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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Effective Sermon Application in a Charlotte Exurb Baptist Church

Submitted to Dr. Jerry Knoblet

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by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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This thesis explores an improvement in expository sermon application using two technical tools added to the sermon divisions of sermon series messages. The background of applicational improvements is explored, the problem at Sandy Plains Baptist Church of Gastonia is outlined, and the solution employed. The problem is a spiritual comfort or plateau among members with previous life applications of sermons. The goal was to provide two new resources that would overcome the spiritual status quo in Sunday worship attendee's lives. This method was tested utilizing Likert scale surveys, unpaired T-tests, and facilitator notations. The thesis project provides guidance to other researchers in expository preaching application improvements.

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DMIN   *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD   *Liberty University School of Divinity*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

After Sunday morning has passed in congregational life, the called and prepared preacher hopes that many of the ways to apply a sermon take root in human hearts and minds. An expository preacher aims for the truth of the Bible to intersect with lives at a deeper level than ivory tower theory, religious ritual, or easy entertainment. There were several obstacles to applying truth well in a congregant's life in the current study inside of an exurb Baptist church, in Gastonia, North Carolina. This thesis aimed to tackle one of them, which was relating to how a sermon division or the sermon idea might apply to a hearer's life in their exact circumstances. This research project explored improvements to sermon applications that increase self-questioning in hearers concerning what God may do positively in their life. These challenged the hearer anew to clarify their Spirit-enabled, holier intentions going forward as a result.

Ministry Context

The ministry context of Sandy Plains Baptist Church entails many factors. Sandy Plains is an exurb church outside of the greater Charlotte, North Carolina metropolitan area. The church is Southern Baptist in belief and practice. The Sunday morning worship attendance ranges from 140 to 225 depending upon the season of the year, holidays, and local cultural events. The area is known as a mix of socio-economic backgrounds. The immediate five miles around the church are poised to experience new growth on a track to becoming a suburban environment. Many of the members are long-time residents who joined in part due to established area family

connections. A few existing newer subdivisions have allowed for new visitors who then join

made up of families and singles. Many practices generally describe the Sandy Plains

congregation. One practice that defines the congregational context includes attendance patterns.

Sandy Plains has most attendees practicing a comfortable pattern of semi-regular Sunday

worship attendance. The long-time church members with deep family ties to the congregation

tend to be semi-regular in attendance. In this group, the patterns, environment, social activities,

and economic choices of the area's rural past have a great influence on current church outlooks.

On the other hand, newer church members added in the past five years tend towards weekly

worship attendance. Also, a small minority of Sunday's congregation are guests who have not

joined but are committed to attendance and giving as a practice. A psychographic value of the

average person in this area includes a strong weekend vacation or escapist tendency. There is a

unique culture in the area where the many long-time established community church members

often choose East Coast USA travel over Sunday worship. They inhabit cross-regional

friendships and regular contacts, such as having a small house, trailer, or time-share near the

beach. Still, others care for a loved one who lives over an hour away while staying at their home

but maintains friendships in both places. Many do beach travel (Myrtle Beach, Tybee Island,

etc.), others go stay in mountain cabins often, others do across the country work trips with

departure times during morning services, and others are highly active in regional travel league

sports over church attendance. That majority group is diverse in age ranges and life situations.

They are made up of families with young children, empty nesters, and seniors. Beyond these

groups, there exists a small minority of attendees who are in worship once a month or less. This

is mainly a result of their perceptions of Covid's risk. This group is also diverse in age and

family make-up.

There was additionally semi-regular attendance at small groups along with those same general outlines. The vast majority of small group attendance was linked to Sunday worship attendance with few exceptions. Small groups are held in the hour between worship services on Sundays. In a like way, the church-elected committees meet in similar patterns as listed above, negotiating a local emphasis on semi-regular involvement and also member travels.

Moreover, there are verbal rituals of speaking about the broader culture. These represent psychographic attitudes about the broader world. This is often described as the American church under siege by evil cultural forces. This outlook was regularly spoken among members in personal conversations across demographics. Inroads of anti-Christian forces in their workplaces and the culture drive these common statements. This also occasionally informs their job choices and career changes. This group tends to be of a psychographic opinion that education beyond high school is unnecessary or perhaps overrated. There was an incredibly common discussion of a hoped-for American revival at this time. There was also a modernistic revivalist emphasis on looking forward to numerical decisions over against discipleship depth. This impacts church culture largely from long-time members but also some newer members. The contemporary recapture of an emphasis on discipleship quality has historically been less common. In another practice, there was a highly prevalent pattern of verbal praying often for sick extended family members, safety for back to school, various upcoming surgeries, or job needs. This is not balanced in prayer for regional or global missions, boldness to share Jesus personally, a new discipleship insight shared as praise, faithfulness at discernment, strength to serve, or a personal prayer desire to grow closer to the Lord Jesus. There was room for applied improvements here.

Yet another practice that the congregation utilized was the greeting of guests in worship services. The congregation excelled at this act before and after worship services on Sundays or

Wednesdays. Initial introductions and offering a few other ways to connect to ministries in the church are common for any visitor. Moreover, Sandy Plains members regularly practiced the ritual of bringing a Bible or Bible app to worship on Sundays. They were generally committed to the authority of the Bible to order their lives as a concept. Church tradition or habit often were obstacles to applying this conviction in small groups, committee meetings, or other ministry events. The practice of traditions from the past century was an obstacle to sermon applications.

Beyond these practices, Sandy Plains regularly engaged in sizable volunteer support of age-graded children's ministries. The psychographic primary values of many members are centered on children or grandchildren ministries. There was noteworthy primary involvement in the elementary age Awana Kids Club ministry. Secondarily, serving involvement in children's Sunday small groups and children's worship services draw in volunteers. These were also intentionally Bible-based programs, such as The Gospel Project and Answers in Genesis materials. It was a challenge with certain long-time children's volunteers for several pastors to switch from less helpful materials used out of children's ministry habit, to Bible-based materials. Children's ministry has flourished under consistent Bible teaching. Families new to the area with lots of children have buoyed this ministry area. Beyond this, Covid's impact has depressed children's ministry volunteering but not attendance. Moreover, the church was accustomed to a large number of weekly senior ministry events. These were a well-established, high involvement age group as a part of broader congregational life. The senior ministry was civically, and group consensus-minded in preference. The majority of the senior ministry events were not Bible or gospel message centric. The senior ministry was fellowship or entertainment-centric, with a special interest in local or regional bus trips to senior preferred destinations, such as the Amish

Country Store, a regional Fruitcake factory, or a movie theater. This group was largely comfortable with existing friendships.

Other than these, the Lord's Supper also was a positive ritual practiced quarterly in a traditional, expected manner at Sandy Plains. There was a congregational solemnness to it rather than a celebration atmosphere. The Lord's Supper has been preferred on Sunday evenings due to many long-time key leaders fearing guests or the ill-committed to the kingdom are partaking poorly. This does yield insight that many of the long-time members are wary of the spiritual state of other long-time community friends who only attend sporadically. This caution extends into other areas, such as committee role appointments as well. There was a general preference also for invitations to be semi-revivalist among the church's boards. This decision-oriented close to service was a tradition to fix long-time but rarely in attendance members or new guests. Some wider contemporary churches have removed a standard invitation, but the church preferred it.

Regular baby dedications, God and Country Day, Veteran remembrance days, and Advent played an expected role in the congregation's regular annual rhythms. Extended family will show up for such events often made up of infrequent attenders of the church. These remain on the membership role but for many years resisted invites to regular worship. Additional annual regular practices included the promotion and collection goals for offerings in December for Lottie Moon international missions and in March for Annie Armstrong North American missions. Among long-time members, there was a culture that these are sacrosanct. Artifacts placed behind plexiglass or high on walls in certain Sunday classrooms glorify Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong or similar church traditions. Local missions to shelters, food pantries, donations of school supplies, the Salvation Army Saturday meals, and more are continually a

part of the congregational and small group planning each year. These were continued in Christian love, but also out of tradition.

Common community rituals include hunting, RV camping, and local sports. The most impactful of these is sports. It stems from members' passionate following of secular basketball, football, volleyball, and cheerleading in our area. These are highly common activities for many church members, whether high school, college, or professional. The devotion to local and regional sports teams spills over into zealous interest and support of church sports ministries, such as Upward Sports. Christian character as a goal for the program predominates the motives for involvement. These sporting events are hosted annually and tend to draw in existing extended family and friend networks. Sandy Plains sports are central to member involvement in congregational life for around one-third of the church body. Additionally, fellowship between coaches and children based on long-term seasonally held friendships is a priority. It is common for people to gather and catch up on community news at such events. Some of those connections rest in family, but others are locally derived from previous decades. There are a few real visitor families for whom Upward is a way to drop off kids in a safe, known, and communal space. Some sports ministry volunteers have high involvement in attending local or regional sporting events, which at times negates even semi-faithful church involvement. Annual adult or child sports leagues also contribute to cultural connections among this segment of the church body.

Yet another influential church activity is the ongoing lament of adult children who left any evangelical church involvement or even Christian lifestyle practices decades ago. The member laments form part of the social consciousness of the long-time church majority. Ritually, these are often mentioned in Wednesday evening prayer services or after Sunday services. This has a substantial impact on the consciousness of the majority core group worldview. The core

group often relives and retells past efforts at raising kids long ago. There is often sadly

resignation to the rejection of children's Christian upbringing. As a cultural undercurrent in the

body, the influence is so powerful it often negates positive reflection on, a celebration of, and

resting in the work of God in bringing many new members who join regularly. Storytelling

surrounding varied long-gone members consumes much conversational bandwidth before and

after events for many members. The laments were never tied to Christian apologetics or winsome

conversations hoped to be had but rather a type of acceptance where the only solution is to pray.

Many on-campus showers, weddings, baby celebrations, and more are held for the now non-

Christian family members. Though these persons rarely or never attend the church on Sunday,

the congregation exerts considerable resources in hosting, attending, and putting on such events.

A significant minority of long-time members plus other newer members often take a broader

view of their potential role as a Bible-based church in an area about to see population growth.

They speak increasingly of discipleship opportunities rather than a current or past social status

quo. The small initial wave of new members often was ready to get involved with the assistance

of certain key long-time members and newer church staff. Discussions about future growth are

generally positive among those members open to new kingdom advancement opportunities.

Plans are even discussed to reach the new subdivisions that were to be coming soon. Foundation

work on new homes and new stores arriving predominate many conversations. In this almost

majority, hope is shared of future ministry opportunities, outreach, and connecting people to

discipleship, such as through a front door of worship invite or men's and women's ministry.

The symbol that most describes the congregation is the Christian cross. In a building

project for a future worship center long-term, the main goal even more than the sanctuary itself is

that the building will have a massive, and very expensive, cross tower high in the sky for

visibility for a mile each way above tall trees. The congregation has and supports a large sign as you enter the current worship space that says "Jesus saves" in large black and silver letters. The cross is commonly mentioned in church conversations on campus. When a pastor or guest preacher focuses on the cross the church responds warmly. Ironically, the existing facilities, including a former sanctuary and the current church sign, do not have any cross image on them. There are extensive prayer gardens, signs, ornate iron rails, moldings, stained glass windows, and ornate display items on the seven-acre church campus and buildings. Yet the cross is very rare, being found in only one somewhat hard to see location on an office building. In baptismal locations, Sunday or midweek classrooms, and bulletin boards the cross is absent or rarely found. The cross is a focus of preaching; however, for the past several decades. Thus, this is an ongoing, long-time verbal, or conscious cultural symbol, but not a largely viewed current symbol.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper bread and cup have meaning to the church body. These are held in high regard but are not expected to be visible Sunday mornings, to the whole membership, or even used often. This reflects a status quo, internally focused streak in the congregation. To the oldest members, pastors from many decades ago also tend to be symbolic. This often comes out in personal conversations and stories. Pastors of the past sixteen years were not as often mentioned as symbols of Sandy Plains. There is in the entryway a prominent wall of a long line of former pastor's pictures and sketches of pastors before the camera was invented and widespread. Congregational history has been a symbol of a significant minority of the church body. 20th-century history still is lifted high as symbolic of the church in committee conversations. Artifacts of the past are highly regarded by long-time members and encased in protective Plexiglas fronted wood cabinets about the church facilities. Another subset of both long-time members and new church members are not interested in those artifacts. In the broader

community, the congregation is seen as a symbol of the past. This originates from previous

congregational negative advertising with outdated messages, the representation of members at

community events such as weddings and funerals, and the unguarded words of many extended

family members of current members scattered in the community giving commentary. The past

remaining relevant to today was increasingly fading in church consciousness as the area

transitions to a suburban environment. Petitions against incoming growth by some long-time

members and similar activities are informal and unintended church symbols. The current church

congregation struggles with the risk of being viewed only in the past due to unchanged older

facilities as well. There was a new worship building project underway to address this. It would

be the first new worship center in eighty years. However, the funds to construct it were several

years away.

Ideals of the group include a desire for a return to revival methods for a significant

minority of the church congregation. A focus often on the past predominates Deacon meetings,

certain committee meetings, and more among the church. There was also stemming from the

above facts a preference for 19th and 20th-century revivalist methods, including hellfire sermons,

tent revivals, and bus ministries. Sometimes these are held up as a church high watermark

spiritually, but without adequate evidence presented to prove that works today. There was a

cognitive dissonance from some ideals of the past to where the congregation has moved today.

Inside of the church congregation, the self-image ironically includes some contemporary church

discipleship and outreach thinking. Conferences, small group principles and training, strategic

one-day service opportunities, evangelism in life service, online outreach methods, and virtual

invites to discipleship are used in faithfulness. The perception of long-term permanence;

however, does enable certain older, stable institutions, like the public-school system to regard

Sandy Plains as a valid partner. Older methods of outreach are desired by these schools.

As regards the further ideals of the group, Sandy Plains as a church has been historically

divided between conservative and liberal theological factions. This in part reflects the intractable

psychographic make-up of the state of North Carolina as well. As a comfortable family church, it

encompassed people who held contrary to Scripture political persuasions for decades. Previous

pastors have even been rebuked by a significant minority of the church holding liberal doctrines

for using the Bible on controversial society-wide topics. These same pastors have been loved by

more conservative, Bible-based congregants during the same situations. In ideals, conservative

political figures hold a majority sway but are not the only voices. Therefore, common church

ideals are largely conservative doctrinal positions.

Traditions of local missions and pro-life rallies are also used by active members to draw

in less active members who will serve and attend seasonally for a special emphasis. Similarly,

Vacation Bible School is a well-attended and expected community and congregational event

each year in June or July. This outreach has been strategically used with a Sunday morning

service day as the kick-off or concluding day of Vacation Bible School in recent years. Until the

past few years, the congregation has taken pride in and invested heavily in certain events that are

known as community symbols of the church. These include an annual Fall Festival in October

and Homecoming in June. The church Fall Festival is a 1,000 to 2,000 person attended, accepted,

and taken for granted community staple. It has been used in recent years by staff and key leaders

to offer a growing array of fun on-site activities to try to buy time at those stations to build

bridges to gospel conversations or potential serving opportunities for guests. However, many

long-time members view it as an opportunity to rub elbows with long-gone church members who

are acquaintances still. Therefore, it has a sociological function rather than a clear Gospel

motive. Typically, adult children long-gone of long-time members bring friends and

grandchildren as well to say hello and get candy. Despite its irrelevance to a Sunday sermon, this

phenomenon explains a mindset of a majority of the church membership. A status quo resting in

annual habits predominates much congregational application of what it means to be a church, to

serve, and to love others. Among long-time members, some judicious members and regular

attendees ask in a private conversation if these events are entertainment for some community

members or a true church in action using a contemporary outreach strategy. The mentioned

Homecoming event has not been well attended by former members for about a decade, despite

that being its original discipleship reengagement purpose. Likewise, it is held up as an event by

many in the congregation to reinforce old memories and old ways of the church. This is often

glorified by a related committee changing out church wall pictures to long ago fellowship

pictures from the 1920s or 1940s, display of church historical artifacts, and more. Current day-

to-day realities among church members are more contemporary; however. Therefore, analogies

shown to connect to their daily life may be used for a positive spiritual renewal or change.

For contextual information, the draw of expository preaching on Sundays has attracted

many Bible-minded singles, widowers, and young families into the congregation. The young

families then also attend church sports or kids' ministries. Their regular schedules are largely

public or Christian schools. There is a small homeschooling influence. The widows who have

joined often connect well to other widows in the church. They tend to get involved in small

groups and outings together. Often lament for adult children in widows who join merge with the

lament in existing members. Many of these also still work or volunteer in the community

regularly. The environment of our area is fully experienced, even though some are new to the

area as well. Other than these, regularly held potluck events by certain members, seniors, a

churchwide event, or the choir ministry occur in a typical year. The discussions are often about

relationships, politics, and family. Across age groups of long-time and new members, Facebook

is almost exclusively used as an active social media platform and engagement environment.

Posts are often about joke memes, political happenings, or vacations that are taken regionally.

Happenings on Facebook determine many ongoing relational decisions member to member.

They also define the image and consciousness of the church body. A building called the Family

Life Center, also used for worship services, is utilized by families for onsite family reunions,

birthdays, anniversaries, social private events, and more. It is rented out for a nominal

administrative fee nearly every day of the week each year. Events like these tend to reinforce the

former connections, reuniting, and acquaintances as life mentality in the church's location. The

newer members often get comfortable with that insular mentality as well. Environmentally the

church is more than a place for worship and small groups, but a kind of community icon. One

other defining event is an annual joint worship service between a nearby Presbyterian church and

Sandy Plains Baptist Church. This event came to be after the two churches, which had been one

congregation in early rural founding days of the 1800s, separated, and yet local families kept in

touch. The local families were related, plus the community small, and positive memories

remained. Those motives drove the major annual event to become a firm tradition in the

congregational mindset. This event is followed by a vast potluck. When leading the preaching for

this, the current Senior Pastor has been told it is new to have an actual Bible message at these.

When it comes to relationship practices, the congregation was largely content with

existing family or close friend relationships. In the immediate area, these friendships meet on the

predictable ground at church, at homes or on the land a home sits on, or in local independent

restaurants. Inside the congregational meetings, there is room for greeting and including new or returning long-time members at an on-campus church event. New guests can expect many handshakes. However, the core group of long-time members socializes far more by phone, in person at homes, and in gatherings largely with existing friendships at restaurants that go back decades. The existing core group is generally open to talking frankly about the town or church issues. Information flows through those channels rather than official channels environmentally. Tools like Call Em All and Text Em All, or even church emails, often must catch up with inter-personal conversations. This was beginning to change at Sandy Plains Baptist Church; however, it was still often determinative of whom conversations are granted about topics. New members have readily connected where they are able in small groups, special small-group social or age-graded events, or newly created men's and women's ministry gatherings. Socially many of the middle-aged or older and long-time members came of age in a time when major industries were exiting economically for China. This was the primary US historic textile area. Many used their hands to build a physical object, such as a car part, textile, or mechanical product for at least several decades. Many of the new members are younger and involved in services, sales, education, or transportation-type jobs that vary in skills. Older members who once worked in the industrial sector transition to retail or services as well. There is a small-scale economic expansion locally into these new service jobs as Charlotte expands. Friendships often track with the current career type most closely. Beyond this, members of all walks do use hallway conversations, potlucks, or committee meetings as substantial social gathering opportunities. Urban social atmospheres do not exist nearby environmentally. Coffee shops, gyms, exercise classes, civic organizations, boutique festivals, and related do not dominate local life. Hardware

stores, recycling centers, independent diners, hunting boards, tractor shops, and more are common.

The church body is in an area geographically West of Charlotte, North Carolina inside a gap in the metro area's former growth. The immediate area had been previously ignored by developers due to a negative perception of Gastonia, North Carolina as not desirable to suburban buyers. This is a known and accepted fact by insiders and outsiders. Historically this was not due to bad schools, but just social perception. Nearby cities were preferred, such as Lake Wylie, South Carolina, and Belmont or Cramerton, North Carolina. However, as a rising sea lifts all boats, Gastonia is seeing new and sustained interest by major home and property developers according to city engineers and newspaper reports. Decades-long empty lots or farms are being purchased, re-zoning signs are prevalent, and single homes going in where any space is leftover. The historically blue-collar industrial factories and support shops that were once dominant employers are seen as refurbishing opportunities or as part of the past. There are some environmentally damaged sections of the area that creates a negative self-image in long-time residents and church members. The EPA has been called in and drinking water damage is real. However, the coming growth has created an excitement or cultural buzz, even among those who would prefer no additional growth. Social and economic tensions do exist between these competing tensions given any triggering directional discussion or choice of application in a sermon point. The lifestyle goals also vary between several types of groups in the church, including views on self-improvement or not, on health choices, on saving and retirement ideas, or how to purchase items. An example is a former men's ministry, The Brotherhood. It was an old friend group full of fellowships at local restaurants interrupted briefly by very short general spiritual testimonies. The values communicated in The Brotherhood ministry were repeated

stories of being thrifty, finding and recycling items, problems of being in an isolated rural area, and extended family fellowship or related news. This has recently given way to a more contemporary model of teaching, activities as a supplement, and discussion of broader issues as a men's ministry. The groups tend to seek different goals, with newer members seeking application and life help more often rather than being focused on existing social friendships.

The Senior Pastor's relationship with the congregation was a welcome newcomer. A previous pastor had tried to bring in unqualified, local relatives to serve on key staff positions after his announced departure. This was an effort that had backfired. There was a sizable portion of the long-time members open to someone not from the immediate area, plus a minority of people who returned home from other parts of the country who had been exposed to wider contemporary church trends. For different reasons, members do support the Senior Pastor. It was not a one size fits all context. Many of the members enthusiastically support any Bible-based, Christ-centered sermon, or teaching. They had a threshold for change if it honors the Gospel advancing. Some of their spouses or families had a much less friendly attitude to a newcomer or any change however small, even if sermons are Bible-based. The Senior Pastor had been careful to not overuse opportunities for change but to proceed diplomatically. Yet the pastor wrestles with being an outsider to inside conversations while also being included in other ways as a desirable change for the church. The Senior Pastor focused on building relationships as a leader due to not having the previous longer-term relationship investments of existing members. A large portion of the church did desire spiritual decisions such as walking an aisle forward to trust Jesus, a general pro-growth membership view, and interest in fellowship groups. The pastor operated aware of these leanings. The pastor was often related to as a partner in ministry who is liked but not entrusted the same way as an old friend. Among new members, the pastor is a

relationship bridge builder and a rare find of a Bible-based expository preacher. For the pastor, the common ground church goals for the Lord provide unity opportunities in planning, sermon applications, and church socials. The Senior Pastor through expository preaching and strategic engagement had drawn in newer singles and families. Strategic initiatives are welcome, but they are furthered often by personal invitation rather than typical contemporary church methods like an App or email invite. The use of common ground goals strengthens an alliance of shared values in that partnership. Spiritually, the pastor noticed a great need for congregants to take new and fresh steps of maturity. There are many good and useful ministries in the church already. However, many operated in a staleness of faith or adventure to create them many decades long ago. Personal spiritual disciplines, evangelism as a lifestyle beyond merely family, and doctrine depth have room for growth across church demographics. Ritual religion was a risk, though not intentional, among the congregation due to the comfort with what has been. There is nothing wrong with much of what has been. But there was a need for a vital faith put to use and expansion today as well. There was also room for addressing a rapidly changing environment with congregationally personified applications inside of expository sermons and planning.

Problem Presented

Given the spiritual formation needs in the Sandy Plains Baptist Church congregation, there is a problem area related to an expository preaching focus. This was centered on the application and framing the application for the congregation. While people in the church often did good, loving, and moral actions in their lives, yet they were staying at a similar spiritual maturity as they had already attained. However, believers are called to apply truths after hearing as part of our active faith in Christ Jesus (James 1:22). Across several groups in the church, a

focus on personal peace and comfort was overriding action from what is preached or taught today.

This was a substantial enough problem discernable regularly to the congregational shepherd. The Lord had revealed this through conversations with members regarding work choices, family decisions, financial investments, perspectives on issues, and personal devotional questions. Instead of a permanent existing status quo, there was ample room to work on this area in the church body. If an astute observer asked the congregation probing questions about their lives, then the answers yield insights that relate to a need for more application of sermons. The sermons were consistently expository and full of doctrinal truths necessary for life. Yet lasting thought and emotional impact of the sermon throughout the week and beyond was being sought.

While there are changing demographic and local cultural emphases, steps of faith remain similar across the new local environment, including in worship services. There was a need for current engagement of newly approaching social-environmental realities. Life situations are changing rapidly enough that applications also had to change. The problem was that Sandy Plains Baptist Church does not understand how to apply sermons to their life situations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN Action Research Thesis was to enable Sandy Plains Baptist Church to apply sermons by framing applications with analogies and questions. This inclusion of new resources in the application section of each sermon division created lasting and motivating word pictures to foster life change.

There are compelling reasons this problem was studied. There is a greater maturity possible in the individual Christian's life that is at stake. Paul the Apostle suggests this is an

ongoing pursuit for each Christian (Romans 12:1-2). There is a corporate witness as God's local church that may be a greater light for the community of Jesus' power and authority. The work and verbal witness of the early church added more persons to God's kingdom (Acts 5). There is protection from the enemy the Devil as church attenders resist him more readily. The new resources would aid in the reminder or means of resisting (James 4:7). The purpose solves a problem that justifies this research further regarding a country club mentality in the congregation. Many members are comfortable where they are spiritually and are comfortable as well with their existing contacts and routines. This creates blinders to God's wider task or even an outright dismissal to possible new applications that would stretch the individual Christian who attends. While Sandy Plains Baptist Church would associate itself as being a friendly church, the improved sermon application stretched beyond the weak spots into the active steps applying truth beyond what is easy. A major benefit to the congregation could result from lingering recollections of and clear application examples that call for a church member on the move rather than a status quo. This acts as fuel to a spiritual fire that drives a person-to-person ministry beyond the comfortable or existing habits of member care and local outreach.

Another likely beneficial result of these new resources deployed in sermons may include members recounting a memorable analogy one to another out of self-initiative. This may aid in truths dwelling richly within the members (Colossians 3:16). That may occur between friends, spouses, coworkers, or a whole gathered family over lunch or dinner discussing the worship experience. In other words, this purpose may start a multiplying effect that was needed. Beyond that, the example of the pulpit ministry utilizing such new resources may have a trickle-down effect long-term on Sunday small group lessons, children's ministry instruction, and more. Existing support ministry lessons tend to often be dry and removed from real-life comparisons.

Basic Assumptions

There are several assumptions made in this action research project. A presupposition is that the congregation studied values expository preaching as a means of living out God's will in their lives. This stems from the congregation being accustomed to this procedure generally and from their hiring an expository preacher through church vote to enable this means. Still another assumption is that the majority of the congregation provides reliable, written feedback upon request. This assumption has been proven in the past regarding the question of multiple worship services or not, feedback on personnel hires, common expressed interest in feedback on worship song selections, and in general a democratic spirit among the congregants. This provides room for analysis by the use of surveying in Sandy Plains Baptist Church, Gastonia. A third assumption is that a significant representative majority of the regular attenders and members of Sandy Plains Baptist Church were present during the action research phase. These embodied a holistic picture of the ages, economic situations, genders, and spiritual maturity of the larger targeted study group.

Definitions

In the goal of clarity for the reader, a few definitions will be suggested at this point. The role of application is being explored in this thesis project. So what is meant by application? Application is defined as "answering two questions: So what? and Now what? The first question asks, 'Why is this passage important to me?' The second asks, 'What should I do about it

today?"[1] These questions bring out the significance to the modern hearer by building a bridge from a truth realized in a text to an impact upon attitudes and behaviors.

Expository preaching is defined as "a message whose structure and thought are developed from a biblical text, covering its scope, to explain how the features and context of the text disclose enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text."[2] This definition orients the preacher to the biblical theology of a single Scripture passage positioned in the larger systematic theology of the Bible. The text was allowed to determine the sermon direction and points. The revelation of God's character in the teachings of each passage calls the hearers to greater personal and community steps of faith.[3] Therefore, expository preaching is not choosing a passage to fit a preacher's own "opinions, others' philosophies, or speculative meditations" but rather lets God speak his will.[4]

An analogy is one additional definition of note. Analogies are here defined as including similarities between an application point and various physical world phenomenon, how products work, the operations of human relationships, or the underlying laws in shared life experiences. An analogy here is narrower than a story or an illustration.[5] Analogies may cross paths with those tools for explanation or motivation. However, analogies are here being used to enable a sermon idea through a sermon division point to be concrete within the hearer's mind from their

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[1] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 188. Chapell explains quoting approvingly from David Veerman that the preacher asking "so what" "causes application."

[2] Ibid., 8-9.

[3] Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 192.

[4] Chapell, *Christ-Centered*, 9.

[5] McDill, *12 Essential*, 139. In contrast to McDill, longer stories such as personal stories will not be included in the definition of analogy here. However, shorter analogies as he defines them will be included.

existing experiences of the laws of the world.[6] The goal was to invade the nearby environment of

the local congregational hearers with spiritual truth similar to physical world truths, rather than

speak of life stories of other people. Analogies for this study are also shortened comparisons

rather than long detailed stories. Analogies in this project differed from metaphor in that the goal

was not visual portrayal alone or a memorable description using poetry.

Limitations

A primary limitation of the project is the focus upon a single congregation of several

hundred regular attenders, Sandy Plains Baptist Church. This was the largest available group for

this social research sample. The research was conducted using the largest sampling available at

Sandy Plains which are the main Sunday morning worship services at 8:30 and 10:30 am each

week. Small groups, recovery groups, and other age-graded ministries were not studied.

Another limitation was those available during the deployment of the resources to bear in

the congregation. There may be a few who are for unforeseen reasons absent during this period

of study, but that is not a problem. The self-reporting of impacts of the research was studied from

that attendant group that was present. There were not make-up weeks for this study.

Beyond this, there is the limit of an expository sermon model. Narrative or other models

of sermon structure were not employed in this study. The expected and preferred mode of

preaching is the expository model in this congregation. This shined a spotlight on new resources.

A final limitation is that the style or tone of delivery was not the main focus. This

research stretched across a short sermon series within a biblical book. The themes of the passage

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[6] Chapell, *Christ-Centered, 205*. This is as Chapell says because "particular penetrate" into lives.

will dictate the style and tone of encouragement, challenge, rebuke, or reminder. There were

small conceivable variations in style and tone as each of the book's chapters was preached.

Delimitations

The delimitations include research spanning a single four-week sermon series on Sundays

in a biblical book. While the study could go longer, this will provide a contrasting and

memorable time frame to evaluate the change in sermon application. In considering another

delimitation, the greatest impact is hypothesized to exist not in studying delivery methods. Nor

did the study change applicational emphases, such as focusing more or less upon hearers'

behaviors or attitudes. There are potential gains from such a study, but given the constraints of

time and other factors, the preparation of analogy and framing questions was preeminent. The

narrow concentration in the project enables effective assessment.

The population of this study included Sunday worship service attendees that are present

at least every few weeks. This delimitation excludes seasonal worshippers, such as Christmas

and Easter only members or visitors. Those make up a significant portion of the existing long-

time membership list at Sandy Plains Baptist Church. However, in the interest of reliability,

those rarely present were excluded from the evaluation. The project surveys' consent page also

excludes those groups from participation. Along these lines, random church visitors who

attended and found another church during the timeline of this study were not evaluated for

feedback. There may have been reasons they visited that are not directly tied to the usual

teaching and preaching ministry of Sandy Plains as well. These factors are not the primary focus

of this project.

Thesis Statement

If the people of Sandy Plains Baptist Church hear application points each framed with analogy and questions, then they may apply sermons more readily. This thesis addressed the problem by testing a narrowly delineated area within the expository sermon and the congregation's response. The thesis was tested using new resources brought into the weekly sermon itself. It was supposed the response will be positively expressed in surveys comparing the baseline before the new resources are brought to bear with the new results after their impact.

The thesis was tested in the context of an expository sermon format. Also, the expository sermons were embedded into a sermon series with a title designed to connect to members and visitors. The goal was to keep a relatively constant number of sermon divisions, either one or three, during the period of the action research. By this, the church congregation was able to offer an evaluation of how the problem was addressed. Successful results of this thesis that benefit congregants it was hoped are easily recalled and applied images through situations, objects, events, processes that are common to life being infused with spiritual truths or doctrines. This project's constructive outcome is the improved sermon application being affirmed by attendees of the congregation in the final survey. This planned result creates increasingly mature Christians who are continually stretching their faith to the next step in their personal life.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

The need for quality application in contemporary sermons is acknowledged by many.[7] The application of timeless truth to today's audiences is more needful than ever. Application in a sermon; however, must be heard well to be applied well. The review of literature covers four major themes in the applications of the main point in a single-point sermon or the main points (or sermon divisions) in a multi-point sermon. This review of literature brings together works on the use of analogy and questions to sharpen application rather than focusing on the work of sermon application in general. There exists a gap in the literature that leaves room for further research; however, existing literature provides valuable guidelines for its development.

The Existence of Listeners in a Connected Environment

There is growing acknowledgment that a congregation hears scripture as persons with a visual library of principles about how life works and interactions they have experienced.[8] This might be compared to a reservoir with familiar objects, experiences, backgrounds, signs, culture, technologies of daily use, which provide connection power with the audience including analogies as these are tied to shared outlooks on life.[9] There is a way that objects, animals, people, nature, and more function, so that a highly familiar analogy may preserve a sermon principle or point in

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[7] Jeffrey Arthurs, "The Fundamentals of Sermon Application, Part I," in *Interpretation and Application*, ed. Craig B. Larson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 67.

[8] Stephen Llewelyn and Lydia Gore-Jones, "The Conceptual World of a Biblical Metaphor: The Metaphor of Sowing in Ezra 4 and Matthew," *Biblical Interpretation* 28, no. 2, (2020): 202, accessed September 27, 2020, https://brill-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/journals/bi/28/2/article-p202_4.xml/.

[9] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 162.

the listener's mind.[10] Professor of Preaching and author Bryan Chapell states the analogy does

more than hold a spiritual point but also works inside a listener in their psychological makeup to

elicit new horizons and a motive to respond.[11] Likewise, Llewelyn and Gore-Jones argue the

willingness to act on a sermon's spiritual point may be encouraged through the analogy

empowering listeners to join the story of God's saving work described there such as in the case

of Nathan telling of a ewe lamb theft to King David so to motivate repentance from sin.[12]

Preaching professor and communications author Jeffrey Arthurs points out the worldview and

expectations of reality inside of the listeners should be utilized, as the way society and the human

mind reflects and recalls ideas impacts applying them, for the study of the congregation leading

to suitable life-changing word pictures.[13] Since a congregation is made up of listeners who

regularly deal with real-life functions God made, analogy and analogies preceded by or followed

by probing questions, help them to avoid being trapped in theory without life transformation.[14]

This focus on the power in analogy relates to the entire goal of the application. Jeffrey Arthurs

explains the "term *application* comes from the Latin *ap* and *plico,* 'to attach to or join,' so that

one substance modifies another."[15] Therefore, the preacher must strive to make the Bible come

alive to the situations the congregants face by applications that connect with the familiar.[16] The

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[10] Chapell, *Christ-Centered*, 168.

[11] Ibid. Chapell serves as a professor at Covenant Theological Seminary and Knox Theological Seminary.

[12] Llewelyn and Gore-Jones, "The Conceptual World," 205. This is published in a peer-reviewed Christian biblical studies journal. Gore-Jones teaches at a Christian theological college.

[13] Arthurs, "The Fundamentals of," 67. Arthurs is a professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

[14] Ibid., 68.

[15] Ibid., 69.

[16] Ibid. See also R. Scott Pace, *Preaching by the Book: Developing and Delivering Text-Driven Sermons*, ed. Heath A. Thomas (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 51. The pastor utilizes his experience to see theirs.

Holy Spirit will assist the preacher to study the local context to discern the embodied experiences

of the audience by use of wisdom.[17]

The connected environment means that a preacher provides the steps and information to

bring a word picture to imaginations even if that object is not present on the stage to relate truth

to life.[18] The better the picture's description is prepared to match their exact environments for an

illustration, including analogies, the more impactful the point will be for their life as well.[19] This

is a method of application to the exact situations and times of the congregation that should be

recaptured from history when both biblical authors and groups such as the Puritan preachers

employed them effectively.[20] In a rare book on preaching that demonstrates analogy in depth

from the veteran preacher Tony Evans, an analogy is a reflection of the Savior Jesus Christ who

took on flesh.[21] Evans explains analogies as shadows of real spiritual truth, as a spiritual meal in

a church being likened to a person coming to sit down in a restaurant and they hear the names of

items available to order for a physical meal, but they benefit from accurate and image construing

wording about each item.[22] A pastor in the pulpit is not only speaking of a real God in Christ to

facilitate belief in the congregation by being themselves in an embodied style and language, but

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[17] Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*. Rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 110.

[18] James E. White, *What They Didn't Teach You in Seminary: 25 Lessons for Successful Ministry in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 146. See also Pace, *Preaching by the Book*, 53.

[19] _____, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 95.

[20] Arthurs, "The Fundamentals of," 69.

[21] Tony Evans, *The Power of Preaching: Crafting a Creative Expository Sermon* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 74.

[22] Ibid., 32.

also backgrounds, upbringings, and environment.[23] As proof of this concept, Evans challenged

years of his preaching students at Dallas Theological Seminary to name any object or situation

they experienced recently in life.[24] Then he would connect the mentioned object to a spiritual

principle that should be preached regularly as a demonstration of its impact on memory and

motivation in an application.[25] The goal of this exercise was to establish that people connect

doctrinal concepts to a word picture in a lasting way. Evans states that God will personally lead a

pastor to see a spiritual connection in His Creation, as objects can be used for the higher purpose

of the Creator.[26] The embodied conversation between a preacher and the congregation represents

a bringing out of shared understandings to show the reality of God and drive application.[27] Due

to the ongoing life of Jesus Christ today, there is a connection possible with God's actions today

revealed in the back and forth dialogue.[28] A professor and well-known Pastor John Piper

explains that God utilizes natural phenomena, even suffering, to point the hearer to applications

and greater vistas of belief in God.[29] The audience participates in observing life's occurrences,

personal and other's emotions, and a place within larger history, including God's intervention in

history.[30] Since preaching is displaying God's reality of truth, their lives are potentially life-

[23] Evans, *The Power of Preaching*, 34.

[24] Ibid., 78.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Gerrit Immink, "Naming God's Presence in Preaching," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 2, accessed September 9, 2020, https://doi.org/104102/hts.v75i4.5453/.

[28] Ibid., 1.

[29] John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 134-135. Piper connects these to how Paul can find joy in any life experience, as God has ordained the connection. Piper served as a Professor at Bethel University and then as a well-known Pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church.

[30] Ibid., 134-136.

changing images.[31] Likewise, pastor and preaching professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary H.B. Charles, Jr. suggests looking to Jesus' use of the local versions of ideal versus non-ideal neighbors in his parables to enable life change in church members.[32]

<div align="center">Relevance to the Listeners</div>

The use of analogy and the type of questions employed to drive home a spiritual truth in an application requires relevant images. Given the short amount of time that one thought is heard and given to be applied in a congregational sermon compared to any given week, immediate relevance will eliminate obstacles. Joel Breidenbaugh advocates for a doctrinal expository model of preaching.[33] Yet he allows for the Bible-based doctrinal expository sermon to remain practical and connected to culturally utilized images to be effective in a postmodern society.[34] A preacher must not give up truth, but rather use word pictures that bring doctrine to bear on the congregation.[35] By studying a congregant's sphere of life experiences, a message may be formulated to touch on these shared pictures of connections with people, life situations, and their

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[31] Piper, *Expository Exultation*, 179-180. See also 184-185.

[32] H.B. Charles, Jr., *On Preaching: Personal & Pastoral Insights for the Preparation & Practice of Preaching* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 86-87. He does not deal with analogies or questions as this project will, however Charles engages on the use of illustrations broadly.

[33] Joel Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching for the 21st Century*, rev. ed. (Orlando, FL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016), 174. Breidenbaugh serves as a Pastor and Professor in preaching.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 168, 174.

relationship with God.[36] The preacher is therefore encouraged to connect truths to life examples. Life challenges or issues may be sought out by intentionally immersing in local experience.[37]

In agreement with Breidenbaugh generally, Murray Capill argues for a deep study of the congregation who will hear concepts and images as well as those in the text for application.[38] These authors come from different denominational backgrounds and emphases on expository preaching. Yet their position is similar enough that application must be primary and not secondary to the preaching preparation task.[39] The preacher must connect with not just a passage from a historical event, but also with his contemporary congregation's needs.[40] Capill argues for analogies to real-life dilemmas by creating potential, hypothetical situations, even names for the people involved, that show how truth relates to situations the audience members might face as well.[41] The choice of exact contemporary analogy, or even a question to accompany it, rely on the person-to-person connection all have in life, of the conscience.[42] The Lord Jesus modeled relevance to the listeners at each preaching station in recounting stories, in giving comparisons, and speaking of spiritual truths by similarity to the familiar physical world as the preeminent example of present tense truths helping obedience.[43] Given this fact, Brandon Hilgemann argues

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[36] Breidenbaugh, *Preaching*, 168.

[37] Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 164-165. Zack Eswine serves as a professor of preaching at Covenant Theological Seminary. Based on the book's foreword, he is connected to the ministry of Bryan Chapell.

[38] Murray Capill, *The Heart Is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text (*Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2014), 50. Capill serves as a professor at Reformed Theological College.

[39] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 50. Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding*, 74.

[40] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 45, 49.

[41] Ibid., 161.

[42] Ibid., 191.

[43] Ibid. Capill speaks in a way to include parables, stories, metaphors, and analogies in saying that.

Jesus' focus on specific nearby touchable or relatable images must inform a sermon to leave it in the hearer's minds.[44] Also, a variety of illustrative materials assist the hearer to relate to the sermon points from common familiarity according to Hilgemann.[45] Capill explains the preacher today isolates truths that apply in any age of history from a passage for what to do and what to avoid so that there is a highly practical heart operation of the passage on the preacher and then the congregation as a result.[46] Likewise, David Ward describes the life of the preacher itself as a relevant way to speak of the experiences of the congregation's hearers to push for belief in God's present actions among them.[47] Ward also suggests incorporating stories of members of God's acts today, with consent, to show parallel ways God might work in their life.[48] Capill suggests, as part of a larger movement, a preacher must utilize ability statements in making applications, which would lend itself as a principle for choosing the appropriate analogy or question.[49] Another way of stating this is a preacher must use the indicative and subjunctive moods in an application, and this would include within the wording of an analogy or question as a result.[50] The applications, their explanation, their support, would speak of what can be today. Similarly, Jeffrey Arthurs encourages preachers to see life through the congregation's eyes and apply the

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[44] Brandon Hilgemann, *Preach and Deliver: Captivate Your Audience, Kill Bad Habits, and Master the Art of Sermon Delivery* (Columbia, SC: ProPreacher, 2020), 129. He is a pastor and writer for Pastors.com, ChurchLeaders.com, OutreachMagazine.com, and Lifeway.com.

[45] _____, *Preaching Nuts & Bolts: Conquer Sermon Prep, Save Time, and Write Better Messages* (Columbia, SC: ProPreacher, 2020), 70-71.

[46] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 57-58.

[47] David E. Ward, *Practicing the Preaching Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 142.

[48] Ibid., 143. The use of parallels, in his case with stories mainly, enables others to believe more so.

[49] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 222.

[50] Ibid., 224-225.

text by showing the mind what can be.[51] Communication from the pulpit must bridge the gap

between what is and what can be in the exact life plans of the congregation members.[52] A step-

by-step process is used to get to a vision of their future life plans, which would fit the use of

analogies.[53]

In a further degree of pushing for relevance, Andy Stanley advocates a position where the

outline is not driven by the text but by the audience itself.[54] In a break from a pure expository

sermon, Stanley states he takes direction from the Apostle Paul who spoke to issues that were on

the minds of the audience.[55] On the other hand, Stanley does focus on the critical importance of

application as do Capill and Breidenbaugh.[56] This opens up a crossing of paths with the other

authors. Stanley too suggests substantial sermon preparation effort at constructing a visual image

in minds to connect in a relevant way with an exact era and also timelessly to the extent it

approximates Jesus' examples of analogies, parables, or metaphors.[57] As regards application

though different on expository sermon format, Capill likewise sees in anything that God has

given to us a means to connect a spiritual truth with God's good purposes in Christ.[58]

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[51] Jeffrey Arthurs, "The Worlds of the Listener," in *The Worlds of the Preacher*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 91. Therefore, one engages the audience in imagining options, 104.

[52] Ibid., 90-92. Questions are used in the application process explanation but might be likewise used in it.

[53] Ibid., 91-92. Note Arthurs does not mention analogies in application but uses them in an analogous way.

[54] Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006), 131.

[55] Ibid., 97-98.

[56] Ibid., 95. See also, analogies might tie into Andy Stanley's relationships heavy applications, 128.

[57] Ibid., 150.

[58] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 85.

By contrast, Carl Trueman offers a competing view of the preaching task that is not primarily concerned with being practical.[59] Trueman comes out against a how-to sermon style, any Sunday self-empowerment message, or a pragmatic audience-driven model of preaching.[60] In its place, an expository preaching style, such as exemplified by Martin Luther, is suggested.[61] This does not stop Trueman from endorsing the use of analogy or metaphors. Since humans are made in the image of God and Christ is God the Son, there is space made for some analogy in an application.[62] Trueman sees the preaching event itself, with examples given of the prophets, as an analogy of God Himself speaking in that, it declares with power and utilizes analogies as the Lord has done in history.[63] Similarly, Mark Dever suggests that a component of the sermon is application; however, the direction of the application takes the form of appeals to look to Christ or God's holiness rather than specific details.[64] Analogy though finds a place in the use of apologetics to address doubts and to hint at consequences of the truths expounded.[65] The relevance of a sermon to a congregant who is born again or who is a non-Christian should be attempted but is not the main structural component.[66] The possible applications are mentioned

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[59] Carl R. Trueman, "The Word as a Means of Grace," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 19, no. 4, (2015): 74, 76, accessed September 9, 2020, https://sbts-wordpress-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/equip/uploads/2016/05/The-Word-as-a-Means-of-Grace.pdf /.

[60] Ibid., 74-76.

[61] Ibid., 76.

[62] Ibid., 61, 64.

[63] Ibid., 65, 67.

[64] Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 113-115.

[65] Ibid., 114-115.

[66] Ibid., 104-107.

deliberately in the introduction and in the message to hold attention for the exposition.[67] The goal of applications is not primary, but they serve to create sustained interest in the minds of those present.[68] In turn, when the pastor is sensitive to the balance of expositional information and historical context with the use of application then the sermon has relevance.[69]

An expository preacher, professor, and doctrinal small group teacher, James E. White tries to navigate several preaching approaches, seeking to be driven by the text but also doggedly relevant to the culture of Mecklenburg Community Church.[70] The choice of up-to-date and culturally relevant illustrations, in general, is strongly explained by White as necessary to reach people today.[71] White includes as part of relevance asking the right questions to frame an application to real issues that people are currently discussing in contemporary culture.[72] Skye Jethani aligns with that use of the right question early enough in a sermon to then use images to paint a picture of a life that applied a sermon point, such as a common question of how to not worry.[73] For Jethani, specific application points expand the targeted question with an additional question, for instance on the precise cause of worry, and then a spiritual exercise to overcome it is offered immediately afterward.[74] After setting up the question, James E. White seeks in every

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[67] Dever and Gilbert, *Preach*, 103-104.

[68] Ibid., 106.

[69] Ibid., 107. Dever is primarily arguing for an expository sermon format, but wants to hold interest too.

[70] Trueman, "The Word as a Means," 142, 146.

[71] White, *What They Didn't*, 142-143.

[72] Ibid., 143.

[73] Skye Jethani, "Fighting for Your Congregation's Imagination," in *Inspirational Preaching*, ed. Craig B. Larson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 74-75.

[74] Ibid., 75.

sermon to create a word picture in a listener's mind even if there is no illustration or analogy set up on the stage itself.[75] White reminds pastors that in the preaching task, the Word of God is living and active, Hebrews 4:12, resulting in the value of the time and place of a hearer's life, the burdens of the time and place, and the currently active Word itself as well.[76] White calls for more extensive applicational explanation to reach a culture that has substantially departed from Judeo-Christian roots, which would leave room for added analogy and well-set questions.[77] Similarities of broken-heartedness should also be included in illustrations and thus analogies.[78] Lane Sebring adds a similar idea suggesting preachers should develop stories or illustrations that allow the hearer to enter into the experience and relate to a sermon point.[79] The audience's entrance into a parallel experience allows emotional and life connections to a point.[80]

Another seminary professor Tyshawn Gardner reveals potential relevance to the current project's use of a question in an application. While Gardener does not engage in the use of framing questions, yet he uses a method of calling by the preacher from the pulpit and response from the church in an American tradition to engage attention to why something should matter.[81] The tradition leans upon the calling question by the preacher to lead members to speak up and

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[75] White, *What They Didn't*, 146.

[76] James White, *Meet Generation Z* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 89.

[77] Ibid., 90-91.

[78] Ibid., 89.

[79] Lane Sebring, *Become a Preaching Ninja: Sharpen Your Skills, Hone Your Craft, Maximize Your Impact as a Preacher* (Knoxville, TN: Preaching Donkey, 2019), 82-83. Lane Sebring has served as a pastor and his preaching articles have appeared on Pastors.com, SermonCentral.com, and ChurchLeaders.com.

[80] Ibid., 83-84.

[81] Tyshawn Gardner, "Can I Get a Witness: Call and [no] Response: Virtual Preaching in the COVID-19 Era," *Preaching: The Professional Journal of Ministry Leaders* 36, no. 2 (2021): 14-15. Garden is at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, and also an author.

affirm what is said.[82] The preacher then preaches along with the congregation creating an amplifying effect to the relevance of the message for climatic points of truth or application.[83] As a valuable tool, this ensures that the main components of the sermons feeding the soul are expressed in a way that is remembered.[84] This provides an art whereby the preacher may connect with and draw in the audience members, even if by video, that maintains attention using a biblical idea.[85] It is theorized here this would also enable the listener to question something in one's life towards a new step of maturity. In the sum of these varied authors and practitioners, the relevance of analogy or question has a significant role in the application. There is a large burden of proof suggesting they have room to play a role in an effective sermon structure.

<div align="center">Application Tools Woven Throughout a Sermon</div>

The location of targeted analogies or questions for the application also connects with the broader question of the application's location inside a given sermon. Capill argues for application throughout the sermon as opposed to merely tacked onto the end.[86] He provides Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as an example of the application attached to each point in a message.[87] Capill argues that a sermon fails to change lives if it includes application only at the ending.[88] Author Capill also relates this to applicational questions, which arise as one moves

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[82] Gardner, "Can I Get," 15-16.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid., 16.

[85] Ibid., 16-17. The author reveals by implication that the holy use of the performance of such questions with a call enables a person to essentially stay engaged.

[86] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 151.

[87] Ibid., 50.

[88] Ibid., 152.

through a passage of Scripture and is suggested by a passage during the explanation effort.[89] A similar position is that of Dave Snyder who argues application must be spread out through the whole sermon.[90] The application should be close to home issues of life people encounter placed throughout to remind the hearer to pay attention.[91] Questions may be likewise employed for bringing the hearer close to their next application step.[92]

Likewise, pastor, author, and church leader coach, Mark Dever supports application being spread in small sections throughout the Sunday sermon.[93] Dever argues that not only is application sprinkled throughout the message but a second entire sermon point may be the application of the first.[94] Dever's focus is not on the application as primary, but as a useful tool to maintain audience engagement throughout a message.[95] He suggests hypothetical conversations as a means to reengage the audience's attention as well as adding some imaginary drama to the moment uncovered in exegesis.[96] Dever also supports a separation between illustration and application in any given sermon structure.[97] Yet in an observation he makes in

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[89] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 114-115.

[90] Dave Snyder, *The Laws of Communication: For Preaching* (Columbia, SC: BubbaBooks Publishing, 2018), 117. Dave Snyder is a preacher and multi-work evangelical Christian author.

[91] Ibid., *The Laws*, 116-117.

[92] Ibid., 118. The questions would connect to situation specific struggles throughout the message.

[93] Dever and Gilbert, *Preach*, 102-103, 107, 167-169.

[94] Ibid., 167.

[95] Ibid., 167, 171. The time invested in it throughout is worth it Dever repeats in this section in practice. Gilbert interviews Dever and their back and forth is recorded showing it is what Dever prescribes. For application as not primary but a part of the sermon, see pages 107-109.

[96] Ibid., 168-169, 172-173. These are teaching examples from an extended dialogue. See also page 114 where Dever says that information is vital of truth. Application comes as a secondary tool.

[97] Ibid., 110, 113.

the illustration section, there is a useful point for this project regarding illustrations do not need to be stories.[98] While Dever does not engage with analogies, metaphors, or framing questions, he does hint at the usefulness of what this project is separately doing with short engagement resources holding attention and allowing time for applications throughout a message.[99]

In disagreement with Capill and others is the author and pastor Andy Stanley, who states the application must be located at the end of the message, in a You and We section, for that explicit purpose.[100] The application would not be following each of several separate sermon divisions, as the sermon itself has one single main point. Even if a preacher modifies the Stanley standard sermon outline, he suggests the pieces should exist either with different names or broader categories, which would leave application near the end in a separate unit.[101] This also is distinguished from the traditional preaching model that focused on the application as an add-on in a formal or didactic stance, whereas Stanley opts for a preacher to share a sermon that unfolds rather than to lecture or formally teach one.[102] The application, and if used any analogies or questions though Stanley does not explore those in-depth, should include a first-person speaking stance talking with the audience where the attitude is sharing what one has found with the hearers.[103] That comes on the heels of having invested the entirety of the sermon with one's experience or story start to end with applications so that it is also the preacher's story.[104] While

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[98] Denver and Gilbert, *Preach*, 110.

[99] Ibid., 110-112. In other words, stories would take up too much time and space and attention.

[100] Stanley, *Communicating for*, 127. Stanley is openly and boldly for application as the sermon's driver.

[101] Ibid., 138.

[102] Ibid., 135.

[103] Ibid., 140.

[104] Ibid., 143.

of a different persuasion than Stanley on sermon content, preaching professor Lucas O'Neill

reveals a similar location of application near the end of the message.[105] The reason is the sermon

creates tension around a dilemma that a man or woman cannot solve in their strength or

ingenuity.[106] During the sermon, the audience member hears about God's standards and holiness.

However, the preacher then displays Christ Jesus as the One who can help and make things right

in their Christian life.[107] These Christ-centered approaches model what Jesus was doing with the

disciples.[108] Each week in messages the dilemma of sinful people is shown and then the delight

of the solution in Christ is presented at the end.[109] Worsening of the sin situations of people

trying to do what is right on their own, is then employed in the necessary tension to make the

hearers turn again to Jesus in conclusion.[110]

Through another lens, Michael Quicke includes the insight that a preacher is a leader of

application throughout an entire worship set.[111] The use of visual aids and visual elements of a

standard denominational worship set may be included in part of an experience of God and

describing that in the entirety of the worship service.[112] These visual elements and the meaning

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[105] Lucas O'Neill, *Preaching to be Heard: Delivering Sermons that Command Attention* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 119-121. See also 70-71. O'Neill is a professor of preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In addition, he is endorsed by well-known preaching professor Bryan Chapell.

[106] Ibid., 120. One's own past efforts not working will favor his approach.

[107] Ibid., 121-122.

[108] Ibid., 122-123.

[109] Ibid., 126-127.

[110] Ibid., 129, 131, 135-136, 158-159, 205-208. The consistent picture is application is held to the end.

[111] Michael J. Quicke, *Preaching as Worship: An Integrative Approach to Formation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

[112] Ibid., 228. Quicke means for this to happen in the sermon itself as well.

read into each to make doctrinal points from the Bible are designed to assist in the application of

gospel witness and changed behavior for everyday living.[113] Al Mohler argues for a related view

of application as spread throughout the worship service.[114] The proclamation of the Bible by the

preacher is the central portion of worship, but that proclamation's application of God's call on

our lives defines and molds the takeaway of the worship service in its entirety.[115] The idea of the

application being woven into the entire service, the congregation, the building environment, and

its trappings has a history. In the post-Reformation era's impact, this was used in places like

England with a positive effect for sermon listeners.[116]

    Similarly, but related to the sermon itself, Breidenbaugh implies that the application

should stay near to the lesson of the passage while advocating both a doctrinal and expository

message.[117] Breidenbaugh's position has another twist in that the most crucial doctrines preached

in a sermon should be primary in the application.[118] He provides Ephesians 4 as a model of this

method where doctrines in the passage are turned to as the passage unfolds them with the

primary emphases being chosen by Paul.[119] Therefore applications would be located throughout.

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[113] Quicke, *Preaching as Worship*, 229.

[114] Al Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 24, 36-38, 121-130. As the worship set continues in the sermon, the sermon itself has application throughout too.

[115] Ibid., 36-38. Rather than entertainment or a cultural artifact, the music is tied to sermon applications.

[116] Matthew J. Smith, "God's Idioms: Sermon Belief in Donne's London," *English Literary Renaissance* 46, no. 1 (2016): 95-96, accessed February 15, 2021, https://web-b-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=96e5980d-4338-4804-a90e-27a153860008%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=2016583386&db=mlf/. Matthew Smith is a professor associated with the Christian school Azusa Pacific Univesrity.

[117] Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding*, 165.

[118] Ibid., 170.

[119] Ibid., 168.

Wayne McDill also attaches application methods to every division or principle within the given expository sermon.[120] This has the impact of spreading out the application across the entirety of the message. Likewise, Bryan Chapell positions the applicational moments in close connection with sets of explanations throughout a message.[121] Using an image of DNA strands, he suggests that a preacher should have an explanation and illustration of each point apart along with an application.[122] However, Chapell does offer flexibility saying some sermon points may not.[123] In a work endorsed by Bryan Chapell, Donald R. Sunukjian also notes preachers must include imagery for an image-obsessed culture by weaving application throughout a message to maintain attention.[124] Several means of this include fleshing out the images in the sermon passage at length, creating images similar to the passage's authorial images, and painting scenarios of application where the image could apply.[125] In summary, most authors argue for a balance of application throughout the sermon. This will maintain audience focus and allow for accuracy when following the various points inside a given Bible passage.

<div align="center">The Specificity of the Application</div>

Preaching professor Wayne McDill suggests that applications, and separately mentioning analogies by name for sermon points, must be precise in detail and definite in connecting to the

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[120] Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 135.

[121] Chapell, *Christ-Centered*, 202.

[122] Ibid., 152. Chapell also illustrates and models this with examples throughout his book.

[123] Ibid., 178.

[124] Donald R. Sunukjian, "Preaching to a Culture Dominated by Images," in *The Worlds of the Preacher: Navigating Biblical, Cultural, and Personal Contexts*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 146. The foreword is by Bryan Chapell and in honor of Haddon Robinson also.

[125] Ibid., 146, 148, 150.

point of the sermon division or principle.[126] The analogy, illustration, or question should be

designed with intention in a goal of what best conveys the immediate point.[127] A question

framing the application point along with adding fear elements in wording or description if the

topic were fear, for instance, should be used to the maximum effect.[128] The specificity of the

analogy should also be checked against one's congregational audience's background and lives as

well.[129] The analogy and attendant question if used should both be tested with a preacher's

ability to simply and effectively deliver them as designed.[130] In employing analogies, general

expectations McDill places upon that section for each sermon division include that it would have

a primary aim at the will of the hearer for life.[131] Action is the goal. In making an analogy for the

will vivid, McDill refers approvingly to John A. Broadus as a type of father of expository

preaching, that application analogy must be tied to what is in nature around hearers or inside

their thoughts regularly.[132] McDill speaking of short story illustrations in general provides tips

that would indirectly improve framed analogies as well saying that a sermon must not just be a

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[126] McDill, *12 Essential Skills*, 135. For applications that envision what exactly "can" be, 196.

[127] Ibid., 147. Analogies for McDill are *per se* for application. They attend the space of sermon points. McDill does not outright declare it, but there is the use of framing questions in passing here as well. They are not a section or point, it is just something that McDill happens to do, by chance, in discussing analogy for the sermon explanation and sermon point. Again, this is not a section on application in his work. But the parallel is helpful.

[128] Ibid. McDill does not precisely connect analogy to application. His main focus appears to be illustrating a sermon point. However, while he does not make the connection, it is possible to see also how one could utilize an analogy for the applications similarly. See info for application, it is a similar interest in a specific takeaways, 196.

[129] Ibid., 146. This includes the differences in very local environments and cultures.

[130] Ibid. That McDill does portray analogies as helpful at each sermon point allows for each to be specific. Again, the analogy section of McDill is not primarily focused on application but illustration. But it is connectable.

[131] Ibid., 132. This is in a section on persuasion in his book, not application. The persuasion is of the sermon point itself rather than application. The hearer should be persuaded of the truth of what is heard in this.

[132] Ibid., 137.

report but feel more like a story with emotions, make sure the tension is in the right place, allow the audience to look at what could be, and then offer a resolution if appropriate.[133] Once again in that broader category of application illustration, the goal would also be to be simple and to the point.[134] To build up a storehouse of effective analogies, McDill suggests that a preacher has his natural limits; therefore, there must be an effort at reading broadly in news and core disciplines as well as to watch the world about oneself carefully in daily life to supplement resources.[135] By doing this a preacher would be able to field more understandable and motivating messages regularly.[136] Along with McDill, Austin Tucker reveals ways to refresh a preacher's store of potential specific analogies.[137] Tucker argues for finding inspiration from word backgrounds of life experiences in lexicon entries, the context of the text being filled in by hypotheticals of imagination that parallel the audience questions, hypothetical local situations, and even personal spiritual journey that may parallel the audience experiences.[138] While Tucker lists more options and is mainly focused on longer stories, it is conceivable to a preacher's study that short analogous examples could be used in applications. Another author in the preaching field Rick Blackfield similarly lays out a connection between life details and sermon point application.[139]

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[133] McDill, *12 Essential Skills*, 153-154.

[134] Ibid., 156-157.

[135] Ibid., 139. McDill does mention and target use of analogy only broadly in this section.

[136] Ibid., 140.

[137] Austin Tucker, *The Preacher as Storyteller: The Power of Narrative in the Pulpit* (Nashville, TN: Baker Academic, 2008), 128-130. Tucker has served as a pastor, speaker, and adjunct preaching professor at Liberty University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

[138] Ibid., 128-133.

[139] Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multi-Sensory Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 149-151.

Blackfield creates highly specific applications for each sermon point and sermon in a series while merging those with visual cues analogous to life situations.[140] The cues may present themselves to an attendee in the sermon, upon entry to the worship center, or afterward as a specific reminder.[141]

The same possibilities to use analogy increasingly for effective application exists in parts of Capill's work.[142] The preacher must always ask how life is for an average John and Jane Doe type figure in their congregation to build up illustrative materials and words that connect.[143] There should be a diligent effort to closely observe the local world and environment near the congregation or audience to show detailed local appreciation and care, which translates into the application being heard well.[144] While this should be regular, it must not be overdone for every single place in a sermon as otherwise it becomes too expected and possibly ignored.[145] Illustrations, and by implication analogies, should be put to use for a vision of how a principle could apply.[146] Capill states some shared agreement with Timothy Keller on preaching application that is near the dilemmas and daily life of the hearers.[147] Capill explains at length that Keller's model grid system may be used to section off listeners into spiritual states through

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[140] Blackwood, *The Power of*, 102-103, see also 90, 94, 111, 149-150. Blackwood in giving examples shows spaced out specific application points throughout the sermon. The specific applications are derived from thinking through exact situations in a congregant's life.

[141] Ibid. The expository message or message series may use these cues that drive specific life changes.

[142] Capill, *The Heart Is*, 89, 153.

[143] Ibid., 89.

[144] Ibid.

[145] Ibid., 158.

[146] McDill, *12 Essential Skills*, 158.

[147] Ibid., 53.

which they observe their world.[148] By taking the worldview of each spiritual section of the

audience into account, the applicational analogies could be tailor-fitted to groups as the passage

indicates a direction. Keller in his work suggests specifically targeting mental image "defeaters"

that would prevent a person from believing a truth with illustration, quotes, logic, or analogy.[149]

Keller does not list analogies or metaphors as a separate point but weaves their actual use into a

discussion of illustrations and application in his work explaining scriptural passages.[150] In a

profound observation, Keller attributes some insights to Jonathan Edwards who saw in

comparisons a connection for God to operate on the human heart.[151] When Keller lists out

groupings for the top themes of the Bible that connect to a given passage anywhere, the

categories he creates are illustrated using analogies that are vivid and simple.[152] The implication

to the reader is that concise analogy use reinforces the key themes. On the creation of a specific

application for the audience, a concise analogy is modeled and encouraged to have common

phraseology and expressions of the area.[153] In the persuasion aspect of an application, Keller

recommends precise words, images, phrases that aid in quick recollection.[154] Another similar

position is taken by J. Josh Smith, that persuasion should be specific with real-world steps.[155]

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[148] McDill, *12 Essential Skills*, 53.

[149] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Viking, 2015), 112-113.

[150] Ibid., 75, 81, 83.

[151] Ibid., 163.

[152] Ibid., 73, 162.

[153] Ibid., 68, 177.

[154] Ibid., 177-178. See also words that stand out, Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 184, 195.

[155] J. Josh Smith, *Preaching for a Verdict: Recovering the Role of Exhortation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2019), 96-97.

Nelson Searcy likewise suggests an applicational grid, though he attaches its theme to a

sermon series, where Christian maturity or absence thereof is factored into the exact next steps

suggested.[156] For Searcy and his assistants, the sermon's next steps of application are highly fine-

tuned and clear for action.[157] They argue a series must operate in the realm of a Bible-based

exposition which isolates principles from the passage to bring them to bear on precise current

cultural objects, situations, or questions.[158] Searcy represents a very contemporary approach to

preaching that anticipates questions. However, the concept of working questions into a sermon

for specific understanding can be found in saving history.[159] The practice of anticipating or using

questions in a text-based sermon to frame specific application was in the Old Covenant and New

Covenant eras so that some advocate for it today as well in good company.[160]

Two authors, Kelley and Hoagland, argue for a more detailed approach that the precise

life situation of a specific person imagined more narrowly than an area's pictures should be used

in the creation of an application.[161] Kelley and Hoagland argue a preacher is to envision an

application that is highly targeted as they go about areas of life in their town that cross paths with

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[156] Nelson Searcy, Jason Hatley, and Jennifer D. Henson, *Engage: A Guide to Creating Life-Transforming Worship Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 74-75. This team coaches thousands of preaching pastors and includes authors impacting preaching.

[157] Ibid., 73.

[158] Ibid., 116.

[159] Steven T. Gaines, "Redefining Preaching: A Beginning," *Res Rhetorica* 4, no. 3 (2017): 33-34, accessed February 15, 2021, https://resrhetorica.com/index.php/RR/article/view/215/122/.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Brandon Kelley and Joe Hoagland, *Preaching Sticky Sermons: A Practical Guide to Preparing, Writing, and Delivering Memorable Sermons* (Monee, IL: Rainer Publishing, 2016), 114. Brandon Kelley is active with ChurchLeaders.com and SermonCentral.com publications. He is also a pastor. Joe Hoagland is a pastor and an active writer on preaching topics with SermonCentral.com and ChurchLeaders.com.

those in exact situations.[162] They do not list out enough details of how to accomplish this with

analogies alone. However, in a parallel section, Kelley and Hoagland reveal in discussing the use

of a story that taking time with a sermon point to envision a real local person's struggle, their

tension on using a truth, and then framing it with open questions about what might be instead

accomplished is effective application.[163] Similarly, Donald Sunukjian argues for a process of

talking through the possible questions a hearer struggles with about their life to frame

application.[164]

     In alignment with these, pastor and author Richard Caldwell states that significance ties

to the very struggles or difficulties in a local area.[165] Specific application analogies flow from

care and concern about local happenings of members including the troubles they and the

preacher experience personally.[166] The activity of the pastor among the congregation enables

seeing the specific next sermon analogies or questions. The local pastor of a church must see that

role as a shepherd feeding sheep as empowering to take them to what nourishes their immediate

questions.[167] This guides the pastor to give nutrition as it is needed from Jesus commanding Peter

three times to that task for shepherds.[168] The pastor must be careful to approximate the needs and

thereby questions of an exact local context and what the sheep there understand or disobey God

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[162] Kelley and Hoagland, *Preaching*, 114.

[163] Ibid., 115, 120.

[164] Sunukjian, "Preaching to a Culture," 154-155.

[165] Richard Caldwell, *Pastoral Preaching: Expository Preaching for Pastoral Work* (Monee, IL: Rainer Publishing, 2016), 100.

[166] Ibid. In particular, Caldwell says hardships drive preacher and congregation closer in applying truth.

[167] Ibid., 29-30. See also 46, 72-75, .

[168] Ibid., 30-31. Caldwell bases this on Robert Mounce and Calvin for the entire Christian life needs.

in during life.[169] Caldwell argues that the sermon emphases in the application should maximize

connections to the weakness of the local believers, such as demonstrated in the ministry of the

Apostle Paul.[170] Pastoral care and oversight both enable a storehouse of answers that are needed

among the congregation modeling Jesus' concern for the disciples' answers to questions.[171]

By contrast to the above perspectives, professor and pastor Lucas O'Neill contends for a

more generalized sermon application.[172] Specific sermon application that aims for the choices

that resemble do this or act on that should be shunned as less spiritual.[173] General focus in each

passage should focus on Jesus Christ as an object of faith, focus, or renewal.[174] If Jesus is not

mentioned in a text, a general application should be made regardless to rest faith in Him.[175]

There should be much appreciation for Christ's redemptive larger goals.[176] The solution to the

hearer's life struggles is generally found in a focus on Jesus, not creating a struggle with

commands O'Neill suggests.[177] Along with O'Neill, pastor Mark Dever holds to a position that

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[169] Caldwell, *Pastoral Preaching*, 76-78.

[170] Ibid., 78-79.

[171] Ibid., 79-80.

[172] O'Neill, *Preaching to Be Heard*, 51, 118-119.

[173] Ibid., 120.

[174] Ibid., 119-122.

[175] Ibid., 123-125. While slightly different on application flexibility, yet professor and pastor David Allen suggests this as the goal of preaching applications. See also, David Allen, "The Four Principles of Biblical Preaching," *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Ministry Leaders* 36, no. 2 (2021): 10-12.

[176] O'Neill, *Preaching to Be Heard*, 124-125. See also, pages 23, 144 on the Fallen Condition Focus bent applied to tension. There is room for the exact passage applying in its unique way, but then the application is used in a redemptive history way.

[177] Ibid., 126-127.

application should not always be too specific.[178] The exact details of a congregation's or congregant's life need not be addressed as it would engage people into thought situations of the heart they are not primarily needing to focus on at this time.[179] There is also value to the big picture of what God is doing in their life that is a fundamental commitment of Dever's.[180] Dever attributes his view of general application to the famed preacher of the 20th century, Martin Lloyd-Jones of the United Kingdom who influenced many congregational and Baptist preachers for generations.[181]

Conclusion

This Review of Literature reveals analogy and framing questions offer room for improving application in expository sermons. The improvement is noted around four key concepts. The improved goal is obtained by connecting to people in an environment they inhabit with its attendant functions and societal expectations, the inclusion of intentionally relevant comparisons to life, weaving application throughout a sermon after the presentation of its principles, and by aiming for specificity in analogy or questions employed. In the first section, it has been found that the connectedness of people to their local environment is not a new idea in the prescriptions for general sermon development; however, there is ample project room available for each application section of a message to use these. Locally embodied concepts, culture, and happenings enable superior application creation that connects to hearers in a way not

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[178] Dever and Gilbert, *Preach*, 116.

[179] Ibid. Dever is the main teacher in this book, Gilbert is more of an interviewer. In questions placed to Dever, Gilbert draws out Mark Dever's view that a larger goal of the gospel is the main focus in a sermon.

[180] Ibid., 116-117, 188-189. Dever still leaves room to say application is for a particular people, such as a church, yet he overall advocates for general application to a particular people. See also, page 48 and 49.

[181] Ibid., 102, 116-117.

found in the literature. Then, the relevance of a sermon topic or sermon point on the second

matter is sometimes a priority in preaching literature. Much of Christian literature either say that

all truth is relevant or argues for a sermon series or title to be relevant. There is support for

relevant illustrations in literature. However, the relevant application is rarely mentioned though

perhaps assumed. Much of the literature focuses on knowledge of life phases or life

responsibilities in the application, however. Yet the relevance of an analogy or question to set up

the application section is not found. This leaves room for exploration of particularly pertinent

application analogy and questions in this project. The third matter of application being woven

throughout the sermon revealed a split in evangelical preaching authors, professors, and pastors.

The majority argue for sermon application located throughout a sermon's structure. None were

found that attempted to connect analogies and framing questions to each sermon point's unique

application section. This makes the current project valuable in exploring a new angle on sermon

structures for effective communication. Fourth, specific analogy or questioning for each sermon

division or point was not common. Many authors at least touch on those resources in general, but

without specifying the location inside a sermon structure. Those who did were found

occasionally tied to the core sermon text explanation and persuasion sections of sermon points.

However, in unique application sections for each sermon point, this concept was not explored in

depth. A few minor passing mentions as a very brief aside were found. Other than those passing

hints, there is a need for this project to explore these tools for each application section of a

sermon point in an expository sermon.

While analogy or framing questions are not always mentioned by name or in an extensive

outline of their function within sermon application in the literature, yet there is substantial

guidance through similar ideas to guide a project generally. The gap in the literature opens a door

for this project. The literature provides some possible ideas, suggestions, and guardrails for this

project, even though the authors did not address the specific questions of this project. The few

mentions of analogies and questions for persuasion or explanation of a passage might yield

similar practical ideas in this project, only applied to application sections inside a sermon. Once

a sermon division or point has been laid out, the current project expands beyond the literature.

Theological Foundations

Introduction

This section will explore the theological foundations for Bible-based sermon application

in key parts of the Scripture. Proclamation of the Word of the Lord is itself a theological concept

in a ministry context. One is set apart by God for the act and call of proclamation, such as Isaiah,

Jeremiah, and the Apostle Paul.[182] The act of proclamation holds up the Lord's Word in a

specific context for a specific people.[183] God's proclaiming servants throughout the Bible shine

the light of truth to bear on an exact context which also points the hearers to Jesus Christ.[184] A

New Testament pattern for the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the Word is found in Romans

10:16 where Paul links a preacher's work of applying the good news to Isaiah's proclamation of

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[182] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 47.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid. See also, Thomas R. Schreiner, "1 Peter" in *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2003), 41-42. Local or regional songs, cultural sayings, and thoughts are employed by Peter to reach a congregation. Some of the concepts are held up for affirmation and some for disagreement, but all for application. There is a unique local-regional faith struggle with persecution. See also, _____, "2 Peter" in *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2003), 293-294. The unique situation in 2 Peter is addressed with a comparison of divine nature proclaimed for applicational change.

timeless good news to a time-bound context.[185] This links the good news of our Savior with the usual application of the word in a sermon.[186] The proclamation is also of a God who is personal and interacting even today with the hearers in their daily lives.[187] The Scripture contains the interplay of God's thoughts and human personality, which allows us to see how the Word is embodied even in its servants.[188] Therefore, proclamation theologically is a living God interacting with a living creation, in people who engage a world created for a relationship with Him. Theologically the proclamation of the Word must call for present faith or action, not merely belief alone, based on a God who prepared us for good works (Ephesians 2:10, 21).[189]

Moreover, within the topic of proclamation, a scriptural basis exists for the use of analogy to aid in application. An analogy is a part of the broad category of biblical imagery.[190] Biblical imagery has the goal of changing the will and motivating changed beliefs or actions rather than just conveying information.[191] Analogies are an easier way to carry the heavy freight of timeless truth about God, humans, salvation, and how the world operates. Analogy finds a place of use even in didactic passages of preaching about the future life. For instance, in 1st Thessalonians, an analogy is utilized to offer hope and clarity to Christians who have friends

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[185] Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of*, 48.

[186] Ibid., 49.

[187] D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 151. Carson is included because of his immense impact on professors and preachers in Bible proclamation.

[188] Ibid., 152-153.

[189] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 58-59. Professor Kaiser approaches this from an expository sermon viewpoint.

[190] Calvin D. Linton, "The Bible as Literature" in *Introductory Articles*, vol. 1, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 135.

[191] Ibid. See also the Bible's use of images as example, Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 184, 185-186.

who have died while believers. There Paul states God's people are children of light who have

hope and therefore should live accordingly (1 Thessalonians 5:1-9). Those who are alive on earth

are said to be awake and those who are dead are said to be asleep in Paul's second use of asleep

(1 Thessalonians 5:10). This alive in either place image holds up two different realities, sleeping,

and physical death, while offering similarities in that life still exists for a Christian. Critically,

Paul was preparing the Thessalonian church to hear this letter for application to moral living and

pressing on without despair.[192] The picture of experiences in everyday life is meant to connect

for the application of assurance and living as those who are alive in the Lord.[193] In either case of

sleeping or death, Paul says a Christian still lives unto the Lord Jesus. Since the life of having

fallen asleep, or being dead, before the Second Coming of Jesus is an unknown or invisible state

to the Thessalonian Christians, the analogy explains and gives insight into its nature and purpose.

Also, the analogy functions to create a horizon of a greater future life in Christ Jesus by faith

which overcomes fear or worry in life.[194] There is a reminder that just as one does not remember

what happens while one is asleep yet awakes to God's mercy anew so it is with death and the

resurrection. The resurrection contrary to Roman pagan beliefs offers ultimate security.[195] The

entire letter itself was to be read before the whole congregation to modify beliefs and actions (1

Thessalonians 5:27). The application had broad import. This particular analogy is used in the

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[192] D. Michael Martin, "1 Thessalonians," in *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1995), 169.

[193] Gordon D. Fee, "Commentary on 1 Thessalonians," in *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, vol. 45, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Ned Stonehouse, F.F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 194.

[194] Michael W. Holmes, "Text and Commentary on 1 Thessalonians," in *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 12, The NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 175.

[195] Ibid.

application phase of Paul's letter which shows how analogies may be used. Paul began the

transition in chapter 4 of the letter. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Paul speaks of comfort and peace

about those who have fallen asleep being with the Lord.[196] The value of an informal analogy that

hits close to home for application even fits well the use of language in this case.[197] Paul utilizes

in letters to churches like the Thessalonian one an informal ability to leave out verbs or key

words to convey the closeness of a personal friend talking understandably.[198] The mix of familiar

language feeding into an analogy creates a sense of closeness in an audience. What's more, Paul

introduces and uses an analogy of sleep that ties to an early Christian creed.[199] This means that

the natural occurrence of sleeping and waking which is close to every hearer was a common

preaching or evangelism tool then. The early Christian lyric went "Awake, you sleeper! Rise up

from the dead! The Messiah will shine on you."[200] The memorable nature of this was worth

repeating to build up Christians. The analogy of sleeping is to aid in hearers a step of Christian

maturity in Paul's use with the common church song and idea.[201] The goal is to focus on the

future age and waking up to what is better in Christ.[202] They are to live knowing that as people of

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[196] J. Harold Greenlee, "The Language of the New Testament," in *Introductory Articles*, vol. 1, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 415.

[197] Ibid.

[198] Ibid., 415.

[199] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 237-238. See also page 233 on 1 Thessalonians 4.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid., 237.

[202] Ibid., 238. See also Ephesians 1 and 5 emphases on the future as maturity applications.

the light of Jesus they sleep as the darkness passes and inherit the real light upon waking up.[203]

This is an example; therefore, of a naturally powerful applicational analogy.

Jesus deploys analogies in his preaching ministry (Matthew 5:14-16; 6:25-33; 7:15-20; 8:18-20; 15:15-20; John 15:1-8, etc.). For example, parables using analogy are a major fixture in Jesus' teaching. In Luke's record of the parable of the sower, the word of God is shown by a mental picture of seeds thrown about onto various soils or growth locations, most of which will not yield a full crop and one location that will (Luke 8:4-15). The parable holds onto a powerful spiritual truth while calling on a hearer to make sure they believe in and keep the words about Jesus. Parables were designed for immediate use by the hearers in their lived experiences and the disciples as well. The immediate audience is targeted by the analogy for the application of hearing to produce spiritual fruit.[204] Mark and Matthew also record the parable with minor differences and when it was taught in another location on the water.[205] The primary focus of the parable with analogies to daily life for the area is not just the twelve disciples, but possibly includes others who may become disciples (Mark 4:10).[206] The analogy to sowing also employs a structure Jesus often uses of sets of three for memory's sake it is believed.[207] Not only is recall

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[203] Wright, *The Resurrection*, 296-297.

[204] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, vol. 3, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 324.

[205] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, vol. 4, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 202-203.

[206] Ibid., 195. France calls this proposal an analogy that is possible too, for those to be initiated also. The analogy therefore has a greater application impact that only the twelve but is useful in a broad audience as a calling. There is also the aspect of using an analogy so that the lost do not understand, Mark 4:10-12, 195. See also France lists some who see only the core disciples represented and maybe just a few others, see 197.

[207] Ibid., 192. France lists some examples: the three reasons not to be at dinner (Luke 14), three servants (Matthew 25), and three payment demands (Matthew 21). This shows the power of analogies in a measured format.

aided, but the threefold structure amplifies the motive to act on the calling in the application of one's life.[208] In any case, the analogy does double duty also applying to how the disciples see responses to their mission.[209] In the future when they experience disappointment, the analogy is an easy-to-remember tool to avoid responding with anger or discouraged inaction. It also illustrates how hardship might have a place in the responses to preaching the Gospel.[210] Rejection by the world will be understood more easily as part of understanding the calling. Studies revealed the ancient Near East rural dweller distributed the risk of gain and loss in food across several crops to be planted annually.[211] Archaeological finds reveal a variety of seeds sown in nearby areas or the same plot, sometimes sown repeatedly in a month, because the weather, soil, weeds, and other factors could each uniquely in a year change the outcome of the sowing.[212] This yields valuable insight into what Jesus was doing with the analogy. The risk of rejection was very real. The variety of outcomes of the disciples' ministries and ways of sharing may be implied as applications of Jesus' analogy use. For instance, the agricultural society immediately had visual pictures in their mind of the types of soil in Palestine that required attention to keep bumper crops for nutrition. The soil condition was tied to the proper location between highlands, fields, and valleys, as well as the livestock fertilizers, rocks, weeds, and

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[208] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 192-193. A kind of tension may be built as each of the three builds on the others before it. This could be utilized in sermons today to also build relatedness that is memorable but also action steps of faith in life.

[209] Ibid., 324-325.

[210] Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 2003), 244, 308.

[211] David C. Hopkins, "Life in Ancient Palestine," in *General and Old Testament Articles*, vol. 1, The New Interpreter's Bible, ed. Neil M. Alexander (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 218.

[212] Ibid., 217-219.

more.[213] Regular meteorological impacts required regenerating the narrow top layer of

Palestinian soil by rotating the type of crop on each patch often, irrigation trench changes or

relocation or modification as the crop changed fields, and use of livestock fertilizer to introduce

organic matter once again to sustain quality dirt.[214] Undesirable weeds would accompany the

small season of torrential rains. The parable of the sower demonstrates Jesus' awareness and

endorsement of the power of analogy for a preaching aid. Jesus' use of the analogy is hyper-local

in context, such as the Judean method of laying seed first and then plowing later.[215] The analogy

is fine-tuned for that exact audience. An implication might be that if the story were told in

another location, to the Mayans, or islands of Southeast Asia, the analogy would change. Still

another surprising aspect of Jesus' parable is it stands not as a single analogy. Multiple analogies

are present in the one parable such as the birds being parallel to the devil trying his attacks (Luke

8:12).[216] Luke tailors the translation from a Jewish "Satan" of Mark 4:15 over to the Greek name

"devil" for audience accessibility.[217] That may imply Jesus also tailored not just the analogy but

the wording depending on the audience. This analogy of the devil also gives a logical warrant for

why a perfectly good witnessing opportunity did not yield the desired response to a disciple. The

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[213] Hopkins, "Life in Ancient Palestine," 217. See also, 218. Locals targeted soils by altitude and erosion characteristics regularly. They allowed livestock onto fields to replenish them, 218. All of this was a local issue and would have been regularly on the listener's mind upon hearing Jesus. That is part of what makes the analogy lasting for future applications.

[214] Ibid., 217. Runoff of nutrients not just overuse of limited quality soil was an ongoing problem. While not mentioned, in theory the runoff of deluge rainfall, which is mentioned in 50 days, could carry weed seeds in too.

[215] Stein, *Luke*, 244. Robert Stein was a long-time Southern Baptist Theological Seminary preaching and interpretation professor and researcher. He was an occasional guest speaker in chapel at Southern as well.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid., 246.

analogy works because the Lord has created the operations of our world with parallels.[218] A

disciple may then easily remember the application that some have lost the word from their heart

or mind whom they share with in future personal ministries.[219] An additional application from

the minor analogy is a spiritual challenge. There may be lapsed Jewish believers in the crowd

who hear the challenge about the devil stealing the Word and it is a means to repent of

indifference.[220] It is then a deduction that even a main preaching analogy may have several

analogies built into it to create a wider application grid. An analogy could relate to various

congregational life concerns or spiritual states.

Jesus preaches analogies related to himself and salvation to redirect belief away from

false ideas of the Messiah. An instance of this is Jesus' comparison of regular water with living

spiritual water to focus the Samaritan woman on himself as Savior (John 4:15).[221] To expand the

knowledge and reality of the Savior in a person confused about the Lord, Jesus engages the

Samaritan woman with what she did observe immediately in her space.[222] In a materialistic

cultural outlook, preaching analogies may assist someone to understand the spiritual as a

bridge.[223] The spiritual bridge is analogous to various applications of faith in Jesus as Savior

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[218] Linton, "The Bible," 135. See also, France, *The Gospel*, 197. France does not make this exact point, but discusses mystery unveiled by the Lord. Likewise, tagging onto that, a spiritual principle may be drawn for application in an analogy that is not immediately obvious to merely human perception, but which the Lord reveals is nevertheless a valid point. The parable of the sower is unveiling a mystery using creation examples of the Creator.

[219] Stein, *Luke*, 246.

[220] William Hendriksen, *Mark*, vol. 2, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 156.

[221] Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *John and Acts*, vol. 9, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 75. Tenney was a professor of Greek and New Testament.

[222] Ibid. Jesus bridges a gap with rhetorical tools as well that impact life change and application.

[223] Ibid., 74.

given the well's proximity to Jacob's well.[224] Analogies also break through false religious

concepts using the natural world, such as Jesus' use of water near the heart of the false worship

center of the Samarians.[225] Also, the resentment and bitterness between separated people groups

may be overcome in an application utilizing a means of analogies by Jesus' example.[226] Persons

who would ignore another member of society typically may also be drawn together around the

person of Jesus who is renewing life.[227]

Another example of analogy as a redirect from false ideas is how Jesus preached to the

crowds gathered around him in John 6, after having fed at least 5,000 people. The miracle

establishes a testimony to his message as Messiah, where a few fish and five barley bread loaves

can be multiplied to feed all there, with excess leftover. Jesus is the greater Moses of Israel who

provides not just physical bread but spiritual as well.[228] Using the immediate environmental

awareness as a profound teaching application, Jesus says that he is the bread of life (John 6:35).

Crucial info is John 6:4 that the Passover was near. Moses had instituted the Passover. Mark has

the teaching recorded as near the Passover to point to Jesus as the fulfillment of the feasts and

annual gatherings of Israel.[229] The goal is to show the Lord over against Moses provided the

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[224] Tenney, "John," 54.

[225] Ibid., 54-55. Her focus on Jacob as their father reveals that Jesus must address, he is the greater Jacob.

[226] J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, vol. 4, New International Biblical Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007), 69.

[227] Tenney, "John," 57.

[228] Ibid., 75.

[229] Michaels, *John*, 99-100.

Exodus bread, and now the Lord is present with Israel which is meant to spark belief.[230] The

analogy is intended close to the embodied bread event so the application is to look unto Jesus. It

not only explains Jesus' authority and identity but also shows Jesus as the greater bread and

greater satisfaction than normal bread offers.[231] This is a type of lesser to greater comparison in

logic. A life experience and object just transpired points to current and greater future spiritual

truth. The spiritual food to feast on is what the Son of Man will give to them that will last into

eternity (John 6:27). The Son of Man is the focal point of a call to believe and be saved that the

analogy also will not allow being the local physical bread itself (John 6:27-29).[232] Therefore, the

tool Jesus uses points beyond just the comparison itself and directs the listener as well. It is not

just employed for clarity alone, therefore it is not a mere illustration. Both the imagery and the

argument, by comparison, linger easily in a hearer's mind for life application. The application is

eternal life in Jesus Christ by analogy.[233] A person should use what is immediately around them,

such as bread, to think and act on higher spiritual truths for the Lord Jesus.[234] Jesus is the original

bread from heaven and therefore has incalculable eternal value to use the lesser to reach.[235] Even

the bread that is left over is gathered up as Jesus is gathering all true sons and daughters of the

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[230] Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), 263.

[231] Tenney, "John," 75-76.

[232] Ibid., 75.

[233] William Hendriksen, *John*, vol. 4, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 233.

[234] Tenney, "John," 75-76.

[235] Ibid., 75.

Father.[236] Jesus is the one who has come to gather his people away from false religion within

Judaism.

There is a set of analogies common in the Bible used to preach God's nature to provide

assurance and hope through life situations. The Lord preaches of himself that he is a Rock in an

environment filled with impressive long-familiar terrain (Isaiah 26:4; 44:8). An applicatory point

from Isaiah's preaching in Isaiah 26 is the Lord may be trusted and will not disappear as a solid

rock unlike false allies such as Egypt.[237] The image for parallel applicatory use is also found in

Isaiah 17:10. Furthermore, the Lord speaks of himself using Shepherd imagery. This is using a

common job in the area as an analogy for God's caring assurance in life (Isaiah 44:28). God's

people in writer Asaph's time also use the title to call upon God in faith upon this image (Psalm

80:1). The applicability of the analogy remains in the 1st century AD when Jesus employed it to

appeal to hearers' expressing trust in him (John 10:1-14). Of these names or analogies for God,

theologian John Frame states their use should have more notice by preachers and teachers to

direct hearers' lives.[238]

Finally, there are categories of analogies that may call for greater faith and vision by

God's preaching. In the life of Abraham, he went from being called Abram, "exalted father," to

instead by God's doing Abraham as, the "father of a multitude."[239] This redirects Abraham to

think of what is possible and to believe in and carry out the promise. The analogy was

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[236] Michaels, *John*, 101.

[237] Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, vol. 15A, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 442.

[238] John Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 344. In person he also has spoken to me in 2006 about similar ideas at Southern Seminary Apologetics Club.

[239] Ibid., 345.

transformative of what could be so.[240] The point that Abraham was supposed to retain is that God

would keep a promise to make him a father to various nations (Genesis 17:6). The promise also

is to Sarah by way of a name change and being a mother to many (Genesis 17:15-16).[241] The

new names show the development of God's plans in their lives if they keep the faith.[242] The

application also is to benefit or bless others by one's keeping faith.[243] The analogy offers a

means by which Abraham and Sarah may maintain the covenant with the LORD for relationship

sake and the blessing of the nations.[244] The weightiness of the application for God's saving

history of mankind is astounding for a sinner saved by grace and yet it is handed to them with

analogies. While many tend to view these name analogies as just statements of fact, these aided

Abraham and Sarah to remember to keep the faith and see a larger horizon in life daily. One's

name is the ultimate hyper-local reminder of God's plan.

Still another Old Testament analogy for greater faith and vision is the Tabernacle sin

offering (Exodus 27; Leviticus 1-7; 16:3-34). The concept of a substitute of life for life is on

display daily in the Tabernacle's operations to the worshipper and priestly families alike. One

particular day shows a picture of a greater reality annually in Israel. On the high holy day of

Yom Kippur, the sins were removed by sacrifice that had been overlooked in the previous year.

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[240] David G. Buttrick, "The Use of the Bible in Preaching," in *General and Old Testament Articles*, vol. 1, The New Interpreter's Bible, ed. Neil M. Alexander (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 190. It is not stated her that one agree with all Buttrick says on this point, but his life changing work of God using literary and preaching tools point is well taken.

[241] Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," in *General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*, vol. 1, The New Interpreter's Bible, ed. Neil M. Alexander (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 457.

[242] Ibid., 459.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Ibid.

One goal was killed for the guilt at the altar. A goat named and labeled by the high priest as the 'go away goat,' or goat 'to Azazel,' was sent out from the Tabernacle or Temple out into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:20-22).[245] The naming of the goats is a picture. The goat killed and the one released represent expiation and propitiation of Israel's sins before the Lord to the worshipper. The worshippers may have wondered how sins could be forgiven by goats (Psalm 51:14-17; 59:9-13, 16; Hebrews 10:10-12). These questions or doubts could be used to point to the greater reality. They frame the analogy. The one who pays the price will come from Zion to save not through animals that the Tabernacle or Temple (Isaiah 59:20-22). This also introduces room to use questions along with an analogy. The sin and guilt offerings were meant to point to a greater spiritual reality in Christ (Psalm 51:16-17; Hebrews 9:13-14). There is also a display by the analogy of a mere servant to the Almighty Lord using the offering of an animal.[246] The lesser party brings an offering to the greater party for acceptance.[247] This was done in full view of all Israel showing a story of relationship to those observing.[248] The applications in these uses of an analogy are the holiness, greatness, and Messiah Kingship of the Lord (Hebrews 10:1-4). In Leviticus 16:2 the presence of the Lord in the form of a cloud about the holy altar showed acceptance of the offering and the people as a foreshadowing. The application is accepted by a holy God. Likewise, worship is enabled as it dawns on the worshipper the offerings are

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[245] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "Leviticus," in *General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus*, vol. 1, The New Interpreter's Bible, ed. Neil M. Alexander (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1112.

[246] Gary A. Anderson, "Introduction to Israelite Religion," in *General and Old Testament Articles*, vol. 1, The New Interpreter's Bible, ed. Neil M. Alexander (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 280-281.

[247] Ibid., 279. God is portrayed in bringing an offering as King who we have sinned against or not lived according to his standard. The gift was costly. Also, there is the standard of approach to deal with (Exodus 3:5; 19:1-13; Leviticus 16). The relationship must be restored or maintained. The sacrifice points forward to Christ' sacrifice, 280.

[248] Ibid., 280. Outside of the Tabernacle offerings, there is the approach of God matter too, Exodus 19.

inadequate but still draws an analogy to the better offering of the Lord, the Lamb (Hebrews 8;

Revelation 5:1-8). This is the ram that the Lord provides an idea as a substitute for acceptance

but expanded in meaning in Israel annually as a comparison (Genesis 22:13; Leviticus 16). The

application is further worship of the Lamb who could restore and justify the relationship with the

Lord far greater than a mere foreshadowing.

Names were used in the New Testament to indicate a parallel spiritual reality as well. The

true Lamb removes our sins and guilt away from us greater than the Tabernacle offerings ever

could (John 1:29). John's mention of the Lamb is deliberately vague enough as to include the

Lamb of the Exodus, the Lamb predicted to come in Isaiah 53, and the Lamb Jesus present.[249]

Since Lamb was a common meal item and significant in Israel's saving history this particular

analogy would have opened the eyes of the many hearers to listen carefully. The idea of sacrifice

and spiritual food is present by comparison. Even the related comments of John the Baptist about

baptizing drive the analogy showing that the Lamb is a mighty Savior from hell and judgment

that our sins deserve.[250] When Jesus approaches the river, John the Baptist used an analogy with

history and local context that was full of spiritual applications to trust in Jesus as Savior (John

1:36). The powerful analogy is used again by John the Apostle in Revelation 6:9 revealing the

Lamb that was slain according to the prophecies of that to come (Psalm 22). Framing questions

might also find a place in the above contexts. In Revelation 6, the context of both chapters 5 and

6 is the question of who the Lamb is. Regarding the Lamb of God appearing at the River Jordan

to be baptized people were asking questions, albeit wrongly thinking John was the Savior (John

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[249] Hendriksen, *John*, 98.

[250] Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus: Divine Messiah* (Ross-Shire, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 302. Reymond taught at Covenant Theological Seminary and Knox Theological Seminary in theology.

1:19-29).[251] John the Baptist preached the analogy to clarify and push belief towards Jesus when people were asking relevant questions.

Also, the use of an analogy for names impacts the Lord's disciples. The Lord Jesus preached of Simon that he would then be called Simon Peter (John 1:40-42) to call him to greater faith and vision. The nickname meaning "a rock" shows him he will by Jesus' help be a strengthening force in life to others.[252] This is an application for the horizons of the future that sees spiritual growth and strength to come.[253] Jesus carries the burden and speaks the truth into Peter's life of what God's power would accomplish.[254] Peter may have had many questions about this to himself. Those potential internal questions could be used to frame the goal of the analogy. Later on, Peter confesses Jesus' true identity as Lord and the Holy One which is foundational to the church (John 6:68-69). The statement by Peter endears a specifically ongoing belief in Jesus based on the Word to assist others as well.[255] That was a growth step revealed by the Father to Peter to stretch the man. This also points the disciples to Jesus' being God incarnate to build faith in others.[256] For Jesus, Peter's nickname is designed to remind and call greater faith and service out of Peter so he will lead churches to greater faith after Jesus' resurrection (John 6:68-69; Matthew 16:13-19). It is an applicatory vision. Another analogy of note in the Gospel of John is

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[251] Borchert, *John 1-11*, 125-126.

[252] Ibid., 143.

[253] Hendriksen, *John*, 106. Hendriksen was a Calvin Theological Seminary professor, a pastor, and had dual doctorates, including one from Princeton Theological Seminary. He influenced generations of pastors and professors.

[254] Ibid.

[255] Ibid., 248.

[256] Ibid., 276.

found in Jesus calling the disciples lambs (John 21:15). Peter is charged by Jesus to feed them

(John 21:15-17). The idea of the shepherd Jesus telling Peter to under-shepherd the lambs along

with him shows a widening spiritual growth resulting from Jesus' ministry and words.[257] The use

of the comparison of the lambs to disciples shows Jesus' tender affection and genuine love for

them.[258] The term sheep is not insulting but one of care.[259] Shepherds often cared for sheep by

bringing them daily to good grazing grass and safe waters. To an outsider watching, it looked

like an attentive concern for sheep. Taking care of the sheep was a labor of love.[260] Shepherds

would often stay in the field laying near the lambs (Luke 2:8). Notice that in all of this Jesus is

using framing questions on Peter as well (John 21:15-17). The analogy calls Peter to show the

kind of concern Jesus showed him to other Christians who are weaker.[261] Moreover, the role of

Peter and others in shepherding the early church set a pattern to repeat using the same analogy

(1st Peter 5:1-4). The example continues to have a practical application today.

Conclusion

In summary, a biblical basis exists to employ analogies in the application phase of

sermons. Questions used to frame an analogy are not absent either. The foundation of analogy

for a spiritual next step crosses covenants and genres of the Bible. Important theological

concepts are processed by hearers using biblical analogies for the greater spiritual maturity in

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[257] Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 335.

[258] Hendriksen, *John*, 488.

[259] Ibid. Hendriksen uses the word even "dear sheep."

[260] Ibid., 489.

[261] Ibid., 489-490.

scriptural history. The widespread use of analogy in application proves its value in connecting hearers to God's purposes for their lives. The Lord Jesus uses an analogy with relevant questions to call persons to belief as well. Another finding is that analogy not only clarifies or assists in memory but provides life direction to the hearers as well. Also, framing questions may assist in the use of analogies or statement applications to draw out a higher point to use for life.

Theoretical Foundations

Introduction

The current project is exploring new ground with the use of analogy framed by questions in the service of the narrow area of application. The goal is to measure through the use of surveys not only the memory of applications from sermons, but clarity, changes to the hearer's will or perspective, and evident life changes from the application. This is a highly specific facet within an expository sermon with no known exact match among recent existing action research. Therefore, the theological foundations found for this project will be combined with general guidance in the review of the literature to form a new research angle. However, the following theoretical foundations exist as generally relatable insights into expository sermon applications.

Previous related ministry research includes projects exploring aspects of expository sermon application generally. An example is a study conducted in a nearby regional city of North Carolina where the researcher focused on stories, objects, and pictures to increase the memory of the sermon.[262] That research was conducted in a similarly aged and educated Southern Baptist

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[262] Garin H. Hill, "The Effectiveness of Using Various Memory Cues in the Preaching Event at Sandy Plains Baptist Church in Shelby, North Carolina" (DMin thesis, Gardner-Webb University, 2015), iv, 8, 9, 17. The ironically same name and regional location is purely chance. This researcher has never visited or known anyone at the other Sandy Plains Baptist Church mentioned here. Nor are there any known church to church connections.

Church, but slightly smaller in size than the current research project.[263] The research stayed

intentionally broader than the use of just analogies in the application. Also, for that researcher

sermon application as a structural element was just one of their memory recall goals but was not

the only goal.[264] Their series testing range was four new resource-rich sermons spaced in-

between existing typically structured sermons over eight weeks. Various illustrative devices were

used to test general sermon memory, including applications, in those hearers. Research then

surveyed the hearers for how well they could select exact previous topics of the previous week's

themes from a list of possible themes.[265] The researcher Hill found that a pre-resource sermon

was remembered best ironically and that illustrations unless placed in the conclusion did not

increase sermon topic retention in his congregation.[266] Hill stated the Bible passage itself was

remembered better than the new illustration or topic resources in test sermons during the eight

weeks. A gap with that research is the current project's specificity of analogy and questions

deployed. Still, another gap is Hill's project focused on a broad sermon theme or topic

remembered rather than applications to precise areas of one's life.

Yet another ministry project with ties to the North Carolina church context but done in a

different state sought to create a life-changing vision in minds of the congregation for a changed

whole church expectation.[267] The goal was a shift from application heard as church consumers

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[263] Hill, "The Effectiveness of," 6-7.

[264] Ibid., 8-10, 11.

[265] Ibid., 8-10, 11-12.

[266] Ibid., 96, 102-103.

[267] David T. Averill, "Preaching APEST: Observing a Sermon Series, Based on Ephesians 4, as a Means of Beginning to Plant a Vision in a Local Congregation" (DMin thesis, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2019), 1-3. The aspect of creating vision look out points that the current project has for what is possible in a person's life created interest in this other earlier ministry project by Averill.

through a sermon series to application heard as a missional community in a given series.[268]

Surveying of the church members was performed both before the new source was deployed and

after the six-week testing period as well.[269] That method is also the approach the current

researcher took. Averill's surveys were primarily concerned with changes in belief and action

about using individual spiritual gifts inside the congregation for more biblical expectations of

whole church functioning.[270] The church demographics bear similarity to the current project but

in another Protestant denomination.[271] However, overlap exists on core orthodox doctrines of the

Christian evangelical faith. The new resource sermons of Averill utilized stories as larger

analogies of proper views of spiritual gifts in the congregation. As examples, illustrations were

brought in of then-contemporary figures such as Billy Graham, movements such as in China to

share the gospel as laypeople, and scriptural parallel stories were used as analogy-like

application resources.[272] False spiritual gift concepts found in a consumer church mindset were

by analogy contrasted to those and biblical characters on the use of spiritual gifts as a means to

enact change in the congregation. The results were effective to increase the use of spiritual gifts

among the entire congregation; however, only a sizable minority of the church participated in the

survey research.[273] A gap in that project exists in the lack of specific testing of shorter analogies.

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[268] Averill, "Preaching APEST," 4-6. This also resonates with the current project in that mass produced generic advice is not the goal. Averill means consumerism a bit differently, but the similar general idea is helpful.

[269] Ibid., 67-68. Insight from a kind of focus or leadership group was also included as an aside.

[270] Ibid., 66-67. Spiritual gift use is a great research topic; however, the current project is not restricted to just discerning or using one's spiritual gift. This is deliberate as the goal is improving any specific application here.

[271] Ibid., 8.

[272] Ibid., 101. The Vimeo sermon links revealed the means of analogy in outreach and serving.

[273] Ibid., 72, 77, 90-91, 102.

Beyond this, a gap is a lack in that project of individual life applications rather than viewing oneself primarily in church life as a community being. Of course, people are to live in a community for a healthy Christian life. However, the denominational bent of the other church project towards emphasizing community is not an obligation of the current project.

Still another research project involving newly deployed application grid techniques was found in the region in a North Carolina Southern Baptist congregation.[274] The study used surveying and feedback from six tailored messages measured by a specially arranged competent focus group.[275] The demographics and industrial history of the area and church are closely approximate to those in this current project.[276] A few minor similar foundational comments are made in that project's theological foundations section.[277] Several of the main eight applicational grid points do connect with the current project generally, namely tying application directly to the immediate life and situation of the hearers, their generational outlook, and the local church view of itself.[278] However, they do not connect with this project's emphasis on analogy specifically or framing application questions generally. Six sermons from the Letter of Ephesians form the project director's deployment of the new resource grid.[279] The current project has also utilized a sermon series, but in a different book from the Old Testament. A smaller and specially trained

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[274] Eric N. Peacock, "The Improvement of the Sermon Application Skill to Enhance the Preaching Ministry of the Pastor at Westchester Baptist Church High Point, North Carolina" (DMin thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 4-9, 96-98.

[275] Ibid., x.

[276] Ibid., 4-5.

[277] Ibid., 8-9.

[278] Ibid., 75. See also, 103 where a local Baptist Church results regarding a grid method are shared in summary.

[279] Ibid., 77.

member control group of 21 individuals was used to survey the new resource results.[280] That is a marked difference from the current project which has an open survey to reach attendees where they are at in understanding of the application. Questions chosen for the evaluation survey tended toward the generalized, big picture goals of application rather than individual life changes and decisions.[281] The results of the other project were in line with the author's pre-research goals. There was increased knowledge of sermon application generally, increased diversity of application points generally were obtained, and a new grid to use for future preaching was established.[282] The researcher admitted many weak points from surveys in the actual improvement of application to the mind of the hearer, not just the pulpit delivery.[283] The researcher appeared to have emphasized overarching grace and redemption themes to the detriment of specific, local applications from his results neglecting increased personal hope in daily life and relating truth to contemporary life decisions.[284] Both aspects of application matter in the view of this current project, however. The gap between projects is that the current project intends to drill down on exactly localized life analogies and direct to situational need questions. In what might have been expected, an admitted weakness of the other ministry project was its lack of immediately apprehended application to some of his control group members.[285] The relevancy of the other project also suffered the researcher stated with those far from the Lord in

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[280] Peacock, "The Improvement of," 78-79.

[281] Ibid., 79-81.

[282] Ibid., 82-88, 97.

[283] Ibid., 97-98. The list of weak points in application makes it clear the project did not connect to the church as would be desired; however, that project researcher was glad to have expanded his application tools.

[284] Ibid., 97-99.

[285] Ibid., 100-102.

their lives.[286] In a potential contrast, the other project researcher hoped to generalize application further as a third post-project observation, even though that appeared to create tension to other post-project observations.[287] The current project aimed to use a much wider range of local, personal applications throughout the test series. There are larger church world applications, but they rely upon local applications first to then enable the wider horizon's possibilities. The current project's approach fits well with the gained experience suggestions found in the conclusion of the other ministry project.[288]

Another Southern Baptist local church project focused upon sermon application was conducted by and evaluated using a group of highly trained hearers.[289] The highly trained hearers are part of the local preaching team and were engaged in evaluation to improve their skills for the congregation's benefit.[290] A small number of the church member lay minister respondents were sought but did not enlist in the survey.[291] The project included application as one part of a ten-step evaluation for sermon structure improvement, with a survey group utilized that closely follows an implicit McDill preparation method. Their project aimed primarily for greater faith, but the larger faith goals were regularly explained using other American preaching authors, such

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[286] Peacock, "The Improvement of," 101.

[287] Ibid., 100-101.

[288] Ibid., 108-109. For instance, the other researcher having realized the general mistake, later on decided in personal ministry to try more specific applications.

[289] Bob C. Greene, "The Priority of Homiletics in Preaching Teams: A Strategy for an Effective Homiletical Process for Christ-Centered, Gospel-Driven, Expository Sermons" (DMin thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 24-25.

[290] Ibid., 25-26. Though not all asked to participate in their study did so. Whereas it is the view of this project that creating so-called highly trained hearers would skew the natural results and feedback for good or ill.

[291] Ibid., 68. This seemed to surprise that researcher, and it might have impacted his feedback balance.

as Tim Keller, Edmund Clowney, etc.[292] The focus on systematic doctrines of grace and other

sermon structural elements minimized the focus in the project on several areas of individual

application.[293] Also, an analogy is not used in the project samples as often as McDill suggested

in his book, but some similar framing questions are used in the application section which is

relevant to this project.[294] The project explored shedding light on clarity about the person of

Jesus and God's saving eras of history within sermon movements as pointers toward

argumentation and application.[295] Among the target preaching team survey responses, there was

increased sense of purpose in orienting preaching towards the heart of the gospel.[296] However,

the researcher discovered a need to continue training the team on the utmost value of preaching,

including application tied to Jesus Christ.[297] Results of the improved application research attempt

were semi-negative, with respondents preferring more real-life connections and less abstract

doctrines in those sermons.[298] The main limitations of Greene's project were its narrow focus on

up-and-coming preachers inside a local church as a primary focus group. Also, they were a very

small size sample for a primary focus group. There also is an academic tendency in Greene's

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[292] Greene, "The Priority of," 149-150. Other steps of the McDill preaching method couched in other authors are utilized.

[293] Ibid., 40-49. Page 52 is an example of how a positive emphasis on grace allowed avoiding other commands of the Scripture, such as moral imperatives. This was likely unintentional, and just an overcorrection.

[294] Ibid., 163, 181, 185, 196-197.

[295] Ibid., iv, 62, 63, 135, 138, 148-149, 155, 163. He also utilizes the Professor Bryan Chapell FCF preaching tools in application and sermon focus.

[296] Ibid., 94-95.

[297] Ibid., 95, 98. This is a particular need to train the preaching team to look for Jesus Christ and application tied to him in the appropriate section. Limited time and lack of clarity about the purpose of application were reasons.

[298] Ibid., 96, 98-99, 100.

hopes for what were non-academic church preaching team trainees. That skewed the impact on the congregation's gain or loss from the attempted resources.

An additional project in preaching the majored-on application explored impact upon a focus group within the church over seven weeks.[299] The sermons were intentionally Bible-based and only testing personal improvement in sermon application clarity.[300] The current project by contrast is testing more than clarity alone as a means for effective application. In a similar theological way to this project, Stults argued for a meeting point of the hearers' life needs and the timeless truth of the Bible.[301] The argumentation for this meeting place's detail and justification inside of the expository sermon was briefer than the current project by comparison.[302] The use of a testing group within the church body as a focus group was also a marked difference between the projects.[303] It is theorized in the current project that an open survey to regular attenders is a more accurate reflection of application impact compared to Stults' project. A similarity is that those evaluating the new application attempt in a sermon series over weeks still had to be regular attendees in worship during the test sermon series.[304] A major difference is that the team that evaluated the applications was by invitation only for

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[299] Robert A. Stults, "Enhancing the Project Director's Preaching Skills in Sermon Application at Oak Point Baptist Church, Algiers, Louisiana," (DMin thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), vii, 5-6.

[300] Ibid., vi, 1-3, 9, 12, 14, 16, 43-44. Stults admits that he saw application was broader for improvement after the project. In the project, again his focus is largely clarity which he believes will yield life change from the text itself. Others are quoted by Stults to support his goal of clarity on application for the audience hearers.

[301] Ibid., 10-11, 43, 107.

[302] Ibid., 5-26, 43-44, 54, 80-81. In theory, this may have been one cause of that project's trouble with application effectiveness.

[303] Ibid., 5-6, 44-45.

[304] Ibid., 105-106.

Stults.[305] Both that and the current project aimed to provide a friendly environment for a cross-section of demographic backgrounds.[306] Also, both projects used a Likert scale evaluation scheme for the surveys to compare data.[307] This scale allows a familiar to the participant way to quantify the potential improvement in both projects. However, Stults' survey questions are geared towards a different set of sermon application emphases focused more on clear presentation.[308] There are also far fewer questions on his project surveys than one might anticipate to get a needed spectrum of feedback.[309] The project's author admitted after research that the focus on clarity and faithfulness to the text alone was complete for improved application effectiveness.[310] In the end, the renowned bridge from the past statement of truth to the present statement for application of the current audience was neglected.[311] There was a great deal correct about Stults' project in its focus on expository sermon impact on spiritual maturity. The main limitation was too narrow a focus on being accurate to a text's meaning as if that completes a preacher's task of the application section.

One additional ministry project is worth noting that delved into improvement in sermon applications at a local Baptist church.[312] The ministry project facilitator Scally mentions it is a

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[305] Stults, "Enhancing the Project," 106.

[306] Ibid., 106.

[307] Ibid., 108. The scale also offers a way to allow accessible further research on the topic after this current project. This is comparable to using standard or metric wrench sockets so that others could build upon what is done.

[308] Ibid., 116-118. Beyond this, the surveys employed in Stult's project are filled with less questions to drill down or narrow down insights.

[309] Ibid.

[310] Ibid., 58-59. Clear application is of course important. However, he discovered clarity alone did not suffice.

[311] Ibid., 57-58.

slightly smaller church than the current project's Sunday worship attendance.[313] Similarity exists

in the industrial sector jobs that dominated its area until the jobs were sent overseas.[314] The same

psychographic of loss and slow rejuvenation exists in Gastonia, NC. However, Gastonia, NC has

rebounded stronger and with more people than Scally's church city. Application is the primary

area of research for Scally as opposed to just one component of the work.[315] Scally is influenced

by contrast more towards the role of exploring the valuable insights of Christ-centered

application points.[316] This project will use those same Christ-centered applications but not

exclusively that one area of application for every sermon division. Both projects by comparison

are covering an entire book of the Bible in the new resource series.[317] However, Scally's ministry

project explored the sermon's improvement using a hybrid middle way of focus group and

congregation. Scally had a focus group volunteer to participate which then became the feedback

group.[318] An applicational grid was not used in either ministry project, after researching experts

on sermon application.[319] Both projects saw the use of a grid as a potential disturbance to testing

close reading to the scriptural text sermon divisions. A much smaller sampling of members was

targeted and asked by the ministry researcher in the other project for a focus group.[320] The

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[312] Joshua Scally, "Strengthening the Skill of Sermon Application in Expository Preaching," (DMin thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 5. Both projects are using a Bible-based approach and theology.

[313] Ibid., 5-6.

[314] Ibid., 5. Both areas have rural or semi-rural characteristics, see also 11.

[315] Ibid., 8.

[316] Ibid., 8-10, 69-70, 80-83, 97, 100, 110.

[317] Ibid., 14, 93-94.

[318] Ibid., 14-15, 96-98. Also, Sunday morning sermons were the focus of his study too.

[319] Ibid., 98. Of course, both projects do show respect for those authors who suggest the grids, but the grid is not the main point of the application testing in either.

sermon resources were also deployed similarly on Sunday mornings in the main worship service.[321] A potential weakness is that Scally's survey forms were kept in visible church areas even though he stated a desire to keep final focus group participants anonymous.[322] There were some minor issues with the forms and averages as a result.[323] General results included different answers between an expert panel and the main focus group and also application being too much information for a person to process.[324] High marks were received by Scally for connecting the Bible's truth to seeing controversial current events in the United States in related sermons in his 1st Timothy series.[325] While not testing just visual applications, there is a similarity in that that project researcher found strong approval from the focus group in those application methods.[326] A takeaway is that the current project finds directional affirmation from Scally's project while also representing an entirely novel angle.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

In summary, these explored ministry projects aid a theoretical framework to tackle the general topic of application both to guide and also steer away from less effective methods. Positive results in certain respects leave a reasonable expectation for a means to test new application resources here as well. The current project endeavors to break new ground by using short, highly localized analogies of life experiences near to the congregational hearer's

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[320] Scally, "Strengthening the Skill," 101-102.

[321] Ibid., 102.

[322] Ibid., 102, 108.

[323] Ibid., 108-109.

[324] Ibid., 108, 111. See also, 112.

[325] Ibid., 113-114.

[326] Ibid., 114.

worldview in application sections. Framing questions surrounding the application point in the current project will also aim for micro-metropolitan events, experiences, and life outlooks. General preaching illustrations or concepts in other parts of the world or national evangelicalism are not the focus. The general sermon structure or general sermon idea is not the new resource goal of this project. The existing research tends toward broad sermon or application recall or effectiveness on the one hand. Or the existing research leaves a gap by surveying smaller groups with a variety of unpredictable tools of illustration, which did not yield as useful a study for application improvement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As outlined earlier, the current problem is a long-term comfort level of remaining at existing spiritual maturity levels. This is blocking the effort to consider or envision new avenues of sermon application in a hearer's life. The problem to be addressed is pressing as the local area is about to experience rapid environmental and social change. The purpose of the project was to assist church attendees of Sandy Plains Baptist Church to better apply sermons to their individual lives in a shared local environment. This project tested a thesis, that if the application sections of sermon points are framed with analogies and questions, then the hearers will be better able to apply the sermon to their lives. This undertaking supported the goal of improved sermon application of biblical truths to real-life scenarios faced by attendees.

Intervention Design

The project intervention took place at Sandy Plains Baptist Church in Gastonia, North Carolina. This was in the two Sunday worship service venues. These are the main worship center, which is the Family Life Center building, a 900-person max capacity gym with movable chairs, and a smaller chapel with pews. The multi-use Family Life Center is set up for worship temporarily each Sunday morning. The facility is equipped with a full worship set, a pulpit, church chairs, acoustical tiles, lighting systems, and a full tech team. It serves as the contemporary service home. The chapel is a 100-person venue with pews, hymnals, traditional furniture, stained glass for the traditional service. These settings reflect a typical, normal worship service for this local church congregation. The regular attendees of the Sunday 8:30 and 10:30

am worship services received sermons that had new resources for applications deployed each

Sunday sermon of a series. The sermon series was designed to be deployed from February 28th

through March 21st, 2021. The new resources are specifically the use of framing questions

preceding or following an analogy for application. The primary emphasis was the use of

analogies in the application. The framing questions assist the analogies or accompany them. The

goal was to connect a scripture passage's truth to a real-life scenario or environment for the local

hearers. There were three application sections in each test sermon of the series introduced. The

current research facilitator's sermons offer four and a half years of previous expository Sunday

service application methods for congregational comparison in response surveys.

The Resources Deployment

The new application resources were tested in a four-week expository sermon series in the

two Sunday morning worship services. This provided the maximum access to the general church

congregation that is available regularly. The length of the test series also enabled a congregant to

notice the changes and make personal judgment calls as to the new resources' effectiveness. To

ensure stakeholder participation, the sermon series was long enough to include every-other-week

Sunday worship attendance. This flexibility allowed for reaching the regular attender at Sandy

Plains Baptist Church over a memorable space of time. The potential reach of the current

research plan was hundreds of regular attendees present most weeks a month. It was theorized

most regular attendees would be present in the late winter to early spring of 2021. This was far

enough into Covid vaccination season and far enough away from the post-holiday dips to reach

many attendees. A small nominal number of regular live stream viewers were a part of the study

via YouTube and the church email newsletter. These were able to do the online survey as well in

this research. The research was open to any regularly attending member or non-member who is 18 years or older.

IRB approval was sought in early February 2021. IRB approval was then granted on February 15th, 2021. Beyond this, there was no external or internal church board needed for additional approvals. The Sandy Plains Baptist Church volunteer Personnel Committee was informed of the doctoral work and is supportive. The Senior Pastor facilitator also is the only preacher on Sunday mornings. There was no denominational higher authority needed to implement the new resource sermons from the pulpit. Resources in the project were the congregation, announcements, email newsletters, the worship services including an expository sermon and paper bulletin, recruitment letters, and the online survey response service. The same surveys and announcements were used in both worship services.

<div align="center">Details on the Resources Deployed</div>

The primary focus of the planned intervention resources was the utilization of analogies in particular for application sections of an expository sermon. On this main emphasis, the intervention analogies located in the application sections of the sermon are designed to show the practicality of the truth to the hearer's life. The analogies were purposely crafted to relate to local life experiences, common life experiences, or natural objects in the area. A hearer in the audience previously may have perceived the shared passage's truth as theoretical or for someone else's situation. An analogy that strikes close to home will be designed to overcome the risk of ignoring the application. Besides this, the analogy at each sermon application point will be deployed to aid in viewing new horizons of living out God's will for the hearer. Analogies then are designed to overcome any ongoing spiritual maturity level plateau in a hearer. The purpose of the analogy

was to assist with the next steps of faith that might be missed if they were left entirely to the hearer's thoughtfulness or imagination. Analogy it was believed maximized the short time allowed in a Sunday message for a hearer to process the personal use of an application section. Analogies introduced will seek to go beyond generic applications, "give to missions," "love your neighbor," "rest more in Jesus to carry your burden," into detailed parallels of nearby life situations with very specific options to act, hope, rest, and believe. The primary focus then was an additional tool for removing the peril of quickly forgotten, simply overlooked, and generally misunderstood applications.

On the second emphasis, framing questions are deployed to regain the hearer's attention and remove obstacles to seeing how truth may apply to their life. Framing questions are secondary in importance in this research to the use of analogy. Questions that set the field of view inside the hearer's mind are like zooming in on an object with binoculars. The questions are an invitation to look through the binoculars to see more clearly. Questions are like a friend saying zoom in and look over here at this. They are like a spotter with a scope telling the hunter where to look in detail across a larger landscape of life. Hearers may otherwise be thinking during the sermon delivery of an unrelated topic, of where to eat lunch after service, or still reflecting on a previous sermon or application point. The framing question removes some of those obstacles by reengaging the hearer into a conversation in the mind about how a present sermon application section may connect to their life realities. The wording of the question was with local flair. The emphasis of the crafted questions was detailed rather than generic ideas. The manner of delivering the questions was to be kept in a similar tone to existing expository sermons. It was to be not uttered too quickly so that it would have time to be processed by

attendees. In addition, the framing questions were not spoken in a harsh or over-emphasized way. Questions were also kept to the point, which allowed the analogy application to stand out.

To compare the typical sermon versus the new sermon application, a contrast with previous applications was occasionally drawn in the sermons. For example, the usual way versus the new way of application could be highlighted by mentioning phrases like this one, "in the past, myself or another, maybe told you just believe this, but imagine with me how if we go a step further, believing impacts real life this way, _____." By pointing out a new step further into a question about or analogy of their daily life, they could realize something new was placed before their ears. Instead of a comment or bare challenge, there is also a mental picture designed with extra hard work to stand out upon its hearing. Another way that comparison may be brought out is the mention of adding in an analogy, with transitional phrases such as, "Instead of just leaving it to chance how we might do this, think about it like this when you go to the grocery store and the checkout clerk does not even acknowledge your existence, how does that make you feel?" The "think about it like this," while seemingly mundane is a powerful invitation to envision horizons. Then the analogy was highlighted as a natural experience of what not to do (or other times of what to believe, do, feel, or rest in).

The ethical question of the research will be addressed for a moment. Beyond these above points, the new resources will not be performed using research deception but will therefore be openly employed for the hearers. Deception used in some social action research projects would not fit the purpose or goal of this current project. In addition, only volunteers are utilized in the research surveys. Therefore, the utilization of new resources will not be a hidden secret to the congregational attendees. The new resources are reasonably considered benign and non-

damaging to attendee health. While such resources have not been employed extensively in the

past if at all, these are not radically divergent sermon tools. For instance, while analogy has not

been used in the past for application, yet analogies have been used in transitions in previous

years. No noticeable harmful effects were noted from those uses in previous years. Likewise, the

framing questions are in a new location in the sermons, the application section. However,

occasional or rare use of a framing question has been used to introduce expository sermons at

Sandy Plains Baptist Church previously. They were not used extensively, but no known

problems resulted from those questions. The above points protect the well-being and the health

of the Sandy Plains Baptist Church congregation in the research. Therefore, the planned risk to

the attendees is minimal from this action research project. This also helps to maintain a low-risk

research study format. Going a step further, the research applications will be for morally good

and worthy agenda items. It was planned so that each sermon's application section encouraged

upright and grace-founded suggestions for Christian living. Legalism and libertinism were

avoided in all application sections. Grace-oriented empowerment for doing suggested

applications was planned to be mentioned in each sermon to prevent any risk of legalism. This

also kept the project in a low-risk category for social research.

The Quantitative Surveys

The congregation was perceived based upon past experiences to be adept at noticing

changes to the sermon. This perception has been true, whether adjustments involved sermon

structure, locations of illustrations, stage resources, means of calling for a response, or style of

delivery. Verbal feedback on sermon adjustments unrelated to this project in the past at the test

location gives credence to the belief a survey will be highly effective as an evaluation. An

example of this was the attendees have noticed and commented on the change from one-point to

three-point sermons or vice versa. Attendees also have widely picked up on the use of subject and predicate sermon divisions compared to mere statements or even inductive versus deductive sermons. Attendees do not mention these by name but still note the adjustments. This awareness of the congregation to expository sermon changes yields itself to survey usage.

The planned research included two online surveys. The two surveys used a single set of questions found in Appendix B. This online survey was deployed before the new resources to evaluate a baseline in the congregation for later analysis. The baseline is to ascertain how currently hearers judge sermons are applying to their real-life issues. The attendees reasonably may be expected to give honest and perceptive answers. Then the four-week series was to commence. The second use of the same survey was to be opened the Wednesday after the third Sunday sermon. This was near enough to the ending of the four-week series to catch a person in case they miss a week of regular worship. This online survey occurs after the deployment of the new resources in three of the four-week sermon series. The second survey tests the effectiveness of the resources to attendees. Surveys are theorized to offer a concrete metric to keep the evaluations on track and relevant to the main focus of the research. It was theorized that the set questions will maintain a focus in the attendee responses. Surveys also work well with a generally busy attendee. The hearers often have substantial work, family, and life commitments outside of Sunday worship services. Additional details of the announcing and implementation of these surveys will follow next.

Detailed Steps of the Surveys of Attendees of the New Sermon Series

Surveying will be conducted using an action research tool, the Likert scale. An online survey service www.surveymonkey.com will be used for both surveys' data collection. The

Likert scale offers advantages to this project. A Likert scale escapes meandering answers or simple yes-no answers, which ensures an accurate gauge of project effectiveness. As a statistical tool, a t-test will be used to evaluate the Likert scale results of both surveys in the analysis phase.

There are ten project questions in the assigned online survey plus four general demographic information questions. Each survey should take a hearer less than three minutes online to complete. Again these survey questions are presented in Appendix B. Questions on the survey will focus on application rather than expository preaching in general, overall sermon themes, or on sermon delivery style. These were anonymously evaluated to gauge their usefulness to the church and to ensure effective research data. The research project as a means to improve the worship service element of the message was announced from the pulpit for a week before the first survey is available. This established awareness and anticipation in the regular attendees. It was explained as a way to test the ongoing improvement of sermons for the benefit of all attending. Announcements it was planned make clear there will be two surveys in total for those who wish to participate. Appendix C has a copy of the planned announcements. These will be made from the sermon pulpit, listed in the Sunday service print bulletin, and the weekly Wednesday church email newsletter. These are the regular means of communication in this particular church congregation. When an event, project, or option of note is placed before the church it would be through these avenues normally.

One survey was planned to be available before the targeted new sermon series. The other it was stated was to be available after the new sermon series has been deployed and is wrapping up. The first survey was to be offered a week and a half before the new four-week sermon resources are utilized in Sunday morning worship. It was available to click on a link in two church Wednesday email newsletters and the link available to type in from a Sunday morning

print church bulletin the Sunday a week before the new series starts. The surveys were to be announced as anonymous, voluntary, a participant must be at least 18 years old, and a regular attender. First survey participation access online was to be cut off late Saturday night before the first Sunday of the new sermon series start. This ensured that the data was accurate for the t-test analysis to be done later. The Sunday morning after that Saturday cut off the new sermon series resources were instituted in worship services. Then after the start of the new sermon series, the first two Sundays and weeks after the new sermon series begins were not to have any survey availability. This changed with the third Sunday sermon installment in the series. On the Wednesday after the third Sunday sermon of the series the second survey launched.

The second survey was to be made available for a week and a half after the Wednesday following the third Sunday morning sermon in the four-week resource series. The second survey was to be announced from the third Sunday morning announcements to the fourth Sunday from the front church pulpit. It was to be activated that week for the Wednesday newsletter after worship. The survey was to be made available in the regular church email newsletter following both those Sundays by a web link and in the church bulletins with a link that may be typed in any browser. Statements that a participant in the survey was anonymous, voluntary, must be at least 18 years old, and a regular attender will be made from the pulpit and in the wording of the email newsletter and bulletin again. The availability of the survey at the third-week point allowed participation by those who may be out of town or working the fourth week of worship. Most attendees would generally know their next weekend schedules in advance. This testing period could reflect an accurate memory of the new sermon series application sections as a result. Those who plan to be at the fourth week's message it was to be mentioned can wait until after the fourth week to fill out their second survey. The second survey was planned to close late in the

evening on Saturday after the fourth Sunday of the series. This allowed for two Wednesday weekly newsletters to invite participation and to include the new survey link once again. This also allowed for two weeks of print literature to include survey awareness.

As an additional reminder, on the last Sunday of the series, a printed paper handout with the printed survey link was to also be available in the entry and exit areas. This recruitment reminder was to be placed on a table near but not blocking the Sunday worship centers' exit doorways. If someone throws away or forgets his or her church worship bulletin, this would help them still participate in the research. Since that is an occasional occurrence after worship services, this is a needed effectiveness measure to ensure the involvement of the willing but forgetful. An attempt was made to emphasize the immediacy of filling out surveys as soon as an attendee may do so. It was believed this would yield better survey participation. The tendency to procrastinate was then headed off in advance. The announcements did not encourage by the wording any waiting until the last minute to complete the survey. Still, the week and a half time frame for the baseline first survey and the results second survey was generous enough to increase participation. It is theorized this would provide an accurate cross-section of the regularly attending congregation to be able to respond. The four-week sermon series deployment also minimized the risk of one-off attendance by a random visitor in the Sunday worship services.

Also, the aforementioned pulpit requests to fill out the survey were phrased in a gentle, appreciative, and asking for help in manner and tone. This is an appeal to human nature. It was theorized that attendees are more prone to assist another person when an ask is framed as a help in this way. It was also mentioned as a potential help to the church's worship service effectiveness. This enabled multiple possible reasons for attendees to participate of their own

free will. This local congregation had responded positively to asks to help and was thought likely to do so again.

Both the first and second surveys online included an informed consent section. This is listed out in Appendix A. This was on the first landing page explaining the participant is anonymous and that they are involved voluntarily. This was located at the beginning of the online survey so that proceeding in the online survey further represents an agreement to voluntarily be involved by its terms. The end of the survey also had a submit the survey button to enable another opportunity for a participant to drop out if desired. In this manner, they could opt out freely by not submitting question answers finally on the survey. This was done by utilizing a reject if not submitted feature on the www.surveymonkey.com survey website platform.

Triangulation

Maintaining an effective study is of the utmost importance. Several perspectives will be utilized in the research phase to ensures this. The internal data was taken from congregational surveys, anonymous, and was in the form of answers to the surveys, using the Likert scale research questions. These form the core of the research responses. Beyond this, the research facilitator kept a reflective journal during the research process. This allowed the facilitator to maintain a clear recollection of the study. The notation journal also permitted the facilitator to minimize the intrusion of personal bias during the research. The notes offered a more objective mirror to evaluate the course and execution of the project in real-time. After the research data was received, the notes provided a way to reference the carrying out of the project beyond mere memory. Besides these, contact with the mentor was planned and carried out during the research project to eliminate biases. Also, an external doctorate level pastor and church coach was sought

out for insight to look over the survey data and insights. This was a person chosen who has

decades of experience in preaching and teaching as well. The above methods ensured successful

action research.

Criteria for Success in the Design

Several main improvements to the sermons for listener application were expected

improvements of accessibility of nearness of the application to a listener's situations, clarity

about a next step to take in obedience to the Lord, and the recollection of application points more

poignantly. Beyond the primary criteria, others were hoped to prove helpful in evaluation.

Additional lesser criteria of success may also be found in reengaging the attention of a hearer

using an analogy or a profound question. Whereas a person may tune out easily, the new

resources are similar to hitting a reset button in the mind to listen once again. Still another lesser

criterion could be people sensing the pastor connects better to who they are. This it was planned

could open up application receptivity in the hearer's hearts. The more reception of application

challenges that exists, the better the usefulness of the resource-rich series would be. The

familiarity of the analogy or question makes it accessible to real life. A further criterion of

success was a claim to an increasingly changed life by the hearers from the resources in action.

Success it was hoped would be shown in better scores on the Likert scale upon second survey

completion. These criteria were evaluated using quantitative research.

During the new sermon series worship announcements, one-time visitors were asked not

to participate in the survey. Therefore, if someone stumbled upon a worship service for the first

time during the initial action research the data would not be skewed. From the pulpit, when the

second survey link was announced, it was stated politely a visitor should not fill out a survey

response form also the third and fourth weeks of the series. Also, social media was not used to promote the research study to remove the possibility that rare attenders or non-attenders know about or could fill out any survey.

Besides this, the regular attending congregation was informed that the surveys were both anonymous from the pulpit and to express their sincere observations as they were led. That positive announcement helped include responses from even the hesitant but regular attendees. Since the attendees at Sandy Plains Baptist Church as a group generally were open to the use of informal surveys in the past it was theorized these announcements would result in a large portion of those present sharing honest opinions. The attendees have expressed opinions openly about other church improvement questions in the past as well. Other areas where they have shared and turned in responses include worship song ideas or preferences, worship service times, and church meal ideas.

Data

The data collected will be displayed using visual aids such as graphs. It was also to be listed with trend observations and analysis of the demographic info of the respondents. The research results were explained in-depth as well to compare project intentions with actual perceived improvement to the sermon application. The analysis sought to allow the congregation's worship experiences with sermon application to stand out. Survey data were stored anonymously in the website cloud. The survey data was downloaded for additional safe keeping from the survey website upon the deadline for the project's completion. The anonymity of respondents was protected by using the online survey method plus not requiring the name, the

exact age, or personally identifiable information of the respondent in the survey. This data was

stored on a password-protected external hard drive inside of a locked office.

A variety of visual aids of received data were explored in the analysis process. The data

sets were analyzed with tools for reporting results from the www.surveymonkey.com online

platform. The platform has an analysis section for such a purpose. This includes survey trend

lines of improved or not results from the data. A t-test was used to evaluate the project's

resources effectiveness from the baseline survey through to the completed final second survey.

Also, a follow-up pastoral thank you to those who participated was placed in the next Sunday's

worship bulletin announcements and mentioned from the pulpit. This will also serve the dual

purpose of informing all present that the research has concluded. The survey links and handouts

were intentionally deleted from announcements materials after each timeline for survey

completion arrived. Once the research was completed overall results were available to share with

any interested regular attendee congregants.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The expository sermon application action research unfolded with an effective

implementation at Sandy Plains Baptist Church, Gastonia, North Carolina. The testing of the new

resources was carried out with full diligence from mid-February 2021 through the end of March

2021. The research facilitator kept a notes journal for triangulation and set up the volunteer

survey response system per the planned steps. Overall, the project moved ahead with no major

surprises. There was at least one smaller surprise during the deployment of resources on

February 28th, 2021 as mentioned below. However, the general use of the new sermon resources

was exactly as planned previously. No known negative effects were observed in the implementation of the research project.

<center>First Survey and Notes Preparations</center>

An online survey system with access to evaluation of data with tools was used. This is www.surveymonkey.com services. The facilitator set up an account and spent substantial time learning the creation and evaluation process of the survey system. Preparation of the online survey forms, the planned questions word for word, and logic steps for the survey were done during the week of February 15th, 2021. The facilitator studied articles, asked for online email help, and then explored creating a survey using the service.

A regular church newsletter email invitation per the plan was coordinated with the church secretary in the office at Sandy Plains Baptist Church the same week. The planned information was placed as an announcement near the top of the list of announcements. The regular Wednesday newsletter February 17th, 2021 was deployed informing volunteer participants how they might in the future take the survey. This week the regular church bulletins for the 8:30 and 10:30 am had the invitation to a research study by volunteers as planned inside of it. Handouts with the proper information were stationed by the doorway off to the side on a desk as well, in case someone threw away their bulletin or forgot it. The link was provided along with the invitation. On Sunday, February 21st, 2021 the research facilitator as Senior Pastor announced the survey that had been promoted in the newsletter and bulletin. This was done from the pulpit in the services that day. The response seemed to be generally normal and positive to the announcement. The survey responses initially came in slowly from February 17th through early on Sunday the 21st. However, later on, Sunday the 21st after worship services through Saturday,

February 27th, the online survey participation by church attenders in worship picked up. The

survey turned off as planned on Saturday the 27th. This allowed a week and a half for the first

survey. The first survey provided the baseline of previous sermon applications, per the planned

intervention for research.

The new sermon strategy was deployed on Sunday, February 28th, 2021. The new

application and framing questions were used in that sermon for a new series as planned. The

series utilized the book of Haggai which was short enough to allow for an expository three-point

per sermon series. The first Sunday was a message delivered virtually due to Covid-19 impacting

the family of the research facilitator that weekend. However, this was not a difficult adjustment

since our Sandy Plains Baptist Church's Audio-Video team has been doing this during the

Covid-19 pandemic in the United States. The sermon was delivered in an authoritative-looking

place at the Pastor's home in his study. The research facilitator also had experience with

delivering online messages due to the worldwide pandemic in 2020, so it was an easily

recoverable situation. There was the necessary pre-event practice and ability to pull it off

effectively. A Call 'Em All system call was used to inform the congregation there would be the

one 10:30 am service, with worship, prayer, and giving in person, but the message was delivered

virtually in the regular worship location. The first sermon was delivered in the one 10:30 am

worship time-space via YouTube at the appropriate time in service. This worked well given this

Covid-19 event in the facilitator's family and the inability of finding a guest speaker on short

notice during the Covid-19 season in North Carolina. Covid fear and travel fears remained high it

is perceived into March 2021. The plan had been for February 28th to include two Sunday

worship services, one at 8:30 am and one at 10:30 am, both in person. However, there was just

one service that day at 10:30 am instead. After the fact, it can be reported that the Sandy Plains

Baptist Church congregation did attend the 10:30 am service in person like they were used to doing. So, this did not negatively impact the research that Sunday. The first intervention-designed sermon on February 28th, 2021 was delivered as planned from Haggai 1:1-6. The sermon actively used both application analogies and framing questions for each sermon division point. The sermon title was "The Priority of God's Timing" in a walk with the Lord. In the lead-up to the weekend service, the facilitator-Senior Pastor invested extra time and energy to creating the localized analogies for the sermon application points. This required processing potential analogies to ensure they were localized at a sufficient level and that they matched the sermon point as well. An added discovery during the unfolding of the preparation of these sermons was the need to be discrete but also accessible in local analogies. Analogies had to be recognizable but not enough to humiliate or reveal unintended information about a local business, process, or relationship. That hyper-local analogy factor added sermon development time to the process during the week. Moreover, the new application exercise added a layer of complexity to the sermon preparation process during office hours for the facilitator. Some of this extra investment of time may have been a new method's learning curve. However, another aspect of the time required was crafting an analogy to connect well. Additionally, the facilitator employed editing the sermon additional times in preparation, during the week and on Saturdays, to check the analogies and questions. This ensured these fit the project and the congregation's context.

The second intervention-designed sermon was delivered on March 7th, in two services as planned originally in the project, at 8:30 am and 10:30 am. The 8:30 am intervention sermon was delivered in the Sandy Plains Baptist Church small chapel sanctuary from the pulpit. This was a new service, added with plenty of planning sessions and announcements. For the rest of the research, there was both an 8:30 and 10:30 am service with the same sermons. The facilitator

uses a detailed outline and summary for expository preaching. This ensures the similarity of the messages. Then, the 10:30 am researched intervention sermon was delivered in the larger Family Life Center (gym) which is normally used for worship services. The 10:30 am service is a worship time unchanged over decades of church life. This second week's message for both services using the intervention tools was titled "In God's Spotlight," from Haggai 1:7-15. This sermon was developed largely later in the week of March 7th, as the Senior Pastor was recovering from Covid-19 earlier. The sermon preparation ended up being largely completed at the Senior Pastor's home office instead of the church office due to this surprise. However, the required guideline days passed by and the pastor recovered. The sermon was a complete sermon overly adequate for the research needs, therefore. It was not lacking regarding the new application resources in any way. The three expository sermon divisions had connected new application resources attached to each. Sunday delivery of the sermons was done in a normal tone and rhythm as planned. The worship services were otherwise routine and attended at a normal rate. Attendance during the Covid-19 first quarter of 2021 at Sandy Plains Baptist Church has ranged in the 17-27 range for the 8:30 am service and the low 100's for the second 10:30 am service in the Family Life Center building. This attendance range increased in the late Fall and early Winter of 2020. The range continued forward into 2021. Sandy Plains Baptist Church still has around 30% of the regular attendees out due to avoiding risks of Covid-19. The online engagement is minimal most weeks. The homebound who tune in online are invited to participate by sending or bringing them church information, including bulletins, and by announcements. They represent a minimal factor in the research project. The vast majority of engaged attendees are in person.

The facilitator-Senior Pastor meeting congregants after the first two weeks of messages heard general positive feedback about the messages. This was noted in the facilitator journal as

well. There were not any incidents of rejection or irritation from the new sermon resources being

applied in services. The additional time and energy to fine-tune analogies for specific

applications were also evident, but not as pronounced in this second sermon. Beyond this, the

first survey itself did not have any reported problems. The vast majority of attendees who

responded also finished the first surveys they began online. These respondents provide an

accurate baseline for later evaluation of application resources based on these facts. No known

complaints or issues came about from the first survey in the congregation. As a confirmation

note, no survey links or survey invites were placed on Sandy Plains Baptist Church's social

media platforms. This prevents any non-attendee interference with an online survey. The broader

non-attendee community occasionally posts odd or off-topic things on social media platforms, so

this project avoided any risks associated with that method. Survey responses were also not asked

about and were kept anonymous. This allowed for more accurate results without any external

pressures on the answers. Additionally, no one came forward with any questions about the

survey questions themselves. The questions were understandable and useful for participation in

this research. The responses did not cluster heavily in the online survey portal on certain narrow

days but came in as people were able to complete these.

<p align="center">Second Survey and Notes Preparations</p>

The second survey allowed factual comparison with the first survey to measure project

effectiveness for the congregation. As a next step, the facilitator-Senior Pastor on Tuesday,

March 9th, 2021 prepared details for the next online survey to be released in the future. The

facilitator double-checked the online survey system itself, the logic on it, and reviewed notes on

the project so far. The project was on track and the survey and plans continued to be on target.

So far Sunday service attendees remained overwhelmingly members or regular guests in the worship as hoped.

During office hours, March 10th-11th, 2021, the facilitator prepared along with the church secretary the next worship service bulletin announcements and handouts for the project's second phase. The announcements were objectively worded. The prepared bulletin for March 14th stated that in the coming week a link would be made available to click. The attendees interested could help the research by clicking on that and filling it out completely. This bulletin and pulpit announcement was a few days in advance to keep the congregation aware of the second survey approaching soon. The effort was used to make people aware it was a new link, not the same as the first link. This proved to not be a problem. Link effectiveness and logic were tested again through the online system preview feature on the 12th-13th of March. On Sunday, March 14th, attendees were encouraged to participate to assist with the Sunday worship services as a unique link from the first link. The accuracy of the survey announcements was checked and affirmed by the facilitator in the church offices for the Wednesday newsletter. The third installment message on Sunday, March 14th, 2021, from Haggai 2:1-9, was titled "Friendship with God Exalts a Person and a People." This sermon was expository as well. Like the previous two intervention resource sermons, the third sermon included carefully crafted localized analogies to help the application connect as well as framing questions to make the call to action stand out. Sermon development was done aiming to use the new application.

Moving ahead, in the Sandy Plains Baptist Church offices on Monday and Tuesday, March 15th-16th, the next weekly newsletter announcement for the second survey to be released and link information was double-checked and prepared for release. Wednesday the 17th marked the activation of the second survey going live for willing attendees to fill out at their

convenience. On March 18th, Thursday, the online system was checked for second survey response answers. They began to come into the online service effectively, showing that the system was working on the backend. Notes were made regarding the weekend readiness. The goal was once again approximately one and a half weeks of open survey response opportunity.

The proper second survey link was included and easily identifiable for weekend materials, March 21st. The sermon then was prepared for the fourth installment in Haggai, Sunday, March 21st, 2021. This message was taken from Haggai 2:10-23 and titled "How to Be Ready as God's Servant." Once again, the highly custom application analogies did require a larger portion of the facilitator's work hours to craft during office hours. The framing questions did not take as long to craft, however. Framing questions also served as transition and attention statements for the analogies. Delivery of the new resources was kept in the standard form of previous series and years at Sandy Plains to not influence the attendees. That Sunday during announcements once again the church was invited to a second survey as a volunteer opportunity. That weekend March 20th-21st, the facilitator double-checked on the upcoming announcement in the church worship bulletins, the information accuracy, and the process of announcing it from the pulpit again. Everything was in order, ready, and proofread.

The March 21st regular Sunday bulletin inclusion of the second survey invitation increased responses. Attendee responses were noticeably higher over the previous half week of opportunity. It is theorized that repeated invites allowed the attendees to prioritize the volunteer opportunity over the coming days. The Sunday worship services at 8:30 am and 10:30 am continued to be overwhelmingly made up of members or regular guests on March 21st, which aids the accuracy of the survey response. Journal notes on the research by the facilitator

continued to be kept during this week. The notes show a diligent execution of the research phase of the project. The research stages were carried out as planned.

From March 24th to 27th, 2021, the research facilitator-Senior Pastor maintained a habit of checking on the online survey system and the progress of responses. Responses steadily were turned in online with no reported problems or access issues. The survey was closed as planned late in the evening of March 27th, a Saturday. The closing of the survey on March 27th allowed the maximum window of opportunity for the four-week modified sermons to be evaluated before the next sermon series was initiated on Sundays the following day, March 28th, 2021. In this way, there was to be no confusion from a different series impacting this new application project. No opportunity was made available to confuse the former research series and the next unrelated Sunday sermon series.

Moreover, a research facilitator thank you was made for those who participated in the surveys on Sunday, March 28th in the worship services. A thank you went out as well as on the following Wednesday in the regular church email newsletter. These also served the purpose of reaffirming the research phase of the project was concluded for any who might be curious in the congregation. The thank-you bookended the action research in the minds of attendees. Also, the facilitator-Senior Pastor was available in person and by email and phone throughout this project for any questions. No questions were noted during the action research, however. It is theorized that the survey and the explanations were self-explanatory or easily understood as a result. Continual explanation of the upcoming and then-current project in visible ways likely answered questions attendees may have had.

Data follow-up was done on March 28th, 2021, to ensure data from the survey was properly kept in multiple places by studying the download options online. The info is still on the

www.surveymonkey.com secure servers. Also, on Monday, March 29th, 2021, the facilitator

downloaded a copy of the secure anonymous survey data to a password-protected hard drive as a

backup of the project from the www.surveymonkey.com website. In this way, the data has been

protected from the failure of either www.surveymonkey.com servers or the facilitator-locked

hard drive. This anonymous hard drive data is also kept in a locked office for privacy and safety.

No one else has access to the project data. The facilitator began to look over the anonymous data

and explore the analysis tools available on March 29th, 2021. Further work was done to read

further on the data examination options online the week following Sunday, March 28th, 2021.

Research into the Likert scale and t-tests were carried out once again to ensure accurate

understanding. This double-checking of the process ensured exactness. Precise tools for

evaluating the data were studied, explored, and inquired about through the

www.surveymonkey.com system online. Further general reading on the evaluation was done by

the facilitator during this period. The www.surveymonkey.com tools were a planned part of the

implementation but were not as user-friendly as had been hoped initially. Help articles and

inquiring on their site were also explored. It should be noted for the reader that

www.surveymonkey.com changed its company name to Momentive during the follow-up data

research and evaluation of the action research. This had no impact on the two survey occurrences

period of the action research. Therefore, there was no confusion to attendees. However, for

future research, this may be beneficial information. Currently, the company is using both names

for social research and marketing.

Throughout the project, facilitator project notes were kept of these steps and the action

research from February 2021 through March 2021. The notation showed an accurate carrying out

of the steps and planned promotion of the project. The project mentor was kept apprised of the

facilitator's research steps and progress throughout the effort. This was done with intentionality and mentor help oversight was welcomed. Also, an outside doctoral person as a resource was utilized per expectations during the research phase as well. Both the mentor and outside resource person offered advice during the project for maintaining standards for the research. The assistance of both was appreciated by the research facilitator and carried out. The research facilitator did not notice any bias or influence on the project being carried out. Normal wording, announcements, and execution of the plan were employed so that nothing was out of the ordinary except the new resources.

Moreover, during the implementation, no social media was to be used in distributing the survey links. This was also true of the research invitations for the first and the second survey. This step assisted in maintaining the accuracy of the data that attendees and member congregants provided. Outside influence would be less of a risk from random or chance community members. Like the first survey, the second survey was available in a mainly closed system of those who do attend Sunday worship services rather than the broader local communities. In past years, the facilitator-Senior Pastor removed inappropriate or unusual social media comments in 2019, 2020, and 2021 occasionally pre-research. As it relates to this project, that historical information confirmed the implementation validity of this approach to the current project. Several false religious groups in the area seem to take advantage of social media by local Baptist churches for their own commentary. No risk of that was allowed into the current project by those means.

<div align="center">Implementation Summary</div>

The February through March project was planned extensively. The planned research successfully engaged a large portion of the congregation in worship, even during the United

States experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. Each of the four test sermons stayed in the intended expository format with three main sermon divisions or points. Each of those sermon points had new application tools attached to it for greater impact to apply the Bible to real-life situations this congregation faces. Extensive checking on the intended purpose of including elements in the application sections was carried out. Sermon preparation time increased due to narrowing down acceptable local analogies to drive home applicational points. The social consciousness of local scenes observed, and local happenings allowed for use of the new tool in these public sermons. The local analogies and way questions were framing them were diplomatic. No personally identifiable information, names, or exact locations were given of the human-interest analogies or natural analogies. This was also carefully done to avoid any unnecessary distraction from the sermon point. Locating common occurrences was perceived to inject relevance into the sermon applications as well.

The research announcements were completed when planned and without any undue pressure. No discomfort or problems were noticed or heard of from the announcements of the project or surveys. Handouts were created and laid in place without any problems. It was noticed that bulletins and handouts were picked up and taken home by attendees in Sunday worship services. The church office, likewise, did not receive any phone calls or emails with any confusion about the project or announcements.

In general, the online anonymous survey system provided an effective platform for recording congregational responses. No problems with the online question system were reported once it was designed and set into motion. The survey logic systems also are thought to have worked without incident. There was a learning curve to using the adopted online system, for properly recording the logic and numbering system of the responses. The online

www.surveymonkey.com system was not simple to operate, but it was effective for accurate research data. Announcements and written invites to the project were effective at drawing in attendee responses overall. A higher percent of attendees involved would have been hoped for, however, it did not prevent effective testing of the resources at the church.

In conclusion, the planned implementation enabled the project's testing of the applicational resources for over a month at Sandy Plains Baptist Church. The project was carried out and completed diligently.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The results showed some improvement in certain areas with the deployment of the new applicational resources to Sandy Plains Baptist Church of Gastonia, North Carolina. The application resources were analogies with local connections and framing questions for each sermon division in expository sermons. This was a shift from previous sermons where a general illustration or mere exhortation was often employed for each sermon point or division. Below an analysis of the results unfolds for the benefit of the congregation and the facilitator. The combined survey collection rate showed 88% of respondents completed their answers. The time to complete each survey stood at four minutes and 33 seconds on average. The total attendee survey responses were 43. Responses were higher in both surveys during their second week available to the congregation for completion. This chapter will engage the surveys in order, beginning with demographic information and then transitioning into resource evaluations.

Survey #1 Results on Demographics

The age distribution for the first survey occurrence (Survey #1) was as follows. The first survey collector was entirely made up of respondents who were at least 18 or older. This matched the goal of the project. Then, there was one respondent who was 18-29 years old. This was a bit surprising. Nine respondents were in the 30-39 age range. This age number would be a fairly accurate representation of the congregation. Then, three respondents fit into the 40-to-49 age range, and five fit into the 50-59 age category. This is a fair participation rate for that age range. Four congregants filling out the first question were in the 60-69 range. This seems a lower representation. Two attendees filled out the survey number one in the 70-79 age range. Zero attendees in the 80+ range filled out a survey. This is not surprising; however, they are avoiding

gatherings due to Covid-19 and are small in number in the congregation so it would not impact

general results greatly.

	UNDER 18	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	TOTAL
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 1	0.00% 0	4.17% 1	37.50% 9	12.50% 3	20.83% 5	16.67% 4	8.33% 2	0.00% 0	57.14% 24
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 2	0.00% 0	5.56% 1	16.67% 3	16.67% 3	38.89% 7	16.67% 3	5.56% 1	0.00% 0	42.86% 18
Total Respondents	0	2	12	6	12	7	3	0	42

The first survey occurrence was taken by seven men and seventeen women attending.

That represents a 29.17% versus 70.83% comparison between men and women. The church

congregation due to work hours (truck drivers, construction workers, military duty) and other

factors are skewed more towards women (pharmacist, teachers, teachers' assistants,

accountants), but the results show still that more women took the survey number one than would

have been expected. The actual congregational attendance is more evenly compared to a normal

range of about 45-55% division by gender.
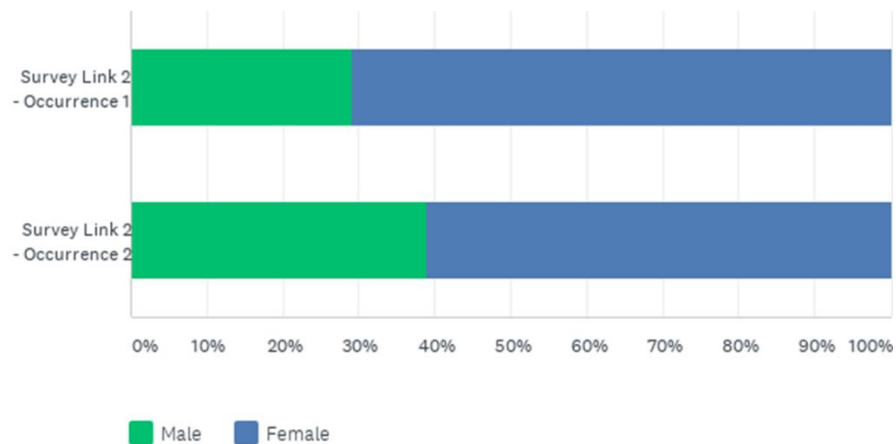
The demographic info on how long a person has attended Sandy Plains Baptist Church

was engaged next. This is potentially revealing about the perceptions of a sermon. The chart

shows in survey occurrence number one that two people who have attended less than one year

participated. Then there were seven who had been members less than five years. Another two

attenders had been around for 6-10 years range. Four had a track record of attending 11-20 years.

Then one respondent had attended for 21-30 years. Four had attended for 31-40 years. Three

respondents had attended Sandy Plains for over 41 years. This question had two persons skip

answering it, so there may be a slight variation. Covid-19 as a pandemic had slowed new guest

attendance so the less than one-year data is not surprising. Previous to the pandemic we had

many new guests, but a sizeable group did not return as yet. The largest range is 1-20 years of

attendance by far. This would suggest more mature Christians or those who are reconnecting to

church are engaged in this survey. We saw substantial growth in the few years before the

pandemic in middle-aged families which could explain this data.
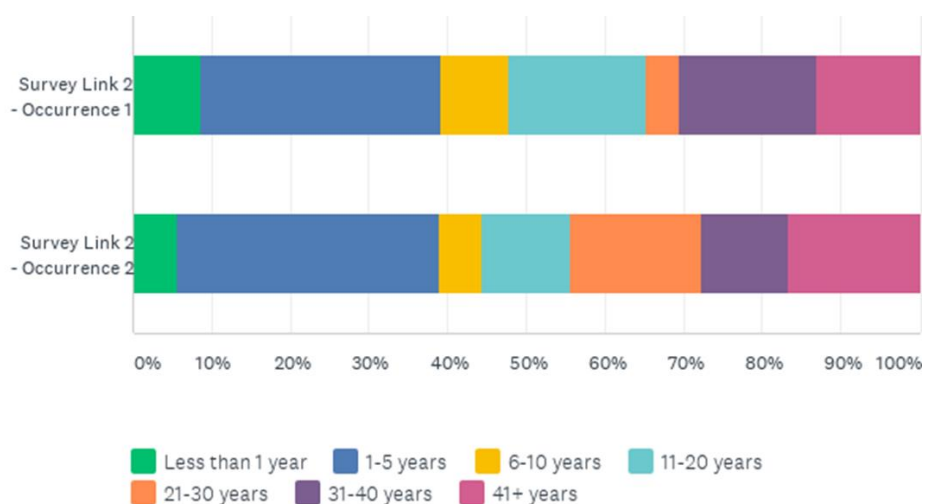
There was another orienting question, regarding how often a respondent reads Bible

verses. This is meant to give insight into their spiritual depth or awareness. The results were

13.04% read verses several times per day. Then another group read verses of the Bible at least

daily, at 43.48%. The next group read Bible verses every few days, at 34.78%. The weekly

verses reading crowd added up to 8.70% of the total. None reported monthly or seasonally.

Presumably, if filling out a survey is too much trouble, so is opening a Bible app to read it. Though useful as a question, it is guessed that a sizable group on Sundays only monthly or seasonally reads the Bible. In addition, if a few times a day includes scrolling Facebook or social media and reading verses, then the question may not be as indicative as it could be. Still, a positive benefit of this question is revealing persons trying to hear the Lord at least somewhat fill out the survey. Two individuals skipped this question, which might add in some variance.

That now concludes the demographic data on the survey number one respondents at Sandy Plains Baptist Church.

Survey #1 Results on Sermon Application

The next section to tackle data evaluation is the evaluation of sermon application before the new resources were deployed. The following explores the pre-project results.

Question #6 in the survey was, "Have the Sunday sermons applied to your life situations in general?" 41 responded and 2 skipped this question. 30.43% agreed strongly. 39.13% agreed. 17.39% were neutral on this question. 8.70% disagreed with the sermons' applications in the past. And one person or 4.35% disagreed strongly. There were a total of 23 answers to question #6. Looking at this, around 70% agreed at some level. That is a supermajority of the respondents.

Then question #7 continued in the sermon application route. Question #7 read, "Have you noticed Sunday sermons having clear ways to apply them recently?" 26.09% strongly agreed here. 52.17% agreed. 8.70% were neutral on clear ways. Two persons or 8.70 disagreed on this question. Then, 4.35% or one person disagreed strongly. Therefore, a total percent of 78.26 agreed at some level with clear applications in typical baseline sermons.

Then looking at results for question #8, it was asked, "Are sermon suggestions for next steps to believe God or obey God in fresh ways evident recently?" To this question, 61.90% strongly agreed with the question. Then 23.81% said yes somewhat they agree. 9.52% remained neutral. One person or 4.76% said they disagree. Zero people answered, "not at all."

As for question #9 in survey occurrence one, it asked, "How often do you find yourself remembering how to apply a message's truth?" On this question 21 answered the first time. 14.29% said they do "extremely often." 33.33% said they remembered "very often." 38.10% said they recall applications "moderately often." One person at 4.76% said "slightly often." 9.52% said that do not remember sermon applications at all.

Then approaching question #10, respondents were asked, "Are you lately able to recall how a sermon applies so to share that with another?" Five individuals skipped this question in either survey occurrence one or two. So, the responses were slightly less. However, among the respondents, 10% said a "great deal" and 45% said "a lot." 30% reported a "moderate amount" in their view. 10% said they could share with another "a little." Then it was found 5% or one person said, "not at all." Question #10 is displayed here in chart format and this is from occurrence one.
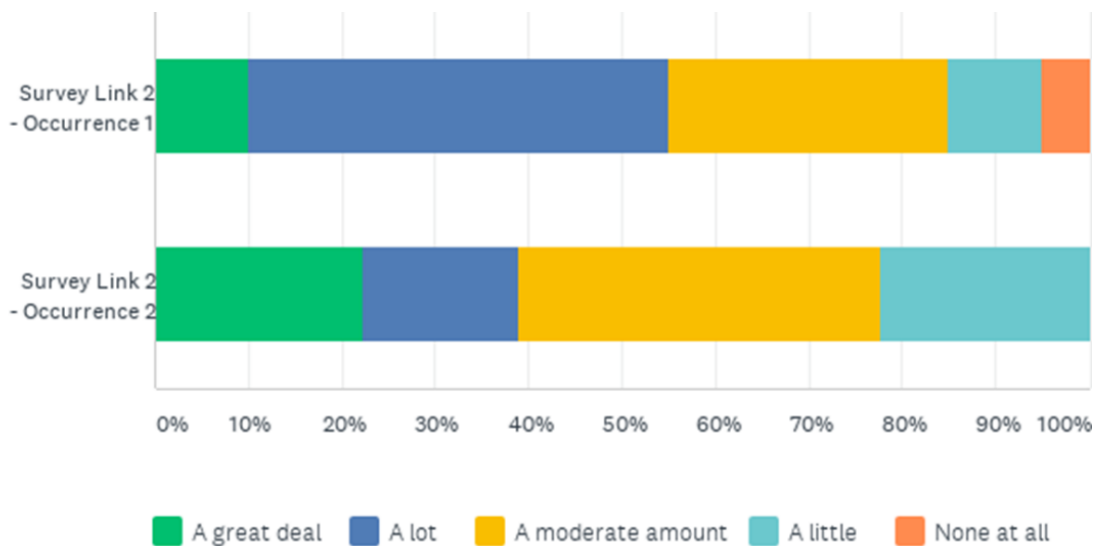
Next, the results for question #11 came from this question, "Do you sense that you are equipped with connections to real-life situations lately to apply a sermon's truth well?" For past sermons, 15% said "extremely often" they are equipped and 45% "very often." Also, 25% said "moderately often" real-life situations are evident. Then, 15% said, "slightly often." Zero answered, "not at all." Therefore, in the past 85% felt equipped with truth for real-life situations.

The next question #12 dealt with perceptions on, 'if an attendee was being fed what they needed to hear from the Lord?' It read this way, "Have you found yourself thinking lately, that is just what I needed to hear?" "Extremely often" was the answer for 25%. Next, 45% were saying that "very often" about sermon applications. Then, 10% felt that was true "moderately." Also, "slightly often" garnered 15% of answers. Lastly, "not at all" gained one answer at 5%.

So, with question #13 it probed "How are sermons lately at connecting to the culture and places near our church, homes, apartments, or workplaces?" First, 35% believed it was "much better" and 25% chose "somewhat better." Then, 35% were persuaded it was "about the same." "Somewhat worse" got zero votes. "Much worse" got one person's vote at 5% of respondents.

Question #14 asked, "Do you notice any personal increased obedience to God from ideas on how to obey Him in sermons lately?" Among respondents, the first 25% believed "extremely often." Second, 50% said that yes "very often" they did notice it. Third, 15% said "moderately often" they did. Next, 10% are "slightly often" finding increased obedience, and zero "not at all."

Question #15 put to respondents this, "How realistic have been the ideas of how you might need to apply sermons lately?" A cohort of 20% thought it "extremely realistic." Then 50% decided the ideas have been "very realistic" lately. Another 20% of attendees marked the ideas as "moderately realistic." One person responding said at 5% of the total application ideas have been just "slightly realistic." Lastly, one person at 5% said "not realistic at all."

In summary of survey occurrence one results, a large majority of volunteers responded positively to past sermon applications being helpful in a variety of ways for life. This shows that as a baseline, the facilitator's Sunday congregational morning sermons were overall received well. There was a segment that was not positive on past sermon application strengths noticed as well. The next section will proceed onto survey number two results after introducing the new applicational resources of local analogies and framing questions.

<p style="text-align:center">Survey #2 Results on Demographics</p>

Now on to the second survey occurrence results. This second survey as a recap was offered after the new analogy and framing questions application had been deployed on Sundays in the congregational messages at Sandy Plains Baptist Church. This second survey occurrence will be explored in participant's demographic background data first. Then afterward, another section will plumb the answers to survey number two's resource applicational questions.

The first section here begins with the age ranges of the respondents in the second survey occurrence. These age ranges of participation were as follows. Those aged under 18 did not respond, which fit the project and research for adults only goal. Only one aged 18-29 responded, which was surprising for the second survey. However, among those aged, 30-39 three attendees responded. Those aged 40-49 included three responses to survey number two. Ages 50-59 included seven responses, up from survey one's representation in that grouping. Then, attendees 60-69 had three responses total. This number is a bit lower than expected for that age range. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has made that group cautious about attendance in mass gatherings. The ages of 70-79 among attendees had one response. This was surprising given that a small but noticeable number of that range do attend even during Covid-19's impacts on North

Carolina. Among attendees 80 and older, there were zero responses. Like survey one, this is not

surprising as many in that group are avoiding mass gatherings due to Covid-19 and are not a

large percent of our congregation at present. Many in that age range have been warned by their

family doctor to avoid mass gatherings. Pre-Covid a number of that age demographic group died

due to other natural causes reducing their proportions in general in the current congregational

landscape. Simultaneously Sandy Plains Baptist Church was adding younger middle-aged

families with elementary or middle school-aged children. A table of this data on age

demographics is listed here:

	UNDER 18	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	TOTAL
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 1	0.00% 0	4.17% 1	37.50% 9	12.50% 3	20.83% 5	16.67% 4	8.33% 2	0.00% 0	57.14% 24
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 2	0.00% 0	5.56% 1	16.67% 3	16.67% 3	38.89% 7	16.67% 3	5.56% 1	0.00% 0	42.86% 18
Total Respondents	0	2	12	6	12	7	3	0	42

Gender-wise seven men took the second survey and eleven women. This gives a percent

comparison of 38.89% men versus 61.11% women. This is more accurate as a balance of men

and women in worship attendance than survey occurrence one had shown. As it relates to normal

attendance, this is still fewer men responding as a percent than attend worship regularly.

However, it is not far off estimates of men versus women in regular Sunday worship either. The

numbers are not far enough apart to skew the response data. The application was also designed

for both men and women, rather than a single targeted group.

The next demographic question measured the length of years attending worship services at Sandy Plains Baptist Church. The vast majority are regular attendees for a year or more, which helps the accuracy of this project as a comparison study. In survey occurrence two, attendance at Sandy Plains included a couple more in a longer-term habit of attendance group. However, the data was similar generally. That data is presented here in a numerical table:

	LESS THAN 1 YEAR	1-5 YEARS	6-10 YEARS	11-20 YEARS	21-30 YEARS	31-40 YEARS	41+ YEARS	TOTAL
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 1	8.70% 2	30.43% 7	8.70% 2	17.39% 4	4.35% 1	17.39% 4	13.04% 3	56.10% 23
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 2	5.56% 1	33.33% 6	5.56% 1	11.11% 2	16.67% 3	11.11% 2	16.67% 3	43.90% 18
Total Respondents	3	13	3	6	4	6	6	41

The second survey occurrence also inquired as to a respondent's personal Bible reading habits. The following chart reveals, like the first survey occurrence, that the vast majority reported Bible reading several times a day, daily, or every few days. Once again, none admitted to monthly or seasonally. Perhaps the respondent group is a possibly more mature group spiritually inside the congregation, or they may have been encouraged to read the Bible and have made that a priority even as newer Christians. Here is that table of Bible reading data:

	SEVERAL TIMES A DAY	DAILY	EVERY FEW DAYS	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	SEASONALLY	LESS THAN THAT	TOTAL
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 1	13.04% 3	43.48% 10	34.78% 8	8.70% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	56.10% 23
Survey Link 2 - Occurrence 2	22.22% 4	38.89% 7	33.33% 6	5.56% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	43.90% 18
Total Respondents	7	17	14	3	0	0	0	41

Summarizing the demographic data from survey number two, this shows a similar distribution to the first occurrence of survey one. One noted exception was the respondents' gender. Survey number two was more equally balanced as compared to the first. The second occurrence survey reflected the congregational normal gender division better. Beyond this, there is revealed an older response group in survey occurrence two. There was a minor shift upward in the age of attendee respondents in survey occurrence number two.

Survey #2 Results on Sermon Application

This section outlines the responses on applicational improvements to the Sunday sermons at Sandy Plains Baptist Church. The results will follow in the order they were asked during online survey number two. The first question on sermon application was again question #6 in survey occurrence two. This question read, "Have the Sunday sermons applied to your life situations in general?" A higher number said, "agree strongly," at 38.89%. Then a higher number agreed at 44.44%. "Neutral" was similar to the first survey occurrence but was at 16.67%. Two other options, "disagree" and "strongly disagree" had no votes this time.

The second question on sermon application was question #7 again, which asked "Have you noticed Sunday sermons having clear ways to apply them recently?" To which, more in this

second survey agreed strongly at 33.33% of total responses. Then, a similar percent agreed on this second survey occurrence at 50%. In the middle, one person attending was "neutral" at 5.6%. Two attendees "disagreed" again in the second survey at 11.11%. Zero this time "disagreed strongly" with clear ways to apply sermons recently.

The third question on sermon application was question #8. It read this, "Are sermon suggestions for next steps to believe God or obey God in a fresh way evident recently?" A larger percent "definitely" agreed at 66.67% this time. Then 27.78% "somewhat" agreed this time, an improvement as well. This time in survey occurrence two none remained "neutral," which was an improvement from survey one response rating. Again, like survey occurrence one, this time one person at 5.56% said "not so much" on question eight on ways to believe God or obey God anew.

The fourth question was question #9, which said, "How often do you find yourself remembering how to apply a message's truth?" The percent did increase in the affirmative, with 16.67% saying "extremely often." "Very often" went way up garnering 50% support. The "moderately often" group was lower at 22.22%. Theoretically, some of the moderates migrated to answering, "very often." A "slightly often" group had 11.11% support. An improvement is "not at all" went from two votes in survey occurrence one to now no votes in the occurrence of survey two. Recall of the Sunday sermons went way up with the new resources deployed after sermon divisions.

The fifth question #10, put to respondents, "Are you lately able to recall how a sermon applies so to share that with another?" Those answering this time "a great deal" of recall to share with others more than doubled, to 22.22%. By contrast, though, those answering "a lot" of recall ability to share went down to 16.67%. Those with a "moderate" amount of recall to share with

others went up to a sizable 38.89%. Those saying "a little" changed upwards to 22.22%. "None

at all" went from one answer to no votes in this second survey occurrence.

Then for question #11, it was asked, "Do you sense you are equipped with connections to

real-life situations lately to apply a sermon's truth well?" A slightly less but similar percent said

"extremely often" at 11.11% they sense equipping to real-life situations. The sense connections

"very often" group grew to 50% of responses. The "moderately often" sensing connections to

real-life were about the same at 22.22%. Then, the answer group "slightly often" saw less at

11.11% this second time. The "not at all" answer group grew to one vote at 5.6%. The data

shows a slight visual decrease in equipping. Here is the visual display in the "Survey 2 Results

1" chart for question #11 as follows:
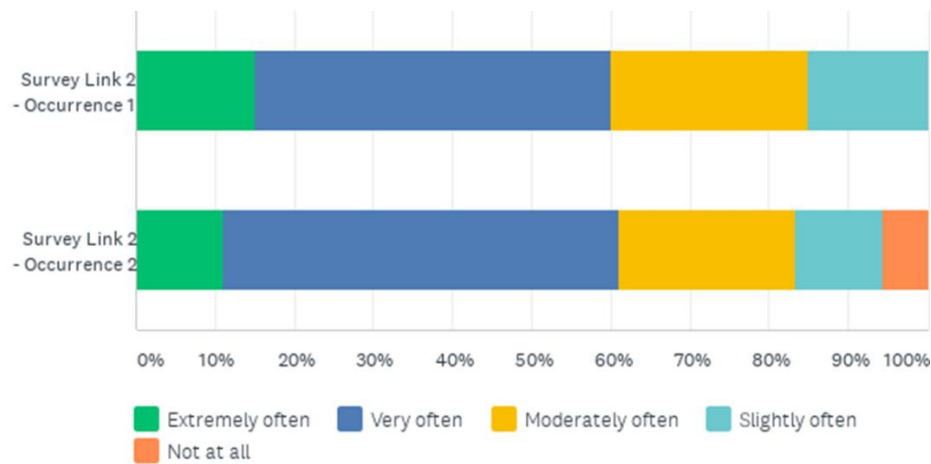
Question #12 read, "Have you found yourself thinking lately, that is just what I needed to

hear?" An "extremely often" category was similar this time at 22.22% of respondents. The "very

often" category dropped a lot to 27.78% this time in survey two. The "moderately often" answer

group went way up to 33.33% on what they needed to hear in life situations. Then the "slightly

often" on needed to hear cohort also went up to 16.67%. There was one less "not at all" answer,

so then there were zero votes for that this time in survey two.

Question #13 states, "How are sermons lately at connecting to the culture and places near our church, homes, apartments, or workplaces?" There was an improvement in the "much better" category up to 38.89% of the total responses. Then, the "somewhat better" group at connecting lately to environments near the congregation also went up to 27.78%. The "about the same" group was, well, about the same at 33.33% of the total. The "somewhat worse" answer group had no votes. The "much worse" answer category also garnered no votes.

Question #14 asked the congregational respondents, "Do you notice any personal increased obedience to God from ideas on how to obey Him in sermons lately?" The "extremely often" answer group dropped to 5.56%. The "very often" category increased to 61.11% of the total. Also, the answer "moderately often" increased obedience self-reported category went up to 22.22%. Then, "slightly often" as an answer went down to one vote at 5.56%. Then, the "not at all" category went up to one vote, to 5.56% of respondents in survey two also. The visual display of the data shows a slight decrease in obedience. A "Survey 2 Results 2" chart gives a picture of these project responses here:
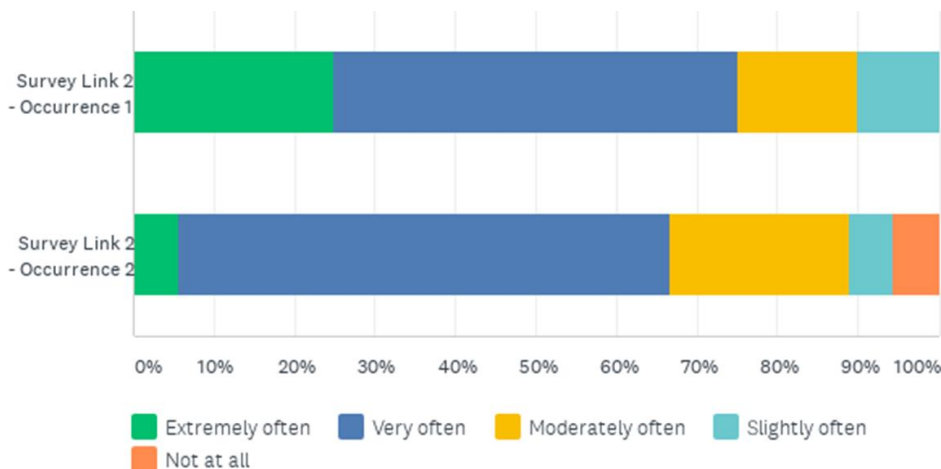
As for the last question in the sermon application survey occurrence two, question #15 stated, "How realistic have been the ideas of how you might need to apply sermons lately?" A

decrease in extremely realistic as a category went to 11.11% of respondents. The "very realistic"

ideas for applications category went up to 61.11% of the attendee respondents. Then, in survey

occurrence two the "moderately realistic" category went up in responses slightly to 22.22%. The

"slightly realistic" grouping went up to 5.56% of the total. Finally, the "not realistic" category

dropped from one response in survey one to no response selecting it in survey two here.

In conclusion of this reporting summary on survey two applications, there were marked

improvements in perceptions in the resource sermons. The analysis will be left to the next section

to compare data in more depth from the project. For now, it is merely noted that general trends

were observed in this section of noticeable improvement. The improvements were, however, not

in every single category on a given application question even as might be expected.

Comparison of Two Surveys Data

This section will analyze the similarity or difference between the control survey and the

post-new resources survey data. This will be accomplished in observations, use of relevant

charts, and unpaired t-test data in graphs. The standard of $p < .05$ will be used for the unpaired t-

tests in what follows. Statistical improvements or non-improvements will be noted in the new

resource survey response questions. This project's resources will then be analyzed in a later

section to draw further conclusions as appropriate.

First comparing the age demographic data, the data is displayed in a chart that follows.

Occurrence one is the name of the first research survey. As a point of clarity, occurrence two is

the name of the second survey after the introduction of the new research. Survey occurrence

one's slightly higher participation rate is evident in the chart. A small difference is found in a

larger the 30-39 participation in survey occurrence number one. That was the control survey in

the research. The second post resource survey has slightly more weight in the 50-59 category. A

visual display chart, "Comparison 1," is shown:
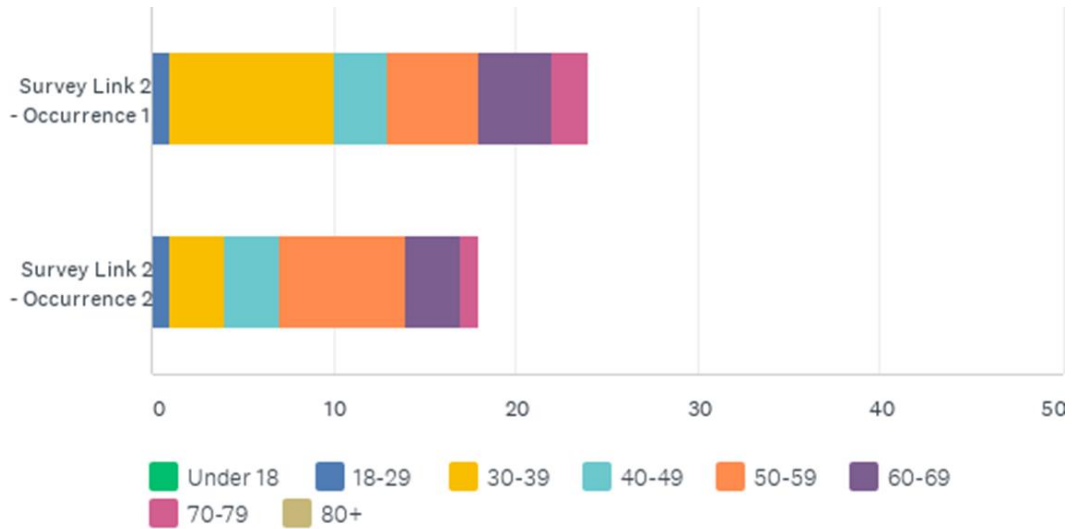
The comparison of genders taking the response surveys is listed in chart form here as

follows. Notably, more women partook in the surveys than men in general. The second survey

after the introduction of the new sermon resources is representative of typical Sunday worship

attendance at Sandy Plains. The second survey included more men responding. This chart

"Comparison 2" reveals a visual comparison of the gender demographics:
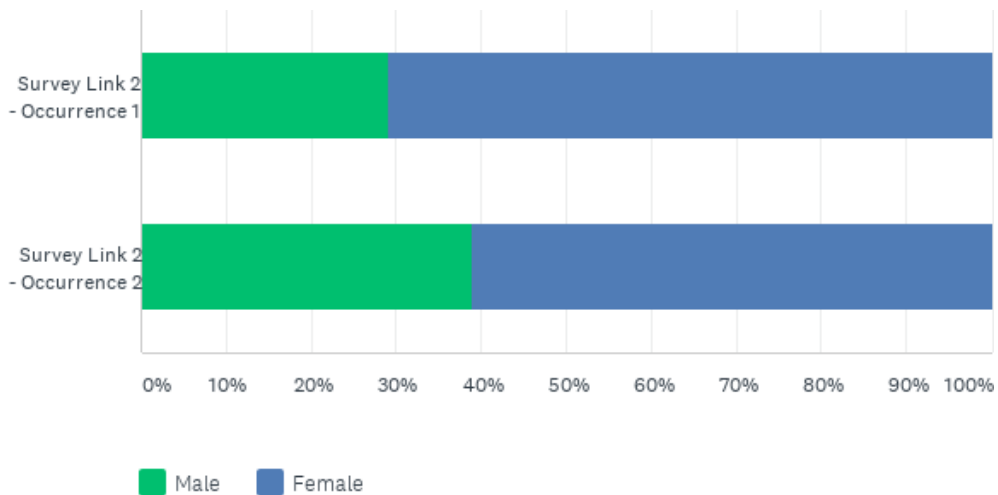
The length of attendance data is shown for comparison in the next chart. It displays a wide range of attendees in either occurrence one survey (control) or occurrence survey two. For an understanding of this visually, this is the "Comparison 3" chart:
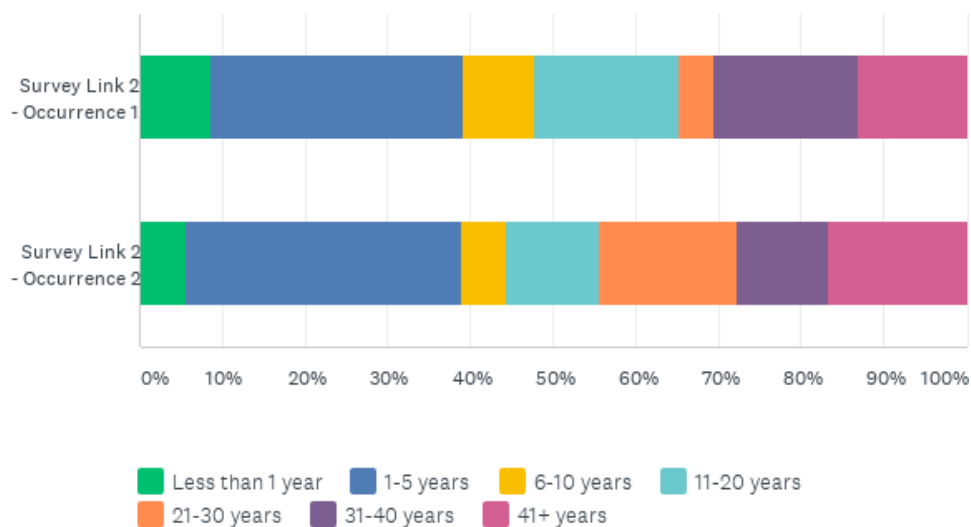

Question #5 reveals insight into the respondent's lives. Bible-reading is a metric sometimes used to evaluate the potential spiritual maturity of each set of responses. The spiritual maturity of the two occurrences differed slightly. In occurrence one survey (the control) more attendees reported higher rates of Bible reading daily or every few days. However, occurrence two of the survey (post-resource introduction) revealed fewer attendees reported reading the Bible as much. Yet due to two attendees skipping the question plus fewer respondents in survey occurrence two, the percentages were similar as shown in the next chart. The increase to several times a day represents one more response in survey two than survey occurrence one. Those who read the Bible only monthly or seasonally did not respond to either of the surveys, which demonstrates a certain group of higher expectations participated in the action research. Those who do not invest the effort into Bible reading also did not invest the effort into taking the survey, in other words. The "Comparison 4" chart is as follows on this phenomenon:
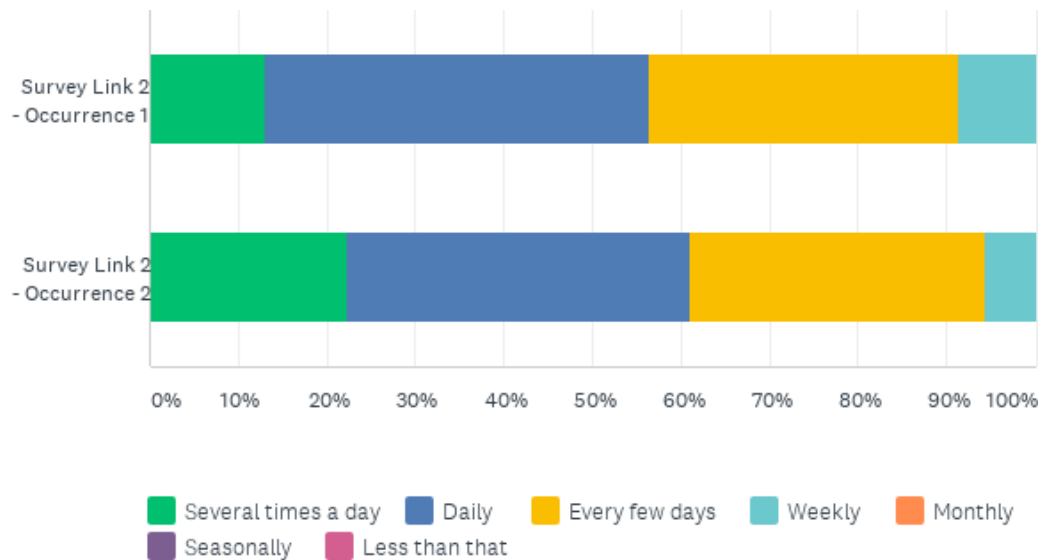
The action research findings for question #6 in both surveys were compared in the following way. The data for question #6 was statistically different at 0.034 and using $p < .05$ as the standard. This is strong evidence against any null hypothesis. The pairing was statistically effective. So, this research may generalize to the congregation as well. The sermon resource improvement was effective by this question's answers. A two-tailed unpaired t-test was used. Question #6 read as follows, "Have the Sunday sermons applied to your life situations in general?" Visually a chart shows the gained effectiveness of relevance into attendees' lives from the two new sermon resources. The t-test is displayed as follows, in "Comparison 5":
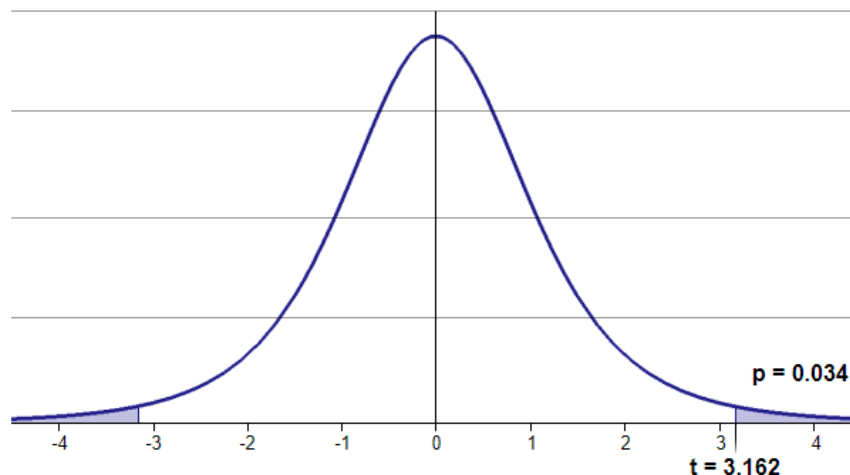
Then on question #7 in the action research comparing surveys, an unpaired t-test was performed to analyze the data. The data was not significantly different at P-value 0.142 using $p < .05$ as the standard. The pairing was significantly effective. The research applications being clear may not generalize to the congregation in the future. It would not be considered clear enough how to apply suggested truths using analogies considering this one question. However, the result of question #7 is closer to showing improvement than some that follow later. There is movement in the right direction to clarity, in other words. Question #7 read, "Have you noticed Sunday sermons having clear ways to apply them recently?" A two-tailed t-test graph "Comparison 6" shows a real but inadequate movement of clarity as follows for question #7:
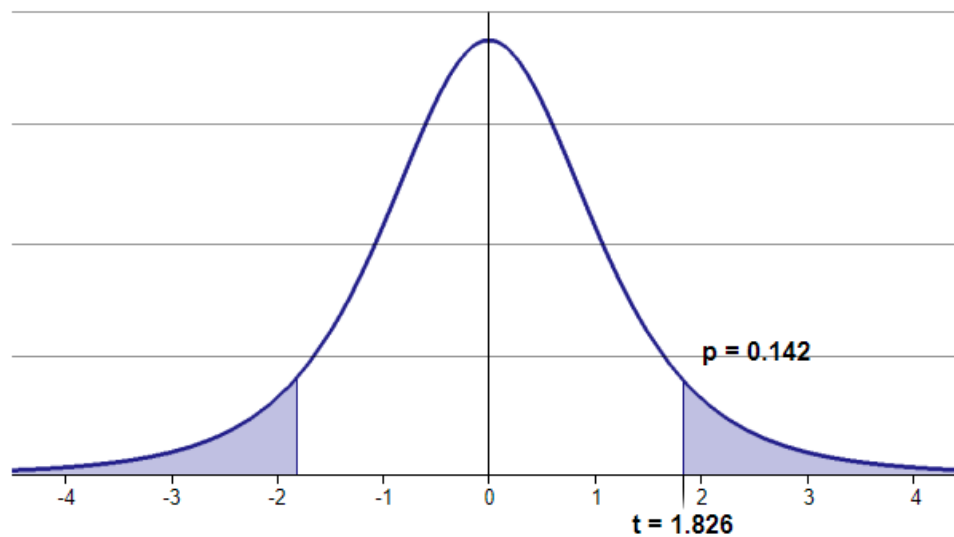
Looking into question #8, it read "Are sermon suggestions for next steps to believe God or obey God in a fresh way evident recently?" A two-tailed unpaired t-test reveals that it is not significantly different at P-value 0.208 using $p < .05$ as the standard. The pairing was statistically effective. This question did not show the new resources could be broadened in the congregation to gain obedience. The next steps were still not evident enough. The t-test graph "Comparison 7" is as follows:

p = 0.208

t = 1.5
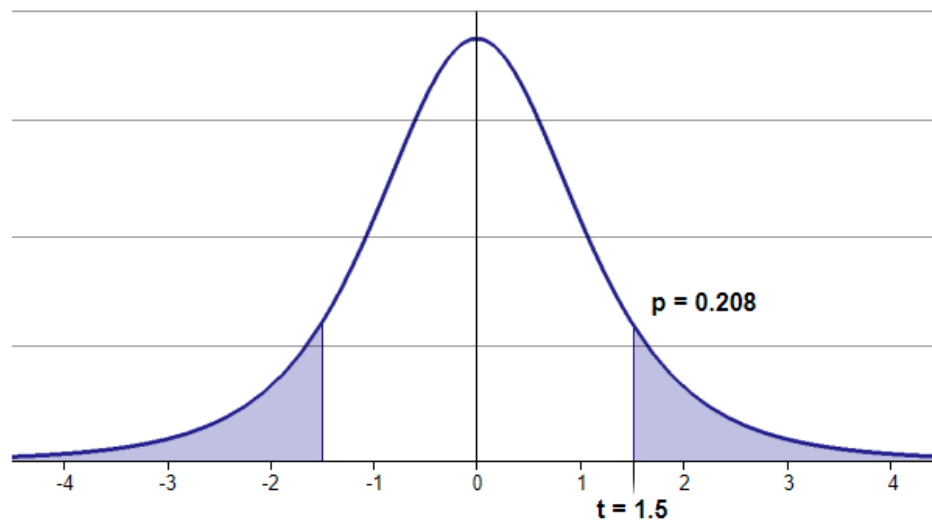
Then on question #9, the attendee respondents were asked, "How often do you find yourself remembering how to apply a message's truth?" The t-test findings were a P-value of 0.607. This was not significantly different to justify future application use in sermons using the p < .05 standard. A project goal of recall does not appear to have improved significantly just considering this one survey question. "Comparison 8" graph displays this not helping visually:


p = 0.607

t = 0.557
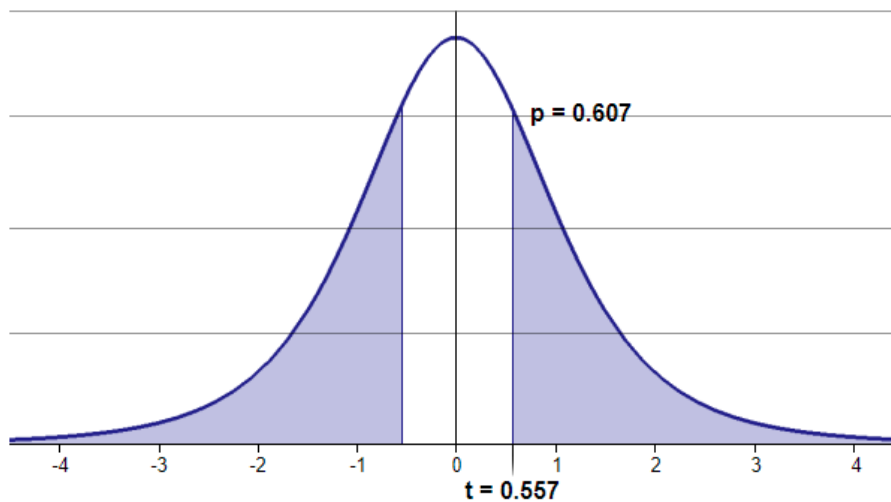
Getting into question #10 of the action research, respondents were inquired about, "Are you lately able to recall how a sermon applies so to share that with another?" The unpaired t-test

P-value is 0.803. This recall to share application ideas is not significantly different between

surveys. The t-test graph "Comparison 9" is here showing no strong improvement:
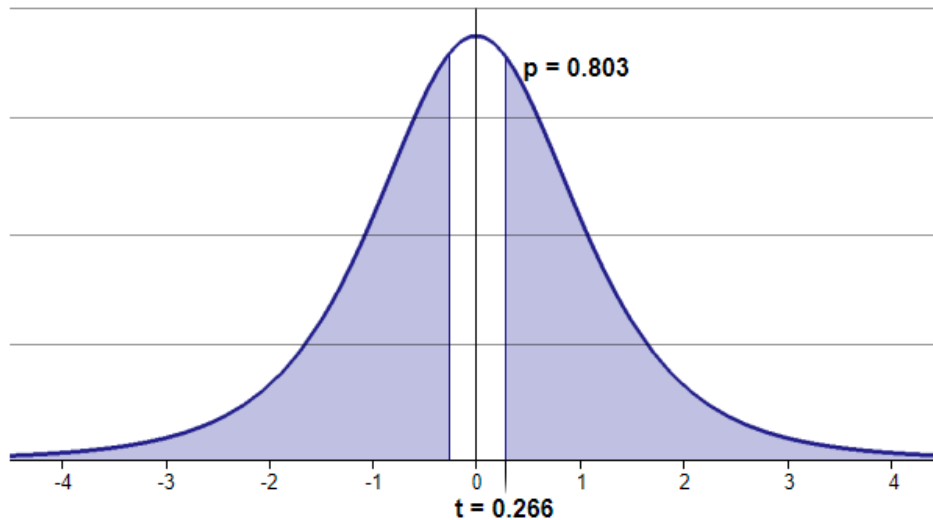
Then examining question #11, it stated, "Do you sense you are equipped with

connections to real-life situations lately to apply a sermon's truth well?" There was not a

significantly different P-value, which was 0.374. Still, the pairing was significantly effective.

Question #11 results do not show extensive future use of the resources would benefit

statistically. Equipping help was more likely than recall to improve shows "Comparison 10":
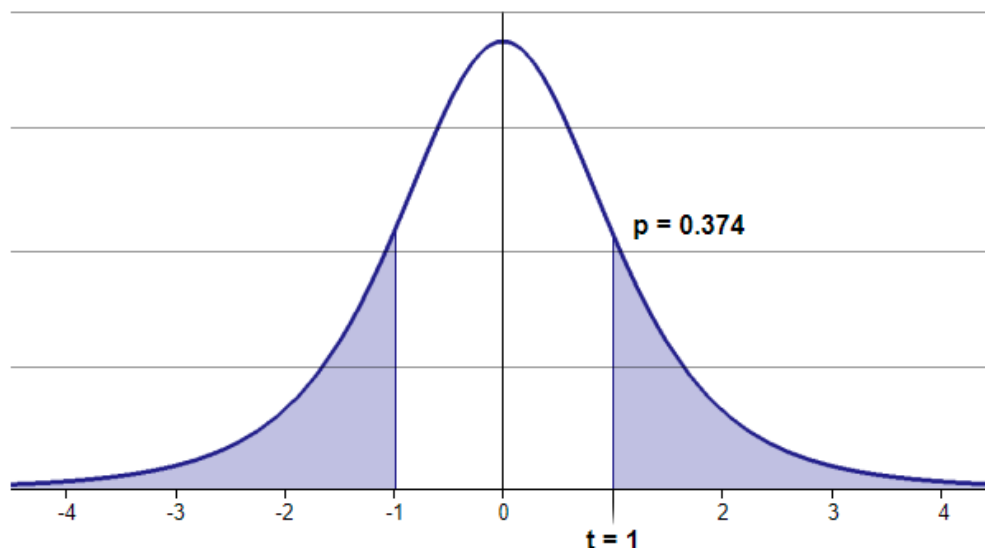
Proceeding on, question #12 of the respondent survey read, "Have you found yourself thinking lately, that is just what I needed to hear?" Using a t-test the P-value was 0.772. This act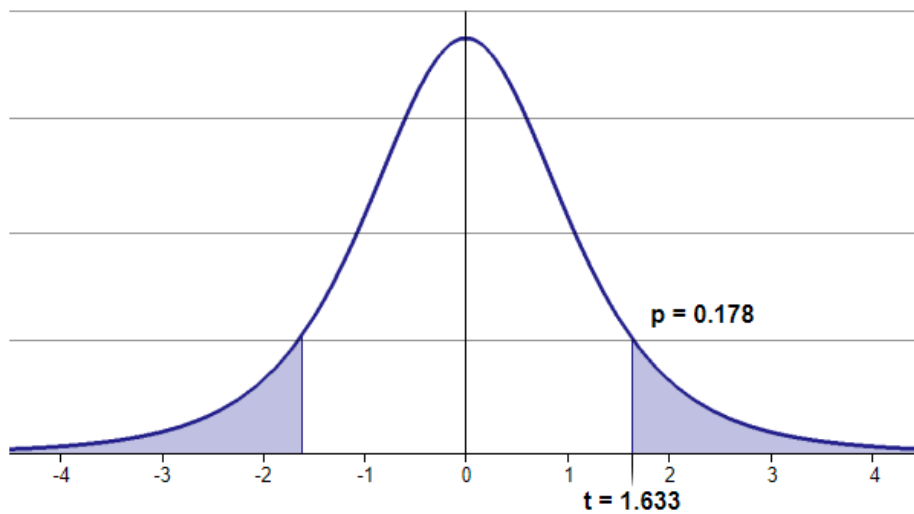ion research question did not find a statistical improvement either using the $p < .05$ improvement standard. The accompanying t-test graph "Comparison 11" shows the new resources in the application did not aid attendees in exactly what they needed. It is as follows:
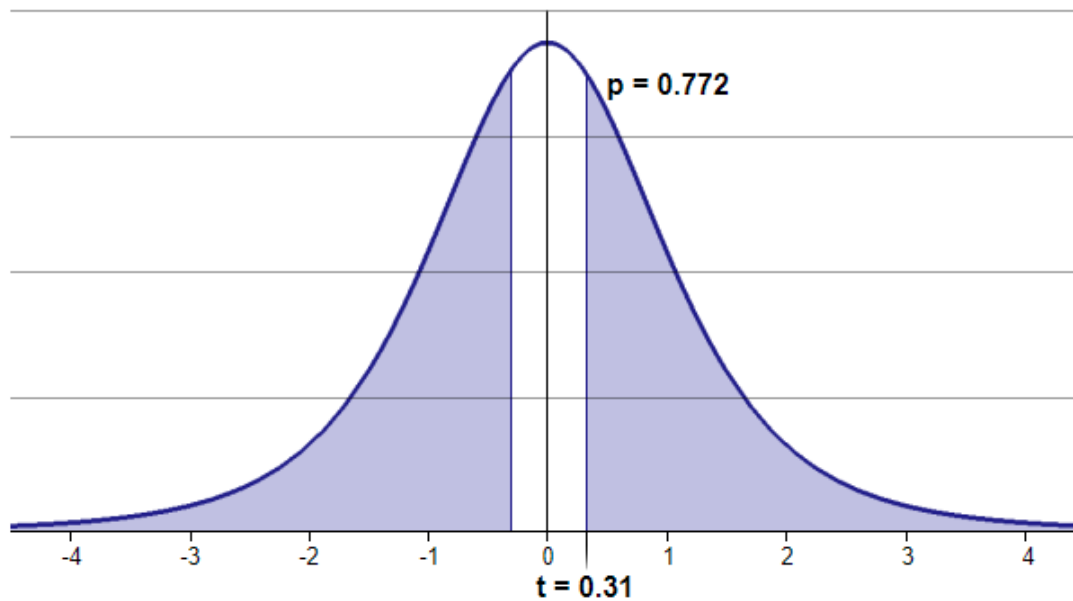
Then moving ahead, question #13 read this way in the action research, "How are sermons lately at connecting to the culture and places near our church, homes, apartments, or workplaces?" The goal was a local connection via sermons. The result was not statistically significant at a P-value of 0.178. However, the improvement was more marked than questions #10 or #12.

Still, there was not enough improvement into survey occurrence two to justify these resources helping in this regard later at Sandy Plains. The unpaired t-test shows this result in "Comparison 12" as follows:

In the action research, question #14 inquired, "Do you notice any personal increased obedience to God from ideas on how to obey Him in sermons lately?" The result of the question demonstrated no statistical improvement using the $p < .05$ standard as a check on the resources. A similar level of satisfaction with the application was found before and after the new resources for question #14. The lack of confirming improvement is shown visually by "Comparison 13" as listed here:
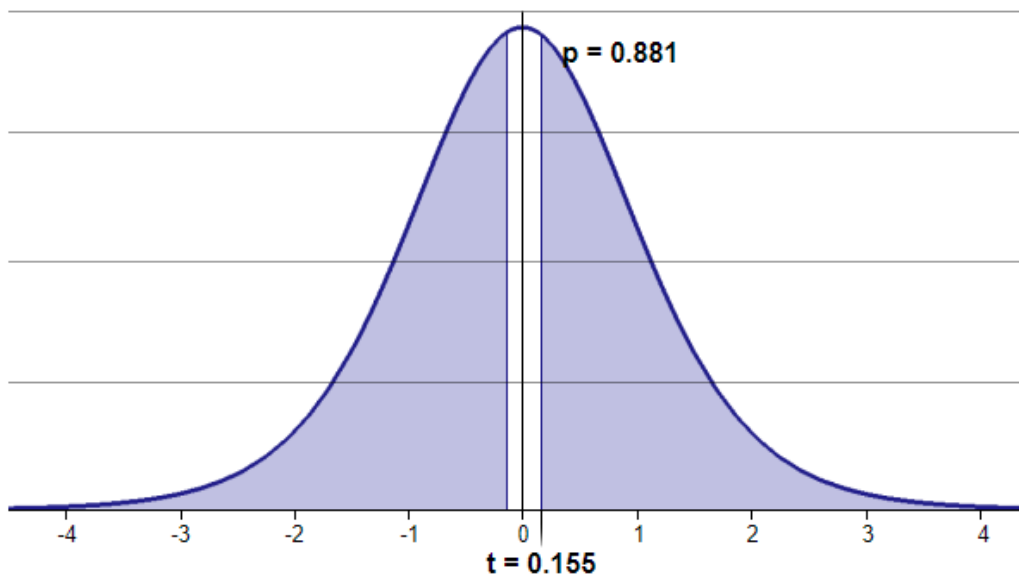
The final survey question online was #15. Regarding the next question, #15 asked volunteer participants "How realistic have been the ideas of how you might need to apply sermons lately?" Based on the respondents' answers, the result shows no statistical improvement using $p < .05$. The t-chart shows a similar set of answers to the question in either survey. This lack of confirmation of realistic ideas is displayed in the "Comparison 14" graph as follows:
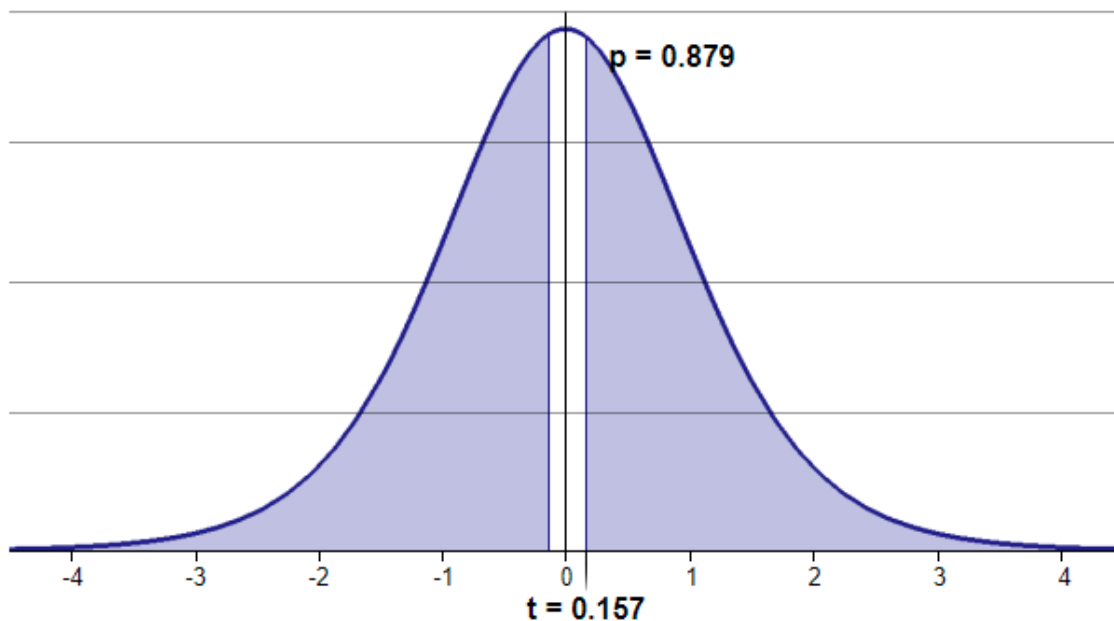
This concludes the comparison section from the respondent data. The next section will critically reflect on the findings from the action research.

Reflective Analysis

This section offers insights into the analyzed data. The interpretation of the data shows an improvement in certain areas. These were, for instance, in the general applicability of Sunday sermons using the new resources. Question #6 read as follows, "Have the Sunday sermons applied to your life situations in general?" There was a statistically significant improvement shown on the t-test. As a result, local analogies and framing questions are useful for general

sermon application according to attendees on that question. The following question #7 was close to showing statistical improvement. Question #7 read, "Have you noticed Sunday sermons having clear ways to apply them recently?" The t-test was not far off of a notable statistical significance. It may be deduced there was some improvement in clarity according to attendees. This is reasonable in comparison of this question #7 to the other questions #8 through #15 that followed.

The no statistical improvement section included questions #8 through #15. As the survey proceeded, there is a trend of less noticeable improvement in the charts. Earlier on, regarding question #8, the question showed no improvement on application suggestions in this study. In hindsight, the area of suggestions is not the primary goal of the action research. The use of analogy might then not be measured well by question #8. However, perhaps the framing questions were not as helpful in the new resource sermon series. Those would be more directive and aim the hearer's mind towards certain applications. This may indicate framing questions are not expected or necessary for improved application.

Likewise, the questions about memory of application #9, recall of application #10, and application in real life lately (emphasis on lately) #11 did not show statistical significance of improvement from the action research. There may have been an improvement for some attendees perhaps, but overall, that was not noted. Question #12 on needed to hear that message was likely too broad of a question. For the average attendee, question #12 probably did not focus enough on the precise application changes in sermons. Also, question #14 on increased obedience lately from the ideas to obey God did not show improvement either. There may be long-term improvements from planting the Word into lives with the new application resources, but they were not evident statistically short-term based on responses, Mark 4:1-20. The local analogy

emphasis in the new resources did not increase the realism of the application, according to results from question #15. Circling back onto question #13, there was perhaps a move towards statistical improvement on the new resources connecting to the culture and home and nearby venues where members frequent. The question #13 t-test shows a result closer to an improvement than many of the other survey questions #8 through #15 as a section. Question #13 did not meet the $p < .05$ standard but was a move in the right direction still among respondents on the survey. This indicates that the project may have been on the right track in general even if not in the exact use of local analogies or framing questions.

The results were not as expected overall but were notable on a few questions. There was some marked statistical improvement on general application to life from the sermons, question #6. There were possible moves towards improvement in questions #7 and #13 as a result of the use of analogy and framing questions in sermon application. That is borne out by the above t-test graphs compared to the other questions in the surveys. However, on the whole, either the collection of survey research questions overall was not of the right form to find improvement or there was not statistically significant improvement measured in the majority of the questions. On the balance, the new resources did not make a statistically significant impact as had been hoped. However, there was a movement towards improvement as a result of the new resources in a few areas as noted above. Perhaps the data reveals that an emphasis on application investment in a sermon shows a marked improvement, but the exact methods used to improve the application were not statistically significant. This would lend itself to the effort of continued investment in the application section after each sermon division.

Effective deployment of the resources occurred in the research. The project as designed was carried out in detail. The promotion and sermon development were as stated pre-research.

The first week of the resources' deployment being impacted by Covid-19 in the pastor's family may have had a slightly negative effect on the research. The effect is not viewed as substantial by the researcher. However, the attendee's focus may have been on the uniqueness of that congregational life event rather than on the new resources. The other weeks two through four went very smoothly with nothing unusual occurring. New or long-time regular attendees also were the norm during the study. That was not a negative factor. A possible detrimental factor was the continued fear among some of attending large gatherings during the worldwide pandemic. Pre-pandemic attendance at Sandy Plains Baptist Church worship was higher by 25-35% most Sundays. This may have yielded less participation or representation among the congregation on Sundays. However, attendance during the study and currently is moving in a similar numerical range, so it would not be reasonable to think the data would be different today than when it was provided. Incidentally, this is confirmed by other area pastors at those congregations as well. The lower participation in survey occurrence two was also a frustration. However, this fact was not a large enough change to hinder the results. It may be a minor underlying factor though in findings.

Conclusions drawn from the above realizations include that the two applicational resources did not, on the whole, prove to be useful. While there was some improvement noted, it was not widespread enough to justify regular, ongoing use in the congregation in the future. The two resources according to the data may have future use in sermon application, but it is not a guarantee of improvement in the sermon's impact on attendees breaking from a spiritual plateau.

What might account for the above conclusions? The newly introduced sermon application resources were evaluated by a slightly older age group in the congregation. However, the survey pool in both surveys was balanced fairly regarding the gender demographic of the attendees.

Another discovery by the research facilitator is that the church is historically used to more analogies in Sunday sermons in the 1980s and 1990s. While this would not account for potential indifference in younger or newer respondents, such as in survey occurrence number one, it would explain the indifference to analogy use in survey occurrence number two. That is due to survey occurrence two being slightly weighted to a longer attending or older attendee demographic. This information was not known in the preparation or deployment of the project. In other words, the use of analogy rather than being perceived as special might simply be expected by the longer attending demographic groups in survey occurrence two. This would be in a confluence of the age and length of attendance at Sandy Plains groups.

In summary, the DMIN project overall was not backed up by statistically significant improvement, even if it was in certain cases. Some improvements or moves towards improvement were observed. Also, there were outside factors that may have negatively impacted the statistical significance, but they were not large enough to justify detriment to the overall project. The research was carried out as planned effectively. The data collected was sufficient and able to be analyzed effectively. The research was carried out consistent with expectations of the LUSOD and DMIN requirements, which ensured its accuracy.

<div align="center">Potential Takeaways from Results</div>

Valuable insights gained from the action research are covered in this section. Based on the results of the previous sections, a first gained insight is the resources did offer a general improvement to the sermon divisions' application points. Placing such resources in the application portions of a sermon improves an attendee's overall perception of relevance to life situations they face regularly. Relevance is a strong desire of many in our culture. Therefore, in

this regard, the project succeeded. The tools deployed would add value to listening well to a sermon or attendance in Sunday worship service in general. However, the resources deployed did not improve exact ideas on how to apply a sermon. This may imply the exact application of a sermon should be left to the individual or collective hearers. There is a takeaway in this. Trying to nail down exact ways to apply a sermon may be beyond the scope of the pastor's role in this congregation. Perhaps the pastor does not connect to the lived experience of many attendees precisely. There is a fair question of whether another person can even do that. Or perhaps that is too high a hurdle to aim to give specific applications for each sermon division. It might be a role better left to the person and to the Lord to bring out in future sermons or sermon series. Another angle on this is that if a sermon has three divisions, as this test series did on Sundays, then maybe there are too many analogies or framing questions to stick in a listener's mind during the week. This project did not explore a one-point sermon format, which may or may not benefit from the resources employed in this project for each sermon point.

Another insight was that improvement of the recollection of a sermon, or its application was not achieved. This data was very clear. It was supposed earlier those memorable analogies would assist in this area of memory. They did not. This was a surprise. The reasons might vary, perhaps the analogies were not long enough to stand out. It is the research facilitator's view that illustrations may still be more valuable in this regard. Analogies perhaps are appreciated in this congregation but do not themselves make or break a sermon's application effectiveness. Due to the length of time to create precise local analogies, illustrations may be a preferable element in many future sermons. Other factors in a sermon or its delivery must weigh more heavily on the attendees than analogies helping them recall ways to apply a sermon.

This directs the congregation's pastor to find other ways to help attendees with sermon recall. It is a case now of knowing what not do to in the future. This will assist with precious time investment in sermon preparations. If the goal for a message or a message series is a strong memory of the sermon division points applications, then that would be found in other sermon resource tools. Analogy and framing questions did not perform in this congregation in the planned way. In the future, on-stage object lessons, timed point enthusiasm, repetition of key applications, or other tools would be more appropriate. In sermon preparation plans, another angle in the future may be to utilize visual aids such as short-take introduction videos often. In a video-driven culture, these may be a memory resource that carries the application points along with it. It is hypothesized that will be increasingly true in the future as tablet and smartphone apps become increasingly video-driven.

Still another takeaway is to aim for clearer and more on-topic questions in the control and follow-up survey. Future research facilitators in congregational projects on sermon division applications should sharpen such questions further. Perhaps a focus group to sharpen the questions could be utilized in such a future project.

In general, lessons mentioned above may be broadened out to help others, beyond merely the use of analogy or framing questions with each sermon division. While it is not viewed as a make-or-break element, questions #8 through #15 may have benefited in this manner. These dealt with the realistic nature of application points and clarity of the next steps suggested. A wide range of sermon questions could benefit from this adjustment. Along with this idea, it is now supposed that exploiting social media in a screen saturated world may aid in survey response rates. The downside is the risk of non-attendees or outside actors being aware of the action research opportunity. Their interaction may skew results. However, the potential upside may

outweigh this risk, as congregants may be constantly reminded of what they care about on social

media platforms. In a culture drifting gradually away from Facebook to other platforms such as

Instagram, the right choice should be planned carefully. A Facebook saturated reminder would

skew to an older demographic in survey responses. Social media reminder tools employ a

constant presence while people are bored or in moments of free time (lunch break), which could

aid in survey response goals. Similarly, the use of texting the congregation systems to send the

survey out may result in higher response rates. Such a system was not used in this project, but for

the sake of greater diversity of response in a congregation, that may be a reliable method to try.

      Considering all of these takeaways, the next section will offer conclusions for the Sandy

Plains congregation and potential future research options or areas. Any implications that touch

on the findings will be explored.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter explores the next steps for improved sermon application at Sandy Plains Baptist Church in a Charlotte, North Carolina exurb. There will also be implications for future research projects and recommendations of how those might adjust or have different goals. Certain of the takeaways from the action research confirmed the project's goals. Other project goals were not statistically significant in confirmation. These will be outlined in what follows.

General Relevance Obtained

To begin with, this project did add sermon application relevance in general to the lives of attendees at Sandy Plains Baptist Church. Therefore, future Sunday sermons would include intentional applicational local analogies and framing questions for general relevance goals. These might include general relevance in the current family or work dilemmas, needs, reasons for thanks, or next steps in life situations for the Lord. Others' action research in the field did at times mention relevance as their project goals. This project obtained general life situation relevance of applications in a three-point expository sermon format. Relevance to life situations was a top project goal in that Sandy Plains attendees must live as a witness in an area that is increasingly changing demographically. Changing life backgrounds, regional migration trends to the area near Sandy Plains in greater Charlotte, and development lifestyle changes are a threat to directionless believers in any given situation they face. The church family is situated in an area that is rapidly transitioning from semi-rural to suburban. This has continued post-Covid pandemic. On the ground, recent door-to-door outreach has yielded insights that the new movers post-Covid are economically, regionally, and racially diverse. This requires applications that

assist attendees to see beyond patterns of habit in who they associate with socially. A substantial

minority of door-to-door outreach meetings are from those fleeing larger US cities to live further

in the suburbs. There would then be an urban to suburban transition that the church will need to

meet. The Great Commission as a local mission goal must be regularly brought into applicational

sections of future sermons at Sandy Plains. In addition, rapid USA cultural changes demand

increased life situation applications. A congregation that is not relevant to what members face

has increasing problems with fulfilling its spiritual mission and recruitment of new members. As

for a pastoral project goal of helping attendees reach their neighbors in a relevant way, the

project was successful on that point. The congregation may avoid the imminent risk of perceived

irrelevance and then a slow bleed of members as the local culture shifts. As further support, the

research did show a potential move towards clear next steps in an application by the new

resources in questions #8 and #13. In this way, believers may have been equipped in that

direction as well.

This is a positive result for the community and the congregation in the future. Modest use

of the new resources may further this perceived benefit. A side benefit to general relevance is

also that it may assist attendees to not remain the same spiritually. Many United States

evangelical churches measure spiritual growth by attendance, decisions for Jesus, and baptisms.

Those metrics have value. This project was interested in greater spiritual depth. This involves

born-again Christian sensing or acting upon important life decisions, beliefs, or worldview

propositions in a new way. The goal is to help people get beyond a plateau spiritually. Despite

the short-term, spiritual growth of this type being challenging to monitor, yet relevant application

successes will provide long-term doorways for an attendee to enter into for greater maturity. For

example, there may be a growing necessity that the typical attendee notices in their heart and

mind to bring Christ to others in new ways or to new neighbors. That would align with one of the project's goals of removing comfort with existing spiritual states. Or another congregant may decide that local analogies showed how their self-control might benefit them with inner peace and be a stronger Christian witness nearby. While not itself a fully realized spiritual maturity, these options that connect to actual life occurrences open the door to that spiritual growth. The attendee essentially grows in wisdom as knowledge of how to apply truths they affirm is then shared in pictures or snapshots of real life. In this regard, the action research made a difference positively at Sandy Plains. Additionally, it is theorized that sermon relevance also is a tool for maintaining new or existing attendees. When the truth is presented and challenged into one's life in a way that makes sense that removes the potential complaint of "this just does not connect to my life at all" from being a risk. Therefore, the backdoor of the congregation is closed more so as a result of this research project. This will then in turn create more volunteerism (even if not all do volunteer) which results in a more robust church influence upon the local community. Beyond the aforementioned points, in a post-Covid and post-Christian culture relevance may bolster one's faith. Attendees may sense that they are receiving great value in this part of the worship service. Instead of facing change with uncertainty or anxiety, having gone over the Lord's will in response to situations in Sunday application sections will offer contentment and peace. Surprise at dilemmas faced will not be the problem. The attendee may sense they are a part of God's kingdom work rather than a victim in an impersonal, faceless modern society. Put into a more popular way, the story of the attendee may join God's story and connect with other stories developing in the local changes. This may even aid in reconciliation and mutual kingdom work among those the church reaches in the future as they see a need to join in a common cause.

Further Implications on Future Research

From another perspective, the project found that exact applications and specific steps for life are not aided by analogy and framing questions. These resources were not a straightforward path to improving the next steps of applying a sermon in detailed ways. Attendees reporting this was a surprise in the action research findings. In the future, the pastor of Sandy Plains Baptist Church would not include those tools for certain sermons or series requiring immediate life change steps. If the need among the church is specific next steps, applicational benefits must be found elsewhere. The community of faith would gain rather by other methods of meticulous next steps. What might those be? What further research or methods could be tried? Other methods could be listing those exact application steps directly even using numbered steps. These may be outlined using a stage object lesson to act out an application step-by-step visually, or even repeated exhortations on a single sermon point. It might be possible to repeat an exhortation across sermon points with a minor change in the why it matters. Alternatively, a demonstration of acting out a sermon application step in detail with a volunteer on or near the stage also may provide more specific or useful steps at Sandy Plains. Another future project might explore those several methods for specific next steps to apply a sermon truth. While other congregations occasionally might be exposed to such pastoral preaching tools, a project that tried to systematize these for exact application goals could be effective. Random usage of such resources would not benefit ongoing detailed application steps of carrying out the mission.

As an example, it is likely not enough to say, "We should do more missions," and point at a screen projection that says mission matters. Rather, an object lesson of a former mission trip overseas could inspire a congregation. This might be a gift from that region given by new believers who are grateful. This could stir the imagination and invite the audience into the task.

This might be a weaved basket made in the high mountain tops of South America. Analogies could still connect to such a new method. That might then be followed the next week by a visual aid projection on-screen showing specific next steps to go on short-term mission trips. In another following message, detailed steps of how to reconcile could help as they are numbered out one after another. This would allow attendees to make notes along those lines. Volunteers on stage could stand with arms crossed and backs to each other. These visual lessons may stand out more than analogy. Further research of a method of balancing those over time could assist pastors with intentionality in sermon application. Therefore, a goal for a book series of applications could be set and then filled in with unique methods such as those mentioned. Then, along the way for planning purposes and to ensure maximum ability to apply truth, a series of those may yield statistical significance of improved applicational methods.

Still another project goal was to assist attendees to grow in spiritual maturity. General relevance to life situations was achieved in this project. Such application is important to a growing Christian in 21st century America. Also, there was positive movement in certain response questions toward effectiveness in clarity and connecting to local culture or place by the deployed resources. In those ways, an attendee could connect an application with the real experiences of a local area. But on the flip side, personal improvement of obedience to God as a goal did not statistically improve in the survey responses. How does this impact future research? This fact presents a mixed picture of a project goal of increased spiritual maturity of attendees. The door was opened to maturity, but the perceived actual maturity did not occur statistically in the one sermon series of this project. There was not a noticeable movement in the survey questions #8 through #15 in the direction of continued use of analogy or framing questions for greater obedience to Jesus. This provides a caution that the two new resources of the project

were not alone enough to affect this goal. Spiritual maturity in this project was focused on if

application suggestions were used. The applications may have been planted in hearts or carried

out somewhat but were not statistically observed across the data. One way to help other churches

in this regard is to bring up a discussion among pastors. A discussion of sermon application with

others might be brought up in conversation such as a focus group before research in a future

project. Using the current results, as a caution of what may or may not work, results may also be

shared among such a group of local pastors. The findings of what does not work might be shared

with other churches through the pastor internalizing this project's realization. This information

might be shared at associational gatherings or pastoral prayer gatherings around town in

Gastonia, North Carolina. Such information might be made available at occasional events in this

area, called "The Gathering." A guest speaker is brought in, typically a Christian author or

speaker, and then after there is an open discussion of ideas. By inserting this into such a

discussion, it would provide direction to area pastors. This would be less dramatic than a handout

or an email. Then those who hear would be a step ahead in not relying on these as the main

improvement to spiritual maturity through the preaching aspect of discipleship. Tying into the

earlier point, benefits generally could be mentioned in sermon application. Therefore, a balanced

picture of these methods could be dispersed in area churches.

  Closely related to the spiritual maturity goal was the goal of recollection of the ways to

grow in the faith. Would a person in worship on Sunday recall on a Thursday at 10 am how to

apply a truth? Sermon point analogies and framing questions did not markedly improve that

project memory goal. It would fall upon other sermon resources to increase the memory of

sermon applications in the future. A related project that goes beyond this current research, might

rely more upon illustrations, even lengthy illustrations, or a collection of them, to provide a

memorable applicational point. A fair conclusion is that short analogies do not have the standout

quality in the attendee's mind that is required in this local congregation. Other congregations

could explore such tools' effectiveness in a project with differing demographics or learning

styles. A future congregational project should be cautious regarding believing analogy and

framing questions will obtain a lasting memory. There may be greater value in other sermon

tools for that. Another researcher might consider visual images projected on a stage screen, an

object repeatedly used on stage not just in a single skit for recall that is unique to each message,

or repetition of a word or phrase instead. Those could even connect to a whole series theme on

Sundays while progressing through a Bible book or section. Perhaps a unique way of entering the

congregational worship setting by the pastor or another stand-out method could obtain the

memory of a certain message. Since it is out of the ordinary, this would elicit focus and post-

service discussion that would linger in hearts and minds. Some of those may likely be overdone,

so a future research project would need to determine a balance so that the pastor is not

predictable. There is a story of a pastor entering a new church riding a motorcycle onto the stage.

This dramatic entry stood out. However, the application in that situation among those who heard

it was not recalled. There may be events where the otherness of the event, such as a new pastor

or a disaster, overrides any use of a dramatic entry, for instance. If a pastor uses an umbrella

unfolded on the stage during a sermon or a workout weight all the time for sermon application

memory, the congregation will eventually tune out those methods, as examples. Likewise,

repetition of a phrase or concept every week in sermon applications would become expected and

lose impact. The strength of local analogies is found in that life advances and changes in how it

works out. Therefore, these capture the newness of the story and life change. Illustrations also

have that ability. Whereas visual aids are beneficial but may reach a limit. Further research into

alternatives on application recall among attendees is a worthy future project at Sandy Plains or elsewhere in a similar congregational setting. There was limited action research on the above-mentioned ideas in the findings. Many application books or sermon books mention in passing such ideas. Those were often very general in the literature review. Few authors developed those or attempted to measure their effectiveness in retention or obedience of application points. This indicates to potential future researchers an opportunity for measuring those options.

Another takeaway is that Sandy Plains Baptist Church in future research would need further reminders for participating in the sermon surveys. This is true regardless of the goal being an application or some other angle of worship research. A future researcher in preaching, music, apologetics, or leadership should assume that people are distracted and busy with other life issues. Any technological means to reach into their lives in a potentially quiet moment would be advantageous. Many of the attendees work during the day first shift or second shift in a nearby city away from their home. At this time, they are often on their smartphone during the week. This was true even during the latter part of the 2021 Covid pandemic. Working from home is not especially common in this congregation, with a few exceptions. Such job positions typically offer a break for an hour-long lunch or other official breaks from pastoral insight. These are when many committees or volunteering members, in general, send church emails or catch up on church-shared cloud docs. Response rates to surveys picked up during the week. This awareness in additional research may also balance the senior versus other age survey response taking rates. Taking advantage of such timely options should be done for even greater participation.

Research at Sandy Plains might in the future also include how to broaden the local analogy's appeal to attendee life experiences. If there is a method to stretch horizons of life with each sermon division application analogy, that may positively impact application survey

response decisions. It was theorized that any local analogy itself would connect across attendees. This assumes a common local experience. However, is that always true? No. Is it generally true? Maybe. There is a possibility that was not true. Perhaps what stands out as memorable to one attendee is forgettable to another if it is too narrow of a topic. In the literature review, few explored the use of analogy in application sections. Likewise, there is even more room for research on which analogies might turn the results to be statistically significant for attendees. A similar project in another similarly sized Baptist or Protestant church might go beyond and explore the exact length or type of analogies. Is there a way to test analogy length or content used for effectiveness across a sermon series in the sermon application points? Could the test sermon series include one section of weeks (say 2-3 weeks) with one type of analogy and another section of weeks with another type? Other alternatives could also assist in gaining effectiveness. Would including, with permission, the name or exact store that something was comparable in, for instance, increase memory? There is a definite possibility. The analogies in this project were kept general enough to hide identities and exact locations. That future work may confirm these results it is guessed at this point. New attendees who recently believe in Jesus or existing Christians who want to grow in Christ further may be expected to be added to this church congregation. The analogies and questions when engaged may need to change their emphasis as the area begins to morph into a new environment and culture. Further projects could explore this.

<div align="center">Lessons Gleaned</div>

The new research was conducted in a manner consistent with the planned execution of the project. Normal channels of promotion and invitation were employed throughout the process. The background of lessons gleaned includes over four years of the current pastor preaching on

Sundays and Wednesdays at the same location. The venues have also remained almost entirely

unchanged except for minor environmental changes during those years. Therefore, the baseline

of comparison for an attendee to evaluate is viewed as reliable and expected.

Given these facts, what lessons were discerned during the process and afterward? One

important lesson was the revelation that the senior and older middle-aged members are highly

tech-savvy and willing to apply that to respond. It was guessed they would respond less than they

did. They have engaged in surveys at Sandy Plains in the past multiple times but were used to

paper response forms. These generations; however, responded to the surveys well. An exception

is the 80+ generation, which was not common as often during the Covid pandemic or is slow to

return to regular worship out of an abundance of caution. Another parallel lesson is that the

younger members were not consistent in responding to the surveys. A subset answered the first

sermon application survey but not the second one. It was assumed that since the project was

explained as two surveys, that they might follow through with the first. This is an assumption

that knowledge would be enough to motivate. Is that true? Some did and some did not. In

retrospect, the local congregation at Sandy Plains does have many in the younger generation who

struggle to keep consistent commitments. A substantial sub-section of Sandy Plains might

illustrate this for future projects. For example, this is highly evident in the children's ministry

department at Sandy Plains, where regular cancellations by volunteers for travel, work, allergies,

family events like birthday parties, and vacations is an ongoing phenomenon. Many seniors have

said they are unable to serve in children's ministry due to health, which has required a large

raising up of new volunteers into that ministry. However, the newer volunteers are not as

consistent with the commitment when scheduled as were the previous generations. Another hint

along these lines is the youth ministry adult volunteer roster. It has similar challenges regularly.

The house and grounds committee has similar challenges with younger generations' timeliness on commitments to improve or fix certain facility-related items. Other examples could be given along these lines. The senior ministry alternatively has a consistent involvement over time. When someone signs up for their events or to do something, it is normally carried out. Likewise, retirement or near retirement age small groups also maintain a higher degree of consistency in attendance, involvement, and planning. Perhaps such concrete younger generational challenges over years indicate that with two surveys, there would be some non-follow through as well. That did happen. This illuminates positively how to counter that follow-through challenge in the future. A statement on the first survey that by completing the first survey a person will agree to commit to the second is a simple tool to improve follow-through results. In thinking of ways to improve this for the future, a researcher would still want to maintain anonymous respondent data. Therefore, an anonymous reminder system online, that maybe records the email address anonymously of the respondent, then reminds them, might also be a smart improvement. Exploring if such a tool is available and how to set it up with an online survey company would be worth the time investment. In general, Bible passages should be preached on perseverance, completing the task, and integrity might be needed in the younger congregation's future health.

Moving ahead, survey response question #12 asked about increased obedience among attendees. This was an important part of the project goals. There were some very positive answers; however, there was not a statistical significance in improvement from one survey to the next. Several lessons may be gained from this. One may be that the two new resources did not offer a fix in this one regard. But a further lesson gained is attendees may have higher standards for being willing to declare that their obedience to God has increased. There could be two opposing definitions of spiritual maturity at work. Sandy Plains has a more traditional streak in

its worldview outlook on being a Christian. How might this relate? While this study was looking

for large or small steps of spiritual maturity, there is a risk that many Baptist church attendees

might think only life-altering obedience steps matter. Real improvements might be defined larger

than the study assumed. Therefore, when asked in a second survey occurrence if obedience in

their life increased, they may be hesitant to answer as highly due to this. For instance, an

attendee may think of greater obedience to Jesus as surrendering to missions, joining the church,

starting to teach a small group, becoming a deacon, recommitting one's life to Christ, or going

on a youth camp retreat as a camp counselor. Members in several of the older generations also

talk of maturity as gained from revivals or revivals in the land. These could be negating factors

in measuring other real spiritual growth. That is noteworthy. It is believed this is a factor based

on pastoral conversations with many members in hindsight. The sermon series of this project did

not call for those precise larger spiritual next steps. The analogies and questions framed to give a

greater sense of how to apply a given passage did not address those. Beyond that, numerous

people have already done those actions at some point in their Christian life. There may be a

checked box mentality, where "been there and done that" also eliminates those options even if

they were to be brought up as sermon division application points. This potential upset may apply

to attendees who have not joined yet but are there in worship services consistently as well.

Around half of non-member attendees have a Baptist church background. A precursor to further

research on analogy and framing questions could be weeks of clear definitions of even small

steps being increased spiritual maturity. That would substantially benefit research in a similar

congregation or at Sandy Plains in the future. For project awareness, attendees in the past have

made such decisions in the past four years as well. These simply were not the primary sermon

series goal of the research in early 2021. That is a marked difference in the minds of many, that likely played into survey occurrence two results.

A set of questions in the surveys asked about sharing the application heard with another person. There was no requirement or suggestion with whom that might be, it was left open-ended for the respondent. The recollection was a part of the question as well. The respondents did not equate the locally analogous situation shared in the application, which they admitted the relevance of, with the desire or act of sharing with someone. The content was relevant but was not desired as a life application for the purpose to be shared with other people. Or on the flip side, it was forgotten possibly. The reasons may involve the application did not fit to share with limited contacts and was disregarded from the mind. Or perhaps, there is a desire not to engage many neighbors during a pandemic even with truth, so the thought was put aside? Was there perhaps not in general an excitement or a willingness to share with others in an increasingly anti-Christian culture? Or to put it another way, did the sermon series application topics not equate to sharable material, so the points were forgettable in that way? Oddly enough the series in Haggai on "Friendship with God" provided many touchpoints to share with someone a positive thought. Insights into a powerful walk with the Lord pervaded most message sermon divisions. The individual messages were packed with assurances that God has 'got situations under control' and things 'will work out.' This would seem to be a high-use message during the national pandemic before widespread vaccination in the USA. Other topics included sharing how a person may resist a sin, say to worry, as you share a victory you had over worry. These were packed with calls to faith. The responses then revealed either an aversion to sharing spiritual truths with another person or ineffectiveness at the two resources in aiding that goal. It is thought that the transitory nature of an analogy or a question is not sufficient as a driver of sharing with others.

People, on the whole, are generally wary of strangers and isolated in 2021 for health and cultural

reasons. The added stress of getting Covid during 2021 may have amplified this dilemma of

conversations with those outside the home. Therefore, timing and changing cultural landscapes

may be in play. As an example, to take off one's mask to talk would in some companies or stores

at the time of the research have been considered a controversial act. Presently there is more

freedom there; however, with Covid variants the dilemma of personal choice may return for

many people. However, Christians still must speak of Jesus and encourage others with God's

truth in times such as this. Christians still ministered during the European plagues. They still

shared the Gospel in places with malaria. How might further research press on to encourage

obedience, regardless? Likewise, other application resources may be necessary to overcome that

internal resistance to sharing spiritual truth with others. Longer illustrations are now

hypothesized to be useful at driving a response that is not naturally comfortable. A succinct

analogy may clarify, which was a goal, but it may also not motivate sufficiently. Short directive

comparisons of how to share an application idea or truth locally may not motivate full action.

Another project in the future may delve into building greater perspective and holy pressure, not

from guilt but from reality, to share with others. Creative means of sharing an application may

also overcome the risk of sickness in such times. A bulletin insert with an outline of the

expository sermon divisions may also aid in future research. While such a tool was not used in

this series, it is now hypothesized that may aid in reducing resistance to and in recollection of

how to share truth with another neighbor. While many sermon bulletin inserts have the main

division points and leave room for profound thoughts, it may be wiser to add in a 'takeaway' line

after each point. That could aid in spreading a sermon's practicality to another person. Many

members are using a smart device to read a Bible app during the messages at Sandy Plains. A

digital notetaking app may enable this as well. Since the deployment of the new resources and the testing of this research, the web hosting company that Sandy Plains has now offers a sermon notes section online. For those who view the sermon again later or who were watching online due to Covid, such a set of notes could also aid in recollection or motivation.

A further lesson was the newness to the church congregation represented by many of the survey respondents. The two surveys early in the set of questions both asked about the length of attendance at Sandy Plains Baptist Church. It was indicative that almost half of the respondents had attended less than 6-10 years. The influence held by the newer attendees is in stark contrast to the history of Sandy Plains which was a static congregation. While the longer-term members maintained the slight majority of survey responses, yet the rise of a newer group stands out post-Covid. Covid may have been a tipping point event in the life of the congregation. Many of the longer-term members are still months after the research was conducted avoiding mass gatherings at doctors' advice. These tend to be more senior members but are not exclusively so. Historically that demographic shift represents a dynamic movement. This is a standout shift for a Baptist church with a large 20th-century local impact and hometown name recognition in the area. There may be reasonable explanations for this in hindsight. Several generations are increasingly less represented due to recent retirements and then preferential house relocations. Also in the local area, many of the attendees from the church's larger biological growth days are found to have moved on to other area churches in their adult life or on to other nearby cities. This began decades ago but has continued recently. By relocation for work or amenity preferences, they have chosen to attend a closer church somewhere else. They may still appear at Christmas, Easter, or Fall Festival annually but are not the core of regular attendees. Biological growth was a substantial driver of attendance and baptisms in late the 20th century to early 21st century.

Presently, new attendees and their families are the drivers. Their strong appearance in the survey

indicates a continued trend. While stories of the glory days of the 1960s through 1990s abound

among senior members, the present narrative is less tied to that each season that passes. Beyond

relocation, many of those raised as members in those decades have been shown to have left the

Christian faith. Others choose to remain inactive members. Lifestyles in direct contradiction to

the Gospel are found in those family members who have not attended actively in 15-20 years.

Some of the older parents of that generation are attending less today as a result. The point is this:

local analogies which were integral to the research project may be less impactful. That fact may

be a community phenomenon in the congregational demographic transition. These did have some

relevance generally. However, other families moving in from various regions or cities attending

now may not value the local history, stores, non-chain restaurants, or existing connections in the

same ways. Several of the newer attendee families are from California, Pennsylvania, Virginia,

New Jersey, and more. Other new attendees are local in the metro sense but have not lived

exclusively in the immediate area near the church. Of course, there is always some connection to

the general human experience. However, the goal of expository sermon applications that connect

to uniquely local events may have less meaning in this congregation. The demographic change is

unfolding more rapidly than expected even a year or two ago. This is likely an explanation of the

muted survey responses among some of the newer or also younger newer demographics. In

going forward, further research should take note (including at nearby similar long-time churches)

and seek out analogies that relate to the current cultural climate more broadly. Perhaps life

encounters, transactions, time or money investments, and entertainment that more broadly fits

the Southeastern USA or general USA experience would be more effective. The next section will

offer summary thoughts on the above research and findings in conclusion.

Concluding Thoughts on Future Research

This project opens a needed doorway to detailed sermon application research in congregational settings where expository sermons are the focus. Given the suggestions to improve action research above, the way to tap this beneficial outlet is clearer. The findings of this action research yield guidance to necessary further projects. A strong theological foundation exists for this research in the Gospels and the Old Testament. The exact area of analogies and framing questions in sermon division application sections was a new action research focus. In previous projects, expository sermon emphasis on the storyline of redemption was a part of some projects and books on the subject as mentioned in the theoretical review. Some applications used objects or stories, but not analogies. Also, creating a vision was the goal of eliciting congregational application desire based on those stories of well-known figures or the object. There were a few published books that tested applications in a narrative formatted sermon, where the audience is invited into a larger story as participants. Other projects tested focus groups to provide ideas for sermon improvement with a team. Those projects explored did not accomplish their goals overall but did see some small benefits. In addition, certain preaching books in the literature review on this applicational topic briefly referenced the tools of drama and object use for sermons. Application guidance tends to be generic and based on experience but not data for commonality and direction of which tool works. Specifics or detailed research were not always evident. Taking the above project results into account, the larger evangelical church would benefit from projects continuing to explore how to evaluate effective application sections inside of sermons. This project serves as a foundational stepping stone for general relevance to be obtained in expository sermons for attendees of worship services. Additional research will need

to be conducted to narrow down applications (not just sermon main ideas) memory, the effectiveness of individual supplements to application sections besides 'rest in grace' again, or 'do this action' again bare statements. The lessons obtained in this project will also aid future research facilitators in gathering as many survey responses as possible across a congregation. Trends in data collection that meets an attendee where they are also noted for future research. Overall, this project was successful in researching its goals, its foundations, and carrying out the preplanned research. There were accuracy checks built into the project as well as anonymous data collection methods. There was project success in obtaining relevance to attendee life situations. Further room exists for finding clearer obedience steps in application sections, providing next steps of application in each sermon, and in facilitating recollection of application points. Some of this desired progress in applications will undoubtedly be entirely in the hands of the Lord by the Holy Spirit. Further responsibility partly lies in the ability of fallen but saved and remade imperfect people hearing a sermon well. There is also an element of spiritual warfare in the reception of the Word of God proclaimed, Mark 4. Yet as far as pastors can connect with the audience, this project provides a launching pad for future missions to increase preaching effectiveness.

February 15, 2021

David Keuss
Jerry Knoblet

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-615 Effective Sermon Application in a Charlotte Exurb Baptist Church

Dear David Keuss and Jerry Knoblet,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office IRB Mentor

Liberty University

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Appendix A

Consent

Title of the Project: Effective Sermon Application in a Charlotte Exurb Baptist Church
Principal Investigator: David S. Keuss, M.Div., Th.M., D.Min. student Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Project Study

You are invited to participate in a project study. To participate, you must be 18 years old and attend Sandy Plains Baptist Church regularly. Taking part in this project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to improve Bible-based sermons applying to real life.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Think about the sermons you hear from Pastor David in worship services on Sundays.
2. Compare the sermons to your life situations and circumstances.
3. Share your thoughts in the first and then one more second follow up survey.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The help of participating in this study is to improve the Sunday sermon's connecting to real-life needs or situations you and others face. This may enable God's Word to assist others with life.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal to non-existent. Sermon application might encourage you to have a stronger faith, love others, build up a friend who is down, etc. To the extent that trying those things in your life or responding about them is risky, the risk is minimal.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private and anonymous. The data will not include names or personal information and is stored on a password-locked computer for three years after the study. Project records of responses to the online post-sermon series survey will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Sandy Plains Baptist Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer the question and withdraw at any time before selecting to submit the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please close your browser before submitting the survey. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is David S. Keuss. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at --------------@--------edu.

You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jerry Knoblet, at ------------------------
-----@-------edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By proceeding with this survey and finishing it by pressing submit, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you proceed. You may print or save this page document for your records now. The researcher will keep a copy of the request with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you proceed and submit the survey, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Button: **Agree to Take Survey Now**.

Appendix B

Survey

Thank you for agreeing to take this short survey! First, some preliminary information will help with the research. Then there are questions about applying sermons to your life after those.

Question #1 "I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study."

Agree. Disagree.

Question #2 "What is your age?"

Under 18. 18-29. 30-39. 40-49. 50-59. 60-69. 70-79. 80+.

Question #3 "Are you Male or Female?"

Male. Female.

Question #4 "How long have you been an attendee and/or member at Sandy Plains?"

Less than a year. 1-5 years. 6-10 years. 11-20 years. 21-30 years. 31-40 years. 41+ years.

Question #5 "How often do you read a Bible verse or read a section in your Bible?"

Several times a day. Daily. Every few days. Weekly. Monthly. Seasonally. Less than that.

Question #6 "Have the Sunday sermons applied to your life situations in general?"

(1) Agree strongly. (2) Agree. (3) Neutral. (4) Disagree. (5) Disagree strongly.

Question #7 "Have you noticed Sunday sermons having clear ways to apply them recently?"

(1) Agree strongly. (2) Agree. (3) Neutral. (4) Disagree. (5) Disagree strongly.

Question #8 "Are sermon suggestions for next steps to believe God or obey God in a fresh way evident recently?"

(1) Definitely. (2) Somewhat. (3) Neutral. (4) Not so much. (5) Not at all.

Question #9 "How often do you find yourself remembering how to apply a message's truth?"

(1) Extremely often. (2) Very often. (3) Moderately often. (4) Slightly often. (5) Not at all.

Question #10 "Are you lately able to recall how a sermon applies so to share that with another?"

(1) A great deal. (2) A lot. (3) A moderate amount. (4) A little. (5) None at all.

Question #11 "Do you sense you are equipped with connections to real-life situations lately to apply a sermon's truth well?"

(1) Extremely often. (2) Very often. (3) Moderately often. (4) Slightly often. (5) Not at all.

Question #12 "Have you found yourself thinking lately, that is just what I needed to hear?"

(1) Extremely often. (2) Very often. (3) Moderately often. (4) Slightly often. (5) Not at all.

Question #13 "How are sermons lately at connecting to the culture and places near our church, homes, apartments, or workplaces?"

(1) Much better. (2) Somewhat better. (3) About the same. (4) Somewhat worse. (5) Much worse.

Question #14 "Do you notice any personal increased obedience to God from ideas on how to obey Him in sermons lately?"

(1) Extremely often. (2) Very often. (3) Moderately often. (4) Slightly often. (5) Not at all.

Question #15 "How realistic have been the ideas of how you might need to apply sermons lately?"

(1) Extremely realistic. (2) Very realistic. (3) Moderately realistic. (4) Slightly realistic. (5) Not at all realistic.

Almost done! To Finish: Click Submit Survey - Done.

Appendix C

Recruitment Pulpit Announcement and Bulletin / Email Newsletter Announcement

February and March 2021 [used twice]

Dear Sandy Plains Worship Attenders:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree to improve Sunday sermons. The purpose of my project is to bring Bible-based application closer to home in our lives as a congregation, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and attendees at Sunday worship services. First-time guests or rare attendees need not participate.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to fill out an online survey twice, once now and once in March. It should take approximately three minutes to complete the procedures listed each time. Your participation will be completely anonymous and no personal, identifying information will be collected. The survey link will be provided by the church bulletin and newsletter each time. Please fill out each survey, one now, and one in March as the links are made available.

To participate, please click on this survey link [link will appear here, it is a randomized link for the first, and second survey] . Please fill out the survey as soon as you can. You can also find the weekly church email newsletter from Beth and click on the link there in email.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the online survey. The consent document contains additional information about my project. After you have read the consent form, please click the button to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Participation is appreciated in this upcoming effort.

God bless,

Rev. David Keuss
Senior Pastor
Office ---.---.----
_____@_____

Appendix D

Pre-Series and Wrap Up of Series Recruitment Letter for the Worship Center Exit Area

February and March 2021 [used twice]

Dear Sandy Plains Worship Attenders:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree to improve Sunday sermons. The purpose of my project is to bring Bible-based application closer to home in our lives as a congregation, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

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To participate, please click on this survey link [link will appear here, it is a randomized link for the first, and second survey] . Please fill out the survey as soon as you can. You can also find the weekly church email newsletter from Beth and click on the link there in email.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the online survey. The consent document contains additional information about my project. After you have read the consent form, please click the button to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Participation is appreciated in this upcoming effort.

God bless,

Rev. David Keuss
Senior Pastor
Office ---.---.----
_____@_____

Appendix E

Additional Considerations

Social Media

The research project did not utilize social media to promote or provide links to the study surveys. This minimized the risk of rare attendees or non-attendees being able to show up for the research which would skew the regular attendance baseline in response data. Also, this prevented access to the survey links by non-viewers or infrequent worship attenders. This decision maintains the project focus on those who can offer the most effective evaluation of the new resources deployed in the expository sermon series application.

Debriefing Statement

There is no debriefing document as no deception was utilized in this research project. The research data is also anonymous. The identity of research participants will not be known.

Permission Statement

The worship services are entirely under the Senior Pastor facilitator's authority in our small church. This includes authority over the sermon, sermon topics, sermon style, sermon series ideas, Bible passage, service prayers, worship style, and worship elements. I am permitting myself to try new use of the application in the Sunday expository sermons for four weeks. The new application resources are also low risk and non-controversial.

Phone Scripts

No phone calls will be used to promote the research so there are no phone call scripts.