the authentic coding. Several times the pastors used stories where the joke was told at their own expense. In this way, the authenticity was masked through a humorous statement. This allowed the preacher to show authenticity and accomplish the goal of authenticity. This, in turn, allowed the preacher to become more approachable and open.

In summary, each pastor showed authenticity throughout his sermon. The primary way this happened was through personal story and honest personal reflections. There was also a significant amount of preaching appealing to authenticity in others and using authentic language in the straightforward language coding.

Conclusions for Research Question #2

All three of the pastors used positive emotion and language much more frequently than negative. This did not mean there was an absence of negative chastisement in the sermons. Each sermon rebuked wrong actions, lifestyles, and thoughts. Yet, the overall tone of sermons was positive, and there was high usage of positive reinforcement, especially in the conclusion of the sermons. This was so overwhelming based on the word usage, LIWC2015 marked that 20 of 21 sermons had an overall positive tone. As the literature testified, millennials expect positive motivation (Ferri-Reed, 2010). Since childhood, they have received this type of praise so now

they desire this from their family relationships and their employers. Anslop (2008) added “The millennials were raised with so much affirmation and positive reinforcement that they come into the workplace needy for more” The pastors used this approach throughout their sermons, and judging by the current attendance growth, it appears to be connecting with the audience.

Between the three pastors, there were two sub-codes in this category that were used more commonly than the others. First, “Encouragement of Positive Actions” was the most common sub-coding category for two of the preachers and the most common overall. This coding was used when the pastor would speak to encourage the congregants to pursue positive actions in their life. It avoided negative statements about what they were doing wrong. This evidence led to the conclusion that the preachers valued encouragement over chastisement.

The second most common theme, as previously discussed, was the corporate or “Church-Wide” positive reinforcement, which all three users, but especially 5 Point Church. This sub-coding was most commonly spent chronicling the story of the church. This sub-code did not happen every week, but each pastor used an extended portion of the church’s story at least once in their seven sermons. This fact indicated that it was part of the regular schedule, even if not a weekly occurrence. This coding was marked by speaking of attendance, baptisms, missions’ trips, salvation, and the number of adoptions in the church, among others encouraging news. They would usually turn the focus from past accomplishments to a future vision at some point in the discussion.

Conclusions for Research Question #3

The research question's original intent was to find if the pastor had actual conversations with the audience by having them answer questions directly. Instead, it was discovered that this type of communication was not commonly used. However, upon review of the sermons, another

trend arose, the frequent use of rhetorical questions. All three pastors heavily relied on rhetorical questions in the sermons. The rhetorical question was when the pastor would ask a question, but an audible answer back was not expected. When used, the pastors were mimicking an actual conversation. As shown in the literature review, millennials have a strong desire to be included in their leaders' conversation (Williams, 2011; Hamidullah, 2015). They want to be brought into the discussion, heard, and valued. The pastors satisfied this desire through rhetorical questions.

This use of rhetorical questions was an unexpected result from the researcher's viewpoint. The expectation was to have more direct dialogue present in the sermons, based on how important this was to millennials in the literature review. Yet, the direct dialogue was almost non-existent in the sermons. There could be many reasons for this, but the most likely reason was it was not practical. It would be difficult to perform this task in a large church context as each church service had thousands in attendance. Therefore, the pastors used alternative methods to fulfill this desire in the church, such as the rhetorical questions.

Between the three preachers, they used rhetorical questions an average 30.14 times per sermon. This was almost one per minute on average, although the uses were frequently grouped together, asking questions one after the other. Rhetorical questions were used in all facets of the sermons. It was used in the introduction where they would often ask large questions to frame the message and draw the people into the dialogue. The pastors also included these questions in their conclusions, helping the congregations apply the sermon. Yet, the most common area for rhetorical questions was during the teaching time of biblical explanation. They used them to draw people into the biblical teaching and make the teaching time more engaging. Williams (2011) states "Adapting to the learning style of Millennials must be accompanied by a generational shift in communication styles: from traditional ('transmission') style to

collaborative (‘constructive’) style.” He goes on to explain that this collaborative style involves dialogue with the listeners. As shown in the previous chapter, the type of questions they asked varied by the preacher. Some asked questions encouraging the audience to go deeper in their engagement with the text, whereas others simply asked questions to make sure they were still listening. Despite the differences, the clear truth that each one of them relied heavily on rhetorical questions as a tactic to engage the audience, creating a sense of inward dialogue in the congregation.

Implications

The implications of the findings will now be discussed. These implications will advance the conclusions and help determine larger truths that can be gained from the information. The implications will attempt to confront commonly held assumptions on preaching, showing where adjustments need to be made in these commonly held beliefs due to the study.

Implications for Research Question #1

This research project confronted several stereotypes of preaching. One such stereotype was that a preacher must not show any imperfections or spiritual weakness. It is often thought that preachers must not show weakness because of the standards found in Scripture; however, this should not be the case. While the preacher should live a life worth emulating (1 Corinthians 11:1), part of a holy life is also a confession of sin and repentance. This truth follows 1 John 1:8, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” It does not benefit the congregation to think the pastor is a perfect Christian, and regular Christians cannot obtain his level of holiness. Rather, it is important for them to recognize the pastor is a Christian just like them, and who is going through progressive sanctification along with them. This aligns with the research for millennials, Stetzer (2009, p. 97) states,

A pastor or teacher can go a long way in cultivating an atmosphere of depth, as well as authenticity and community, by simply acknowledging that he or she doesn't have it all figured out. By including not only the informative content but also the personal content, including questions and struggles, people have the sense that they are truly encountering something of quality—a moment of true, deep, and honest content. And that's what connects.

In that way they can look at his life and try to emulate it, rather than being discouraged by the lack of obtainment. However, that is not what millennials are desiring. The information verified that some of the best communicators do not follow this tradition, but rather they are unashamed to share personal insights both good and bad.

Another implication from this discussion was that personal stories and subjective truth can enhance the text's objective truth. Most millennials hold to the post-modern worldview which does not believe in absolute truth, but highly values personal experiences (Eswine 2008). The high levels of authenticity shown by the pastors likely portrayed Godly truth more effectively than an appeal to the authority in Scripture by itself. Millennials and younger who attend church are more likely to accept something as true if they see it personally true for someone else they know. Some might see this as problematic, but if Scripture is true, as it says it is, it will be true when applied to personal life. Therefore, as a pastor applies biblical truths to his personal life, he does not compromise the truth found in the Bible. Rather, he is applying it in a way that the younger generation would more easily accept.

Implications for Research Question #2

Another stereotype confronted was the effectiveness of the old fire and brimstone sermons. This preaching style has waned in recent decades, so it will likely not come as any surprise that this style of negative preaching is no longer the most effective. This study instead showed that growing churches in the SBC are using positive reinforcement. Millennials, who grew up being told they were special, appreciate and respond well to this type of communication.

They expect to be recognized for their accomplishments because this is what happened the whole first half of their life (Espinoza, et al., 2010). The preacher that understands this trait will be able to communicate to the largest generation more effectively. After the preacher earns the right to be heard by showing positive reinforcement, they can then speak to the congregation more poignantly with a better connection.

Another implication found in the positive reinforcement coding was the understanding that growing the church and growing the individuals in the church cannot be separated from each other. Instead, the pastor should see them as hand in hand. There should not be a disconnect between building up the church or the church member (Dixon, 2001). This is why the corporate positive reinforcement was significant. The pastors saw growing the church as helping the individual grow. If they speak well of the church and encourage dedication to the church, it will help the church member as well. There should not be a false dilemma between whether to build up the church or the build-up the individual Christian, because one leads to the other.

Implications for Research Question #3

Another implication from the studied sermons was that a pastor should not think of the sermon as a lecture, but rather as a dialogue. This is true across various spectrums, an “important communication issue for Millennials entering the workplace is their desire for open communication, and lots of it—again, more so than newcomers from previous generational cohorts” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, n.p.). The exception to this would be the difficulty in having an open dialogue between a large group of people. Thus, in that case, it might not be possible in the normal sense of the word dialogue, but as the preachers in the study showed, it is something that can be mimicked in the sermon. The pastors leading these fast-growing churches understood that their congregation had questions, and answering these questions and honestly

engaging with their congregation was important. Therefore, pastors do not need to engage in direct questions to portray open dialogue, but they should actively think through what type of questions might naturally arise from the text or the topic and then attempt to answer those questions. It may be even more beneficial for the pastor to voice the fact that he had thought through and was willing to address the questions the audience might have. This shows the congregation that their opinion and voice matters, and it even matters when the questions are not directly voiced. The pastor does not need to have a time of open questions in the sermon to show this, but rather see it as a rhetorical device that can and should be implemented throughout the sermon.

Part of a larger understanding of using open dialogue in the biblical explanation portion of the sermon is that the pastors were willing to do whatever they needed to keep the audience's attention and engage them. They did not appear to think it was the audience's job to stay engaged. The preacher saw it as their job to bring the audience into the story by continually going back to them and engaging their perceived thoughts, and asking rhetorical questions.

Applications

The applications will now be discussed. The purpose of this study was to provide practical guidance and understanding for pastors trying to reach young families and adults in the millennial generation. This final portion will advise how this information can and should be used in other pastors in a practical way. This is significant because it is, in effect, the fulfillment of the entire study. If the information gathered cannot be practically applied, this study did not fulfill its ultimate goal of advancing the gospel by providing a practical resource for pastors to reach the largest generation in America.

Applications for Research Question #1

The idea of openness on the part of the preacher goes against many traditional expectations for clergy. A pastor has been traditionally thought of as someone who is supposed to be a “holy” individual and thus should not parade his weaknesses. While the minister's overall example is one to be emulated (1 Cor. 11:1), the pastor must not forget that honesty and confessing sin are also things that the congregation needs to learn to do as well (Sanders, 2010). Thus, the pastor is the ideal person to set an example. Transparency should be celebrated in the church, even if strictly from a theological standpoint. Yet, as the study showed, it also had immense practical application as millennials respond well to this authenticity and transparency (Kinnaman, 2016).

Therefore, the pastor should be honest and transparent in his sermon, which ultimately makes him a normal Christian. This will create a bonding experience between the pastor and the congregants and allow the preacher’s message to be better received. As shown by the three pastors, there are different ways this activity can be done. However, the most significant truth about authenticity is it must be unique and personal, or it will not be authentic (Abrahams, n.d.). The pastor must do it in a way that fits within his God-given talents and personality.

There were some other practical takeaways from the three pastors and how they used authenticity. First, all three of the preachers used humor in their unique way. As a result, any pastor reviewing this information should not shy away from humor and especially self-deprecating humor as long as it is done authentically and genuinely. Authenticity can help lower peoples’ guard and help them be more willing to listen. This is because they do not feel as if they are being talked down to. Humor does this same action as well; so it is wise to combine the two whenever appropriate. However, it should be noted that if something is not part of the preacher’s

personality, then it should be avoided. This is the most important point about speaking authentically: the preacher must always be true to himself. It cannot be something that is done for the sake of performance. If humor can also be incorporated in this way, then it should be pursued as well.

Another practical application is that preachers should use personal stories in the sermon. An important part of preaching is the use of illustrations as it often is what makes the sermon come alive and personal (Perry, 1990). As a result, whenever possible and appropriate, the speaker should strive to use it. Although outside illustrations can be useful, they will not build authenticity like a personal story can. In addition, a personal story should be used to illustrate and explain the biblical text, and when done effectively, it will give the listener a better view of God and not the preacher (Robinson, 2014). Furthermore, preachers should focus on speaking authentically when using personal stories. If an illustration is used, but it only serves to make the preacher look more holy than everyone else, then any benefit from using the story is undone. Therefore, the preacher should evaluate each of his personal illustrations for authenticity and for giving glory to God.

Applications for Research Question #2

Regarding Research Question 2, the study showed that the pastor should reinforce the congregation's values and actions that are done well. The pastor will not know and cannot mention specific actions of specific church members very often. Rather, there should be a focus on showing what good actions are and how these positive actions benefit the Christian when they are performed. Whether it is from an employer, parent, or pastor, this type of communication helps further motivate the millennials who are trying to lead.

Regarding positive reinforcement, Loveless (1998) wrote, “While acknowledging that our task is to “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted,” we should steadily assure people of God’s loving affirmation. That, more than anything else, can lead to the motivation that will change behavior” (n.p.). This does not mean the pastor cannot or should not speak of sin and negative actions. Each of the pastors directly addressed these things frequently in their sermons. Yet, as the evidence showed their positive tone averages twice the amount of time. Furthermore, the total amount of time chastising them for their behavior was significantly less than their positive reinforcement. Suppose a pastor wants to follow the example of these three ministers, even when addressing the negative aspects or behaviors of the congregation. In that case, the pastor should give the congregation an option to overcome that with positive actions and reinforcement immediately following the negative chastisement.

Another important application is that the pastor should include positive reinforcement on the corporate or church-wide level as well. He should remind the congregation of the church’s story and successes often. As mentioned in the conclusion section, each pastor took time to tell the story of the church’s growth and success at least once in the seven sermons reviewed. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude this is a helpful practice for pastors to perform from the pulpit and something that pastors of quickly growing churches are doing. This practice gives the impression that the listeners are part of something bigger than themselves, which is an idea very important to millennials. Apart from the work of God, nothing in this life will be eternal, and very little will outlive oneself at all. The church has the unique ability to show this to their congregants; they are a part of something eternal and thus bigger than themselves. While it need not be mentioned every week, it should also be reinforced whenever there is an opportunity.

Furthermore, when the whole church is encouraged, the individuals are also blessed by it, and vice versa. Building up both congregants and congregation should be viewed as complementary.

An objection pastors of smaller churches might have is that it is easy for a large fast-growing church, like the ones studied, to speak of their success, but it would be more difficult for smaller stagnant churches to do the same. While it is true that fast-growing churches might have more opportunities to share growth stories, it should not be assumed that smaller churches do not have opportunities as well, which can be celebrated. In every organization it is important to find “small wins” which can be celebrated (Kotter, 1996). For example, when the sermons were studied, not every section under this coding simply discussed attendance. Rather they would often celebrate mission trips, outreach events, as well as encouraging the church for a job well done during a large Sunday. One time a story regarding one individual in the church, who had done something commendable, was shared. The pastor then turned the focus to the entire church by remarking about how many wonderful people went to their church. In summary, the pastor should speak of the church's accomplishments and attempt to frame the conversation in ways that allow the church member to feel as though he or she is a part of a bigger story. This should be possible in any size church.

Applications for Research Question #3

As previously mentioned, the overwhelming usage in this particular coding was when the pastors would ask rhetorical questions or questions that they did not expect an audible answer given back. This practice successfully teaches all age groups as it brings the listener back to the content, but especially for millennials who appreciate the feeling of being heard and having their questions and concerns addressed.

Rhetorical questions are relatively easy for pastors to incorporate in their sermons, although it will likely take some intentionality if they use it as often as the pastors studied. To follow the example of the three pastors, a pastor wanting to incorporate this tactic could ask a question at the start of the sermon to have the congregation start thinking about the subject. For example, a pastor could ask, “What is the most important thing about you?” The pastor can then build on this question, creating a sense of a conversation throughout the sermon. In addition, a pastor can ask questions in moments of heavy teaching. This could capture the congregation's attention if they are disengaged during the preaching, or it might challenge them to think more deeply on a subject, becoming active participants versus passive bystanders. Simple questions such as, “Do you know why it says this?” Or “What would you do if you were him?” can be asked. The purpose is to involve the audience in the story. Whether the preacher is expecting an audible answer or not this is a beneficial practice, “Questions have long been used as a teaching tool by teachers and preceptors to assess students’ knowledge, promote comprehension, and stimulate critical thinking. Well-crafted questions lead to new insights, generate discussion, and promote the comprehensive exploration of subject matter” (Tofade et al., 2013, n. p.). The benefit of questions is not a new revelation, but how often the preachers used this tool should be noted.

To increase effectiveness, the preacher should use the preparation time to think through and attempt to address questions the audience might have about the topic or the passage being discussed. Simple questions will help the audience engage, but meaningful questions show that the pastor understands the congregation’s questions or concerns are the most impactful. Once the questions have been chosen, the Pastor should address and directly acknowledge that these

questions might exist and not answer with a passing comment but instead give an answer that will satisfy the millennial congregation.

Research Limitations

The study applied certain limitations in the scope of the research to provide more accurate conclusions. The first limitation was regarding the church's denomination. The churches studied were all in the Southern Baptist Convention. Sermons and communication styles often vary greatly between different denominations. Also, mainline churches frequently differ on the purpose, goal, style, and length of the sermon from evangelical churches, so much so that it would potentially not produce worthwhile results. While certain principles would crossover to like-minded churches, it would be inappropriate to apply these findings to substantially different denominations from the Southern Baptist Convention.

The preaching and teaching ministry discussed in the study was solely for the pulpit preaching ministry. It did not attempt to determine the best styles for teaching in a Sunday school class or small group setting. These other formats would likely require a different teaching style and is outside the scope of this dissertation. Furthermore, the content analysis primarily focused on the usage and understanding of authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue. While other portions of the sermon were analyzed, no effort was made to fully understand and critique the sermon's other components. This was primarily done because qualitative content analysis must be limited in order to properly understand the pertinent information. The volume of information is too great to process everything, Schreier (2012) states "QCA will help you describe your material only in certain respects which you have to specify. QCA does not allow you to describe the full meaning of your material in each and every respect" (p. 14). Therefore, it

does not provide a full understanding of each sermon, but rather how the sermons used these specific traits.

In addition, the study was specifically applied to millennials. While there were comparisons to other generations, conclusions only applied to millennials based on the information in the literature review. Communication practices vary between generations; therefore, the dissertation was limited to those specifically in the age group. Furthermore, the study did not attempt to prove that these themes of authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue are effective for millennials, previous literature has done that. Rather, it sought to understand how these three pastors used those traits. Because of the specificity of the study in the context of the church, the study could not be applied to leading millennials in a secular context. Although there may be some parallel between churched and unchurch millennials, the churched context rightfully stresses different components of communication and leadership. Articulating authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue is different inside in the sermon because so much of the information presented is based on the Scripture being expounded. It would be impossible to state how these traits would be impacted were they not in the context of a sermon.

The study was likewise unable to determine the exact impact of the preaching ministry on the growth of the church. Many factors go into a church's attendance growth from both inside and outside the church. Music, kids' ministry, small group connections, and effectiveness of the community outreaches, to name a few, are all areas that impact the growth of the church. Therefore, this study is not suggesting that preaching is the only factor in growth, or even that if a pastor uses these traits in his sermon that the church is guaranteed to have more millennial congregants. Instead, this research attempted to simply understand how the preaching at fast growing churches used the traits of authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue,

knowing that these themes are effective in millennial communication. The benefit of the study is understanding how the preachers at these fast-growing churches applied the subject matter to their sermons. Similar usage does not guarantee similar results, but more knowledge helps to equip other preachers in their task of communicating the gospel effectively. Furthermore, the paper did not establish whether the pastors studied used these three traits at a more frequent rate than other pastors. There was no comparison made, but rather it sought to understand the sermons being preached without taking their counterparts at declining churches into account. There was special attention given to noting the similarities between the three preachers. If similarities were established among the three churches then those similarities have the potential to provide insight and patterns for other churches to follow. The information presented could assist the preacher and thus the church. The information presented is not recommending that preachers use these traits of authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue any more or less, but rather that preachers who are leading fast growing churches are using the traits to this frequency and thus could be emulated.

Further Research

The limitations discussed allowed the study to be worthwhile and accurate. Because of the limitations there are opportunities for further research. One of the limitations discussed was limiting the focus to millennials. Therefore, there would be opportunities to compare these results to similar studies of other age groups. A study could discover how these traits impact the other generations, or what traits a different generation might prefer. This study could be strengthened if churches that were reaching different age groups, whether that be Baby Boomers, Gen X, or especially the younger Gen Z generation, were studied. It could confirm if the information discovered was simply good communication tactics which relates to everyone or if it

were highly specific to each generation. Along with that, more information could be gathered on if millennial pastors, or those in the same range as the target audience, have an inherent connection and thus advantage. As more millennials become senior and teaching pastors, studying their communication styles and how it is received would provide an even deeper understanding on how to preach to millennials. This is beneficial information regardless of which generation is being studied. Out of the three pastors, only Pastor Hopper would be considered a millennial, so greater information regarding whether those in the same generation have a distinct communicative advantage over those not in that generation could be of benefit in advancing knowledge.

Another research opportunity would be to determine how much the sermon impacted millennials regarding their decision to stay at the church and how it impacted them on a spiritual level. This could be done in various ways, including surveys or interviews, but a better understanding of how and why sermons impact millennials and their preferences could help chart a further path forward. This would also strengthen a shortcoming of this study as it establishes the connection between millennials and the sermon directly. Since an exact number of millennials in the churches could not be established in this study, an additional study could confirm the themes of the research questions were indeed important to millennials while listening to a sermon while also taking into account specific growth patterns among the churches. Rainer (2009) and Gallup (2017) has shown that the sermon is still an important aspect for unchurched people choosing a church, but there were no studies completed to understand the sermons impact specifically on millennials and if they are still going to be as important in the future. Qualitative interviews with various church members could then be of great insight in understanding the sermon's impact.

The study focused on three key themes previously deemed as significant in communication towards millennials: authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue. This study does not intend to state that these topics are the only themes important to millennials. Therefore, further research could be completed in determining other themes. These themes could even change as millennials continue to age. The QCA method that was employed, started with a basic coding frame which was based on the research questions. Yet, research done with a Grounded Theory approach could discover additional themes that were not seen in this study. More themes discovered would only strengthen the ability to communicate to millennials.

More focus could be given to non-verbal communication in the sermon as well. The sermons were observed through online videos so what was analyzed in the transcripts were true and accurate based on both verbal and non-verbal communication. Yet, the study did not discuss or attempt to specifically analyze the non-verbal communication traits of the pastors. The research was primarily concerned in making sure the non-verbal communication did not conflict with the verbal statements (such as clear sarcasm or humor where their body language indicates humor whereas the transcript did not present it as such), but it did not seek to understand what the non-verbal communication was conveying. A significant amount of human communication is non-verbal, and non-verbal communication has the potential to change or enhance the message being spoken (Burgoon et al., 2010). Therefore, it would be appropriate to study this aspect of communication by itself and how it is received by the congregation. This would likely include bringing in research from other fields of study as well and thus continue to strengthen the research.

Lastly, additional research could be beneficial regarding these communication traits and their application to small group settings. For instance, the open dialogue was difficult to

accomplish in such a large service, but it would be more feasible in a smaller setting. Questions could be asked and answered as more genuine relationships are built through this dialogue. Authenticity and positive reinforcement also would likely be more impactful if the speaker and audience knew each other personally. This setting could allow even more authentic, personal stories to be shared; as well as specific occurrences of positive reinforcement as the leader has more knowledge of the life occurrences of those in the group. Studying these three traits in smaller churches or small groups within a large church would provide further insight into their impact on reaching millennials, especially considering millennials value relationships with their leaders (Thomas, 2018). In the small group setting, these activities might be perceived as more natural and this knowledge has the potential to help shape not only the preaching ministry, but also many various teaching ministries in the church.

Summary

This study aimed to discover how pastors who are leading the fastest growing Southern Baptist Churches in America incorporate authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue into their sermons. Through a review of the literature, it should be evident that preaching is an essential and needed function of the church. The analysis of the sermons identified effective tools for preaching in today's contexts. While this study will not answer all questions concerning preaching to millennials, it is one tool for the preacher who desires to reach young adults, professionals, and families in the millennial generation. This chapter's practical applications provide several suggestions to display authenticity, positive reinforcement, and open dialogue in a general sense and precisely how they can be incorporated in a church. The study's primary practical applications included that the pastors used personal references and reflections frequently, even if it did not always portray them in a positive light. The purpose of the personal

references was to relate, not to boast. Second, the pastors used positive reinforcement much more frequently than negative reinforcement. They also took time to reinforce the church as a whole and repeat the church's successes often. Finally, they all frequently used rhetorical questions in the sermon, especially in the teaching time, to engage the congregants. The research confirmed that the pastors of these fast-growing churches in the SBC were all using these traits in their sermons and thus hold significance for other pastors as well. The study provides helpful insight to other preachers who would desire to enhance their preaching.

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APPENDIX

INDIVIDUAL SERMON CODING DATA

Mercy Hill Church

Mercy Hill Church #1 - Transformed Not Conformed	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	6107	62.57%
Research Question #1	850	8.71%
Research Question #2	1295	13.27%
Research Question #3	1508	15.45%
Totals	9760	100.00%

Mercy Hill Church #2 - God's plan	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	7248	70.39%
Research Question #1	475	4.61%
Research Question #2	938	9.11%
Research Question #3	1636	15.89%
Totals	10297	100.00%

Mercy Hill Church #3 – The new self	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	5863	58.91%
Research Question #1	1059	10.64%
Research Question #2	1768	17.76%
Research Question #3	1263	12.69%
Totals	9953	100.00%

Mercy Hill Church #4 - A generous response	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	5753	55.34%
Research Question #1	519	4.99%
Research Question #2	2312	22.24%
Research Question #3	1812	17.43%
Totals	10396	100.00%

Mercy Hill Church #5 - Jacob has a problem	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	4870	42.05%
Research Question #1	1771	15.29%
Research Question #2	3351	28.93%
Research Question #3	1590	13.73%
Totals	11582	100.00%

Mercy Hill Church #6 - Fully in the family	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	5656	51.71%
Research Question #1	866	7.92%
Research Question #2	2657	24.29%
Research Question #3	1760	16.09%
Totals	10939	100.00%

Mercy Hill Church #7 - Plan & purpose	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	6961	61.85%
Research Question #1	1310	11.64%
Research Question #2	1832	16.28%
Research Question #3	1151	10.23%
Totals	11254	100.00%

5 Point Church

5 Point Church #1 – Evaluation	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	2688	37.75%
Research Question #1	1185	16.64%
Research Question #2	1154	16.21%
Research Question #3	2093	29.40%
Totals	7120	100.00%

5 Point Church #2 – Foundation	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	2795	38.27%
Research Question #1	1329	18.20%
Research Question #2	1712	23.44%
Research Question #3	1468	20.10%
Totals	7304	100.00%

5 Point Church #3 - 5 Point Church worship services	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	4058	61.15%
Research Question #1	531	8.00%
Research Question #2	338	5.09%
Research Question #3	1709	25.75%
Totals	6636	100.00%

5 Point Church #4 – Manuscripts	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	4353	58.25%
Research Question #1	670	8.97%
Research Question #2	996	13.33%
Research Question #3	1454	19.46%
Totals	7473	100.00%

5 Point Church #5 - History is Our Redemptive Story	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3740	49.91%
Research Question #1	2002	26.72%
Research Question #2	450	6.00%
Research Question #3	1302	17.37%
Totals	7494	100.00%

5 Point Church #6 - 20/20 Vision	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3346	41.85%
Research Question #1	2173	27.18%
Research Question #2	1355	16.95%
Research Question #3	1121	14.02%
Totals	7995	100.00%

5 Point Church #7 - Priority Change	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3740	49.91%
Research Question #1	2002	26.72%
Research Question #2	450	6.00%
Research Question #3	1302	17.37%
Totals	7494	100.00%

Sandals Church

Sandals Church #1 - Finding God's will for my life	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	4735	62.07%
Research Question #1	1402	18.38%
Research Question #2	442	5.79%
Research Question #3	1049	13.75%
Totals	7628	100.00%

Sandals Church Sermon #2 - Dealing with discouragement, depression and anxiety	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3147	41.06%
Research Question #1	2724	35.54%
Research Question #2	758	9.89%
Research Question #3	1035	13.50%
Totals	7664	100.00%

Sandals Church Sermon #3 – Into God's House	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3963	50.60%
Research Question #1	2591	33.29%
Research Question #2	392	5.96%
Research Question #3	546	10.15%
Totals	7492	100.00%

Sandals Church Sermon #4 – Invited to Give	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3963	55.96%
Research Question #1	2591	18.46%
Research Question #2	392	17.01%
Research Question #3	546	8.56%
Totals	7492	100.00%

Sandals Church Sermon #5 - To change what needs to change	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3984	48.48%
Research Question #1	2540	30.91%
Research Question #2	1247	15.18%
Research Question #3	446	5.43%
Totals	8217	100.00%

Sandals Church Sermon #6 - Motivated to change my life before it falls apart	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	3653	51.11%
Research Question #1	1350	18.89%
Research Question #2	1323	18.51%
Research Question #3	821	11.49%
Totals	7147	100.00%

Sandals Church Sermon #7 – Love that Works	Word Count	Usage Percentage
Not Relevant	4933	57.08%
Research Question #1	1584	18.33%
Research Question #2	1909	22.09%
Research Question #3	216	2.50%
Totals	8642	100.00%