

**INFLUENCE OF PREACHING'S RHETORICAL APPEAL ON EVANGELICAL
LISTENERS' MOTIVATION**

by

Nicholas Anene Oji

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

School of Communication and the Arts

Liberty University

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Abstract

Preaching is a form of rhetorical narratology aimed at persuading its audience via sermons to experience a renewal of the mind and the transformation of their life. While previous research established the fact that listeners comprehend sermons through their rhetorical appeal, it has been unclear how this has motivated evangelical listeners to act. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore how the rhetorical appeal of preaching influences evangelical listeners' motivation at evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia. A comprehensive approach to exploring a sermon's rhetorical appeal was utilized by focusing jointly on individual perception and social context. The Narrative Transportation Theory served as the theoretical framework, and 34 participants from six churches were interviewed to reach saturation. The findings showed that rhetorical appeal embedded in preaching, plus its narrative essence, influences evangelical listener motivation. In addition, listeners subconsciously understand that aspects of rhetoric and narrative work together in sermons to influence their motivation. This study specifically identified three themes, seven categories, 13 conditions, and 32 codes relevant for rhetorical appeal to be effective and to help motivation occur. The three themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement were aligned with Ethos, Logos, and Pathos, and then integrated with Environmental, Cognitive, and Behavioral functions, to create the Sermon Listener Motivation Triangle. This study's corroboration of preaching's collaborative nature between the perfectly divine and the imperfectly human is shared in hopes of helping speakers prepare scripturally authentic sermons and communicate in engaging ways that inspire change.

Keywords: Rhetoric, Appeal, Narrative, Persuasion, Preaching, Evangelical, Motivation.

Copyright Page

Dedication

To my ladies, Chinwe, Gabby, Nichole, and Caroline. You make my heart sing, and this life's journey would be bland and etiolated without your love, zest, and support. We have had many adventures together, and the best is yet to come. I am and will always be your biggest cheerleader and champion.

Acknowledgments

I considered giving up a few times on this doctorate journey. Balancing being a busy husband, dad, professional, and volunteer made this work feel overwhelming, and it would have been impossible for me without God's grace and mercy. To Him be all the glory. I am grateful he blessed me with my best friend and fellow doctoral intransigent, Chinwe. The fact that we signed up to do this together was what helped keep me sane. To the Headmaster, I am grateful to be called your son. You pushed me to dream big and always told me to climb higher. Mom and the boys, your inspiration and advice were like cold water on a scorching hot summer day. God's special gift to me came in the form of Dr. Sandra Romo, and I could not have asked for a better dissertation chair. Your kindness, wisdom, and motivation have set an example that I will always aspire towards. Dr. Erin Black and Dr. Robert Mott, thank you for the guidance and direction which improved this work, and more importantly, improved me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to deliver a framework for the research by introducing the research topic and making a compelling case regarding the problem being investigated, the research purpose, the research questions driving the study, and the significance of the study. As the first impression of this project, this chapter will serve as an introduction to help attract and sustain readers' interest (Radhakrishna, 2008). To set up the rest of the study, chapter one will end by defining some of the key terms that may be unfamiliar or polysemantic, though ultimately crucial for readers to understand the crux of the dissertation.

Background

In many organizations, communication is at the heart of daily life, and the first function of a leader should be to develop and maintain a communication system (Schneider et al., 2015). In the church organization, this communication comes primarily in the form of preaching, which is often delivered by ministers who serve as leaders. Communication style plays a significant role in personal relations and information exchange, and directly affects interactions between speakers and listeners (De Vries et al., 2013). While different congregations have different expectations of their preachers, all preaching styles would benefit from understanding what elements of their persuasion are perceived as helpful by listeners (Hussey, 2014). Preaching is persuasive in nature as both a rhetorical art and an act that intertwines the divine message with human discourse (Hogan & Reid, 1999). The human component of rhetoric in sermon delivery illuminates how preaching involves bringing God's truth to others through one individual's

personality (Brooks, 1907). Preaching is thus a collaborative activity between the divine and the human, and this study's curiosity lies in how the human role can be understood and improved.

Adequately connecting with the necessities and capacities of listeners changes with shifts in culture; consequently, preachers must consistently explore the interaction of scripture and society. Though the truth of God remains constant, the ways it is delivered to distinct groups of people can be somewhat different. The preacher must strive to present the gospel in a way that will help listeners get the point (Gore Jr., 2017). Keller (2016) postulated that preaching well and making a sermon great must come from both a love for God's Word and a love for people. This study integrates these dual components of God and people, the living word and the hurting world, by exploring how preaching, which is narrative, is rhetorically communicated, and how this impacts the actions of people who listen to it in the evangelical community.

There is plenty of current research on the ways in which ethos, logos, and pathos affect how listeners pay attention. However, there is minimal research on how rhetorical appeal embedded in a preacher's narrative message influences the actions people take after hearing the sermons. Thus, a comprehensive approach to exploring a sermon's rhetorical appeal should focus on both the individual and social perceptions of preaching. This is vital, because listening to sermons in-person at church involves social learning, as it is done in a group environment with listeners discussing their experiences with each other (Carrell, 2000). This study will help equip preachers by exploring how sermons move the congregation to act in their life's physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects. It will contribute to the age-old preachers' debate about what makes for effective preaching by exploring the combined influence of narratives and rhetorical appeal in evangelical listeners' motivation to act on these sermons, not just listen to them.

The Historical Context

Communication scholars such as Bauer (1964) have called for focusing communications research on studying the message receiver rather than just the sender. This pivot of perspective regarding who ultimately determines the communication approach changed the focus of the entire communications research world. A contemporary, more inclusive, and productive approach to communication research emerged, exploring how the receiver understood the message, what role the message played, and what the receiver did with or to the message (Webb, 2005). Rutten and Soetaert (2013) explain that academic interest in the power of narrative has become prominent over the last few decades. Though considering narratives is part of an older tradition dating back to Plato and Aristotle, the focus was predominantly on a story's form and content. From the 1960s, attention has shifted toward narrative's political, ideological, cognitive, and social functions. The new narratological approach explored the diversity of narratives and their probable purposes.

This shift acknowledged that while details are valuable, concentrating on the big idea is more critical, especially regarding developing and delivering memorable sermons (Gore Jr., 2017). The digital-age listener is attuned to sound bites with limited bandwidth for the customary substantive arguments delivered in sermons. The transformation in the modern listener's attention span began with exposure to radio programming that offered short programs, or extended programs with an array of short acts. The advent of television in the 1940s and 1950s further impacted audiences' attention spans, leading to our now dominant image-based culture. The task of preaching has become daunting in terms of balancing the diverse preferences of modern listeners. The digital-age preacher does not have the luxury of sticking to the more

traditional style of delivering a sermon with a thesis, main points, and sub-points. However, Jesus' approach serves as a template for using narrative to connect with listeners in exciting ways (Gore Jr., 2017). Jesus distinguished himself as a teacher through his ability to meet his audience where they were and initiate discussions on relatable terms. He captured his listeners' interest, frequently using stories and pictorial language to make his points. His narrative regularly presented unique plot resolutions that astonished his audience (Lowry, 2001). Modern preachers will benefit from an exploration and implementation of Jesus's public speaking approach, which connected him with his audience and motivated them to act.

The Social Context

Ong (1982) highlighted a dramatic shift in civilization due to changes in the nature of communication from orality to literacy. The world was progressively moving from an oral language culture toward one based on textual language. Some of the implications of this are positive, such as expanding information dissemination to the masses using the printing press. On the other hand, this shift from orality to literacy also altered human consciousness, because at a base level, individuals moved from speaking, which is a natural verbal-based activity, to writing, which is an artificial visual-based activity. Oral communication directly mirrored how the human mind instinctively functioned and was how society collected and spread information for centuries. Spoken communication provides a broad context of body language, facial expressions, tone, pitch, inflection, and emotion, all of which help establish meaning. However, this context was lost when communication became written; consequently, literacy had to use elaborate grammatical structures and agreed-upon rules to make up for the lack of natural cues. This

dichotomy impacted the culture of literate societies, as technology expanded into other forms like computers, thus changing the global economy from producer-oriented to customer-oriented.

Like other foundational communication scholars such as McLuhan, Ellul, and Postman, Ong's thinking is clear regarding the fact that technology can negatively impact humanity and culture, but also that it is not an enemy. An essential lesson from Ong is the necessity of integrating orality into contemporary communication through its traditions of storytelling, poetry, folklore, heroes/heroines, and proverbs. Communication incorporating narrative and rhetoric can tap into oral descriptions that are more affluent, more emotional, and more picturesque, thereby making a lasting connection in the mind for the purpose of recall (Moon, 2016). Furthermore, the impact of cultural and historical influences must be taken into context when exploring human communication (Eubanks & Schaeffer, 2004). Preaching as a form of oral communication is uniquely positioned to use symbolic mental images and biblical descriptions which are rich and expressive in order to spur its listeners into action.

The Theoretical Context

Though many disciplines separate rhetoric from narrative, exploring them exclusively, Aristotle frequently linked both, since a story utilizes rhetorical effects. He understood that every narrative implicitly contends for a specific viewpoint at the expense of other probabilities. From Aristotle to numerous subsequent rhetorical theorists such as Burke, there is precedence for the idea that creating narratives and utilizing rhetoric should not be deemed mutually exclusive actions (Dinkler, 2016). The new rhetorical approach championed by scholars such as Burke introduced a wave of narrative theorizing used as models for analysis and explanatory tools. People's stories and social experiences were now being studied through narrative methods

(Rutten & Soetaert, 2013). Malikova et al. (2019) saw the appearance of the Gospels as the beginning of an ongoing reconciliation process between rhetoric and homiletics, and it became necessary to merge the texts' citation with the usefulness of oratory and the rationalization of sermon content with preparation for its delivery.

Fisher (1984) formalized Burke's theory of dramatism through the juxtaposition of narration versus rational functions and suggested that both paradigms share in human choice and action. He saw the academic community as partial to the rational paradigm within the study of rhetoric due to the presumption that humans are essentially logical beings. Consequently, rhetoric was taught through the values of public debate and argumentative structures, but Fisher proposed storytelling as a more appropriate mode of conceptualizing how people communicate (Fisher, 1984). Fisher (1985) based his Narrative Paradigm theory partly on the biblical perspective of John 1:1, which introduces Jesus in the beginning as the "Word." Fisher explained that since "Word" is translated from Logos, which means story or discourse, every form of human communication and expression, from words to architecture, religious to statutory, is included in this purview. Green and Brock (2000) built their Narrative transportation theory on earlier scholars, such as Fisher's work identifying the power of persuasion via narrative (Miller, 2019). This persuasive power of narrative connects the narrator to the listener through the influence of past experiences and circumstances.

Situation to Self

A dissertation is a researcher's work that begins in wonder and involves the challenging work of developing ideas. However, the ultimate drive for this exploration is the inspiration that sets the heart and mind on fire and ignites a longing that compels the researcher to take a journey

(Lukenchuk, 2017). For me, this inspiration comes from almost two decades of serving as a minister and preaching possibly over 1000 sermons, including Sunday school lessons, Bible institute classes, eulogies, and more. This experience has come with the discovery that though most ministers deliver each message with particular aspirations, they are rarely sure whether these have been achieved. Were lives changed? Did people get some answers to their questions? Was some meaningful wisdom imparted? Feedback is often either rare, on the surface, or from the same small group of individuals who are either superfans or haters. Carrell (2000) reported that while listeners frequently discuss sermons with family and friends, they rarely express their thoughts to the preacher. Listeners process sermons as monologues; thus, offering feedback to the preacher is uncommon. This results in a paradox of preachers endeavoring to influence listeners yet repeatedly barred from knowing what meaning listeners have derived from their sermons. Consequently, this study will help ministers and communicators at large better understand how their messages impact people in various areas of their lives.

Guba and Lincoln (1988) described philosophical assumptions as the guiding philosophy behind qualitative research. The epistemological approach is instrumental in my thinking, as opposed to ontological, methodological, and axiological options. With the epistemological assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants. Consequently, subjective evidence is constructed based on individual views. Knowledge is provided through the subjective experiences of individuals, and it is thus vital to conduct studies in the field where the participants exist and operate, since these are critical contexts for understanding what the participants share. More time spent in the field or connecting with the participants results in firsthand information that elevates the researcher's depth of

knowledge. The researcher depends on quotes from the participants as evidence and collaborates with them in the field, thereby becoming an insider and shrinking the distance between themselves and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1988).

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge and how humans know what they claim to know (Williams, 1973). Among the scholarly matters that concern epistemology, the one most important to this study explores the process through which knowledge arises. This issue is at the center of epistemology, since the process chosen for uncovering knowledge determines the form of knowledge that develops from that process (Miller, 1978). While there are various positions on this issue, as a researcher I lean towards Empiricism, which states that knowledge arises from perception. Humans literally experience what is happening around us, which influences our understanding and interpretations, so a listener's perception of preaching through the lens of rhetorical appeal is the focal point of the present research. In what ways do evangelical listeners see and become motivated by a sermon's ethos, logos, or pathos? Since knowledge arises in perception, does the perception of a narrative through the lens of rhetorical appeal affect evangelical listeners' motivation to act?

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identified paradigms as interpretive frameworks or beliefs that the researcher brings to the research process. Additionally, paradigms may also be theories or theoretical orientations that guide research practice. The researcher's paradigm is influenced by their discipline orientations, research communities, advisors, and previous scholarly experiences. I am approaching this research through the worldview of pragmatism, as opposed to the other paradigms of postpositivism, constructivism, or the transformative paradigm. Pragmatism as a worldview arises out of actions, situations, and consequences, and rather than

focusing exclusively on methods, uses all approaches available in order to understand an issue (Patton, 2015; Rossman & Wilson, 1994). With pragmatism, researchers can choose any methodology, system, and scholarship process that best enables the understanding of a research problem (Cherryholmes, 1992; Murphy & Murphy, 1990). Pragmatists agree that scholarly study happens constantly in social, historical, political, and other contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consequently, I am approaching this study with an openness to explore any applications that may provide solutions to problems, rather than getting tied to specific techniques.

Problem Statement

Though preachers endeavor to affect listeners, they are repeatedly sheltered from information regarding the meaning that their listeners derive from their sermons (Carrell, 2000). Allen and Mulligan (2009) postulated that listeners hear sermons through the three settings of Ethos, Logos, or Pathos. Consequently, some listen due to the ethos of a relational connection with the preacher; others listen due to the logos of an engagement with the content; and yet some listen due to pathos, which centers on feelings stimulated by the sermons. While this confirmation of Aristotle's rhetoric appeal highlights the settings through which sermons are received, it remains unclear how these settings motivate listeners to act (Rietveld, 2013). There is also uncertainty about the role that social context plays, since listeners of in-person church sermons discuss their experiences with each other (Carrell, 2000). Guthrie (2007) outlined that though many ministers approach preaching as an opportunity to persuade, others dismiss the idea, concerned about the potential for manipulation. However, instead of taking sides regarding motive, research can help move the discussion forward by exploring how preaching does or does not persuade.

Rietveld (2013) posited that understanding the phenomena of listening to sermons is an emerging discipline, and researching the role of emotions could advance our homiletical understanding. The Bible describes man as a triune being with spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23); consequently, humankind has physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. The problem is that while listeners hear sermons through the perception of rhetorical appeal, it is unclear how this rhetorical appeal influences evangelical listeners' motivation. The Bible portrayed Jesus as an expert storyteller (Matthew 13:2-3), and this has served as a model for preachers. The desired end of preaching should lead to some form of action taken by the listener, since a Christian is expected to be a doer of God's word, not merely a hearer (James 1:22-25).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to explore how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation at evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia. At this stage in the research, rhetorical appeal will be generally defined as the three Aristotelian categories of effective discourse deployed systematically to make it persuasive, and which include logos, ethos, and pathos (Rietveld, 2013). The theory guiding this study is the Narrative Transportation Theory by Green and Brock (2000, 2002), which postulates that when people lose themselves in a story, their attitudes and intentions change in order to reflect that story. This theory is relevant to the study because sermons are fundamentally narratives based on biblical, societal, and personal stories. Stories facilitate world creation and invite listeners to get involved (Heacock, 2014), and narrative transportation is a powerful form of persuasion (Lindsey-Warren & Ringler, 2021). Preaching thus uses stories to transport listeners into biblical times or worldviews.

Allen and Mulligan (2009) posited that every sermon listener is influenced by all three rhetorical categories; however, one appeal typically predominates. Additionally, listeners are influenced by their social context (Bandura, 1986). Motivation is a necessary component of Christian growth as there needs to be an application of what is heard resulting in obedience, which pleases God (1 Samuel 15:22). Pleizier (2010) stated that sermon research can be divided into effect research, which explores what the properties of sermons do to listeners, and audience research, which explores what listeners do to sermons. Though effect and audience researchers are aware of each other, they typically vie for which perspective plays a more significant role. This study strives to blend both research perspectives by exploring the effects of the different rhetorical settings on the listener, as well as what actions listeners take when listening to and implementing the lessons of the sermon.

Significance of the Study

There is a need for current research regarding how contemporary preachers and teachers of homiletics rely upon rhetoric. Riley (2015) posited that unlike Cappadocian Fathers and earlier ministers, most contemporary preachers lack an explicit rhetorical education and have likely received training regarding rhetorical principles more tangentially. Consequently, more studies are needed to explore how rhetoric could reinforce modern homiletics and improve preaching today. There is also a need for research through the lens of the narrative transportation theory to explore how storytelling in religious pulpits can empower and positively affect people's attitudes and behaviors (Lindsey-Warren & Ringler, 2021). Gore Jr. (2017) proposed a story and doctrine loop structure delivered through narrative exposition, combining deductive and inductive approaches. Similarly, this study's significance is its exploration of the balance of

story and rhetoric in sermon preaching, rather than separating the two. This approach holistically examines how preaching affects evangelical listener motivation based on the actions they take. Balancing narrative and rhetoric in preaching will help churches address the limitation of consistently employing just one homiletical approach or sermon structure.

The deficiency in church growth due to enervated preaching highlights the need for this kind of research (Shin, 2005), as well as the necessity for communicators to reassess their preaching and make necessary adjustments to better influence the lives of their listeners (Hauf, 2018; Robinson, 2001). Hauf (2018) argued that there is an explicit correlation between the absence of sermon influence on listeners and the absence of persuasion. Consequently, the proper examination of preaching should involve an analysis of persuasion. The importance of balancing both story and rhetoric in preaching lies in the reality that preaching is a form of persuasive storytelling based on a narrative art form. Preaching goes beyond simply delivering information, as it strives to move listeners to believe, transform, and act in faith (Lowry, 2001). Preaching should foster an examination of one's attitudes and actions, thereby leading to repentance and change (Psalm 139:23-24).

Scripture itself demonstrates the persuasive nature of preaching. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, the apostle Paul declared that the fear of God compelled him to persuade others. In Acts 17:1-4, Paul and Silas preached at Thessalonica and persuaded some of the Jews and Gentiles. In Acts 18:4, Paul was in the synagogue weekly, preaching and trying to persuade listeners. In Acts 19:8, Paul was in Ephesus, reasoning, and persuading people about God's kingdom. In Acts 28:23, Paul was in Rome towards the end of his life still trying to persuade a crowd of listeners about the teachings of Jesus. In 1 Peter 3:15, the named apostle exhorted believers to always be

prepared with a defense in order to address any questions about their hopes. In Isaiah 50:4, the named prophet declared that God had given him the tongue of the learned so that he would speak words of encouragement to the weary. And in Luke 1:4, the named doctor explained that he wrote his gospel to convince Theophilus about the certainty of Christian teachings.

Research Questions

While listeners hear sermons through their perception of rhetorical appeal, it is unclear how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to explore how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences listeners' motivation at evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia. The research questions work together to create a more focused direction for the purpose statement (Patton, 2015).

RQ 1 - Does a sermon's rhetorical appeal affect evangelical listener motivation?

RQ 2 - Does narrative storytelling affect evangelical listener motivation?

RQ 3 - Do listeners connect rhetorical appeal and narrative storytelling in sermons?

Definitions

This section provides the definitions of several terms pertinent to this study, but which may be unfamiliar, unclear, or polysemantic. The aim is to provide a common ground for understanding specific concepts that will be discussed throughout this work (Moran, 2021).

Rhetoric

The ancient Greeks defined rhetoric as the theory of oratory and a cultured tool for persuasion in order to evoke a desired response from an audience (Hauf, 2018). Bryant (1953) highlighted that the study of rhetoric in ancient Greece was the beginning of the communication

discipline and was initially concerned with persuasion, because rhetoric was the art of constructing arguments and speechmaking. Since then, rhetoric has grown to include the human usage of symbols to influence their environment, plus the process of adapting ideas to individuals and vice versa through all forms of messaging.

Rhetorical Appeal

The Greek thinker Aristotle, regarded by numerous scholars as the father of rhetoric, outlined the three binding modes of persuasion in rhetoric: Ethos, Logos, and Pathos. These three components comprise what is known as Rhetorical Appeal or the Rhetorical Triangle. Ethos addressed the speaker or author, logos dealt with the speech or text itself, and pathos referred to the audience (Wolfe, 2016). Scholastically, ethos refers to the character of the speaker or the appeal to ethics, while logos refers to the reasoning of the content or the appeal to logic, and pathos refers to getting the audience to feel something or the appeal to emotion (Gagich & Zickel, 2018; Hauf, 2018). All three modes are connected, and it is imperative that they work together for success to be achieved (Wolfe, 2016).

Narrative

Typically, a narrative is a story containing a plot, setting, character, and point of view, and the literary conventions of a plot include complications, reversals, denouement, and emplotment (Dinkler, 2016). Graaf et al. (2016) argued that while there can be various understandings of a particular narrative, the common thread is that it must include a minimum of one character experiencing at least one event. They defined narrative as the presentation of a specific character or characters experiencing a concrete event or events in a particular setting or

settings. Boyd (2009) added that narratives are expressions of human adaptation to challenges through stories that foster community, cooperation, and creativity.

Persuasive communication

Persuasive communication is the process of using words and nonverbal messages to shift the opinions, attitudes, objectives, or actions of others, either intentionally or unintentionally. This style of communication is founded on the rhetorical tradition (Derin et al., 2020). Warren et al. (2017) described persuasive communication as the process of communicators striving to convince others who have the choice to change their beliefs or behaviors through the transmission of a message. Since multiple factors such as age or race influence persuasion, effective communicators adapt their approach to their audience (O’Keefe, 2016). Persuasion is different from compliance, because it aims to influence and change the attitudes and behaviors of an audience through free will rather than to demand conformity (Gass & Seiter, 2014).

Motivation

Motivation is the influence or drive that causes humans to act in a particular manner, and it needs to consist of energy to move towards a particular direction in a sustainable way (Kroth, 2007). According to Gopalan et al. (2017), motivation furnishes the motive for individuals to react and to fulfill their needs. They defined motivation as the process of starting, guiding, and maintaining goal-oriented behaviors, which means that motivation leads people to act so that they can attain a goal or fulfill a desire. Sevinc et al. (2011) saw motivation as the cause propelling human behavior and determining the direction, force, and insistence of this behavior.

Evangelical

Veldman et al. (2021) used the National Association of Evangelicals framework to define evangelicals as people who strongly approve of the Bible being the highest authority for what they believe; affirm the importance of spreading the gospel; and believe that Jesus is the only path to eternal salvation. It is a trans-denominational, global movement that stresses the necessity of personally experiencing conversion through faith in Jesus and being committed to the infallibility of the Bible (Bebbington, 2003). According to Lloyd and Waller (2020), more than 800 million Christians worldwide identify as evangelical, with a fundamental theological belief that the person and works of the Holy Spirit are central to Christian life.

Homiletics

As a theological discipline, homiletics refers to the pursuit of understanding the purpose and process of sermon preparation and delivery. In doing so, homiletics strives to incorporate insights about the place of the preacher, the sermon, and the audience (Warby, 2008). Immink (2004) noted that homiletics deal with the complex theological reasoning of preaching by integrating knowledge from related disciplines such as rhetoric and philosophy. Furthermore, this field has evolved from merely searching for a sermon theme or topic to exploring preaching as a communicative act of addressing people's needs. Augustine is credited with writing the first homiletics textbook, "De Doctrina Christiana," in AD 397 (Pasquarello III, 2005).

Summary

In the church, communication primarily takes the form of preaching, which can be both persuasive and narrative in nature (Hogan & Reid, 1999; Heacock, 2014). Though preachers strive to influence listeners, they are repeatedly sheltered from information regarding the

meaning that their listeners derive from their sermons (Carrell, 2000). Allen and Mulligan (2009) contended that listeners hear sermons through the three settings of ethos, logos, or pathos. Additionally, listeners are influenced by their social context (Bandura, 1986). The problem is that practically no studies have yet explored how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation, which this study aims to do, focusing on evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This study focuses on persuasive communication by studying how rhetorical appeal embedded in preachers' sermons influences evangelical listener motivation. This chapter provides a context for the study, demonstrates its importance via the existing body of academic literature, and addresses the need based on identified literature gaps. The nature and role of rhetoric are explored from the times of Aristotle to today, revealing that rhetoric goes beyond showy performance and is now an established philosophical exploration of all forms of holistic social human discourse, including preaching (Hauf, 2018). This chapter will begin by reviewing the study's theoretical framework, the Narrative Transportation Theory, which postulates that when people lose themselves in a story, their attitudes and intentions change to reflect that story (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Matthew 13:2-3 showed Jesus as a master storyteller. The humans who played a role in writing out the scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16) intended to persuade their audience and did so many times through stories.

Next, the meaning of evangelicalism and its rise is explored, showing that evangelicals are a passionate and eclectic group from many churches, denominations, and nations defined by their core convictions of the trinity, the Bible, faith, salvation, evangelism, and discipleship (NAE, 2021). An overview of homiletics and the interplay with rhetoric and narrative are provided. The rhetorical tradition, rhetorical triangle, and rhetorical appeal in sermons are examined, showcasing that listeners interact with preaching through their impressions of ethos, logos, and pathos (Gaarden & Lorensen, 2013). Furthermore, exploring rhetorical appeal in a social-cognitive context will show that listeners perceive it through both individual and group

influences. Then, persuasive communication and its rhetorical, narrative, cognitive, and oratorical components are investigated. In verses such as John 20:31, we see that biblical writers wanted to persuade their audiences of their worldviews and influence their thinking in diverse areas of their lives. Finally, narratology and its rhetorical possibilities regarding listener motivation demonstrate that narrative transportation propels persuasion via narratives (Escalas, 2007; Vaughn et al., 2009). The literature review's purpose is to provide a context for the study and to demonstrate its importance based on knowledge, issues, and demonstrated gaps.

Theoretical Framework

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described interpretive frameworks as the paradigms, beliefs, theories, or theoretical orientations that guide the practice of research or influence a researcher's process. These are also referred to as worldviews and describe a researcher's typical philosophical orientation about existence and the nature of research. A scholar's paradigm or worldview is influenced by their disciplinary orientations, research communities, advisors, and previous scholarly experiences (Patton, 2015). Of the four listed frameworks, postpositivism, constructivism, the transformative paradigm, and pragmatism, my perspective aligns most closely with pragmatism. Therefore, I employ the view that research should arise out of actions, situations, and consequences, using all approaches available to understand the issue, instead of only focusing on methods (Patton, 2015). My inclination toward pragmatism means that I do not see solutions as having to be an "Either Or" situation but prefer to have flexibility in exploring interesting situations that may arise during data collection or analysis (Cherryholmes, 1992; Murphy & Murphy, 1990). This works well for my qualitative study, which will use semi-structured interviews to explore the potential relevance of the complete rhetorical triangle, rather

than pitting one appeal against the other. Additionally, the assertion of pragmatism in the sense that research constantly happens in social, historical, political, and other contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), also works well for my exploration, which will have historical, theological, and phenomenological components.

This study focuses on persuasive communication by studying how rhetorical appeal embedded in sermons influences evangelical listener motivation. Matthew 13:2-3 showed Jesus as a master of using stories to teach lessons, and this has served as a model for preachers as well. Since preachers tell a lot of biblical, societal, and personal stories in their sermons to inspire life change in their listeners, this topic will use the Narrative Transportation Theory, which postulates that when individuals lose themselves in a story, their outlooks and intentions alter to reflect that story (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Finnern (2014) explained that more than half of the Old Testament is narrative, with examples such as the stories of creation, the flood, the patriarchs, the exodus, the judges, the kings, the prophets, the captivity, and others. The New Testament contains stories of Jesus and his apostles in the gospels, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, which serves as a narrative of the celestial realm and of future events. These scriptural characters act as role models regarding Christian beliefs, actions, and practices. The narrative methodology assists in assuming the main character's perspective, thereby immersing the audience in the story as witnesses of God's thoughts and acts. Heacock (2014) suggested that because a substantial portion of the Bible is composed of narrative, it is vital for scholars and preachers to understand how these stories function rhetorically. The proper integration of biblical narratives and homiletics involves creating sermons that combine both content and rhetoric. Human history itself is also seen as intrinsically narrative in nature.

Narrative transportation theory explores the process of storytelling, which absorbs its listener into an involved narrative that transports them into the story's world, thereby directly affecting them (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Green and Brock (2000, 2002) postulate that narrative transportation is a fundamental device employed in persuasion because its influential ardent nature empowers listeners to experience changes in attitudes, behaviors, intentions, and beliefs. In other words, narrative transportation possesses the capacity to produce transformative experiences for listeners who lose themselves in the story. Essentially, this process of absorption and transformation is engrained in the ability of people to comprehend the narrative (Lindsey, 2017). Narrative transportation is comparable to a person traveling to different places by means of transportation and undergoing changes along the way due to experiences enabled by the journey (Lindsey-Warren & Ringler, 2021). This study's aim of integrating rhetoric and narrative while exploring how preaching impacts motivation is partly captured by an observation from Green and Brock (2000), who pointed out that the modern study of persuasion appeared to be unevenly skewed towards quantitative approaches which displace narrative with rhetoric. Though the power of stories to shift beliefs has been acknowledged, empirical researchers tend to ignore the persuasive impact of narratives.

Three explanations have been suggested regarding how transportation enables belief change. First, proposals like epistemic monitoring (Richter et al., 2009; Schroeder et al., 2008) and counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000) argue that transportation may diminish fundamental rational and elaborative actions that predispose resistance to persuasion. Second, transportation facilitates strong mental simulation of described events, which results in misremembering these events as if they were real-life happenings (Johnson et al., 1993).

Third, because transportation is generally pleasurable, it stimulates dynamic emotional responses that positively influence factors such as persuasion (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004), arousal (Clore & Schnall, 2005), or simply identifying with the characters in a story (Oatley, 1994; Mar & Oatley, 2008). While this study does not attempt to explain how preaching enables belief change, it will explore whether rhetorical appeal and narrative play any part in inspiring change.

Narratives raise unanswered questions or present unresolved conflicts and then outline the encounters of characters as they deal with these issues (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002), and sermons also meet this requirement. Typically, preaching offers an identifiable storyline with a beginning, middle, and end. Narrative transportation involves a convergent mental process that comes with focusing one's attention on fictional and nonfictional stories. The transportation elements experienced by the audience include emotional reactions, mental imagery, and a suspension of disbelief as they connect with the narrative's world (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Transportation applies to all modalities of exposure to stories, in the form of readers, listeners, viewers, and all other recipients of narrative information.

Green and Brock (2000, 2002) posited that the extent to which people are absorbed in a story affects how much it influences their real-world beliefs. The consequences of transportation include the listener losing access to some real-world facts as they embrace the narrative world. A typical example of such loss of access is someone who has become engrossed in a story and no longer notices things happening around them. Another consequence is the experience of strong emotions and motivations, even though the account may be fictitious or not occurring in the present. One additional consequence is that individuals come back from being transported having

been changed to some extent by the experience. These consequences capture the experience of attentive evangelical listeners who are transported when the preacher's biblical narrative calls for the transformation of their values, attitudes, thinking, and behavior (Romans 12:2). Biblical narratives can assist people with finding a new sense of self-identity, and this discovery occurs when readers and listeners inhabit scriptural stories and decide how they relate to specific characters. Particularly, narrative preaching in the form of written scriptural narratives promotes and requires a high degree of participation on the part of listeners (Heacock, 2014). The audience become active participants in the story's journey, not just onlookers.

Several models of persuasion have worked to explain the mechanisms of belief modification. Though examples like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Wegener, 1999) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chen & Chaiken, 1999) explore persuasion, they fall short of capturing the power of narrative persuasion. The principal reason for this is that narratives, unlike other persuasive message types, do not require active elaboration. On the other hand, narratives can be fictional and do not need to prove their validity. Their power does not reside in analytical methods, such as propositional reasoning or critical thinking. Transportation presents a holistic existential experience typified by the emotional connection of the recipient to the story's world (Appel & Richter, 2010). Preaching in a sense asks listeners to forgo human analytical intelligence and instead take a leap of faith, even when they do not understand.

The Rhetorical Tradition

The rhetorical tradition typically refers to the use of persuasive resources or study of those resources (Rutten & Soetaert, 2015). Scholars like Blair (1784) have stressed the necessity for oratory students to nurture their taste for music composition, as he believed this would help

them comprehend and understand beauty and arrangement. He also encouraged cultivating rhetorical style by valuing architecture, the contours of a river, furniture design, and plants. Pivotal to the rhetorical tradition were the five canons of rhetoric, which covered the fundamentals of public speaking preparation. These included invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory (Littlejohn et al., 2017). Nelson (2014) touched on some fundamental components of this tradition, including the rhetorical act, rhetorical situation, and rhetorical audience. The rhetorical act refers to speaking within a rhetorical situation and involves the seven elements of purpose, audience, persona, tone, evidence, structure, and strategies. The rhetorical situation refers to the context of the individuals, events, things, relationships, and circumstances that invited the need for discourse. The rhetorical audience consists of the people capable of being affected or caused to act due to the speech.

A new rhetorical approach that expands upon this tradition now goes beyond seeing rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Instead, the rhetorical tradition covers all frameworks for examining and comprehending how language and symbols construct meaning, negotiate identities, and establish social connections (Rutten & Soetaert, 2015). Littlejohn et al. (2017) concurred that the progression of the rhetorical tradition had extended the canons beyond public speaking to include symbol usage. Invention is also referred to as conceptualization and covers the process of assigning meaning to symbols via interpretation. This acknowledges that humans go beyond simply discovering what exists to creating it using interpretive groupings. Arrangement covers the organization of symbols and information composition based on the interrelationship between humans, symbols, and context. Style addresses all aspects of presenting these symbols and includes areas such as symbol choice, symbol systems, symbol meaning, and

symbolic behavior. Delivery addresses how symbols are embodied in any form, whether nonverbal, verbal, written, drawn, or technological. Lastly, memory covers more than just memorizing speeches, including processing, perceiving, and retaining information in a social context.

Reasons for the Evolution of the Rhetorical Tradition

Some contemporary developments that challenged and thereby expanded the rhetorical tradition included new rhetoric, Burke's dramatism, the growth of social movement studies, and postmodernism (Hogan, 2012). New Rhetoric, formed in the middle of the 20th century, saw rhetoric as a framework for better understanding and analyzing how language operates within the context of meaning construction, identity negotiation, and social relationship formation (Rutten & Soetaert, 2015). Dramatism is a framework for examining human relationships, social and political rhetoric, and motivation through language usage (Burke, 1969). Postmodernism challenged earlier principles of rhetoric, sought more active audience involvement, and opposed the idea that persuasion and coercion were synonymous (Carter, 2013). Other challenges to the rhetorical tradition were presented by the mass media, which diminished the need to use historic rhetorical devices in enhancing persuasion (Bruzgiene, 2019). This broader scope of the rhetorical tradition has resulted in the interchangeable use of rhetoric and communication, dependent on one's theoretical perspective. Irrespective of word choice, the process always involves a symbol, symbol user, medium, audience, and situation (McCroskey, 2017).

The Rhetorical Triangle

Browning (2014) defined rhetoric as the methodology of effective audience communication with the purpose of persuasion. This effective communication comprises the

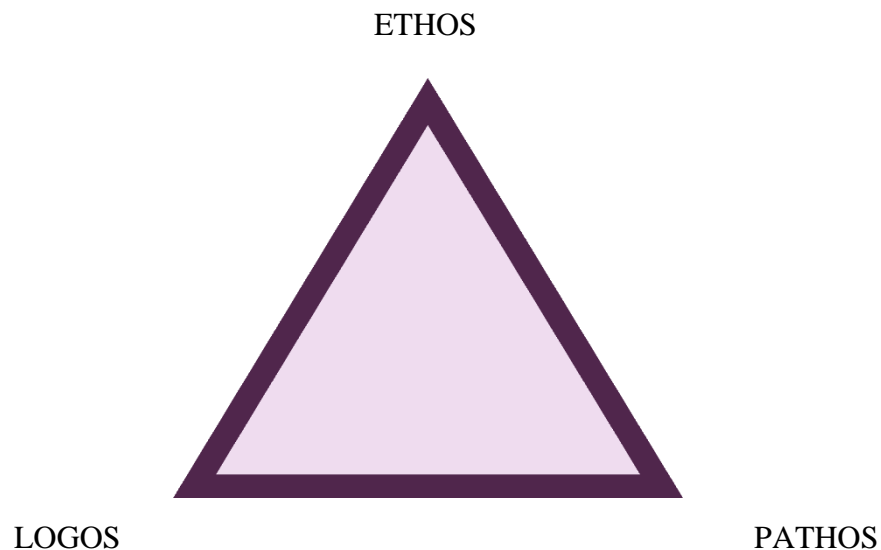
three key parts of ethos, pathos, and logos, collectively referred to as the Rhetorical Triangle. The rhetorical triangle was a term devised by rhetorician James Kinneavy in his 1971 book, *A Theory of Discourse*. Kinneavy's image of a triangle (Figure 1) provided a visual metaphor for ethos, logos, and pathos. This model also captured the relationship between writer, audience, and text (Engbers, 2018). Aristotle initially identified these three elements in his book, *Rhetoric*, and referred to them as the available means for persuasion (Beebe & Beebe, 2012). He saw logos as the logical proof in an argument, ethos as the ethical proof supporting the orator's character and credibility, and pathos as the emotional proof influencing listeners' judgment. The total rhetorical triangle was essential to persuading an audience (Appel & Richter, 2010). Ethos is the ethical appeal that provides credibility, while pathos is the pathetic appeal that connects emotionally, and logos is the logical appeal that connects intellectually (Browning, 2014). All three rhetorical elements are interconnected and form the foundation of a convincing argument.

Fitzpatrick et al. (2021) explained that logos in Greek primarily referred to logic or reason and can also be depicted as evidence or proof. Tinelli (2016) pointed out that logos could be thought of as the base of the rhetorical triangle, since it represented clarity, validity, and evidence. Logos covers facts, data, and other information needed to provide proof to the audience (Thompson, 2016). Pathos is the vehicle for considering the beliefs and principles of listeners and then infusing personality into a speech, thereby appealing to the imagination. This involves the creative use of examples, illustrations, metaphors, analogies, and more (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021). Pathos can alter the audience's perspective and undermine the impact of objective evidence, because with human nature, emotions typically subjugate reason (Wolfe, 2016). Ethos involves convincing listeners of the speaker's credibility and can be achieved by demonstrating

their authority, integrity, qualifications, knowledge, and experience. Ethos enhances the effectiveness of logos and pathos, because if the audience does not trust the speaker, then the facts and feelings will not matter (Eward-Mangione, 2021). In contemporary settings, ethos can cover connecting with the users' persona or branding, while pathos is connecting with the users' feelings, and logos is connecting with the users' understanding (Engbers, 2018). The three elements of the rhetorical triangle have been successfully used in preaching for centuries (Hauf, 2018). Sermon listeners regarded content that balanced logos, ethos, and pathos as the most appealing (Rietveld, 2013). This balance appears to be a continuously evolving collaboration between preachers and participants, with timing playing a vital role.

Figure 1

The Rhetorical Triangle



Rhetorical Appeal in Sermons

Preaching is profoundly rhetorical in nature when one observes the connection between the role of the preacher, the characters represented, and the origins of preaching. Ignoring the link between rhetoric and homiletics limits a minister's understanding of their profession and, more significantly, reduces their influence on listeners (Riley, 2015). Gaarden and Lorensen (2013) portrayed listeners as the makers of meaning because of their interaction with the sermon through their impressions of the preacher, ethos; the message's content, logos; and their experience-based interpretation, pathos. Preaching advances the understanding of faith when the preacher connects with the congregation's dreams, knows the history and wisdom of scripture, and shares this good news in the proper context (McDaniel, 2006). Hauf (2018) emphasized that as an educated Roman citizen, Paul would have been familiar with the rhetorical tradition, and his sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-31 and defense before leaders in Acts 26 demonstrated strong rhetorical technique. Paul appeared to support the necessity of persuasion, and thus rhetoric, in scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 5:11, where he references persuading men because of our responsibility to God.

Karl-Fritz et al. (1983) observed that most listeners instinctively judge whether a sermon is good or bad based on their perception of the preacher's authenticity, how closely the message adheres to scripture, and the passion with which the sermon is presented. Consequently, preachers should actively pursue the perspectives of listeners and then incorporate them into their messages (Carrell, 2000). Allen and Mulligan (2009) noted that many Christian scholars and preachers resisted the notion of empirically evaluating preaching based on the theological view that it originates from God, citing concerns about compromising the gospel message with

feedback from other humans. They consequently refuse to accept exploring rhetorical appeal or any evaluation of preaching and how people respond to it. Troeger (2006) warned that the likely misuse of the gift of speech by human vessels does place an obligation on the church to strive for its faithful and practical usage. Such an obligation should distinguish between the sermon's focus, or what God is saying, and the sermon's function, or how best to deliver it. Paul's reservation was regarding the source of rhetoric when ornamental persuasion came from carnal means, as seen in 1 Corinthians 2:4. Paul intentionally refused to employ approaches that showcased his astuteness, but rather proclaimed the truth persuasively, dependent on God's wisdom (Hauf, 2018). Paul's preaching was not based on the persuasive performance used by the Sophists of his time, but rather on words from God anchored in His power.

Although all sermon listeners are affected by the three rhetorical appeals, one influences each person more than the others. With sermon listeners influenced more by ethos, a perception of connection with the preacher is paramount. For sermon listeners influenced more by logos, the sermon's content is crucial. For sermon listeners influenced more by pathos, emotional inspiration is needed (Allen & Mulligan, 2009). Rietveld (2013) concurred that some listeners paid attention because of ethos from a relational bond with the preacher; some listened because of logos in terms of wanting to engage with the sermon's content; and still others listened because of pathos centered on feelings stirred up by the message.

Exploring Rhetorical Appeal in a Social-Cognitive Context

The traditional rhetorical approach primarily adopts the perspective of the speaker and how they persuade without sufficiently acknowledging the importance of the listeners who are being persuaded (Benoit & Smythe, 2003). A more holistic approach strives to explore the

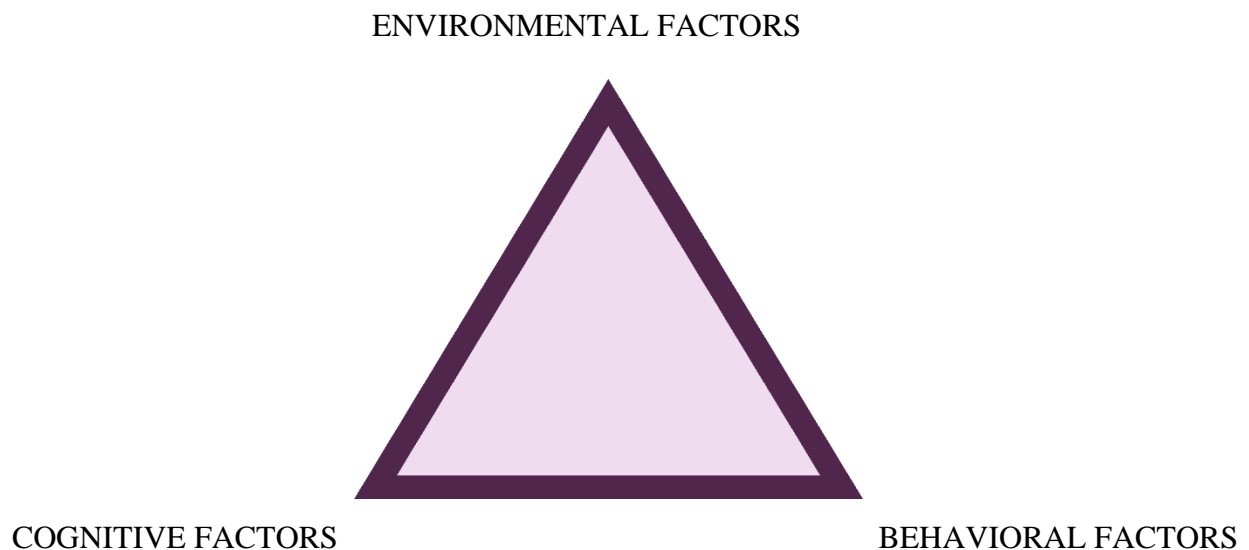
listener's perspective instead of perceiving them as targets. The study of persuasive communication will benefit from a fuller understanding of listeners' thinking processes regarding persuasion and what factors influence their perception of the message (Cialdini et al., 1981). Listening to sermons in-person at church involves social learning, as it is done in a group environment with listeners discussing their afterthoughts with each other (Carrell, 2000). In a social cognitive approach to rhetoric, listeners are active participants in the persuasion process, as they perceive rhetorical appeal through both individual and group influences. This is in line with Fisher (1985) who saw humans as homo-narrans and who evaluated communication, especially rhetoric, in its historical and societal context. The social cognitive theory posits that human communication functions as an interactive communal process (Bandura, 1986). It does so by emphasizing the cognitive processes of individuals observing others and their environments, then reflecting on that in combination with their own opinions and behaviors, and eventually changing their own actions accordingly (Burney, 2008). Social cognition can prove beneficial in examining the rhetorical appeal of sermons because in-person preaching is experienced in a social context. There is a cognitive basis for rhetorical appeal, and when communication happens in groups, there is a social cognitive basis.

The Social Cognitive Theory depicts the combined influence of environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors on individual behaviors (Bandura, 1986), offering a triangular model of reciprocal causation, with people being actors as well as products of their environment. While the rhetorical triangle features ethos, logos, and pathos (Figure 1), the social cognition triangle features environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors (Figure 2). Flower (1989) argued that communication will benefit from a more integrated academic approach that explores how

context, including social dynamics, interacts with cognition, thereby impacting people. Integrating traditional and cognitive rhetoric smooths out the rough edges of each, making for a stronger approach to exploring rhetorical appeal. While traditional rhetoric taps into an emphasis on the rhetorical triangle, cognitive rhetoric anchors persuasive communication in a culturally relevant context.

Figure 2

The Social Cognition Triangle



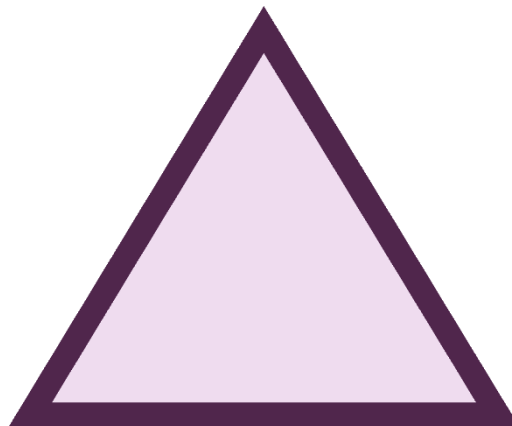
Approaching rhetorical appeal both traditionally and cognitively helps when considering the importance of both ambiguity and specificity that is relevant for persuasion. Such an interactive approach to exploring a sermon's rhetorical appeal would focus on both the individual and social perception of preaching. While ethos explores the speaker's credibility, the environmental factors integrate with this to explore the extent to which the preaching's persuasiveness is affected by external influences, such as support from others. While logos

explores the sermon's content, the cognitive factors integrate with the content to explore the extent to which the preaching's persuasiveness is affected by societal constructs, such as previous life experience. While pathos explores the emotional connection, the behavioral factors allow for an exploration of the extent to which the preaching's persuasiveness is affected by cognitive influences, such as the listener's own attitude. This integration examines rhetorical appeal in tandem with social cognition. Ethos, which deals with the speaker, is also an environmental function based on external effects, while logos, which deals with facts, data, and other information, is also a cognitive function based on mental interpretation. Pathos deals with the appeal to emotion and is also a behavioral function based on internal perspectives.

Figure 3

Rhetorical Appeal Aligned with Social Cognition

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS WITH ETHOS



COGNITIVE FACTORS WITH LOGOS

BEHAVIORAL FACTORS WITH PATHOS

Some key components of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory as it relates to individual behavior change include self-control, self-efficacy, behavioral capability, expectancies,

observational learning, and reinforcements (Bandura, 1991). Self-control refers to regulating and monitoring individual behavior. Self-efficacy is the belief regarding an individual's ability to exercise control and execute a behavior. Behavioral capability covers knowing and having the skills to execute a behavior. Expectancies refer to people's beliefs regarding the outcomes of behavior change. Observational learning involves seeing and observing the results of others who perform or model the desired actions. Reinforcements deal with promoting incentives and rewards that motivate behavior change (Bandura, 1991). Cognitive studies have evolved to understand that human communication cannot be effectively explored just by looking at immediate goals and logical inferences. Rather, the impact of cultural and historical influences must also be taken into context (Eubanks & Schaeffer, 2004). Specifically, when exploring the rhetorical appeal of preaching and its influence on listeners, there are personal and group influences. While the rhetorical triangle focuses on those personal interpretations of ethos, logos, and pathos, social cognition brings into focus the larger impact of the evangelical church's social context. Both factors together influence evangelical listeners, and this study will explore how.

From Aristotle to America

Aristotle described rhetoric as every available means to persuade, while Quintilian designated rhetoric to be representative of a good person speaking properly, and Cicero saw rhetoric as a kind of speaking aimed at convincing others (Engbers, 2018). The concept of rhetoric typically explores the use of persuasive resources, known as *Rhetorica Utens*, and the study of the use of these resources, known as *Rhetorica Docens* (Blakesley, 2002). Throughout the evolution of civilization and technology, contemporary scholars have expanded on the Greco-Roman definitions; for instance, Foss et al. (2014) defined rhetoric as the action people

execute whenever symbols are employed to communicate with each other. David and Butler (2013) saw rhetoric as controlling events for an audience's consumption. For many people today, the word rhetoric carries a negative connotation, such as empty flowery words that say much but mean little (Engbers, 2018). Rhetoric has been used in various ways throughout many generations, often leading to uncertainty regarding its meaning. In some manner, rhetoric has always involved using human symbols to convey some other kind of meaning.

Rhetoric's Beginnings

Aristotle, who studied under Plato, is considered the paramount philosopher of ancient rhetoric, having laid out the elements of persuasion in his book *Rhetoric*. These included the classes of public speaking, the types of rhetoric, the modes of persuasion, and the canons of rhetoric. Rhetoric, which comes from the Greek word *Rhetorike*, was first defined in Plato's Gorgias as a particular form of communication used for persuading listeners (Hauf, 2018). Several Greek scholars labored to define and organize the art of rhetoric. Sophists, considered to be the first teachers of communication, trained people in the art of legal arguments. Plato, who subscribed to absolute truths, disagreed with their relativistic approach to knowledge and pitted them against Socrates, which can be considered the beginning of rhetoric's negative connotations (Littlejohn et al., 2017). Roman scholars, including Isocrates, Quintilian, and Cicero, continued this work by making rhetoric more practical in order to meet the necessities of the expanding empire. This pragmatic approach to rhetoric continued during the Middle Ages from around 400 to 1400 A.D., and its focus on style resulted in a contrast with Christianity, which relied on truth as a means of persuasion. Augustine of Hippo, a rhetoric scholar who converted to Christianity, began the work of integrating the applicability of appropriate rhetoric with preaching, arguing

that preachers must know how to teach, delight, and move listeners. The following Renaissance period witnessed the resurgence of rhetoric as a more philosophical and holistic art. Social constructionists explored how the power of the word and the deliberate use of language could help interpret the world for humans. The enlightenment period, from 1600 to 1800 A.D., was characterized by rationalism, with philosophers like Rene Descartes exploring concepts such as objectivity and empiricism. Rhetoric was consequently separated from logic and was limited to style, which further added to the deleterious connotations of the term (Hauf, 2018). From its beginning, rhetoric and its meaning have changed throughout different time periods, with each generation of scholars advancing their own rationales.

Rhetoric Across Church History

Using rhetoric as a means of persuasion was widespread during the times of Paul the apostle. However, this period of the first and second centuries A.D. was characterized by a Sophistic approach to rhetoric, which focused on performance and showmanship at the expense of substance (Hauf, 2018). Witherington (2009) posited that during the church's infancy, rhetoric was considered to be a way of tickling listeners' ears rather than providing them with meaningful content. This form of persuasion was what Paul renounced, though he was trained in rhetoric and used its proper approach in his discourses. Schreiner (2012) asserted that even if he had not studied rhetoric, Paul would have been familiar with it due to evidence of its use in his epistles.

McGrath (2013) outlined that the Patristic period of the early church fathers revealed first an aversion to rhetoric from around 100 to 300 A.D, then a return to promoting rhetoric afterwards. The initial period of dislike was due to the state's persecution of Christians, who distanced themselves from secular methodologies. Chrysostom and Augustine were two leaders

instrumental in the shift towards rhetoric as the state-supported persecution of Christians ended. Chrysostom was a prolific preacher of over one thousand sermons and was dubbed the Golden Mouth because of his exceptional oratorical ability. He recognized the role of persuasive speaking in sharing the good news and rebuked the use of rhetoric for deceit (Shin 2004). Augustine, recognized as one of the cardinal preachers of his time, contended that rhetoric could be used for either good or evil, and noted the relevance of rhetoric in preaching due to its value in communicating truth (Shin, 2004).

In the early 16th century's protestant reformation, Martin Luther, who considered preaching his primary call, employed rhetoric in his sermons to stir his listeners to action. His messages were a stark contrast to the lifeless language of Catholic liturgy, because he engaged his audience as participants rather than spectators, infusing imagery plus personality into his preaching (Matheson, 2004). In the 18th century's great awakening, George Whitefield emerged as an orator of the utmost caliber, using rhetoric to move the masses with colorful portrayals and vicissitudes in tone to astonish his listeners. His inspirational messages were simple and direct, avoiding ornate flamboyance, and were often conversational. Some rhetorical features he commonly used comprised of identification with his listeners, ample illustrations, and expressive body language (Hauf, 2018). Across church history, just like with their secular counterparts, Christian thought leaders and scholars have understood and used rhetoric in a variety of ways.

Rhetoric in Contemporary Settings

Historically, the prerequisites for orators continually shifted depending on the period, era style, social atmosphere, political context, perception of rhetoric, and other considerations (Bruzgiene, 2019). In the twentieth century, the emergence of mass media highlighted the

importance of public speaking and extended the focus of rhetoric beyond oratory to explore all usage of symbols. All types of messaging, such as propaganda and advertising across growing media from print, radio, television, and computers, were thus investigated by rhetorical scholars. This investigation includes movies, billboards, video games, websites, social media, computer graphics, and more. Rhetoric is being rediscovered as a legitimate field of study, with multiple lines of inquiry addressing any rhetorical situation (McCroskey, 2017). The emergence of numerous rhetorical viewpoints on race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as how they intersect in life experiences, have resulted in distinct rhetorical theories. This emergence has established rhetoric as a philosophical exploration of all forms of holistic social-human discourse, rather than mere showy performance (Hauf, 2018). Digital technology and visual media have amplified the importance of factors such as body language, non-verbal cues, facial expressions, and other graphic accents. Today, these increasingly matter to rhetoric, as they interact with other contemporary influences, such as the cultural dynamic (Bruzgiene, 2019). Though the understanding and implementation of rhetoric have evolved over time, it has always remained a topic requiring further exploration due to its significance in the communication field.

Evangelicalism

Juzwik (2014) posited that although defining the term evangelicalism is complex, it encompasses people who believe in the Bible's authority, declare a personal relationship with Jesus, and practice their faith by living and proclaiming it. Sweeney (2005) described evangelicalism as a movement established in traditional Christian orthodoxy, molded by a predominant Protestant interpretation of the Bible, and which is unique due to the influence of Martin Luther's Reformation and the Great Awakening. During the Great Awakening,

revivalism emerged as evangelicalism's chief establishment, and thriving revivalists became the movement's eminent leaders, a pattern that continues today. Driven by the great revivals, evangelicalism birthed missions, eventually embraced Black denominations, and rejected fundamentalism's cultural disengagement. The National Association of Evangelicals (2012) explained that the term derives from the Greek word *Euangelion*, meaning good news or the gospel. Noll (2021) noted that today, the term appears to be in trouble for two distinct reasons. The first is tied to American politics, because the term is now used to describe the most active religious supporters of the Republican party. The media typically labels evangelicals as white conservative voters, yet historically, evangelicals have comprised numerous social progressives as well. The second reason is more academic, tied to the vagueness, flexibility, and inexactitude of the term, making it challenging to specify a particular denomination of Christians.

Bebbington (2003) offered four principal characteristics of evangelicalism, which have become the yardstick used by many, including the NAE. The first, Conversionism, captured the necessity of transformation through a born-again experience and a lifelong progression of following Jesus. The second, Biblicism, described the emphasis and submission to the Bible as the ultimate authority. The third, Activism, pointed to a life of service by actively demonstrating and sharing the gospel. The fourth, Crucicentrism, stressed the conviction that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross provided atonement for sin and redemption for humanity. Scholars commonly see Biblicism as the most significant criterion for identifying an American evangelical (Juzwik, 2014). These four criteria together show that while many evangelicals identify with conservative politics, the term extends beyond right-wing ideology. Balmer (2006) argued that evangelicalism is better understood as a social movement, because there exists a broader evangelical subculture

that may not attend any church at all, though they hold onto personal beliefs. An individual's self-identification, rather than a theological approach to evangelicalism, reveals how being evangelical cuts across denominational, racial, political, and other boundaries (Lindsay, 2007). Being evangelical therefore goes beyond easily identified categories and is more of a combination of one's beliefs, life perspectives, and inclinations.

The Rise of Evangelicalism

Scalise (2018) showed that Martin Luther and his followers regularly referred to themselves as evangelicals from the start of the sixteenth-century Protestant reformation. The term articulated their claim that their teachings were grounded on the gospel or good news, which comes from the Latin word *Evangelium* or the Greek word *Euangelion*. Unlike centrally structured orthodox institutions, evangelicalism is more of an informal network or subculture that now includes parachurches, publishing houses, schools, and community organizations. Over the preceding few decades, the most apparent transformation for the evangelical movement has probably been the upsurge of charismatic Christianity and the worldwide progression of Pentecostalism. Noll (2021) highlighted that in the 18th century, fueled by revivals connected with George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and the Wesley brothers, the term alluded to genuine religion, which differed from formal religious observance. Famous examples before the Civil War included the evangelist Charles Finney, who opposed slavery, and Frances Willard, who fought to protect women and children from abuse after the Civil War.

Following the Second World War, the bid to reform postwar fundamentalism brought about a new form of evangelicalism called neo-evangelicalism. A principal identifier of these new evangelicals was engaged orthodoxy, which meant simultaneously holding onto biblical

doctrine while actively engaging with modern life's academic and social issues. New evangelicals espouse bringing their Christian faith into academia and the marketplace. With the backdrop of global pain and suffering, Neo-evangelicalism sees Christian obligation as going beyond building churches to experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit outside of the church walls (Scalise, 2018). During this period, evangelicalism was popularized by individuals such as Billy Graham and organizations like the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Many Christians embraced the term as they sought a less combative and more inclusive way to engage with society. As a result, numerous Pentecostals, Lutherans, Mennonites, Charismatics, Christian Reformed, and other denominations began using the term to describe themselves (Noll, 2021). Young adults in the 1950s and 1960s, living in the aftermath of the World Wars and experiencing the Vietnam War, plus other societal challenges, questioned truth and authority in their search for meaning. Many sought ways that Christianity could address spiritual and social problems, which contributed to the emergence of the Jesus Movement, a powerful resurgence of evangelicalism for the youth. These self-identified Jesus Freaks engaged in new styles of Christian music and approaches to cultural relevance, including creativity and the arts (Young, 2012). As the Jesus movement began to dissolve in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of its proponents were assimilated into the religious right movement, which was growing during the Reagan era and looking for ways to win the culture wars. The Jesus Movement and its methods of cultural engagement provided a model for evangelical-leaning organizations like the Christian Coalition and the Moral Majority as they rose to prominence, fighting for the Christianization of American culture (Balmer, 2006). Nowadays, many people consider evangelicalism to be the conservative political wing of protestant Christianity.

Evangelicals Today in America

The advancement of mass media over the past century has played a prominent role in the growth of evangelicalism. From evangelists like Dwight Moody through Billy Graham up until today, print, radio, television, and now social media have heightened the prominence of evangelicalism as the movement embraced technology to proclaim the good news. This unity of media with global missions has helped place evangelicalism as a key Christian praxis on the international stage. The National Association of Evangelicals, which was formed in 1942, is now the largest and most diverse voice of evangelicals, representing over 45,000 local churches across 40 different denominations and covering millions of Christians (Ott & Téllez, 2019), and has expanded its membership to Christian schools and nonprofit organizations as well (NAE, 2021). Its message was that evangelicals are a passionate and eclectic group from many churches, denominations, and nations, not to be defined by political, social, or cultural trends. They all share the core convictions of the trinity, the Bible, faith, salvation, evangelism, and discipleship (NAE, 2021). The NAE uses the definition of evangelical criterion offered by Bebbington (2003). *Christianity Today*, founded by Billy Graham in 1956, has become the most dominant and widely read evangelical magazine in the U.S. (Ott & Téllez, 2019), reaching almost 500,000 subscribers and over 4.5 million Christian leaders monthly (Christianity Today, 2022). Miller (2003) argued that the ability to use the cultural vernacular had kept evangelicalism relevant when traditional denominations struggled to maintain membership. This influence of evangelicalism on various aspects of the culture can be felt across many American communities, such as in Savannah, Georgia.

Savannah in Early American Evangelicalism

The initial charter awarded to the Georgia Trustees in 1732 helped establish the city of Savannah, and since the charter was vague regarding approved religious practices, it served as a conducive environment for early evangelicalism to thrive. Among the few religious issues it addressed was the denial of rights for Catholics to worship in the Georgia colony because of fears that they might be sympathetic to the Spanish. This ban on Catholicism paved the way for other groups like evangelicals to flourish in Georgia under Oglethorpe's leadership (Georgia Historical Society, 2022). Christ Church, established in 1733 by Oglethorpe, became Savannah's first church (Religious Travel, 2021) and was home to three of the most influential figures in the early revival movement: John Wesley, his brother Charles, and George Whitfield (Official Savannah Guide, 2022). Oglethorpe brought all three men to Savannah. John Wesley became the founder of Methodism and a pivotal figure in evangelicalism who served as Christ Church's pastor from 1735 and published the *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, America's first hymnal (Religious Travel, 2021). Charles Wesley became Oglethorpe's secretary and wrote over 6,500 hymns (Official Savannah Guide, 2022).

George Whitfield, a friend of the Wesley brothers, took over from John Wesley as the pastor of Christ Church. Whitfield is regarded as America's first celebrity, because in a period before television and the radio were invented, he preached about 18,000 sermons to over 10 million people. Additionally, Whitfield addressed the large number of deaths and diseases among Georgia's orphans by building the Bethesda Orphanage in 1840. Today it has evolved into the Bethesda Academy and serves as America's oldest childcare institution in continuous operation. In addition to the work of the Wesley brothers and Whitfield, another critical development for

Christianity and evangelicalism in Savannah was the establishment of the First African Baptist Church, America's earliest African-American Baptist church. The church was built from 1859 to 1861 by predominantly enslaved members, and George Liele served as the founding pastor (Religious Travel, 2021). Liele is acknowledged by many as America's first overseas missionary due to his preaching in Jamaica around 1782 (Neely, 1998; Shannon et al., 2013). Christ Church, the First African Baptist Church, and numerous monuments celebrating the Wesley brothers, George Whitfield, and George Liele form part of Savannah's modern landscape.

Homiletics

Homiletics is concerned with helping preachers prepare to preach, develop scripturally authentic sermons, and present them in culturally relevant ways. The word sermon originates from the Latin *Sermo*, which means discourse (Warby, 2008). While preaching appears to be the simple act of explaining to listeners what a scriptural text means, it is actually a more complex process involving the selection of biblical passages, articulating the sermon's purpose, and successfully executing its delivery (Phillips, 2021). Homiletics has different meanings to diverse audiences and still needs a widely accepted articulated authoritative theory. This is probably because of preaching's complexity, which requires communication, exegetical and ministerial skills, and input from theories of language, rhetoric, and discourse, all within a cultural, historical, and philosophical context. With these multiple perspectives in mind, it is critical to establish a framework for homiletics as a theological discipline (Immink, 2004).

Homiletics comes from the Latin *Homilêticus* and the Greek *Homilêtikos*, which means conversation. Due to its links with the words *Homilein*, or to converse with, and *Homilos*, or crowd, homiletics in its historical context denotes conversing with a crowd (Warby, 2008).

Historically, Christian sermons did not merely echo ancient rhetoric, but the Greco-Roman tradition played a significant role in preaching (Edwards, 2016). Preaching is one of the most complex forms of rhetoric because it must weave in religion, confession, philosophy, doctrine, interpretations, and liturgy, plus the preacher's personality, values, and communication style (Bruzziene, 2019). One distinguishing feature of preaching from secular rhetoric is its dependence on the authoritative scripture to persuade listeners. This dependence on the Bible as the source of the preacher's authority places moral boundaries on their actions and approaches (Bagg, 2021). Preaching thus involves a partnership between the divine Holy Spirit and the human communicator (1 Corinthians 3:9, Philippians 2:13, Philippians 4:13, and Ephesians 2:10).

The Interplay of Homiletics, Rhetoric, and Narrative

For centuries, homiletics and rhetoric were interwoven and shared similar concerns regarding style, structure, concepts, speech, audience, public opinion, and dialogue (Carter, 2013). Historically, traditional rhetoric was a starting point for a preacher's training (Garner, 2003). Exploring this through a cultural lens, Thomas (2016) argued that Black preaching is fundamentally and naturally rhetorical, integrating its oratory with its theology and striving to provoke specific experiences, such as invigorating celebration, which is particularly vital in Black homiletics. From its scholarly origins, homiletics was tied to the rhetorical tradition and was frequently perceived as a discipline incorporating theology, rhetoric, history, communication, and more. Augustine used the rhetorical skills that he learned before his conversation in his new role as an early church preacher, apologist, and bishop (Stern, 2013). Augustine's book *De Doctrina Christiana*, written in A.D 397 and considered to be the first on

homiletics, explained that preaching was more than an act of communication, and was actually a spiritual vocation involving the transformation of both speaker and hearer (Pasquarello III, 2005). However, the emergence of New Homiletics in the 1970s saw a shift from the rhetorical to the poetic. Currently, a return to rhetoric is being undergone as preachers grapple with issues of culture, feminism, media, and globalism (Stern, 2013). Contemporary preachers are searching for ways to communicate themes of security, hope, and understanding in the face of global skepticism, division, and suffering.

Recent theological scholarship acknowledges that preachers struggle to communicate because preaching moves in a one-way direction, resulting in consumer-like behavior from listeners. While sermons are comforting and inspiring, they fail to engage the thinking process and change lives (Immink, 2004). Rhetoricians can use homiletics to explore unique oratorical qualities such as empathetic listening. Conversely, rhetoric can offer homiletics richer points of inquiry to aid in the more profound development of sermons (Carter, 2013). Homiletics should strive to incorporate balance regarding the place of the preacher, the sermon, and the audience (Warby, 2008). This is in line with the rhetorical appeal of ethos for the preacher, logos for the sermon, and pathos for the audience (Wolfe, 2016). Responsible preaching balances humans' spiritual and temporal components by addressing God's people with God's word in the human world in which He positioned them (Gore, 2017). Lowry (2001) argued for the need to move beyond the traditional homiletical approach of organizing sermons based on logical content, because sermons are a narrative art form that unfolds like a story about an event in time.

Consequently, logically organizing a sermon based on a single topic fails to engage communication dynamics. Homiletics should provide an intersection between the problem and

theme in a plot form, thus giving it life. Preaching is storytelling through a sermon, which is a narrative art form, and narratives are probably the most persuasive resource that homiletics has for influencing listeners. This power can be experienced in messages that place the listener inside stories such as the exodus from Egypt, the creation and fall of man, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and many others (Bagg, 2021). The observation that communicating biblical truths involves communal connection, and that preaching needs imagery in addition to doctrine, correlates with findings across various generations and disciplines.

Persuasive Communication

Persuasive communication is the process of consciously or unconsciously altering the opinions, thoughts, objectives, or behaviors of others with words and nonverbal messages (Stiff & Mongeau, 2016). Persuasive communication influences individuals and groups to accept particular positions or beliefs and requires an understanding of the audience to be successful (Derin et al., 2020). Sermons cannot directly change or reprogram people, but they can encourage a reconsideration of opinions and actions. The Bible is intended to affect its readers' beliefs, emotions, and lives, and contains persuasive written and spoken elements (Domeris & Smith, 2014). In verses such as John 20:31, we see that biblical writers intended to persuade their audiences of their worldviews and influence their thinking in diverse areas of their lives.

While many ministers approach preaching as an opportunity to move or persuade their congregation, some reject the notion of persuasion as a goal due to the possibility of manipulation. Though these fears are rational and highlight the need for ethics, they do not negate the reality that sermons aim to influence people's thoughts, perspectives, or behaviors (Guthrie, 2007). Preaching should be full of passion, dynamism, conviction, lucidity, and other

characteristics of persuasive communication. If preachers have a sacred mandate to persuade, there should be an urgency to invigorate the pulpit with sermons that use the most effective communication techniques to connect with their audiences. However, this does not mean ignoring biblical principles, diluting the word of God, or employing the questionable practices of self-promotion, sensationalism, and histrionics (Hauf, 2018). Instead of exploring arguments regarding ministerial ethics, this study focuses on whether and what role the rhetorical appeal of preaching plays in evangelical listener motivation.

Rhetorical Persuasion

Purnama (2022) saw rhetoric as the use of words and symbols to accomplish a particular objective. With persuasion being the ultimate aim of rhetoric, the communicator uses symbols to impact an audience's thoughts, opinions, ideals, and behaviors. Rhetorical persuasion stresses the necessity of adapting speeches to distinct listeners and circumstances, meaning that employing rhetoric for persuasion can use any necessary avenue, such as entertainment or notification (Lull & Coopman, 2016). This highlights the idea of persuasion as an art, since it involves probability rather than certainty regarding how an audience will respond. Alternatively, the reliance on specific hypotheses and theories to explain the interaction between communicator and audience highlights the science of persuasion (Purnama, 2022). The need for all three elements of persuasion to be active alludes to rhetoric's intention of appealing to the whole person, spirit, mind, and body (Witherington, 2009). Hauf (2018) postulated that the rhetorical persuasion of preaching helps convey a message in ways that implore the listeners to respond to the truth. This involves components such as body language, mannerisms, intonation, reason, word selection,

and perspicuity, and should never involve manipulation, toadyism, intimidation, domination, or emotional blackmail.

Narrative Persuasion

Cho et al. (2014) described narrative persuasion as the strategic deployment of messages, specifically in a story format, in order to influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Recently, academia has experienced an increase in studies exploring the persuasive effects of diverse narratives. One recurring finding is that narratives, compared to other types of messages, are typically more effective in belief formation, influencing intentions, and encouraging healthy behaviors (Falzon et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2014). And this influence of narratives on individuals is still present even when the characters or happenings are fictitious (Appel & Richter, 2010). This effectiveness of narrative messages cuts across numerous formats, such as short stories, commercials, movies, educational programming, and others (Cho et al., 2014). Narrative persuasion is effective due to the exceptional capability of stories to stimulate audience involvement through engagement with plots, background, characters, conflict, resolution, and other factors (Quintero Johnson & Sangalang, 2017). Another reason for success may be that the fundamental construct of narratives is one of cause and effect or action and reaction, thereby intrinsically connecting narrative to persuasion.

Consequently, narrative persuasion has been shown to be effective in various fields, such as entertainment, health, and civic policies (Graaf et al., 2016; Cho et al., 2014). Tukachinsky and Tokunaga (2013) posited that when individuals engage with a narrative, they experience a stronger connection with the opinions and viewpoints suggested by the narrative. Over the years, various researchers have used different terms to describe this phenomenological involvement

with stories. Some include the narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1985), narrative absorption (Slater & Rouner, 2002), message engagement (Larkey & Hecht, 2010), and narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Despite their differences, they all suggest that because narratives stimulate experiential participation, they possess the ability to affect persuasive results and overcome persuasive reluctance (Quintero Johnson & Sangalang, 2017). They are simply different labels describing the process through which the audience focuses on the narrative and is thus influenced by it (Cho et al., 2014). This study will specifically use the narrative transportation theory to explore the nature and role of rhetorical appeal on narrative involvement, as well as how this connection might facilitate evangelical listener motivation.

Narrative Paradigm

Fisher's (1985) narrative paradigm is worth further exploration, as it served as the springboard for this study's theoretical framework, Green and Brock's (2000, 2002) narrative transportation theory. The narrative paradigm is based on the concept that humans are storytellers, with storytelling being among the earliest and most prominent forms of communication. Fisher claims that storytelling was the most appropriate mode of conceptualizing how people communicated (Fisher, 1984). People have attempted to understand the world through narratives from the time of cave paintings to the origins of mythology, and Fisher suggests that humans narratively engage their social world narratively and subsequently make decisions and act in this narrative context (Stache, 2017). Fisher (1985) defines narrative as all verbal and nonverbal interpretations assembled systematically to create meaning, and this communication process involves both narrator and listener, whose experiences are influenced by factors from the past.

Fisher juxtaposes this concept with the rational paradigm in traditional rhetorical traditions that saw people as typically logical, noting that the human approach to storytelling was more ontological than epistemological (Hamon, 2020). The narrative paradigm views individuals as homo-narrans who evaluate communication, especially argumentation, in its historical and societal context. Narration involves individuated forms such as characterization, generic forms such as argumentation, and a conceptual framework, such as dramatism (Stache, 2017). Fisher (1985) established his theory partially on the biblical viewpoint of John 1:1, which introduces Jesus in the beginning as the Word. Fisher expressed that since the Word is translated from *logos*, which means story or discourse, every form of human communication and expression, from words to architecture and religion to statutory, were included.

Cognitive Rhetoric

Although rhetoric is persuasive, as human communication it involves cognitive processes such as message perception and modification. The success or failure of rhetorical appeal is somewhat dependent on whether the audience decides that they have been persuaded (Jingwei, 2015). The foundation of cognitive rhetoric is based on how the brain works, and focuses more on the daily, common expressions of persuasion, while the foundation of traditional rhetoric rests on the Aristotelian virtues and focuses more on the graceful, exemplary, and remarkable expressions of persuasion. Typically, traditional and cognitive rhetoric, rather than engaging in dialogue, tend to maintain exclusivity, even though there is a relationship between both. Both recognize the virtue of rhetorical appeal, but traditional rhetoric focuses primarily on *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, while cognitive rhetoric focuses on underlying mental structures (Eubanks & Schaeffer, 2004). Properly exploring the persuasive power of preaching should consequently

involve considering the everyday, common aspects of listeners' social lives, as well as the sometimes extraordinary experiences that happen when sermons are delivered from the pulpit. Cognitive linguistics asserts that language is a product of the human mind, established on the same structural principles that function in other cognitive domains (Lakoff, 1992). Eubanks and Schaeffer (2004) highlighted a weakness of cognitive rhetoric in that it tended to ignore the rhetorical context, prioritizing the brain rather than the heart. Traditional rhetoric on the other hand can lean towards the over-simplification of concepts, thereby losing depths of meaning. A major difference from traditional rhetoric is cognitive rhetoric's approach to figures of speech, such as metaphors. Cognitive rhetoric looks beyond the verbal adornment of figures of speech to see them as conceptual structures that play a critical role in human cognition and culture. Encouraging traditional and cognitive rhetoric to complement each other can result in a better exploration of the balanced logical and emotional aspects of persuasive communication. In new rhetoric, Burke alludes to the advantage of cognitive rhetorical awareness in his exploration of metonymy. Burke (1969) saw metonymy as a reduction of the complex data of human information, possibilities, or events to one single sign. For instance, the single term emotion reduces diverse specificities of human feelings into one commonality. While this reduction is sometimes necessary due to the difficulty of expressing all human experiences in detail, metonymy however can result in the loss of relevant meaning. The mutual consideration of traditional and cognitive rhetoric helps determine when is best to persuade through either simplification or specification.

Orality and Oratory

Thomas and Webb (2002) argued that orality was the primary component of rhetoric, since the ancient Greeks depended on speech to order their collective existence, and their leaders endeavored to be great at it. For Ong (1982), orality depicted the oral nature of communication with its associated traditions of storytelling, poetry, folklore, and the proverbs. This was for centuries how societies transmitted and saved information. Oral communication mirrored how the human mind and thinking process naturally functioned. The introduction of literacy via writing subsequently caused a shift in human consciousness since speaking is verbal while writing is visual. With orality, people grasp meaning within the full collaboration of spoken words, body language, facial expressions, tone, pitch, inflection, and emotion. Writing loses much of this context, so literacy instead employs elaborate grammatical structures and rules to function. The combination of literacy and orality resulted in the second orality, where communication that exists as written text is transformed into spoken words. In second orality, oral communication becomes dependent on the influence or pattern of written text, becoming more of a recitation, such as when a television anchor reads the news (Assis, 2015). Many public presentations, such as inaugural speeches, now necessitate an intricate interplay of literacy and orality, since they are written to be vocally performed (Kowal, 1997). Second orality is significant in modern communication, as politicians communicate via teleprompters and celebrities use one-liners driven by social media.

Malikova et al. (2019) explained that before the time of Christ, religious oratory was seen as the broadcasting of divine intentions, rather than a performance. Therefore, preparation was discouraged, since this was unnecessary for a spiritual announcer. However, the gospels'

appearance began a reconciliation process between homiletics and rhetoric, thereby acknowledging the usefulness of oratory for preachers. By the time of Christian scholar Origen (185–253 AD), stenographers had begun to write down the sermons delivered by the best preachers for circulation. Consequently, during this era a sermon was treated as a literary work that required human thought and preparation. Origen believed in the necessity of preparation and the active role of preachers in the rhetorical process. The period of John Chrysostom (344–407 AD) exhibited an unfeigned amalgamation of rhetoric and homiletics, as he incorporated the exploration and use of rhetoric into ecclesiastical oratory and clerical literature.

Narratology

In its simplest form, narratology is the science or study of narrative (Onega & Landa, 2014). As a field of study, it explores the internal mechanisms of narratives, plus the form of narrated stories, through the lens of a narrator who communicates a series of events or actions in a particular format (Guillemette & Lévesque, 2019). Since numerous studies have established that narratives can have persuasive effects, it is crucial to understand how and what conditions impact these effects (Hoeken & Fijkers, 2014). Humans are social beings in search of establishing connection through the sharing of stories, and they develop many narratives to represent, explain, and organize relationships, experiences, and events. Each narrative's content is constructed based on context. As a symbol-using species with the ability to communicate, narrative construction comes naturally to humankind. Early men used this to develop bonds, since tribal cohesion offered greater protection (Abraham, 2016). Preaching can be seen as a narrative strung together by Old Testament, New Testament, and societal and personal stories, all dependent on a biblical viewpoint.

Rhetorical Narratology

Rhetorical narratology is a subfield of literary theory that explores narratives' rhetorical power (Dinkler, 2016). Rhetorical narratology does not claim simply that some stories use persuasion; rather, it connotes the idea that narratives are not merely stories but are also actions intentionally carried out by someone with another person to achieve some objective (Phelan, 1996). Wertsch (2002) stated that when chronicling and explaining actions, humans are essentially storytelling animals narrating things like motives, settings, consequences, and others. Successful storytelling needs three main elements: relatable characters, plausible storylines, and verisimilitude (Van Laer et al., 2014). Kearns (1999) described rhetorical narratology as an approach to blending tools for analyzing narrative and rhetoric in order to better understand how working together affects the audience. For centuries scholars have struggled to define the relationship between ancient rhetoric and narratology, and both were confined to separate silos, with rhetoric seen as covering arguments and narratology covering stories (Lampe, 2010). Numerous biblical scholars have argued that it was impossible to articulate a systematic rhetorical approach to the narrative sections of the Gospels and Acts, with rhetoricians seeing Paul's work as the standard. At the same time, narratologists embraced the stories of Jesus (Robbins, 2016).

Dinkler (2016) affirmed that the rhetorical and narrative nature of the New Testament is substantial because the writers intended to persuade and influence, doing so many times via story, testimony, or personal account. A narrative's standard structure is inextricably tied to its rhetorical influence, with Greek philosophers such as Cicero and Quintilian recognizing the natural affinity between narrators and orators. With a significant volume of scripture consisting

of narratives, preachers must understand how narratives work rhetorically (Heacock, 2014). Today, more scholars see the necessity and advantage of weaving the virtues of rhetoric into narratives and vice versa (Dinkler, 2016). Abraham (2016) claimed that for ministers, even their pastoral interactions with congregants unfold in narrative form, much like a novel, as they assist people through life from an initial situation to a successive stage in time. Dinkler (2016) highlighted that while some scholars consider rhetoric and narrative to be mutually exclusive, the rhetoricity of scriptural narratives is evident. Preaching's nature as a combination of rhetoric and narrative is consequently of great interest in exploring how it motivates listeners to renew their minds and transform their lives.

The Role of Narrative Transportation in Listener Motivation

Narrative transportation is at the heart of veritable and stirring storytelling, where listeners or readers become immersed in a story and lose themselves. This emotional experience is entrenched in narrative transportation theory and captures the feelings and imagination of audiences (Lindsey-Warren & Ringler, 2021). According to the narrative transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002), when recipients of stories are reading, viewing, or hearing, they experience a state of transportation described as embarking on a mental journey into the narrative's world. Green and Brock (2000, 2002) stated that narrative transportation is a primary means of persuasion because of its innate ability to help people experience changes in their outlooks, actions, and opinions. They further contended that transportation, as the basis of narratives' persuasive impact, predisposed participants' views to be influenced by the narrative. The recipient's transportation temporarily suspended their cognitive systems and capacities as they became focused on the narrative's events. The suggestion that transportation propels

persuasion via narratives has been reinforced by other studies as well (Escalas, 2007; Vaughn et al., 2009). People with heightened emotional dispositions experience transportation more strongly, and consequently, its persuasive effects are more significant.

Gilley (2009) found that a leader's ability to influence is built on some combination of their skill and their followers' willingness to participate. Motivation theories explore this interplay using various approaches, such as need theory (Maslow, 1943, 1954), expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1968), ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969), and goal theory (Karoly, 1993). Motivation theorists are concerned with exploring the why behind human behavior, as well as what causes people to act (Wigfield & Gladstone, 2019). Vroom (1964) tied people's motivation to their desire to enhance pleasure or avoid pain, while Skinner (1968) focused on operant conditioning as the means through which individuals learn to perform a behavior, and Karoly (1993) links motivation or achievement to a person's competing goals that impact what behaviors they pursue. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is an extensively used theory and states that humans have five fundamental needs centered on order of importance. The lower-level needs must be fulfilled first before an advancement towards other higher-order needs. These five needs, from lower to higher levels, include physiological needs such as hunger and thirst, safety needs in the form of security and housing, social needs like belonging and love, esteem needs such as status and recognition, and self-actualization needs that take the form of fulfillment and development (Belch & Belch, 2021). A significant critique of Maslow's theory is the rigid hierarchical order of humankind's needs (King-Hill, 2015). Maslow oversimplified the factors involved in personality development, and it is a challenge to assert that needs are fulfilled in a specific order of ascendance (Comer et al., 2013). In contrast to Maslow's humanistic

approach focusing on self, scripture attributes man's development as a journey from death to life through Christ's sacrifice (Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Alderfer's ERG theory (1969) improved upon Maslow's, categorizing core human needs into three groups that are interconnected rather than predicated on each other, and these include existence (E), relatedness (R), and growth (G). Existence needs cover the physical component of man, as these needs deal with food, water, shelter, and other material provisions. Relatedness needs cover the relational element of man, as these needs deal with relationships, status, and emotions. Finally, growth needs cover the transcendental component of man, as these needs deal with the human search for meaning, self-actualization, and spirituality (Alderfer, 1969). Alderfer's ERG theory appears loosely aligned with the biblical perspective that man is a triune being with spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Existence needs line up with the physical component of man, while relatedness needs align with the soul component of man, and growth needs satisfy the spiritual component of man. Narrative transportation does traverse human motivation theories, as it can broadly influence people and produce transformative experiences for a story's recipients. Individuals who experience the narrative transportation process become engrossed in storytelling, which profoundly affects them and results in behavior and attitude changes (Lindsey-Warren & Ringler, 2021). Consequently, using the narrative transportation theory to explore the motivational capability of preaching will likely provide robust possibilities.

Summary

This study will focus on persuasive communication by studying how rhetorical appeal embedded in preachers' sermons influences evangelical listener motivation. Guthrie (2007)

pointed out that even though preaching is a fundamental feature of Christian ministry and the church world, it remains among the least conceptualized and academically studied phenomena in the area of religious studies. However, its significance demands more investigation from theorists and researchers of religion. Preaching scholars should ensure that their subject matter receives its proper dues within academia. Hauf (2018) stated that since history proves the positive role of persuasive preaching in the church, learning institutions should provide a prominent place for persuasion in the study of homiletics. Preaching is storytelling through a narrative art form of a sermon (Bagg, 2021). Ancient philosophers such as Cicero and Quintilian recognized the natural affinity between narrators and orators, and with a significant volume of scripture consisting of narratives, preachers must understand how they work rhetorically (Heacock, 2014). Rietveld (2013) observed that some sermon listeners paid attention because of the ethos of a relational bond with the preacher, while some listened because of the logos of wanting to engage with the sermon's content, and still others responded because of the pathos centered on feelings stirred by the message. Additionally, the impact of communal influences must be taken into context, so a comprehensive exploration of rhetorical appeal should also involve social cognition.

Matthew 13:2-3 showed Jesus as a master of using stories to teach lessons. Since preachers follow this model in their sermons to inspire life change among their listeners, this study will use the narrative transportation theory as its theoretical framework. Green and Brock (2000, 2002) postulated that narrative transportation is a fundamental device employed in persuasion, since its influential and ardent nature empowers listeners to experience changes in attitudes, behaviors, intentions, and beliefs. In other words, narrative transportation possesses the

capacity to produce transformative experiences for listeners who lose themselves in a story. The mental state of narrative transportation may shed light on the persuasive effect of stories on people, as well as what role ethos, logos, and pathos each play in the listeners' change of attitude and intentions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This chapter's purpose is to present this study's procedures, research design, and analysis. This qualitative study explored how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation. Specifically, a narrative design was used to examine the stories of diverse listeners across several evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia. The qualitative narrative design employed a historical approach with in-depth interviews designed to collect participants' stories, fulfilling this study's purpose, and addressing the research questions. The data was collected via purposive sampling and analyzed using Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic mode of analysis through an interpretative reasoning lens. By enabling participants to share their own stories about experiences with sermons, this study unveiled narratives regarding rhetorical appeal's role in motivation. The setting for this research included in-person and Zoom options so as not to lose the context of oral communication, which involves body language, facial expressions, tone, pitch, inflection, and emotion (Ong, 1982).

The interviews used semi-structured questions that were open, probative, manageable, and which capture the intent of the study, with appropriate limitations (Simon, 2011). When appropriate, the questions dug deeper with open-ended follow-up questions (Punch, 2014). The study procedures included reviewing, addressing, and adhering to the standards provided by Liberty University, IRB, and the student code of ethics. Some techniques used to improve the study included triangulation, bracketing, reflectivity, behavioral observation, thick description, and member checking. Various means of promoting credibility, dependability, confirmability,

and transferability are discussed in this chapter in order to help guarantee the study's trustworthiness. Ethics were ensured by prioritizing privacy concerns, confidentiality, and trust.

Design

This qualitative narrative study explored how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation. A qualitative research approach using narrative design, including in-depth interviews with evangelical listeners, fulfills this study's purpose and addresses the research questions. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study because this method is apt for determining how people construct meaning through their value-laden contexts and experiences (Patton, 2015; Sarma, 2015). The research methodologies that scholars can use for research include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Crane et al., 2018). The quantitative methodology objectively and deductively investigates correlation using numeric data to test hypotheses (Terrell, 2016). The mixed method assumes that integrating qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative alone (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The choice of research methodology entails evaluating the study's objective, theoretical approach, and inherent philosophical values (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). No methodology is perfect, however, and each context presents a variety of factors to help determine which method to use.

The qualitative approach is most suitable for this study as it explores listeners' perceptions and experiences within the context of rhetorical appeal and motivation. This is because qualitative research relies on non-numeric empirical data, such as words or images (Christensen et al., 2010), to investigate artifacts and interpret meaning (Patton, 2015) using rigorous data collection techniques and procedures (Yin, 2018). The qualitative methodology has

five research design approaches: case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative design (Lichtman, 2014). The selection of research design depends on which offers the most suitable strategy for addressing the research question. A qualitative methodology is appropriate when obtaining detailed meaning from participants telling a story (Hennink et al., 2011). Freeman (2015) stated that narrative inquiry is the most appropriate vehicle for studying human lives, and this study used the narrative qualitative approach to explore the stories of evangelical listeners.

The Narrative Design

Narrative design is a qualitative approach in which stories become the raw research data. This approach is typically used to discover more about a subject's culture, historical experiences, identity, or lifestyle (Butina, 2015). McAlpine (2016) outlined how narrative design facilitates the documentation and understanding of variable personal and interpersonal experiences. Patton (2015) explained that narrative research explores the life of an individual or small group of individuals through collected stories. Individuals use storytelling to make sense of complex phenomena; consequently, narrative design is a valuable technique for exploring these stories, their development, and their impact across various levels (Scott et al., 2018). Using narrative design for qualitative research is appropriate when temporality is essential to anchoring stories to specific places or situations. This helps build contextual details that may capture physical, emotional, and social depictions (Patton, 2015). In both event and experience-based narrative research, the focus is on using a personal internal narration of phenomena, thoughts, and feelings to provide external expression, as stories hold clues to understanding lives (Andrews et al., 2013). This narrative design study explored the stories of diverse listeners across several

evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia, and listeners were chosen to reflect different demographics and perspectives.

Riessman (1993) asserted that narrative research's characteristics are experience-based, chronological, contain first-person stories, built from field notes, coded via themes, incorporate context, and are a collaboration between the researcher and participants. Liberty University (2021) highlighted that narrative design collects data through six techniques: restorying, oral history, memorabilia, storytelling, letter writing or emails, and autobiographical and biographical writing. Restorying is the retelling or developing of a story from field notes (Riessman, 1993). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the three main narrative research approaches are biographical study, autoethnography, and historical study. Biographical studies record the experiences of someone else's life. Autoethnography is documented and composed by the persons who are the subject of a study. Historical studies involve collecting data from one person or several people, plus their reflections on incidents and their causes and effects. The chosen approach depends on the content being explored and how best to present it (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). This narrative study employed the historical approach to collect from several participants their reflections on preaching as well as their causes and effects on motivation.

Challenges of Narrative Design

Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) posited that embarking on qualitative research in its various forms can present multiple problems for researchers. Narrative design, focusing on collecting personal stories, can affect the researcher emotionally due to their depth of involvement with the subject or subjects. Data collection can be intense when the research involves stressful or harmful experiences such as illness, death, or abuse. The researcher is immersed in stories of

severe suffering, social injustice, or other issues that may emotionally, mentally, or physically drain the researcher. Emotional extremes can range from becoming desensitized to developing unhealthy attachments. Researchers must protect themselves through various means, including adequate training and supervision, undertaking a risk assessment, and utilizing professional and personal support systems for counseling and debriefing throughout the research process.

Patton (2015) highlighted the narrative design challenge of collecting vast amounts of information about the subject in order to clearly grasp the story's context. This voluminous collection of data sometimes requires prolonged investments of time and energy, plus a keen sense with which to identify the appropriate material for the story without getting buried in the details (Liberty University, 2021). To strike a proper equilibrium, Patton (2015) encouraged an active collaboration between the researcher and subject which would involve discussing the stories and reflecting on their background, as well as how this shapes interpretation. Operating with defined research processes provides a crucial safeguard against getting lost in the work. Anchoring stories in more prominent social, cultural, familial, linguistic, or organizational contexts creates a holistic framework (Patton, 2015). Despite its challenges, narrative research is this study's most suitable approach, as it seeks to understand individual experiences and how these influence both present and future experiences (Patton, 2015). Narrative research is appropriate for studies of subjectivity and identity (Riessman, 1993). By enabling participants to share their own stories about their experiences with sermons, this study unveiled narratives regarding the influence of preaching's rhetorical appeal on motivation.

Research Questions

RQ 1 - Does a sermon's rhetorical appeal affect evangelical listener motivation?

RQ 2 - Does narrative storytelling affect evangelical listener motivation?

RQ 3 - Do listeners connect rhetorical appeal and narrative storytelling in sermons?

Durbin (2004) established that the research process begins with a question, while Tully (2014) emphasized how formulating clear and concise research questions is pivotal to conducting research. Simon (2011) described qualitative research questions as being open, probative, manageable, and capturing the study's intent with appropriate limitations. They are usually exploratory, asking how or why things happen, or what the perceptions and experiences of participants are. Most dissertations are guided by a maximum of three substantive and unambiguous research questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) outlined how research questions are considered signposts in research because they create a more focused direction for the purpose statement, which serves as the first signpost establishing the principal intent of a study. In contrast, research questions served as the next signpost narrowing the purpose statement to expectations about what is to be learned or questions that are to be answered in the study. Kapoor (2020) concurred that research questions are important and essential components of research because they function as signposts by addressing what, why, when, where, or how.

Setting

This study explored persuasive communication through narrative; consequently, obtaining the full context of storytelling was paramount. The setting included in-person and Zoom options so as not to lose the context of oral communication, which involves body language, facial expressions, tone, pitch, inflection, and emotion (Ong, 1982). Moser and

Korstjens (2018) indicated that researchers should choose settings that offer the richest information regarding the phenomenon. The interview setting affects recruitment because participants are unlikely to enroll in the study if the location is inconvenient (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). Having in-person meetings in private settings where participants feel safe, such as their church or neighborhood café, was more in line with the qualitative essence, and this resulted in better data collection (Bamdad et al., 2021). Zoom offered assurances of safety for those with health concerns while still providing a means of recording the interviews (Kauffman et al., 2022). Offering participants interview choices between either in-person or via Zoom met the need to collect data in a setting that helped establish trust and allowed for rich data collection (Morse, 2015). Fusch et al. (2018) depicted rich data as high-quality versus low-quality.

Evangelical churches that met this study's geographical, demographical, and doctrinal criteria were contacted with a request for permission to conduct interviews with interested members. Appendix C is the Permission Letter. Before emailing the letter, the appropriate organizational gatekeeper was determined, as many times this was someone other than the pastor. The gatekeeper had the authority to decide for the organization whether the research and interviews were permissible (Liberty, 2021). It was also beneficial for me to first use my network to establish contact with someone in the church who then personally introduced me to the gatekeeper. This approach assisted me with getting the letter to the appropriate gatekeeper instead of having it lost in places such as a junk mail folder.

Participants

This study drew participants from an established population of self-identifying evangelicals who regularly listened in-person to church sermons weekly on average and had been members of their church in Savannah for at least one year. They all were consenting adults over the age of 18. A population is a full range of individuals from which the researcher selected a sample to examine (Christensen et al. 2010), and this study's participant demographic was diverse, covering different races, ages, genders, marital statuses, educational levels, and evangelical churches. Participant income level is not a factor in this study, and verification of income was not needed for participation purposes, as people do not like to divulge how much money they make and asking income questions can affect participation (Davern et al., 2005). Participants were required to self-identify that on average they listened to at least one sermon weekly. This study considered the term "regularly listen" to sermons as listening for an average of once a week or more, with the Pew Research Center (2022) identifying that among evangelicals, 57% of women and 43% of men attend church weekly. This criterion provided a large enough pool of participants among evangelicals who were adequately engaged with their church and familiar with sermons. Weekly attendance was deemed an essential yardstick of evangelical commitment for this study, because among weekly attendees, 99% believe in God, 99% see religion as necessary, 98% pray weekly, 93% have a sense of spiritual well-being, and 83% read their bibles at least weekly (Pew Research Center, 2022).

The church demographic also covered different denominations led by pastors from different genders and races, and this diversity provided strengths for both demographic and psychographic segmentation. Tuten and Solomon (2017) explained that demographic

segmentation clusters similar interests using common characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic background, educational attainment, family life cycle, and occupation. Psychographic segmentation, on the other hand, offers a more detailed description of consumers by dividing the market based on personality, motives, lifestyles, attitudes, and opinions. Provided in Chapter Four is the participant group list with demographic information using pseudonyms, followed by the church list with demographic information also using pseudonyms. Participants were asked to recall impactful sermons that they had heard within a six-week period. Many churches run their sermon series for no longer than six weeks to avoid listeners losing interest (Hilgemann, 2022).

Participant selection was conducted using purposive sampling, because all participants were from a specific group (Hou et al., 2012), which for this study consisted of evangelicals in Savannah, Georgia. Using purposive sampling in qualitative studies is popular as it allows the researcher to select relevant participants (Miles et al., 2013). Seidman (2013) identified purposive sampling as an effective method for determining research participants. For this study, a purposive sample was appropriate for selecting participants who were able to provide the richest data on the research topic (Yin, 2010). Screening participants via a survey was carried out in order to ascertain that participants were adult evangelicals who listened to sermons and attended church at least weekly. The screening survey, seen in Appendix A, collected demographic data, and ensured that participants were equipped to be included in the study. A consent form, seen in Appendix B, briefly outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and more was shared with potential participants to ensure that they were informed and willing to participate. Using purposive sampling with screens enabled me to identify participants with lived experiences that were relevant to the research.

Additionally, several participants were recruited using snowball sampling, a type of purposive sampling in which the researcher begins with some information-rich participants and then asks them for relevant contacts (Patton, 2015). The snowball sampling generated additional participants for this study, because the initial purposive sampling participants provided the contact information of others in their churches with relevant life experiences to share. To ensure data saturation, this researcher aimed to interview enough participants, in this case a minimum of 30 participants. Data saturation involves the systematic and repetitive analysis of data to provide a thematic saturation point whereby no new themes continue to emerge (Cronin, 2014; Lowe et al., 2018). Consequently, three to ten participants from six churches were interviewed to eventually reach a total of 34 participants.

Morse and Coulehan (2015) argued that using pseudonyms in such studies is inadequate, since several demographic identifiers may compromise confidentiality. To minimize the risk of violating confidentiality, researchers should not publish a table that lists participants' demographic information line by line. Instead, demographic characteristics should be reported as group data in ranges. This study's detailed participant coding approach for anonymity is provided in Chapter Four's section on Participant Demographics.

Recruitment

A vital component of qualitative studies is the recruitment of top-quality participants. Qualitative recruitment is the process of finding, screening, and scheduling appropriate research participants (Carroll, 2021). Finding participants can be challenging, but an effective way to address this is by utilizing gatekeepers to access prospective participants (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). Working with the appropriate church gatekeeper served as a resource for advertising on

the church's social media groups, using Appendix F, or their church bulletin, using Appendix G. Collaborating with organizational gatekeepers who already have participants' trust is a successful recruitment strategy (Renert et al., 2013). Appendix E was the email message sent to members identified by the church gatekeeper through resources such as their church database or membership list. In addition to working with churches, partnering with other evangelical organizations in Savannah, such as schools, was also explored, but ended up yielding minimal results.

Interested members were offered the option of accessing the screening form in Appendix A and the Consent Form in Appendix B via email, in-person, or on Google Forms. Google Forms is an easy, free, and secure cloud-based file-storage system that provides ideal options for educators to automatically gather data in a web-based spreadsheet that can be exported to other software, allowing for easy data analysis (Djenno et al., 2015). For the Google Forms option, Appendixes A and B were featured in a survey format because digital survey formats enhance speedy interaction with potential participants, reduce errors, make information collection simpler, cost less, increase participation chances, and are more reliable than traditional methods (Khazaal et al., 2014). Documents were printed and delivered to potential participants who preferred more conventional methods and emailed to those who preferred digital means.

Online recruitment of research participants using strategies like advertising in online communities or Facebook groups is increasingly popular (Manohar et al., 2018). This study consequently explored online recruitment on several church and para-ministry platforms and reached out to several potential participants on Facebook. In keeping with ethical online research practices, the researcher identified themselves and was transparent regarding the purpose of their

outreach (Costello et al., 2017). Fiesler and Proferes (2018) explained that online transparency refers to clearly communicating to the digital community what the research is about and how their data can be used. For this study's recruitment efforts, establishing specific inclusion criteria was critical to guaranteeing that participants could provide the data needed to address the research questions. Inclusion criteria denote prospective study candidates' characteristics with regards to participating in the study (Moran, 2021). This study's inclusion criteria included that they must be over 18 years old, self-identified evangelicals, church members for over a year, and listen to their church sermons weekly. The recruitment process can be challenging, requiring a researcher to modify their original recruitment plan and explore other methods that may improve participation numbers (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). My pragmatist worldview promoted flexibility over methodology (Cherryholmes, 1992), and therefore the recruitment approach was adjusted as the need arose. The online recruitment effort ended up yielding just one participant.

Procedures

Liberty University (2020) requires that doctoral candidates secure IRB approval before recruiting participants or collecting data. IRB is a federal organization authorized to ensure the ethical treatment of human subjects (Liberty University, 2020). Consequently, the standards provided by Liberty University, IRB, and the student code of ethics were reviewed, addressed, and adhered to. By doing so, this research and all related activities have been conducted ethically. The approval letter was forwarded to the Doctoral Support Team upon receiving IRB approval. Informed consent is crucial to ensure that no harm comes to the participants, so this was obtained via written permission, as this is a research requirement (Moustakas, 1994). A field test was conducted using two experts to review the interview questions. These experts were

specialists in the instructional design and training profession, and this field test helped to eliminate interview question ambiguities, inconsistencies, and misinterpretations by asking experts to provide feedback on the questions' clarity, structure, and meaning. For instance, they recommended including one more question, IQ19, at the end of each interview, which asked, "Is there anything else you would like to add?" The answer to this question introduced interesting perspectives that this study would not have otherwise received. The open-ended nature of this question served as a catch-all for participants to reflect and share their thoughts.

A pilot interview was then conducted with a small sample outside my study sample to ensure clarity of questions and wording. Due to this pilot interview, the researcher discovered that for the evangelical community, there needed to be a slight edit of IQ14. The original question was "What role does your emotional experience play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?" while the final question became "What role does the delivery's emotional experience play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?" There were two major reasons for this. First, the evangelical community holds steadfast to walking by faith, not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), with feedback indicating that sight here encompasses the physical, mental, and psychological senses and emotions. Some evangelicals therefore would approach this question with the perspective that their emotions should not be a factor when it came to ingesting God's word. The second reason was that some answers provided to the original question were very similar to answers from IQ15, "What role does your attitude play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?" This is because the general populace sees our emotions and attitudes as closely aligned and functioning together. Editing IQ14 therefore broadened the inquiry and

assisted with gathering data focused on pathos by addressing the appeal for the audience to feel or imagine something due to the speaker's personality (FitzPatrick et al., 2021).

Several data collection and analysis stages followed the IRB approval, field test, and interview pilot. The preliminary interview stage involved identifying participants, verifying that all criteria satisfied the research, obtaining informed consent from selected participants, and scheduling interviews. The interview stage included semi-structured interviews and involved reminding interviewees of pertinent information such as my contact information, the study's purpose, the selection process, participation benefits, confidentiality, freedom to withdraw, and confirmation that interviews are recorded (Sin, 2005). Interviewing became easier for me with each one conducted, and my increase in confidence and ease led to more adept field notetaking and eventually the ability to identify emerging patterns as more participants shared their stories. This also led to increased comfort when asking follow-up questions to help provide stronger context for participants' original answers. In addition to the interview recordings, these field notes and follow-up questions helped capture, contextualize, and/or clarify specific experiences.

The review stage involved transcribing all recordings and then conducting member checking by providing participants with the transcriptions for correction or confirmation. Interviewees were asked to share any additional thoughts that they might have. The data analysis stage involved analyzing interview data, identifying emerging themes, and using field notes to provide more depth. The data mapping stage included interpreting the data in line with the research questions and then providing findings and concluding statements.

The Researcher's Role

In qualitative studies, the researcher serves as a human data collection instrument aware of the propensity for errors and flaws (Cypress, 2017). This awareness made me check things multiple times in order to minimize human error. This study was carried out with the understanding that a researcher's background impacts the study, including design methodology, participant choice, and the data collection and analysis processes (Morse, 2015). The pragmatism worldview provided flexibility and interest in exploring intriguing comments during interviews, rather than sticking to a prearranged approach (Cherryholmes, 1992). This exploration of abstract concepts or in-depth descriptions was voluminous and sometimes challenging to articulate, but still worth the effort because it led to the discovery of pertinent information.

Consequently, it became a priority to consistently avoid infusing my bias, thereby impacting the study. Acknowledging personal experiences that might influence their research lens helps scholars alleviate bias (Fusch et al., 2018). Bias was also minimized in this case by reflecting on background influences in consultation with the participants (Morse, 2015). Additionally, bracketing was employed in order to address any personal bias in the study and curtail personal sentiments or experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, systematic data analysis was used to identify significant statements for effective meaning derivation, interpretation, and description, thereby capturing the essence of participants' experiences (Liberty University, 2021). Minimizing bias because of its ability to skew results and lead to incorrect or misleading conclusions was a necessity for this study.

To collect data for this study, interviews were conducted using open, probative, and manageable questions that captured the study's intent with appropriate limitations (Simon,

2011). These questions were exploratory, asking how or why things happened, or what the perceptions and experiences of participants were. And while the research questions formed the basis of inquiry for the study and what it aimed to address, the interview questions focused on gathering participants' perspectives as a part of data collection (Moore, 2021). The process of reflexivity helped me remain attentive to, conscious, and respectful of the multi-cultural, socio-economic, and other perspectives of those who participated in the process, including myself (Patton, 2015). This awareness of others and self was an asset in the field and during analysis.

Data Collection

A narrative study's data collection must be extensive and with a clear understanding of the participants' context (Patton, 2015). A vital component of this study's data collection process involved ensuring that all participants had informed consent, which included explaining to all interviewees the study's purpose, expectations for participation, use of interview data, confidentiality, and other pertinent information that helped them make informed decisions regarding whether to participate (Cypress, 2018; Yin, 2018). This narrative study used a qualitative approach to collect data through semi-structured interviews that enabled participants to share stories relevant to the research topic. Lune and Berg (2017) posited that one of the most effective ways to learn about the circumstances of people's lives is simply to ask them. Everyone included in the study was chosen as a potential source for gathering pertinent information due to their connection to the situation.

Consequently, the interviews collected in-depth information about the participant's experiences and viewpoints on the research topic and its questions (Turner III, 2010). Open-ended questions were used in the study, and this allowed participants to share in-depth

information about their experiences (Punch, 2014). The recordings for in-person interviews were collected with a recording application on the researcher's phone, while the recordings for virtual interviews were gathered via Zoom. The digitally recorded data was reviewed several times to ensure accuracy and then uploaded to my laptop, which is password protected, and another backup was uploaded to the cloud. As earlier interviews were completed, this researcher began transcribing them as more interviews were scheduled and confirmed. Transcribing a few of the interviews revealed that the process took a lot of valuable time and energy away from writing and conducting interviews. Therefore, transcription tests were run through a variety of companies that offered both human and digital options at a variety of costs and delivery timeframes. Eventually, all remaining recordings were transcribed by two transcription organizations, Rev and Scribie, based on their accuracy rate and cost. The researcher then double-checked all transcriptions by reviewing them while listening to the recorded interviews concurrently.

With the transcriptions completed, member checking was then performed to confirm the validity of the interview data (Lincoln et al., 2011). The availability of Appendices A and B as Google Forms, plus uploading backup data to the Cloud, increased the need to maintain data confidentiality, because uploading data using third-party service providers or clouds can create other challenges (Talha et al., 2015). Therefore, to ensure privacy and confidentiality, anonymity was employed, and all identifiers were removed from the data by grouping demographic data in the form of ranges, as seen in Chapter Four.

Interviews

The research questions were this study's foundation for inquiry and exploration, while the interview questions helped collect data from participants to help answer the research questions (Moore, 2021). Liberty University (2021) has established that semi-structured questions are the recommended approach for qualitative study interviews. Semi-structured questions proved advantageous for this study because they saved time and energy while allowing for specific and individualized responses. This study's interview questions were brief and directly related to the research questions, and thus enhanced both the effective collection and analysis of the data. The interview questions were articulated so that virtually anyone would interpret the question similarly, which helped minimize confusion while gathering relevant data. A deliberate effort was made to limit the complexity of vocabulary used in order to enhance the participants' understanding of the expectations and to improve the clarity of their answers (Liberty University, 2021). Although the interviews primarily employed semi-structured questions, open-ended questions served as a follow-up to dig deeper in some cases as appropriate (Punch, 2014). Following up with impromptu open-ended interview questions for this qualitative narrative study assisted with capturing or understanding the experiences and perspectives of interviewees (Van Manen, 2014). The following interview questions helped to better understand, explore, and explain participants' opinions, behaviors, and experiences.

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your experience at your church. This addressed RQs 1, 2, and 3.
2. Tell me about the culture of your church. This addressed RQs 1, 2, and 3.

3. What sermon message from your church has impacted you significantly? This addressed RQs 1, 2, and 3.
4. What was most memorable about this sermon? This addressed RQs 1, 2, and 3.
5. Over the past six weeks, which church sermon did you find the most memorable? This addressed RQs 1, 2, and 3.
6. What about this sermon affected you considerably? This addressed RQs 1, 2, and 3.
7. While you were listening to the sermon, what emotions were you experiencing? This addressed RQ 2.
8. Were there specific ways the sermon shifted your perspective? This addressed RQ 2.
9. Did you make any changes in your life due to the sermon? This addressed RQ 2.
10. What role does your connection to the preacher play when it comes to church sermons motivating you? This addressed RQ 1.
11. What role does the support from others play when it comes to church sermons motivating you? This addressed RQ 1.
12. What role does the sermon content play when it comes to church sermons motivating you? This addressed RQ 1.
13. What role does your previous life experience play when it comes to church sermons motivating you? This addressed RQ 1.
14. What role does the delivery's emotional experience play when it comes to church sermons motivating you? This addressed RQ 1.
15. What role does your attitude play when it comes to church sermons motivating you? This addressed RQ 1.

16. What are your favorite aspects of preaching in general? This addressed RQ 3.

17. What about preaching typically makes you do some soul-searching? This addressed RQ 3.

18. How has preaching influenced your behavior? This addressed RQ 3.

19. Is there anything else you would like to add? This addressed RQs 1, 2, and 3.

Questions 1 to 4 helped build context and led to the substance of the study. Questions 1 and 2 were vital in understanding the listeners' preaching environment and their perception of the church. For instance, if the listener did not feel that their church environment was healthy or supportive, it would negatively impact their listening and affect the findings of this study.

Questions 3 and 4 helped explore what participants thought was essential in a sermon before they were asked to recall the specific six-week period that followed in questions 5 and 6. Questions 1 to 4 promoted a clarification of expectations before getting into the critical research questions.

Questions 5 and 6 served as introductory questions asking interviewees to focus on a specific recent church sermon that they connected with. These preliminary questions established rapport and provided direction so that the interviewees felt freer to begin telling their stories (Lune & Berg, 2017). With interviews, there tends to be a natural power dynamic where the interviewee feels apprehensive or wants to conform (Madison, 2012), so encouraging them to talk about things that they feel invested in or comfortable with is encouraged (Lune & Berg, 2017). For this narrative study, purposive sampling was used to deliberately select participants who were experienced in the topic and therefore more likely to feel comfortable providing the richest information (Cypress, 2017). When churchgoers listen to sermons, they subjectively create their own meaning with the narrative and rhetorical aspects that are interwoven in the

experience (Gaarden & Lorensen, 2013). These questions consequently provided an introduction and overview of answers for RQ 1, 2, and 3 collectively, and then the subsequent questions further explored each RQ independently. For question 5, the timeline of six weeks was chosen because many churches run their sermon series no longer than six weeks to avoid losing listeners' interest (Hilgemann, 2022). Some churches go longer, but even in these cases, the timeline gives participants sufficient sermons to pick from that are still fresh in their memory. This timeline also aided with all participants from the same church providing feedback on a common phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Interview questions 5 and 6 helped establish a solid structural foundation.

Questions 7 to 9 were adapted into a qualitative interview format from Green and Brock's (2000) Narrative Transportation Scale. These questions answered RQ 2, which asked, "Does narrative storytelling affect evangelical listener motivation?" The narrative transportation scale is the quantitative standard for measuring narrative involvement (Frank et al., 2013) and uses a Likert scale. These interview questions allowed me to explore beyond the qualitative constraints of the Likert scale, such as its uni-dimensionality, limited options, and failure to measure the genuine attitudes of participants (Bishop, 2015). The narrative transportation scale provides scholars with a valuable tool for evaluating the workings of narrative involvement that are vital for persuasion and offers an established measure of narrative involvement that has predictive utility in better understanding participants' cognitive and affective responses and belief changes (Quintero Johnson & Sangalang, 2017). The narrative transportation scale shares the same foundation as this study's theoretical framework of narrative transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002), capturing a substantial portion of the phenomenological experience of

narrative immersion (Appel & Richter, 2010). These questions helped effectively ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research, because they are deductively shaped using a theoretical framework (Liberty University, 2021).

Questions 10 to 15 explored the specific impact of rhetoric appeal on the listener by answering RQ 1, “Does a sermon’s rhetorical appeal affect evangelical listener motivation?” There are individual and group influences when exploring the rhetorical appeal of preaching and its influence on listeners. While the rhetorical triangle focuses on personal interpretations of ethos, logos, and pathos, social cognition brings into focus the larger impact of the evangelical church’s group context. Both factors together influence evangelical listeners, and this group of questions provided a comprehensive exploration of rhetorical appeal. Questions 10, 12, and 14 considered RQ 1 through the traditional rhetorical appeal approach. The entire rhetorical triangle is essential in persuading an audience (Appel & Richter, 2010), and each of the three elements of rhetorical appeal have been successfully used in preaching for centuries (Hauf, 2018). While it has been documented that listeners hear sermons through the rhetorical appeal of ethos, logos, or pathos (Allen & Mulligan, 2009), it remains unclear how these settings motivate listeners to act on the sermon (Rietveld, 2013). All three rhetorical elements are interconnected (Browning, 2014) and work together to influence listeners; however, one appeal typically dominates (Allen & Mulligan, 2009). Questions 11, 13, and 15 approached RQ 1 through a social-cognitive context, exploring how rhetoric functioned in an interactive communal setting (Bandura, 1986). These questions aimed to provide clarity on the impact of environmental factors, cognitive factors, and behavioral factors on evangelical listeners’ motivation. Interview questions 10 to 15 together offered an integrated perspective regarding how the individual and group influences of

rhetorical appeal affected evangelical listeners' motivation. Though preaching influences people, the way in which it motivates listener action is a question that needs to be explored (McDaniel, 2006), and these interview questions helped examine this further.

Questions 16 to 19 were about participants' perceptions of preaching in general, and thereby examined the interplay of rhetoric and narrative. Preaching is profoundly rhetorical, and understanding the link between rhetoric and homiletics improves a minister's professional proficiency and influence on listeners (Riley, 2015). These interview questions helped answer RQ 3, "Are listeners making connections between rhetorical appeal and narrative storytelling in sermons?" The emotional component of narrative persuasion is evident, but there are also relevant attentional and cognitive elements of transportation. The relationship between these emotional, attentional, and mental aspects is a dynamic worth further exploration (Appel & Richter, 2010). The interplay of rhetoric with narrative helped provide insight into this dynamic in sermons. Many modern preachers are not formally educated in rhetoric, and it is therefore vital to have more studies exploring how contemporary preaching can benefit from the connections of homiletics to rhetoric (Riley, 2015). This study's interview questions 16 to 19 helped identify areas in which a better understanding of the interplay of narrative and rhetoric could improve preaching. Preaching is storytelling through a narrative form, and stories are probably the most persuasive resource that homiletics have for influencing listeners (Bagg, 2021). The Bible, which consists of many narratives (Heacock, 2014), is intended to affect its readers' beliefs, emotions, and lives, and contains persuasive written and spoken elements (Domeris & Smith, 2014). Since numerous studies have established that narratives can have

persuasive effects, it is crucial to understand how and what conditions impact these effects (Hoeken & Fikkers, 2014). These interview questions helped explore this further.

Data Analysis

For qualitative studies, data analysis involves evaluating the collected data using coding to sort this data into themes, and then representing the findings in appropriate formats, including narrative (Guest et. al., 2012). The qualitative data analysis process typically focuses on four essential components: codes, categories, patterns, and themes. Codes are concepts identified from raw data through a coding process, while categories are created by linking the codes; patterns are then identified through repeated categories, and themes emerge from similar patterns' representations (Kim, 2016). Polkinghorne (1988) described narrative analysis as a means of using stories to understand human experience, phenomena, and existence. Narrative analysis uses data collected through stories to understand meanings that interviewees ascribe to themselves, their environments, their existence, and their lived experiences (Kim, 2016). Narrative analysis assisted me in discovering the underlying beliefs embedded in participants' stories and the context within which they view their experiences.

Narrative data analysis requires interpretation, which means that the researcher interprets the stories' meanings or representations by analyzing plotlines, thematic structures, and socio-cultural contexts (Kim, 2016). This study's narrative data analysis used interpretative reasoning in analyzing the artifacts, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). This allowed me to treat stories, social action, and human activity as texts, since human action can be seen as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning, and the interviews were then transcribed into written text for analysis. This integration of behavioral observation and literature review alongside the

interviews provided the necessary triangulation to improve the study. Interpretative analysis methods are not as precise as quantitative tools (Polkinghorne, 1988), and consequently, the theoretical construct was used to identify and analyze data such as surface meanings, latent meanings, and intent (Punch, 2014). This also helped minimize my personal sentiments, biases, or experiences, thereby performing bracketing (Liberty University, 2021). The analyzed data was interpreted to help uncover the meaning that participants ascribed to their experiences.

According to Riessman (1993), recording and transcribing are utterly imperative for narrative analysis. Data analysis begins by transforming participants' interviews into written text, which is a representation involving selection and reduction. This study's analysis used inductive coding manually in Microsoft Word, starting from scratch to create codes based on the raw data (Medelyan, 2022). The field notes and transcripts were manually coded line by line through a process of fracturing or breaking down the data into smaller pieces (Tracy, 2013). The inductive coding stage created tentative labels for chunks of data assigned to conceptual bins as patterns emerged (Tracy, 2013). This was followed by secondary-cycle axial coding and selective coding. The axial coding stage involved noting relationships between the conceptual bins and developing narratives around the emerging themes, sensitized by the study's research questions (Tracy, 2013). The selective coding stage was marked by the final classification, prioritization, integration, abstraction, conceptualization, and creation (Saldaña, 2009). A hierarchical coding frame was used to organize codes based on how they related to each other, allowing for several levels of granularity (Medelyan, 2022). The analysis of the collected data via manual coding generated themes, followed by the development of textural and structural descriptions (Patton, 2018). Inductive coding is an iterative process that takes longer but is more thorough and

provides a more comprehensive and less biased view of the themes (Medelyan, 2022). Though the manual coding was laborious, it helped to streamline the entire analysis process.

The data analysis procedure used for this study was Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic mode of analysis, which utilized the skill of paradigmatic cognition in order to organize experiences in terms of common themes and characteristics. The paradigmatic mode classifies a story's common features into various categories in an attempt to fit individual details into larger patterns, leading to cognitive networks of themes. Qualitative research generally uses the paradigmatic mode of analysis when examining data from stories to discover common categories and organize them under various themes (Kim, 2016). The paradigmatic mode was used within the predetermined focus provided by this study's topic, and the findings were therefore arranged around descriptions of themes that arose from experiences relevant to persuasive communication, preaching, rhetoric, or narrative issues. My paradigmatic analytical approach paid attention to relationships among research-relevant categories, uncovered commonalities across triangulated data sources, and produced findings from specifics embedded in participants' different stories.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is referred to as the rigor of a study and denotes the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods employed to guarantee the study's quality (Polit & Beck, 2014). Numerous qualitative scholars accept the criteria delineated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the standard for trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are necessary for creating the trustworthiness required for qualitative research. Credibility ensures that research participants are provided with proper context; dependability ensures that the study can deliver consistent

outcomes if repeated in a similar context; confirmability ensures that the study's findings have been explored without researcher bias; and transferability ensures that the research is applicable to other studies (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). In every study, scholars must establish the essential protocols and procedures needed for the work to be worth the consideration of readers (Amankwaa, 2016). Ensuring trustworthiness for this study enhanced the claim that its findings benefit serious consideration.

Patton (2015) described validation in qualitative research as the process of evaluating the accuracy of findings, as best expressed by the researcher, participants, and readers. Validation is a definite strength of qualitative research because value is added. The study's accuracy was heightened due to the extended time devoted to the field, the thick detailed description, and the researcher's generated familiarity with the study participants. Liberty University (2021) outlined the difference in validity and reliability measures for quantitative and qualitative research, in which validity and reliability are ascertained through internal and external reliability. However, qualitative research uses the terminology of credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility

Credibility covers the extent to which a study's findings accurately describe reality, as well as how we can know that the study sufficiently conveys the necessary information (Liberty, 2021). Credibility denotes the authenticity or degree of truthfulness represented in a study's findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and it can also be described as the process by which the scholar determines factors and information relevant to the research results (Wertz et al., 2011). A study's credibility depends on the richness of the data collected, as well as the researcher's analytical abilities (Liberty University, 2021). Various strategies were

employed to ensure credibility for this study. The accuracy of the collected data was confirmed through member checks (Cypress, 2017), while the literature review and behavioral observations augmented the interviews, providing methodological triangulation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, the collection and analysis of thick data provided rich descriptions of participants' experiences (Fusch et al., 2018). Safeguarding this study's credibility increased the confidence that readers can have in the accuracy of its findings.

Dependability and Confirmability

Though dependability and confirmability are comparable to reliability in quantitative research and also deal with consistency (Liberty University, 2021), Korstjens and Moser (2018) differentiated between the two, describing dependability as the concern for consistency with repeating the study's processes and analyses, while confirmability was described as the concern for the scholar's neutrality during data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that ensuring dependability involved providing the details of the research population, sampling method, data collection, and data analysis so that another researcher could conduct a similar study and obtain similar results. This study's protocols, processes, and population information are clearly outlined in order to enhance dependability (Maher et al., 2018). The documentation of the data collection processes was clear, established interview procedures were followed, and member checks were conducted (Sarma, 2015). Confirmability involves drawing accurate inferences regarding the data (Moustakas, 1990) and ensuring that the research findings are based on the interviewees' responses rather than the researcher's biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several strategies were implemented to achieve confirmability, including methodological triangulation, member checking, thick

descriptions, bias avoidance, comparing findings with contrasting information, and spending extended time collecting the data (Guest et al., 2012). The same strategies used to ensure confirmability also increased dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Sarma, 2015). Both dependability and confirmability were critical elements used to evaluate the quality of this qualitative study.

Transferability

Transferability covers the degree to which one study's findings will apply to other contexts (Liberty University, 2021). Qualitative research is not typically generalizable, as it is bound by time and context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), focusing on producing a rich depth of information regarding a smaller number of participants or cases (Patton, 2015). The qualitative researcher can only provide thick descriptions of context, and future researchers will determine transferability to other contexts (Cypress, 2017; Fusch et al., 2018). A rich, thick description was generated by using abundant, interconnected details in this study to describe themes so that readers could transfer information or findings to other settings dependent on shared characteristics. Using this validation strategy required revisiting the raw data soon after its collection in order to insert further contextual descriptions, which proved helpful during the analysis process (Patton, 2015). Validation in qualitative research is the process of evaluating the accuracy of the study's findings, as best expressed by the researcher, the participants, and the readers. This study's accuracy was also heightened by the prolonged time devoted to the field, the thick description, and its familiarity with the study participants (Patton, 2015). Validation is consequently a strength of this qualitative study because of the value that it has added.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics refers to understanding and distinguishing between what a person has a right to do and what is actually right to do (Ladd, 2015). Privacy concerns and confidentiality were two of the paramount ethical issues for this study and its data (Poulson, 2019). Privacy was ensured by storing all documents digitally with password protection and determining the appropriateness of the published data, since the results may potentially harm those being studied (Morgan, 2016). Bearing in mind that researchers struggle with prioritizing the accumulation of new knowledge versus the ethical principles of protecting privacy (Petrova et al., 2016), boundaries were set in order to prevent participants from sharing deeply personal information not relevant to the study. During interviews, a few participants were politely reminded that it was not necessary to share certain information when they began going down paths not relevant to the study. In addition to privacy, confidentiality was also maintained, though this was sometimes complicated and difficult to achieve (Punch, 2014). When participants shared stories that contained traumatic experiences, confidentiality entailed using discretion to distinguish between information that should be made public in this study or otherwise be restricted (Israel & Hay, 2007). Another strategy used for maintaining confidentiality was anonymization, which necessitated using pseudonyms and removing from stored data and analysis information such as people's names that potentially made it easy to trace and identify individual respondents (Punch, 2014). However, Morse and Coulehan (2015) argued that anonymization is inadequate, since several demographic identifiers may compromise confidentiality. Consequently, an additional step was taken, as described in Chapter Four, to minimize the risk of violating confidentiality by publishing demographic characteristics in groups with data ranges instead of a tabulated list of

participants' demographic information. Every research step endeavored to develop trust with participants, promote research integrity, and guard against misconduct and impropriety (Israel & Hay, 2007) by adhering to the standards provided by Liberty University, IRB, and the student code of ethics.

Christian researchers have an even greater incentive to be ethical, since ethics is founded on God, the perfect creator of a morally ordered universe and the author of morality. As a Christian researcher, my actions were guided by Colossians 3:17, which commands that everything must be done in word or deed in the name of the Lord Jesus. In encouraging Christians to be like God, Proverbs 11:13b states that anyone trustworthy conceals a matter, which was my standard for privacy and confidentiality. Melé and Fontrodona (2017) posited that the Christian faith brings about principles, criteria, and guidelines for action, as well as a set of ethical standards based on the Bible. Keller and Alsdorf (2012) pointed out that the Christian faith gives believers a much more encompassing moral foundation for acting with integrity which goes beyond the pragmatic approach of a cost-benefit analysis. Christian researchers are to be honest, compassionate, and conscientious in their work not because these things are rewarding, but because they are right and honor the will of God and his design for humanity.

Summary

The qualitative approach is the most suitable method for this study as it explored listeners' perceptions and experiences within the context of rhetorical appeal and motivation. This is because qualitative research relies on non-numeric empirical data, such as words or images (Christensen et al., 2010), to investigate artifacts and interpret meaning (Patton, 2015) using rigorous data collection techniques and procedures (Yin, 2018). This study used the

narrative historical qualitative approach to explore the stories of evangelical listeners, as this is the most appropriate vehicle for studying human lives (Freeman, 2015). Individuals use storytelling to make sense of complex phenomena; consequently, narrative design was a valuable technique for exploring these stories, their development, and their impact across various levels (Scott et al., 2018). The data was collected through purposive sampling, as this allowed me to select relevant participants (Miles et al., 2013).

Offering participants interview choices either in-person or via Zoom met the need to collect data in a setting that established trust, allowing for rich data collection (Morse, 2015). The interviews were semi-structured (Liberty University, 2021) and used open-ended questions as a follow-up that dug deeper when necessary (Punch, 2014). Ethics was prioritized through techniques such as anonymization to promote the integrity of the research and guard against misconduct and impropriety (Patton, 2015). This study involved several stages in addition to the data collection and analysis processes, such as securing IRB approval, running a field test, and an interview pilot. Triangulation, bracketing, reflectivity, behavioral observation, thick description, and member checking were some of the techniques that were used to ensure the quality of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter Four outlines the findings of this qualitative narrative study, which uses a historical approach via in-depth interviews to collect participants' stories and thereby fulfilling the study's purpose and answering the research questions. This study's purpose is to explore how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation in Savannah, Georgia, and the three research questions work together to appropriately focus the purpose statement's intent (Patton, 2015).

RQ 1 - Does a sermon's rhetorical appeal affect evangelical listener motivation?

RQ 2 - Does narrative storytelling affect evangelical listener motivation?

RQ 3 - Do listeners connect rhetorical appeal and narrative storytelling in sermons?

This chapter also offers an overview of the participants and their churches before explaining what manner of data was collected, how it was collected, and the data's coding process. This chapter's thorough analysis will include participants' interview responses and the themes that emerged from the research, ending with a summary of the findings.

Participants

Using semi-structured interviews, stories were collected from 34 participants who shared their cultural and historical experiences, identities, and lifestyles, which became the raw research data (Butina, 2015). Adult participants from six evangelical churches were recruited by first using purposive sampling with the assistance of organizational gatekeepers. An initial pool of 117 potential participants emerged, and they further identified 57 more possible participants in their circles who were recruited through snowball sampling. A screening survey, as seen in

Appendix A, was used to ensure that these 174 potential participants met the criteria to be included in the study, and this eliminated 101 individuals. The main reasons for elimination were that they either did not attend church at least once weekly or had not been members of their church for at least one year.

A consent form, as seen in Appendix B, was then distributed to the 73 remaining potential participants, outlining the study's purpose and procedures in order to ensure that they were informed and willing to participate. 35 individuals subsequently eliminated themselves from participating, primarily due to time constraints, and secondarily due to privacy concerns regarding having their interviews stored for up to seven years. Of the 38 remaining individuals, four ended up canceling multiple interview appointments due to work and family conflicts, and never reconnected despite reminders. Ultimately, 34 individuals completed their interviews, and their demographic information will be subsequently explored.

Participant Demographics

Morse and Coulehan (2015) contended that employing pseudonyms to provide privacy was insufficient, because some demographic identifiers may still compromise confidentiality. To minimize this risk of violating confidentiality, this study reports demographic characteristics as group data in ranges instead of publishing a table that lists participants' demographic information line by line. Both the participants and their churches have been provided with pseudonyms.

Table 1*Total Demographic Overview of All 34 Participants*

Age Representation	18-30yrs	31-40yrs	41-50yrs	51-60yrs	61+yrs
Number	5	7	15	4	3
Percentage	15%	21%	44%	12%	9%
Racial Representation	White	African American	Hispanic		
Number	19	12	3		
Percentage	56%	35%	9%		
Gender Representation	Female	Male			
Number	21	13			
Percentage	62%	38%			
Marital Status	Married	Single			
Number	22	12			
Percentage	65%	35%			
Educational Level	High School	Some College	College	Post Grad	
Number	4	2	21	7	
Percentage	12%	6%	62%	21%	

N/B – This study’s Hispanic/Latino representation of 9% is higher than the Hispanic/Latino population percentage of 6.5% in Savannah, Georgia, as estimated by the United States Census Bureau (2022).

Table 2*Demographic Breakdown from All Churches*

Age Representation	18-30yrs	31-40yrs	41-50yrs	51-60yrs	61+yrs
Total Number					
Church	5	7	15	4	3
Freepoint	1	3	3	0	0
Hope Chapel	3	2	5	0	0
House of Faith	0	0	4	1	0
All Saints Ministry	0	0	2	1	2
Joy Cathedral	1	0	0	2	1
Amor Inglesias	0	2	1	0	0
Racial Representation	White	African American	Hispanic		
Total Number					
Church	19	12	3		
Freepoint	7	0	0		
Hope Chapel	9	1	0		
House of Faith	0	5	0		
All Saints Ministry	3	2	0		
Joy Cathedral	0	4	0		
Amor Inglesias	0	0	3		
Gender Representation	Female	Male			
Total Number					
Church	21	13			
Freepoint	4	3			
Hope Chapel	6	4			
House of Faith	3	2			
All Saints Ministry	3	2			
Joy Cathedral	3	1			
Amor Inglesias	2	1			
Marital Status	Married	Single			
Total Number					
Church	22	12			
Freepoint	4	3			
Hope Chapel	5	5			
House of Faith	4	1			
All Saints Ministry	5	0			
Joy Cathedral	1	3			
Amor Inglesias	3	0			
Educational Level	High School	Some College	College	Post Grad	
Total Number					
Church	4	2	21	7	
Freepoint	0	0	6	1	
Hope Chapel	0	1	7	2	
House of Faith	0	0	4	1	
All Saints Ministry	2	0	1	2	
Joy Cathedral	1	1	2	0	
Amor Inglesias	1	0	1	1	

Table 3*List of Churches*

Church Name	Denomination	Pastor's Gender	Pastor's Race	Church Size
Freepoint Church	Non-denominational	Male	White	8,000
Hope Chapel	Non-denominational	Male	White	1,500
House of Faith	Foursquare Gospel	Male	Black	1,000
All Saints Ministry	Charismatic	Female	White	700
Joy Cathedral	Baptist	Male	Black	150
Amor Iglesias	Pentecostal	Male	Hispanic	70

The Coding Process

All data was coded manually and analyzed for categories and themes. Guided by the research questions, the interview questions encouraged participants to think about the sermons that connected well with them. The IQs prompted participants to reflect on why those sermons were memorable, as well as how the message, the preacher, or the approach motivated them to think and act differently. The beginning of the coding process was the transcription of all recorded interviews, which came to a total of approximately 30 hours of audio from 34 participants. The data analysis process focused on four crucial components: codes, categories, patterns, and themes. Codes are concepts identified from raw data through a coding process; categories are created by linking the codes; patterns are then identified through repeated categories; and themes emerge from similar patterns' representations (Kim, 2016). Interpretive reasoning was used to treat participants' stories and actions as text that was triangulated with behavioral observations and a literature review to fortify the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After all transcribing was completed, the data analysis first embarked on a primary coding cycle using manual inductive coding, then shifted to secondary coding employing axial and selective coding. The inductive coding was used manually to create codes from scratch based on the raw data (Medelyan, 2022), and these chunks of data were assigned to conceptual bins of categories (Tracy, 2013). This initial qualitative exploration into the influence of preaching's rhetorical appeal on evangelical listeners' motivation uncovered 32 codes and seven categories. The developing categories were color-coded based on topics that arose throughout the interview in order to better organize the findings.

The secondary coding stage was next, and this involved noting the relationships between the conceptual bins as patterns emerged, thus developing narratives around unfolding themes (Tracy, 2013). The data was cleaned up following the initial coding, thereby eliminating, and combining duplicate topics to appropriately condense the data. For example, the codes of being Genuine, being Real, and being Authentic all captured the same thoughts from participants who were merely using different words to express the same idea. The selective coding process was marked by the final classification, prioritization, integration, abstraction, conceptualization, and creation of themes (Saldaña, 2009). These themes and their characteristics were specifically organized using Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic mode of analysis. This study's paradigmatic analytical approach used the identified relationships between participants' stories and the uncovered categories in light of the literature review to determine its findings.

Presentation of Findings

The Seven color-coded categories and 32 codes uncovered during the primary coding included:

Yellow – Participants prioritized being able to relate to the sermon. This category encompasses the codes of Authenticity/Genuine/Real, Empathy, Personable, Storytelling, Humor, Trust, and Relating to Everyday Life.

Green – Participants needed sermons that they could apply or implement. This category emerged from the codes of Relevance, Practicality, Call to Action, Sermon Challenges Me, and Conviction/Need for Repentance.

Pink – Participants valued sermons that strived to connect with them. This category is based on the codes of Passion, Intentionality, Sermon Has Structure, Preacher is Prepared, Preacher Asks Probing Questions, Preacher Shares Specific Examples, and Preacher Offers New Perspectives.

Red – Participants felt detached from sermons that projected a preacher's superiority. This category encompasses the codes of Humility, Vulnerability, and Transparency.

Blue – Participants were only persuaded to act on sermons that they perceived to be biblically based. This category encompasses the codes of Scripture is Paramount and Context is Important, with sub-categories of Cultural Context and Historical Context.

Grey – Participants admitted that their attitude mattered and affected their perception of sermons. This category emerged from the codes of Attitudes, Past Experiences, Emotions, and Changing Bad Attitudes, with sub-categories of Worship, Welcome, Prayer, and Participation.

Purple – Participants felt that their social circle served more as a sounding board for their independent thinking. This category is based on the codes of Community, Personal Responsibility, Repetition, and Retention.

Code Description

This section offers descriptions of the 32 codes. Each description was ascertained by first establishing the shared meaning ascribed via the participants' responses, next by using specific quotes from participants to provide meaningful context, and finally by anchoring it to scripture. This study is built on a solid foundation of research and a strong structure of scholarly theories. However, since this study explores aspects of preaching in a sacred environment, there is a spiritual component that is also relevant. There needs to be scriptural evidence that goes hand in hand with academic discoveries, and thus bible verses are included to support each code.

Authenticity: This code emphasizes that participants were open to messages when the speaker came across as genuine or real in their faith and how they shared it (in line with 1 Peter 1:7).

So great sermons give listeners a little window into the preacher's life, giving a little personal story so that they feel like, alright, now we know a little bit about you. When that happens, there is some authenticity, some, uh, authority in what the preacher is saying, just because now there's a little bit of a connection between the two parties. But when it doesn't feel authentic, when it feels like it's manufactured emotion, it's very difficult for me to want to continue to listen to the sermon. (David)

Empathy: This code highlights the fact that participants were moved to action when the sermon spoke truth in love rather than criticism (in line with Ephesians 4:15).

The pastor's sermon directly addressed the struggle of sin and our brokenness. But he was empathetic in a way that I'd never heard before. There was a tremendous amount of empathy on his part, and understanding even. And because of that, I realized my need to

acknowledge my sin and confront it with the gospel, not ignore it, not push it to the side, or sweep it under some rug. (Kingsley)

Personable: This code addresses participants' inclination to become engrossed in the sermon due to the preacher's amiable approach (in line with Proverbs 15:1).

I like when preachers, you know, are personable and their tone and like level, you know, like, they don't scream <laugh>. I love when they bring in like things about their own life, you know, it always, again, just makes them more personable when they give examples about, you know, their children or their spouses, um, or a situation that they were involved in. Because then you're like, okay, yeah. Now I'm seeing their personality and understanding what they're trying to get across, and they're human too. (Tanya)

Storytelling: This code emphasizes that the power of narratives makes the sermon's meaning more easily accessible to participants (in line with Matthew 13:34).

Storytelling is always great. Um, so I think that's, that's good. And I mean, it's also been studied, the power of storytelling is great, that audiences can relate so much better to the preacher, the speaker when there's a story. (Sue)

Humor: This code showcases that although making people laugh was not a necessity, it significantly helped ease participants' resistance to challenging sermons (in line with Proverbs 17:22).

Humor is good, because anytime humor is present, there, there is something that you can connect to. There's something about explaining the truth in a funny way. Um, however, there are different forms of humor that people can connect to. So yes, I love a little humor. (Kenan)

Trust: This category shows that participants struggle to learn from a speaker until they have a better understanding of the speaker's strength of character, reliability, and motives (in line with Colossians 3:9).

I think if you can trust and understand someone, it's easier to trust and understand what they're saying back to you. I know our pastor's life, so I mean, I can trust what he is saying is biblical, you know. I don't have to sit there and question like, is this some televangelist that's just blowing smoke up my butt? (Javier)

Relating to Everyday Life: This concept underlines that participants learned more from sermons that were simple and down to earth, using illustrations from everyday life such as jobs, marriages, raising kids, etc. (in line with 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

My pastor relates, and I love this about him, that he relates to the fact that we're not all in ministry. I want to be able to listen to a preacher talk about how messed up he was in his marriage, and how it's a miracle that he's still married. And it makes me now not just see him, as a mighty minister. It makes me see him as like human, just a guy who is messed up, but for God. I am wary of preachers who are like, "I've been in this my whole life and I'm so great and cool. I actually don't really need Christ anymore because I'm great and cool." I can't relate to that because I have my messes. Every day I fall, I slip. I don't do what I'm supposed to do. I do what I'm not supposed to do. I have children, I'm struggling. Am I making the right decisions for them? Will they always follow God? (Jennifer)

Relevance: This concept stresses that participants understood sermons more when the message was connected to appropriate contemporary occurrences (Matthew 18:1-4, Mark 12:41-44, and John 13:3-17 show that Jesus used things and issues surrounding him as object lessons).

Tell me what verse we're going over today, then tell the story of why that verse is relevant to that time, and then make it relevant to today's world. Use your own practical life or even something that you have experienced, um, to help me see why that is important for us to hear and why it was written, um, and how to apply it to my own life.
(Kaliya)

Practicality: This concept shows that participants found it easier to adopt sermons' lessons when the messages were adapted and designed for practical use rather than theological discussion (in line with 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Our minister is, uh, how can I say it? Uh, practical, practical-based where he takes the Word and breaks it down to everyday living and how you apply these principles in your everyday living. So that drew me in because a lot of, a lot of times, you know, church turns people off because they, they come from a place they can't relate to. You could act on the message once you go through your everyday life journey, you could see it. Yeah. You could see the pitfalls, the evils, and the good and that helps you on how you move throughout these spaces, of this life journey. (Aaron)

Call to Action: This concept highlights that participants were better equipped to implement sermon lessons when there were clear and defined steps for them to take (in line with Philippians 4:9).

I connect with sermons that have a very specific scripture and just kind of talk through the next steps like, where is your place in your Christian walk, what should that look like, you know, within this phase of your life and where you're at, and just kind of meeting you where that was and a good reminder of what that looks like too. As a wife, I needed to hear that specific message of what does it look like for me as far as serving my home, serving my children, supporting my husband, and walking that walk. So, I just like the direct application of this and just being able to say like, okay, here is what I need to do.
(Elena)

Sermon Challenges Me: This concept identifies the participants' desire to be positively challenged and pressed by the sermon to reach for more, as this inspires growth (in line with Hebrews 4:12).

It was challenging in that, um, my Bible reading had gotten pretty robotic in some ways maybe I was just checking off boxes. And so, I guess challenged, I was challenged by the word that was shared that day. I need a challenge or a charge to do something with the sermon, then I feel like I leave with homework that I'm willing to do because I've been taught and now I'm going to go practice it. (Max)

Conviction/Need for Repentance: This Concept pinpoints the participants' need to have the sermon confront their sins or wrongdoing so that they can experience a change of heart and direction (in line with Hebrews 3:15).

If I'm gonna leave and say, wow, like that was a really good sermon, I feel like for me it always comes down to two things, but I think the one that sticks out the most would probably be conviction. It's a good sermon if first I feel convicted and second learn

something. I think if scripture is used properly, then it's gonna convict you, no matter what. I would say that's more of the work of the Holy Spirit than the preachers themselves. (Melody)

Passion: This concept identifies that while participants can discipline themselves to sit through most sermons, they connect more strongly when the delivery is engaging and dynamic, infused with appropriate emotion (in line with Romans 12:11).

So just having a motivational passion, somebody that's passionate about the Word. Where you can feel their love for the Word, their love for God, and that pours out into their message. That they're truly passionate about God, about the Word, and about his people. So having a pastor that is passionate about God's word, loving God's word, you can tell when that comes out in their sermons. And that's motivational for me because you have other pastors that are out there that are a little bit dry. (Ben)

Intentionality: This concept shows that participants learn more when sermons have a goal or destination that has been deliberately and purposefully crafted (in line with Proverbs 21:5).

My pastor is not all over the place. If he's gonna come from several scriptures and move around, he'll tell you at the beginning. There's a method to it. So, it's not like he's just kind of jumping all over, instead, he's very intentional. He is intentional about church members, wanting to relate to them and stay connected to them. (Sierra)

Sermon Has Structure: This topic identifies that participants find it easier to follow a sermon when there is a clear arrangement and organization of the speaker's points (in line with Habakkuk 2:2).

Um, so is the sermon's story cohesive? Do we have the beginning with a clear middle and end? Did we get some resolution out of it? And then how was it related to whatever scripture the speaker was trying to pull from or the message they were trying to pull from? (Ellen)

Preacher is Prepared: This concept recognizes that participants learn better from sermons when the preacher has clearly invested in studying, researching, and waiting on God, and is ready to speak (in line with 2 Timothy 2:15).

Sermons for me are good when they are well-prepared. It's easier to connect with sermons when it's clear to me that the speaker has done their homework, um, that they're prepared. When they present some, like, background in history on the passage or some information about the passage that you wouldn't necessarily get just reading it through a couple of times. You know, that adds a layer of, okay, they've really looked into what this means. (Jack)

Preacher Asks Probing Questions: This concept establishes that participants who are hungry for spiritual growth want to be asked questions that require them to dig deeper and reflect on the message (Jesus was a master of asking questions; examples in Matthew 16:13, Mark 10:15, Luke 10:26; and John 4:7).

But they ask these questions in the midst of reading the verse that kind of gives you light to why they are great preachers because you're reading it and you don't think about all these things. But they'll just make you ask, like for instance, uh, when Jesus ran into the woman at the well, why did he go through Samaria when he could have taken a straight shot? Stuff like that is not in the Bible when you're just reading and don't pause to think

about that question. But they posed the question and put it in perspective for you and I'm like, oh, that makes sense. I can connect with you now. (Kaliya)

Preacher Shares Specific Examples: This code demonstrates the value of having sermons infused with several clear instances and examples that can help disperse confusion or provide illustrations (in line with 2 Timothy 1:5-6).

The examples, they made it so real for me. He gave a lot of examples, and the sermon was really good. (Naomi)

Preacher Offers New Perspectives: This code acknowledges that participants understand sermons more easily when a fresh godly point of view or way of thinking is introduced to them (in line with Colossians 3:2).

For some reason that stuck out to me, I think because it just kind of put it in a different perspective. Putting that perspective on something I know but have never put together like that before. Um, so whenever a preacher is able to do something like that, um, or take something like really small, uh, that you haven't given much thought to, and then being able to take that and like expand on how it's very significant. (Henry)

Humility: This code emphasizes that participants connect more strongly with sermons when the speaker identifies with their humanity instead of arrogantly overstating their own importance (in line with Philippians 2:6-8).

I've noticed it's a lot easier to hear and to listen and to accept if there's an attitude of humility. Um, and if there's like a lot of pride and arrogance, it's, it's easier to zone someone out. So, if there's like an attitude of I'm a sinner, I'm broken, but I'm a servant

of God and I'm preaching to you, then it's, it's so much easier to hear and to focus and to relate to when there's like the humility that comes from whoever's speaking. (Becca)

Vulnerability: This code underlines that participants value openness and a sincere view into how the speaker is dealing with the realities of prevailing in this fallen world (in line with 2 Corinthians 6:11).

I've been to a lot of fire and brimstone-type sermons, and I don't mind the passion. I like it. Um, I just don't like when a preacher pretends that they're also not a human and are perfect, right? So if they present it in a way where they don't also struggle with these things, I shut down and I'm not very receptive to the rest of the message. Um, but when they are able to share stories that remind us that they're human, they are opening up and being vulnerable and saying, "Hey, I'm not perfect and I'm not trying to be, but we're gonna learn this together." That's what makes me more receptive and engaged with what they're saying. (Mary)

Transparency: This concept underlines that participants expect truth, accountability, and clarity on a preacher's ethics and moral values (in line with Psalm 139:23-24).

I think being transparent to a certain extent, of course, not sharing your whole life, but being transparent is definitely beneficial for members of a church or people visiting a church because it allows them to see, 'cause people can tend to put pastors on a higher pedestal. And so, when a pastor allows themselves to be on the same level as the congregation, I think that is really impactful and it can really help further draw people in because it allows them to see that you're not placing yourself on a higher pedestal. And

that can make people kind of more open to hearing the words. I think just being transparent. (Brea)

Scripture is Paramount: This category matches with Bebbington's (2003) quadrilateral and confirms that evangelical participants prioritize the infallibility and inerrancy of the bible above a speaker's opinions (in line with 2 Peter 1:19-21).

I'm very firm in my belief in the authenticity of scripture, uh, and the authority of scripture. With my pastor, he wholeheartedly believes the same thing. The Bible is the ultimate authority, right? And he's not letting other things dictate to him what the Bible says. He lets the Bible inform his view on other things. Preachers must say what the Bible says, and what we need to do is see how the Bible impacts our lives and not how our lives impact the Bible. (Don)

Context is Important: This category consists of two sub-categories, with participants indicating that sermons impacted them more when they showed either Cultural Context or Historical Context.

Cultural - Um, so the thing I think that I appreciate most about the way that my pastor teaches is that we'll go verse by verse through the entire book. Um, and so sometimes we're getting the broader context for the overall point that's being taught, or sometimes we're getting some cultural context, but every bit of scripture helps to interpret scripture. (Richard)

Historical - The sermon about the ten plagues specifically had me thinking, oh, that is cool to have that historical knowledge or see the context that those plagues specifically were showing that the Egyptian gods were nothing compared to God. I think for me,

either extra historical context that we can bring current to just know or having some more insight shed onto the hard stuff, hard topics, I find it interesting, I guess. (Robin)

Attitudes: This category uncovers that though participants know better, they still deal with negative attitudes from life's struggles, and this impacts their reception of the sermon (in line with Proverbs 4:23).

Yeah, I would definitely say my attitude plays a significant role. If I'm coming into a sermon and we've had an argument that morning on the way to church, it changes my mindset and puts it in a different place. If the preaching or the message is not related to that, then it's harder to put that away. (Bob)

Past experiences: This concept addresses that though participants are going through the process of transformation, they still filter a preacher's message and its meaning through the lens of their previous life experiences and background (in line with Romans 8:28).

My previous experience matters quite a bit because I grew up in the South and I grew up in segregation lifestyle. Being black in the South or being black in America, period, you were treated differently. And so, to come to Georgia and be in a mixed congregation with white pastors, yes, it did. They did not have to go to a different bathroom or go to a different water fountain or anything like that. So, their perspective is gonna be a little bit different because they don't really understand a lot about the way we look at life being black here in America. But I can approach my pastors and talk. (Isaac)

Emotions: This concept uncovers that though participants strive for spiritual maturity, they all have emotions, sentiments, and feelings that play both positive and negative roles in how sermons are processed (in line with Proverbs 3:5-6).

Being a negative emotion person, I try not to let that be my filter, but it is until about maybe halfway through the message and then I say to myself, "Okay, stop that self, stop that." And then I become more open. But yeah, my emotion is what's normally first though I have tried to become a more faith and more positive person. I think in many ways I have but, yes, that emotion is there. (Anayah)

Changing Bad Attitudes: This concept consists of four sub-categories, with participants indicating that during those moments when they are struggling with their attitude, Worship, Welcome, Prayer, and Participation help them reset and connect better with the sermon (in line with 1 Thessalonians 5:15-19).

Worship - Um, there have been more times than not when I went to church not wanting to be there for many reasons. I felt defeated. I felt like a train had like, just trampled over me. But somehow or another, you know, I went into church. And I just, I lose myself in worship. And as soon as I do that, I feel the cleanse. Like I'll start bawling my eyes out and there's no stopping this river flowing. But after that's done, I feel cleansed. I feel like I can face the world again. (Shakira)

Welcome - So usually some Sundays are stressful and once we get the kids checked in to the nursery, we run to church, find our seats, and then my husband and I are probably not talking to one another. We're probably just staring at the front, right? And then we do the meet and greet, welcoming others to church. I feel like the meet and greet kind of forces me to be kind and shake people's hands. A genuine interaction with other believers is welcoming and can put you in a better mood and more prepared to, um, to hear the word. (Mary)

Prayer - *I make all sermons personal and even like, when I might not be doing that, but I just cover myself with prayer. So, I never miss out on the opportunity to go up there for prayer. Even if the sermon might have not touched me personally but let me just go up there to keep me covered. So, I never missed the opportunity to go for prayer. I'm always up for prayer.* (Jordyn)

Participation - *On tough days, I just try to take away distractions. Like I put away my phone and really try to remember like, I'm here just once a week so I need to listen. If it's worship time, I'm really trying to participate, like singing can help. Um, or if the preacher says, "Open your Bibles to this," I'm trying to do that. So, I take an action to where I turn my focus on what's present, what we're trying to do <laugh>.* (Tanya)

Community: This code highlights that participants enjoyed consulting their social circles, which served as influential sounding boards on sermons and how they are interpreted (in line with Hebrews 10:24-25).

I think that community support in your church is vital to keeping everyone connected. It's important to have different perspectives on things that are taught. It's important for you to stay connected with other people in the church that you may not normally interact with on a regular basis. And in talking with them about the message, you're able to learn what impacted them and how they're applying it in their lives. And even other things that they're studying and things that they're going through. I think it's important to have that community. (Liza)

Personal Responsibility: This code reveals that though participants valued community, they also understood that their relationship with God was personal, and because they were

individually accountable to him, they strived to exercise independent thinking (in line with Colossians 3:23).

Sometimes the sermon may not be exciting, but it may be just what you need. Though I value getting together with a group of guys to discuss the sermon, I am responsible for taking the message and making sure I understand and apply it for myself. (Jamar)

Repetition: This code emphasizes that participants apply sermons better when they have opportunities to repeatedly hear or discuss the word again, and community plays a vital role in this (in line with 2 Peter 1:12-13).

I think repetition is a big thing and so my small group is major. I think the repetition of going over that with my community group is vital to just me like wanting to make that change, and then, especially because our group is really good at challenging each other and encouraging each other, and then springing in the different perspectives that they may have gotten from the sermon versus what I heard have always been good. So, anyways, I think the repetition for me is really what helps me and challenges me to change. (Leah)

Retention: This code underlines how sermons are better absorbed and continually applied by participants when they happen in a social context with support from someone else (in line with Proverbs 3:1-2).

I'm a verbal processor. So, if I don't talk about it, I'm not really thinking about it. So, being able to talk through messages and sermons, and things with my community is really helpful. And I think that really makes me internalize it a lot more. The sermons that I don't really talk about after, I mostly forget about until I go back and read my notes and

then I'll go, "I do remember this." But when I talk about them, it's just the different way that people listen and understand things, that helps it to stick more. (Jess)

Measure of Objectivity

In addition to the manual coding, the data was inputted into ChatGPT to see if the Artificial Intelligence would introduce any interesting tangents. Interview question Q16 was selected, and the AI was instructed to identify common themes or ideas across participants' answers. Q16 was chosen because it ended up being a favorite with the participants and captured data across all 3 Research Questions by asking, "What are your favorite aspects of preaching in general?" The AI's response produced similar results to the manual data analysis, consequently serving as a measure of objectivity. This process therefore helped the researcher remain consistent in emphasizing key ideas. Below are the decoded common patterns and points extracted by ChatGPT from the inputted participants' data.

- **Relevance and Applicability:** Many respondents mentioned that they value preaching that feels relevant to their lives. They appreciate it when the sermon connects with their personal experiences, challenges, and questions, and they look for practical takeaways and guidance on how to apply the teachings to their everyday lives.
- **Clarity and Simplicity:** Respondents often mentioned the importance of clear and straightforward communication. They prefer sermons that are easy to understand and not overly complicated, and they appreciate speakers who can break down complex topics and present them in a simple and relatable manner.
- **Engagement with Historical and Cultural Context:** Several respondents mentioned their appreciation for sermons that provide deeper insights into the Bible and its context. They

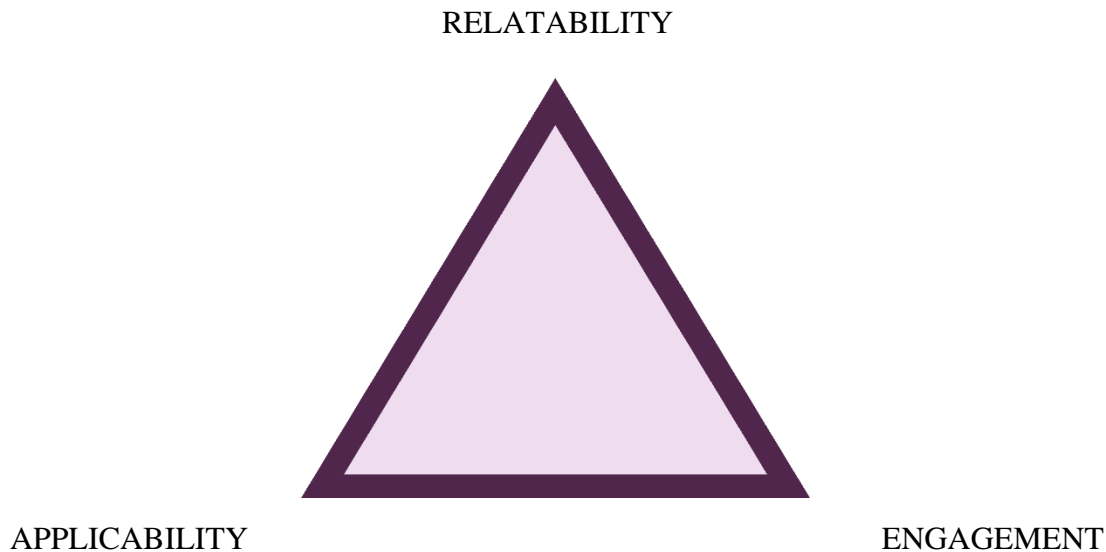
value historical and cultural context, as well as explanations of scripture that go beyond surface-level interpretations. They also appreciate a deeper exploration of the times and circumstances in which the Bible was written.

- **Connection and Relatability:** Many respondents mentioned the importance of feeling a personal connection with the preacher. They appreciate speakers who come across as approachable, relatable, and down-to-earth, and they want to feel like the preacher understands their struggles and can relate to their experiences.
- **Authenticity and Genuineness:** Respondents value speakers who come across as genuine and sincere. They want to see that the preacher is speaking from the heart and truly cares about the well-being of the congregation. Authenticity and a lack of pretentiousness are highly regarded.
- **Exploring Deeper Theological Topics:** A few respondents mentioned their appreciation for sermons that delve into deeper theological topics or challenge their existing beliefs. They are open to sermons that expand their thinking and provide a fresh perspective on a familiar subject. They appreciate a variety of topics, including those that explore lesser-known aspects of scripture or address contemporary issues.
- **Storytelling helps with connection:** A few respondents noted that their personal connection to the preacher is amplified through shared experiences or a similar background and can thus influence their engagement with the sermon. Preachers who shared memorable experiences left a lasting impression.

Themes

The main findings of this study following the secondary analysis include the emergence of three core themes: Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement. These themes capture an organized amalgamation based on discerned patterns of the seven categories and 32 codes discussed previously. The participants' connection with these themes is not surprising, as they identify spiritual principles that are divinely meant to regenerate humans through preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Due to the emergence of patterns from the conceptual bins, the first six categories in pairs of two led to the unfolding of these themes. The seventh category with its associated codes was discovered to work across the themes of Relatability and Applicability, thus reinforcing their depth. These details are explained next. In keeping with the earlier theoretical patterns established in Chapter 2 of both the rhetorical triangle (Figure 1) and the social cognition triangle (Figure 2), these themes are also arranged into a "Themes Triangle" (Figure 4).

Figure 4*The Themes Triangle****Reliability***

This theme addresses how preached sermons affect or relate to participants and their experiences, emerging from the following categories:

- Participants prioritized being able to relate to the sermon.
- Participants felt detached from sermons that projected a preacher’s superiority.

The codes relevant to this theme are Authenticity, Empathy, Personable, Storytelling, Humor, Humility, Vulnerability, Transparency, Trust, Community, and Relating to Everyday Life. The code of Community was part of the category described as follows: “Participants felt their social setting served more as a sounding board for their independent thinking.”

Reliability highlights that listeners understand and grasp sermons with less reservations when the following conditions are present:

- The truth is spoken in love through an amiable approach, rather than in criticism.
- The speaker is genuine in their expression of faith and sincere in how they deal with life's challenges.
- The speaker displays humility in conjunction with integrity, accountability, and strength of character.
- The power of storytelling is sometimes used in conjunction with humor to underline spiritual concepts.
- Social circles exist as a supplemental means for listeners to evaluate their thoughts.

The necessity of Relatability is seen in Hebrews 2:18, as Jesus knows and has experienced our suffering and consequently can provide help. Believers possess a desire to have the Word relate to us, and sermons are supposed to do so. Hebrews 4:15-16 expresses that we can approach God's throne confidently because we have a high priest who empathizes with our weakness and was tempted just like we have been. Though Jesus successfully conquered the sins we struggle with, he is not condescending about it, but in humility offers his leadership and example (Philippians 2:5-11). For evangelical Christians, this sense of humility, transparency, and genuineness, when exhibited by preachers, fosters how strongly they relate to the sermon.

It's that feeling of being genuine about their love of God. I think that's what it is, because like, I'm sitting here thinking about the different pastors that I've listened to over the years just from being here in Savannah 'cause we're in the Bible belt. And then even thinking about what I watch online and, um, the ones who are genuine and transparent that they'll say things like, "Look, my walk with God ain't always been great. I wasn't

always, um, what I was supposed to be, but even in the midst of all of my brokenness and my mess, you know, God still thought enough of me to grab me and pull me and put me to where he wanted me to be.” Their ability to be transparent and, and show, I’m just like you ’cause I’ve had my share of mess. But this is the God I serve, and this is what he’s done for me and this is who he’s been in my life. And this is who he can be in yours.

(Zola)

Hans Van der Geest, a Dutch minister who supervised pastors preaching in a Swiss hospital, got feedback from the audiences of 200 sermons which uncovered that the primary element of effective preaching was making the sermon personal. Sermons needed to address the audience as individuals, reinforcing their sense of personal security in God’s love. Having preachers foster a sense of relationship, identification, and empathy with the audience was more fundamental than the sermon’s actual content (Van der Geest, 1978). This observation ties to and reinforces the importance of Relatability, as outlined in this study.

Applicability

This theme addresses the motivation and inclination of participants to implement or apply the preached sermons to their lives, emerging from the following categories:

- Participants needed sermons that they could apply or implement.
- Participants were only persuaded to act on sermons that they perceived to be biblically based.

These were based on the codes of Relevance, Practicality, Call to Action, Sermon Challenges Me, Conviction, Scripture is Paramount, Personal Responsibility, Repetition, Retention, and Context is Important, with sub-categories of Cultural Context and Historical Context. The codes

of Personal Responsibility, Repetition, and Retention were part of the category described as follows: “Participants felt that their social setting served more as a sounding board for their independent thinking.”

Applicability highlights how listeners do better in terms of utilizing or acting on sermons when the following conditions are present:

- The messages are connected to suitable contemporary occurrences or a cultural or historical context.
- The messages positively challenge listeners to change, with clearly outlined next steps that are anchored in real-life experiences.
- Personable accountability is strengthened through support from a social circle, which promotes repetition and retention.

The necessity of Applicability is seen in James 1:22, which commands Christians to be doers of the word and not just hearers. Genuine believers long for an understanding of how to practically implement sermons into their everyday lives. This includes their jobs, relationships, and other areas. An understanding of the biblical context helps with this because many modern Westerners cannot relate to some of the Middle Eastern concepts used in the Bible, such as agriculture, idioms, and geography. It helps when preachers connect lessons to a contemporary framework while maintaining the integrity and meaning of the scripture.

For some reason an illustration that he used about the iWatch, his watch not matching up with his phone all the time. And like, you have to realign yourself with God's words. Um, I don't know. For some reason that stuck out to me. I think because it just kind of put it in a different perspective. I know recently for me, life has been just kind of stuck in that

grind of just the daily tasks and just trying to get through the week and all that. Um, just that reminder that like, hey, you might think you're doing all right, but you're actually like three hours off. (Henry)

Van der Geest (1978) observed that the consistent communication of hope was the second element of effective preaching. The speaker needs to take the text's message and connect it to everyday life, finding a balance between explaining what is written and how it can be fulfilled in our lives. This finding is tied to and reinforces the importance of Applicability, as outlined in this study. Gore (2017) stated that in every church, people experiencing the challenges of life constantly bring problems with them to every service, such as health complications, relationship difficulties, family struggles, financial constraints, and occupational uncertainties. The preacher is consequently tasked with interpreting the biblical text in light of the congregational context. Thus, great preaching is a specific word being delivered from a specific speaker to a specific assembly with specific troubles at a specific time and location.

Engagement

This theme addresses how preached sermons better connected with and influenced participants, emerging from the following categories:

- Participants valued sermons that strived to connect with them.
- Participants admitted that their attitude mattered and affected their perception of sermons.

The codes relevant to this theme are Passion, Intentionality, Sermon Has Structure, Preacher is Prepared, Preacher Asks Probing Questions, Preacher Shares Specific Examples, Preacher Offers New Perspectives, Attitudes, Past experiences, Emotions, and Changing Bad Attitudes, with sub-categories of Worship, Welcome, Prayer, and Participation.

Engagement highlights how sermons are more apt to engender attention and participation when the following conditions are present:

- The preacher has studied and prayed in advance in order to obtain a particular purpose, then delivers a clear arrangement and organization of their key points.
- The delivery is engaging, dynamic, and infused with clear illustrations and specific examples.
- The sermon introduces a godly perspective that challenges conventional thinking and causes listeners to reflect.
- The sermon helps listeners strive for spiritual maturity by admitting and addressing their attitudes, emotions, and past experiences.
- Churches help listeners focus on the Word by providing an atmosphere of Worship, Welcome, Prayer, and Participation.

The necessity of Engagement is demonstrated by Jesus, who was effective at capturing his audience's imagination and providing them with ideas that they could interact with. He expertly taught God's word based on what people were experiencing, not by hammering out the rabbinical list of do's and don'ts. The gospels state that "when Jesus concluded his address, the crowd burst into applause. They had never heard teaching like this. It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying—quite a contrast to their religion teachers! This was the best teaching they had ever heard" (Matthew 7:28-29, MSG).

Van der Geest (1978) pointed out that the third element of effective preaching was that it must engage with people's thoughts, doubts, questions, and insecurities. This observation ties to

and reinforces the importance of Engagement, as outlined in this study. A preacher should shine God's light on human concerns and challenge people towards a lived faith. This does not mean that all questions are tidily answered, but that they are addressed in terms of God's sovereignty and how it should affect the way we live (Van der Geest, 1978). Though evangelicals yearn to live a life worthy of God's calling (Ephesians 4:1), they are still affected by attitudes and emotions. Therefore, Proverbs 4:23 instructs us: "Above all else, guard your affections. For they influence everything else in your life (ESV)." It is not surprising then that participants' attitudes influenced their connection with and their implementation of the sermon.

I think my attitude plays a very large part in how I receive things, um, and whether or not I'm actively listening or if I'm just there and hearing it, but not actually engaged and paying attention to what's going on. Since I'm human, my attitude plays into how I consume things, you know, if I'm tired or drowsy, I might be more grumpy, which you know might make it harder for me to accept something that the sermon says, versus like me going into the church and being like, you know, this is great, I'm happy, I'm positive.
(Leah)

Summary

Chapter Four outlined this study's findings, which came from data collected from 34 participants via semi-structured interviews. These participants came from 6 different evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia, and represented a diverse demographic population. The data analysis process focused on four crucial components: codes, categories, patterns, and themes that were extrapolated through primary and secondary manual coding cycles. As a measure of objectivity, data was introduced into ChatGPT. Seven categories and 32 codes were captured and

then integrated into three final themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement, systematized using Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic mode of analysis. Relatability addresses how preached sermons affect or relate to participants and their experiences. Applicability addresses the motivation and inclination of participants to implement or apply the preached sermons to their lives. Engagement addresses how preached sermons better connected with and influenced participants. In chapter Five, these findings will be directly tied to the Research Questions in order to explore the influence of preaching's rhetorical appeal on evangelical listeners' motivation.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to explore how the rhetorical appeal of preaching influences evangelical listeners' motivation at evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia. The three Research Questions and the Interview Questions associated with each are listed in Chapter Three. Collectively, they strived to ascertain whether a sermon's rhetorical appeal and narrative storytelling affect evangelical listener motivation, as well as whether listeners are connecting both in sermons. Chapter Five will weave in the previously established themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement in order to help answer this study's research questions, building on the previous chapter's analysis by extending them to the research questions and extrapolating this study's results. The findings will show that the rhetorical appeal embedded in preaching plus its narrative essence is what influences evangelical listener motivation. In addition, listeners are subconsciously making the connection that aspects of rhetoric and narrative are working together in sermons to influence their motivation. Chapter Five will incorporate a discussion of these results from both empirical and theoretical points of view, reviewing methodological, theoretical, and practical implications. Finally, the study's delimitations and limitations will be highlighted, ending the chapter with recommendations for future research, and ultimately offering a conclusion.

Discussion

Contemporary preachers are searching for ways to communicate themes of security, hope, and understanding in the face of global skepticism, division, and suffering (Stern, 2013). This discussion employs the perspective that because preachers have a sacred mandate to

persuade, there should be an urgency to invigorate the pulpit with sermons that use the most effective communication techniques to connect with their audiences. This section therefore discusses this study's findings in light of previous academic research. However, this does not imply ignoring scriptural principles, diluting the bible, or espousing questionable practices such as self-promotion (Hauf, 2018). Rather, this study of preaching as persuasive communication identifies with the concern of homiletics to help speakers prepare scripturally authentic sermons and preach in culturally relevant ways.

Rhetorical Appeal Discourse

This chapter's findings establish that the rhetorical appeal embedded in preachers' sermons influences evangelical listener motivation. While sermons cannot directly reprogram individuals, they can still inspire people to reevaluate their thoughts and actions. Scripture contains persuasive written and verbal elements designed to affect its audiences' beliefs, emotions, and lives (Domeris & Smith, 2014). Previous research has found that sermon listeners regard content that balanced logos, ethos, and pathos as the most appealing (Allen & Mulligan, 2009). Though there is confirmation of Aristotle's rhetorical appeal in sermons, it has been unclear how these settings motivate listeners to act on the lessons of the sermon (Rietveld, 2013). In addition to confirming previous research showing that listeners receive sermons through rhetorical appeal, this study further addressed a problem that was previously unclear regarding how this motivated evangelical listeners to act. Chapter Four uncovers specific conditions that must be met for rhetorical appeal to be effective and to help motivation occur. These 13 identified conditions are present across the themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement, which all work concurrently, proving the need for all three appeals. The necessity

for ethos, logos, and pathos to be active points to rhetoric's intention of appealing to the whole individual: spirit, mind, and body (Witherington, 2009).

This study establishes how most sermon listeners were instinctively most influenced by preaching based on their perception of how closely the message adhered to scripture, the preacher's authenticity, and the passion with which the sermon was presented (Karl-Fritz et al., 1983). The message's adherence to scripture was part of the Applicability theme and leaned strongly into logos. The preacher's authenticity was part of the Relatability theme, which leaned strongly into ethos. And the presentation's passion was part of the Engagement theme, leaning strongly into pathos. Participant responses confirmed that if listeners did not trust the speaker, then the facts of logos and the feelings of pathos were not as effective (Eward-Mangione, 2021). Participants also corroborated how a connection with the content and an appeal to structure, clarity, and biblical authority was essential (Thompson, 2016; Tinelli, 2016). They additionally recognized the huge impact of creative and passionate use of examples, illustrations, metaphors, analogies, and personality (FitzPatrick et al., 2021). The code of "Scripture is Paramount" provided additional credence to the scholastic observation that out of Bebbington's (2003) quadrilateral, Biblicism was the most significant criterion for identifying an American evangelical (Juzwik, 2014). Participants prioritized the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible above a speaker's opinions. This dependence on the Bible as the source of the preacher's authority (Bagg, 2021) also caused evangelical listeners to expect moral boundaries in the actions (ethos) and communication approaches (pathos) of their preachers.

Furthermore, virtually no previous research on preaching's rhetorical appeal explored the social impact on an individual listener's motivation. This study's comprehensive approach

examined a sermon's rhetorical appeal by focusing on both the individual and social-cognitive aspects, which is vital because listening to sermons in person at church involves social learning, as it takes place in a group environment with listeners discussing their experiences (Carrell, 2000). This study's integration of a social cognitive approach to rhetoric established listeners as active participants in the persuasion process who perceived rhetorical appeal through both personal and community influences. This study examined the persuasive power of preaching by considering the everyday, common aspects of participants' social lives, since humans are social beings in search of establishing connection through sharing stories. This is in line with Fisher's (1985) description of humans as homo-narrans who evaluate communication, particularly rhetoric, in its historical and societal context. This study found that within the evangelical community, a participant's social circles served as an influential but limited sounding board, since listeners saw themselves as personally responsible and answerable to God for their actions.

Rhetorical Narratology Discourse

A variety of contemporary studies examine preaching as rhetoric or preaching as narrative, but few examine both in tandem (Robbins, 2016), and none explore how this combination influences listeners' motivation. However, because the Bible largely consists of stories, preachers must comprehend how narratives work rhetorically (Heacock, 2014). This study contributed to the age-old preachers' debate about what makes for effective preaching by exploring the combined influence of narratives and rhetorical appeal on evangelical listeners' motivation, ultimately finding that memorable and impactful sermons, at least according to participants, were those that employed rhetorical narratology. This combination of rhetorical appeal and narrative in preaching helped motivate listeners to meditate and act on the sermons.

In addition, this study corroborates the collaborative nature of preaching between the perfectly divine and the imperfectly human (Brooks, 1907), and the findings identified 32 specific codes that help understand and improve the human role in preaching. Scripture itself outlines that preaching involves a partnership between the Holy Spirit and the human communicator (1 Corinthians 3:9, Philippians 2:13, Philippians 4:13, and Ephesians 2:10). Consequently, this study uses this combination of divinely inspired scriptures and human empirical research to provide a trusted framework for preachers who are looking to grow.

Over the years, sermon research has typically been separated into the silos of either effect-focused research or audience-focused research. The former explores what sermons, and their properties do to listeners, while the latter addresses what listeners do to or with sermons (Pleizier, 2010). However, both effect and audience researchers should be working in partnership rather than vying for which perspective plays a more considerable role, and this study strives to break new ground by blending the two sermon research perspectives. The findings present the effects of sermons' rhetorical, narrative, and social settings on the listener, as well as how listeners process sermons and their motivation to act on them.

Research Question Findings

The previously established themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement help answer this study's research questions. Reliability emphasizes the conditions that need to be present for listeners to understand sermons with fewer reservations. Applicability highlights the conditions that need to be present for listeners to do better in terms of utilizing or acting on sermons. Engagement addresses the conditions that need to be present for sermons to better connect with and influence listeners.

RQ 1 - Does a sermon's rhetorical appeal affect evangelical listener motivation?

The first research question aimed to shed light on the impact of rhetorical appeal on listeners' motivation by investigating both individual influences and group influences. The specific individual influences examined are the elements of ethos, logos, and pathos, while the specific group influences examined are the social context of environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors. The results of this study show that rhetorical appeal does affect evangelical listener motivation. The individual influences of ethos, logos, and pathos are clearly highlighted in the themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement. While all three themes support each other and share commonalities, they individually lean into the three unique rhetorical appeals. Relatability identifies more with concepts and patterns that foster a stronger connection to the preacher (ethos). Applicability identifies more with concepts and patterns that foster a stronger connection with taking clear actions (logos). Finally, Engagement leans more into concepts and patterns that foster a stronger connection to a memorable sermon (pathos).

Participants identified the role of ethos when they expressed the importance of their relationship with the preacher and the necessity of trusting the speaker. Participants were typically skeptical until they had a better understanding of the speaker's strength of character, reliability, and motives. Hauf (2018) postulated that the use of persuasion in sermons is legitimized via ethos, because the preacher's character is what serves as the pivotal point of impact. Paul's Christ-centered character is emphasized in examples such as his rejection of trickery and his selfless motives, which connected strongly with his audience. Gaarden and Lorensen (2013) noticed from their study that when asked about the sermon, congregants tended to largely describe their impression of the preacher. Their experience of the speaker as a person

remained in their memories after the sermon ended. The congregants' like or dislike of the preacher was based on their perception of the person's authenticity, and this impacted the act of listening. Consequently, listeners subconsciously tied their perception of the speaker to how they interacted with the sermon and the meaning they constructed from it.

So, our current preacher at the church, I feel like I've got a connection to him because I went on a mission trip with him. So, when he talks, I want to listen. Now sometimes when he talks it does not feel applicable or it doesn't really feel like there's a message. It feels more anecdotal, like he's just telling a story, um, not necessarily with a message, or the message isn't tied up very carefully. But I still always listen since I respect him because I got to know him. Um, so when there's a connection to a person, I'm more apt to listen. And I think it's just getting to know him on a deeper personal level. Like, he's wildly kind, wildly compassionate, and has been doing international mission trips just about as long as I know. So just this very giving nature and wanting to share with everybody. Um, very pretty laid-back demeanor. He's what I would call a nice Southern gentleman, like just a very kind, compassionate individual. Um, but just learning more about him was pretty impactful. (Ellen)

Participants highlighted the importance of logos by identifying the value of sermon structure, specificity, and context, and ultimately the importance of the Bible's infallibility and inerrancy. Participants found it easier to follow and apply a sermon when there was a clear arrangement and organization of the speaker's points, as well as instructions regarding the next steps. Patel (2019) posited that every sermon should be a tour de force of content, using a logical argument as contained in the passage and corroborated by the Bible at large, leaving listeners

convinced and ready to apply it. Since numerous vocations are represented in a church, though the preacher is not an authority in each specialty, if the preaching uses examples from these areas, they need to be accurate and correct. Nowadays, anyone with a smartphone can quickly fact-check information, and inaccuracy can hurt a speaker's logos and ethos. Martin (2011) argued that a sermon's intellectual content produces a new vision of the world through the perspective of God's word. Logos provides pivotal arguments, reasons, and sound thinking in order to help listeners think differently. Consequently, audiences value messages that are well-prepared, educated, and doctrinally sound.

So, um, a sermon's content and arrangement does have an effect. Um, there was a, uh, a sermon a little further back on, on apologetics, I think, and specifically about where we got the Bible. How do we know it's trustworthy? Um, I thought that was fascinating. So, I'm, you know, as an engineer a nerd type person, I was like, this is documented proof I can trust. I mean I trust that the Bible is true regardless of this, but it's interesting for me to know how we came up with this. And I think it would be beneficial if I'm ever in the circumstance with somebody who has questions for me to know some of those answers. Some other sermons that don't analyze or scrutinize things sometimes seem less applicable. Give me structure in the word of God so that I can follow, um, and so that I can receive and so that I can act. (Jack)

The role of pathos was confirmed as a priority when participants shared the significance of relating to the sermon through concepts such as storytelling, humor, authenticity, and passion. Sermons with clear illustrations that correlated to life's situations connected better with them. Participants were also more motivated by sermons when the delivery was engaging, dynamic,

and infused with appropriate emotion. Purnama (2022) noted the requirement of pathos for effective persuasion because imaginative feeling and intensity produced eloquence, with the power of emotion making one a more convincing speaker. Christian (2018) argued that New Testament rhetorical criticism frequently overstated the importance of logical arguments at the expense of pathos when it came to persuasion. Therefore, an increased focus on pathos was needed to better connect the rich visual and imaginative elements of the New Testament to listeners. Pathos serves as a powerful force for motivating listeners, with mounting evidence stressing its importance to narrative persuasion (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Listeners' emotional involvement is crucial for the narrative's power to persuade (Slater & Rouner, 2002).

I really connect with the way that my pastor delivers the sermon because he is humorous at times. Um, though he is very structured, he is also very passionate. Knowing that it comes from a place of genuine passion, not like he is trying to emotionally manipulate in any way, uh, makes a big difference because I know that the word matters to him that, that whatever it is he is teaching is deeply important to him. And so that, that makes it, um, more valuable I guess in that regard. One way that I kind of am resistant, I guess, um, in terms of, uh, delivery style would be the more emotionally manipulative kind of thing. Um, where someone is intentionally or not, just diving very much into their own emotions, and appealing to the emotions of the congregation in an attempt to get them to do whatever. Um, maybe it's just my nature, but I kind of push back against that a little bit. (Richard)

This study's findings confirm that using the entire rhetorical triangle is crucial to persuading listeners (Appel & Richter, 2010). This study also validates the fact that all three

rhetorical elements are interconnected (Browning, 2014) and work together to influence listeners, with listeners simultaneously processing sermons through ethos, logos, or pathos (Allen & Mulligan, 2009). Participants were not scrutinizing sermons trying to figure out which appeal was superior, but instead were wrapped up in the moment and enjoying sermons that integrated all appeals. For participants, these appeals were not competing against each other, but rather supported each other to make the sermons more holistic and wholesome. While specific participants enjoyed certain appeals above others, their inclination was for a balanced sermon.

I love good energy, you know, and prefer to listen to a pastor who is passionate.

However, they also need to be articulate, organized, and simple, explaining here's the expectation. Plus, they have to be down to earth, real but not critical. Like that's, that's what I enjoy now, and it makes me want to listen to what's next. (Kenan)

The study also examined rhetorical appeal's influence on listeners' motivation through the lens of a social-cognitive context (Bandura, 1986). The communal influences of environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors were considered in terms of how rhetoric affected evangelical listeners' motivation. Burke (1969) implied that a better and more balanced examination of persuasive communication occurs when traditional and cognitive rhetoric complement each other, and this study's findings appear to confirm this. Eubanks and Schaeffer (2004) argued that human communication can only be effectively studied within the context of both personal inferences and societal influences. This exploration of the rhetorical appeal of preaching and its influence on evangelical listeners' motivation therefore considered both individual and group influences. As Guthrie (2007) pointed out, studies of preaching as

persuasion are best researched through the incorporation of social factors and existing attitudes within the peculiarities of the communities of listeners.

The environmental factor focused on the extent to which the preaching's persuasiveness was affected by the external influence of support from others. A surprising discovery was that participants considered the social impact of Community to be limited, especially when compared to other influences, such as their attitudes. Participants said that the people they surrounded themselves with played a role in how they processed sermons, and yet participants saw themselves as independent thinkers who were answerable to God for their actions. Consequently, though support from others was considered vital, social circles did not determine one's relationship with God. Most participants would like to have and enjoy a strong social circle, but had decided to individually take responsibility for their spiritual walk. Subsequently, they strived to make decisions about sermons on their own, but still saw the value of running their thoughts by a select group of trusted people, usually consisting of family or friends. While participants did sometimes gain different perspectives through discussions with their community, the prevalent benefits of such discussions appeared to be reinforcement and retention. The process of repeating what had been heard to others reinforced that message and led to a greater retention of that biblical principle.

We all have our own idiosyncrasies and propensities that we're bringing into this space. So, there can be a verse that speaks to me differently that would speak to my community differently. And sometimes we do have group discussions, but even in those discussions, there may be things that we heard differently or that we heard the same, but it affects us differently. So, I would say there's almost a little effect. (Kaliya)

Usually, the support from others is extra. I mean I talk to my circle often and ask questions like “What do you think?” “What did y'all get?” “What do you hear from it?” But the answers don't change necessarily how I feel about it. Even if their answer is contradictory, it doesn't really affect how I've consumed the sermon. I see it as more complimentary because it introduces a different perspective that I hadn't thought about, and this makes me go a little bit deeper. (Bob)

The cognitive factor focused on the extent to which the preaching's persuasiveness was affected by the societal construct of someone's prior experience. Kossen, et al. (2021) explained that part of being human involves learning from one's experiences, which in turn affects everyone's outlook toward life, including methods of communication. Though people can share experiences, each person's encounter with particular events leaves them with unique perceptions. Participants confirmed this to be the case when listening to sermons as well. However, they were also aware that sometimes charting a course for the future by interpreting the past could lead to mistakes, because the filters of experience can fool us or warp our perceptions (Soyer, 2015). This is one vital area in which preachers should strive to use the credibility of ethos, the reason of logos, and the compassion of pathos to build bridges. The power of God's word equips sermons with divine answers to those unique experiences of race, gender, age, socio-economic status, and more (Hebrews 4:12).

I would definitely say that my previous experience is a factor. Um, I think anytime there's something that comes up that you've experienced on a personal level, or you know that's a struggle for you, or if somebody close to you has experienced that, or is still experiencing it, this is something that you're more likely to lean into at the moment. So, I

would say that previous experience has a role in terms of the sermon and your connection to it. Um, I think it's just human nature when we can personally relate to what is being, uh, you know, preached about. If we have personal experience, then I think we tend to lean in a little bit more because, because of that. (Jamar)

The behavioral factor focused on the extent to which the preaching's persuasiveness was affected by the cognitive influence of the listener's attitude. Just like every person has body parts, individuals all have specific attitudes that shape their world and how they perceive issues, whether they realize it or not (Perloff, 2020). Roy (2022) argued that attitudinal barriers develop throughout a person's life due to internal and external experiences and can become key barriers to communication because messages are selectively distorted, obscured, or filtered. Participants admitted that their attitudes affected how the rhetorical appeal of preaching influenced their motivation. Gaarden and Lorensen (2013) posited that it was impossible for listeners to think, understand, or talk about God independently of their own thoughts and understandings, and that this resulted in the interpretation of sermons in relation to the listener's context. This is exactly what the participants interviewed did when they listened to sermons as well, creating their own meaning in dialogic interaction with the sermonic discourse interwoven in the entire service. This study's findings support the fact that listeners interpret sermons influenced by the context of their environment and experience.

My attitude is everything. Um, the seed can only grow well on good ground. If I come into the church all beat up, many times, the ground is not fertile. I'm not receiving the word. I've had a rough week, you know, so I'm just here because on the one hand, I want to feel better, but on the other hand, I'm just not in the mood today. So, I think my

attitude plays a big role because it affects how you receive the sermon. It's just like, you know that statement that people always make, "You can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." So, if you come in with the wrong attitude and the wrong mindset, the word is still gonna go forth, but if you're not receiving it, if you're not in a place where you can receive it, you may miss something that could have blessed you. And so, I think my attitude matters, yes. I've had to check my attitude at the door sometimes. And my attitude may not have even had anything to do with the church, but I have come in there with the attitude from something that happened before. And it's harder just to receive when you're not in the right mindset. (Sierra)

Fortunately, participants recognized that bad attitudes needed to change, and they identified four specific ways that preachers could help them reset their focus on the sermon. These sub-categories of Worship, Welcome, Prayer, and Participation were enumerated in the previous chapter. It is also worth noting that not all attitudes are bad, and participants observed that good attitudes helped them better connect with and act upon the sermon.

Normally my attitude when I go to church is pretty much I'm happy to be there, it's one of my favorite times of the week. I would say that probably because of that, because I'm happy to be there, I definitely am more accepting of the sermons. (Leah)

RQ 2 - Does narrative storytelling affect evangelical listener motivation?

The second research question aimed to discover whether narrative storytelling played a role in evangelical listeners' motivation. This question explored the workings of narrative involvement in persuasion by learning from participants what emotions they experienced during sermons, and whether these sermons shifted their perspective or led to any changes in their lives.

The results of this study show that narrative storytelling does affect evangelical listener motivation. The effect of narratives is found in codes such as storytelling, relevance, and passion. According to participants' data, all three themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement played a role in the impact of narrative storytelling. The theme of Relatability specifically identified that effective sermons use the power of storytelling sometimes in conjunction with humor in order to underline spiritual concepts. The theme of Applicability revealed that participants are more apt to act on sermons when they are connected to contemporary occurrences or a cultural or historical context. Finally, the theme of Engagement determined that participants more successfully bonded with sermons when the delivery was dynamic and infused with clear illustrations and specific examples.

Participants shared that when they listen to sermons, they feel a variety of emotions, with the most common ones being love, guilt, joy, sadness, inspiration, and fear. Feelings of guilt and fear were felt when the narrative addressed the consequences of sin and held participants accountable for their actions. Feelings of love and joy were felt when the narrative showcased stories about God's compassion, Jesus's sacrifice, man's redemption, and the Holy Spirit's actions. Feelings of sadness and inspiration were felt when the narrative addressed things such as missed opportunities in life and the potential for true victory due to God's divine involvement. Many participants experienced a mixture of these emotions happening one after another as the narrative hit on various aspects. Appel and Richter (2010) posited that while transportation is a holistic experiential state with various components, the emotional components appear to be the driving force of narrative persuasion.

Well, when the message spoke to my heart providing an answer, it gave me joy, um, and happiness because it was an answer to my prayers, but there was also fear there. There was a kind of hesitation. I felt fear because it was something that I didn't necessarily want to do, it was uncomfortable. Throughout the sermon, as he was preaching, I was trying to fight it in my head. I did feel conviction, which is why I ultimately decided to go ahead and do that thing. But yeah, I would say it was joy on one end and then fear and conviction on the other end. (Brea)

Um, so we've been going through the book of Jonah and talking about how everyone runs, and everyone has their boat that they go to. That was something that was super convicting to me because I was, I was realizing in that window of time, the boat that I was guilty of going to was shopping. And I was thinking, oh my goodness, that is what I'm doing to occupy my time and my energy. I know it's silly, but when I'm frustrated, I shop, or I'm going to these other things, um, more activities and more friends or fun things. I realized, oh my goodness, shopping is an actual boat that I'm going to for contentment. And, I remember the Lord being like, okay, this is something I need you to take a break from for a little while. (Becca)

The participants in this study experienced clearly identified emotions that moved them toward transforming their thinking and changing their actions. The storytelling went beyond bringing enjoyment and pleasure and served as a conduit for healing, motivation, and empowerment (Lindsey-Warren & Ringler, 2021). Participants shared that they were made new in their thinking (Ephesians 4:23) and blessed because they heard God's word and put it into practice (Luke 11:28).

It was from Genesis 36, uh, a sermon about Jacob and Esau. Esau made a decision based on desire and appetite. The takeaway from the sermon, the idea was that greatness is not standing on the podium, but it's kneeling and washing feet. And the pastor was saying that there's no Oscar award for helping people, and there's no popularity contest for serving others, for giving up your life. It made me think, okay, what is success? How do you define success? If you look at the, um, Bible, what does it mean? So, that actually impacted my decision about my current career, to kind of switch. Because I mean, in my field, and I think in anyone's field, our tendency is to get very competitive and to climb the ladder. That's what life becomes, is just like chasing your dream. And I realized real success is not about that. It's, it's about giving. So that impacted my decision on a career path. It also connected to other things happening in my life. (Sue)

Around that time, I thought that salvation was behavior-based. And so having that way of thinking affected my level of peace and my relationship with God. And it wasn't until learning from that sermon the true meaning of salvation, believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven, that is what actually gave me peace. And I came into the truth that helped me further develop my relationship with God. (Brea)

Hearing the word every Sunday, you know, it recharges you. I work in a stressful environment. If I just react on how I feel, then I'll be acting crazy or get mad or go home frustrated. When you hear the sermon, it makes you analyze what causes you to get upset. But if you never heard it, then you'll still be trying to figure it out yourself. You're throwing something on the wall that don't stick. You know? Whereas when you hear a

word then you are able to start putting the pieces together. Now when stuff shows up, you see it coming, you understand what it is. And it don't affect you the same as it did like maybe two weeks ago or a year ago. (Aaron)

Sermons that adopted narrative elements including a plot, setting, character, and point of view with relatable illustrations connected strongly with participants, thus influencing their thinking and actions. This confirms other findings that narratives affect belief formation, influence intentions, and motivate healthy behavior more than other message types (Falzon et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2014). Transportation is a term used to portray the phenomenological occurrence of getting so immersed in a story that the listener focuses less on themselves and becomes changed by being absorbed by the story (Quintero Johnson & Sangalang, 2017). Participant responses showed that they experienced narrative transportation in the form of being lost in the sermon and were thus more predisposed to the sermon's persuasive influence (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008, 2009). The confirmation of transportation in sermons is exemplified by the participant's response below:

It was actually a sermon on how Jesus died for our sins. The vividness of the words that were used, the tone of his voice, my pastor's voice. He shouted, he yelled out, like Jesus would've yelled out. And it just, it grabbed me like nothing before. And I think that was the beginning of my change. The examples, it made it so real for me. Like when we hear that Jesus died, we think that he wasn't human. Like, he could do this, but we couldn't do this. You don't really relate to his experience. But when he gave that sermon, I saw Jesus just like me, a human with feelings, emotions, and how he felt to have someone drill nails in his hand. The pain of it brought me to tears. It's like I really could feel it and it

brought it home for me. The emotions of what he must have went through and the pain. It, it just, it moved me. I've always been a person that said I love the Lord. I've said it so many times, but now I feel like I'm really falling in love with Jesus, with God. Like, it's different when you are just talking it and when you are feeling it. I really feel it. (Naomi)

RQ 3 - Do listeners connect rhetorical appeal and narrative storytelling in sermons?

The third research question aimed to examine the interplay of rhetoric and narrative in preached sermons, especially whether listeners perceive this connection. RQ1 and RQ2 confirmed preaching as a form of narrative with rhetorical power, as earlier studies have argued (Dinkler, 2016; Heacock, 2014). Rhetorical narratology as a subfield analyzes narrative and rhetoric together in order to better understand how they affect audiences in tandem (Kearns, 1999), and RQ3 relates this understanding to sermons. The results of this study indicate that listeners are subconsciously making the connection that aspects of narrative and rhetoric are working together in sermons to influence their motivation. While the study's participants were unaware of the academic terminology, they still identified components of rhetorical narratology in preached sermons. This is found in their responses regarding what their favorite aspects of preaching were, how it motivated them to do some soul-searching, and how it influenced their behavior. This makes sense, since according to participants' perceptions, the three identified themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement all operate concurrently.

The following participant described a sermon that captures the components of both rhetoric and narrative as demonstrated by the presence of ethos, logos, and pathos embedded in structured storytelling. The participant instinctively makes the connection and identifies the impact of this rhetorical narratology.

I feel like Easter sermon messages they're always like the same, right? You're like, all right, we're going for Easter Sunday and obviously know what they're gonna be preaching about. And you, you've heard that sermon so many times. But this particular sermon, he is like, you know, I'm gonna preach out of a text that's completely different. And he preached out of the book of Numbers and it's essentially the portion where all of them are like, like very sickly, and they're trying to find a cure per se. And Moses is like pointing out to them, like all you have to look at the serpent on a pole. So essentially like, all you have to do is look to the serpent on the pole and it'll heal you. And then he ties in his own story. Uh, he had tried to run a marathon and he did make it through the 26.2 miles, but they had to take him by ambulance and all this stuff. It was funny. He's like, the sign on an ambulance is essentially a serpent that's wrapped around a pole. And he's like the cure I needed was in this unit of a serpent on a pole. That's how he relates it back to Christ. Like he's there on the cross and we just have to look towards him. I think there are very few sermons that I've listened to in my life that I can remember in detail like that. It's like just in the back of my brain. I think what made it connect so strongly was it was, it was so simple, yet it defied my expectations of what I was going to hear. It took the message and flipped it into something that's like, it's the same, you get to the same point at the end, but it gets there so differently and it's something that you never expected. (Melody)

The following participant identified the rhetorical narratology of sermons, referring to it as “the story inside the story.” His description links structured and contextual storytelling

(narrative) with reason, credibility, and passion (the rhetorical appeal of logos, ethos, and pathos).

I'm always looking for the, uh, the breakdown, like the story inside the story. The story inside the story has always fascinated me. You know, this is the reason why this happened and that happened, and this is the backstory. And I mean, so my pastor is always good. He's an organized retired Marine, who likes to have fun. He might be like; this is the title of the sermon, and the main scripture is this. But what he does is he'll start by providing the context and walk you through the whole thing to get to what he really wants to talk about. So, it's complete and he builds it up. By the time you get to the end, you completely understand. You get to understand why the person did that because it started here and led that person to this. I can relate sermons like this to something I've been through, something I'm going through, or how to move in the future. (Aaron)

This study's findings reinforce how participants make the connection that effectively preached sermons are a combination of rhetoric and narrative. This combination helps motivate listeners to renew their minds and transform their lives. Preaching influences people because it changes their experience, which moves them to change their minds. This influence happens because the spoken words introduce God and His work into their world, which carries power (McDaniel, 2006). This study consequently concludes that effective sermons are not just mere stories but are also rhetorical narratives that bond a divine message with human communication in order to achieve a particular objective.

Implications

This narrative study collected the stories and experiences of 34 participants using semi-structured questions, and the qualitative data was gathered to explore how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influenced evangelical listeners' motivation. The Narrative Transportation Theory served as the theoretical framework for examining this study's findings through both methodological and practical perspectives. The identified implications are therefore valuable to scholars, especially within the fields of communication, theology, psychology, and neuroscience. Additionally, the research information and results are of great benefit to speakers, preachers, ministers, leaders, storytellers, and sermon listeners, who for different reasons seek to better understand or execute clear presentations that connect strongly and inspire change.

Methodological Implications

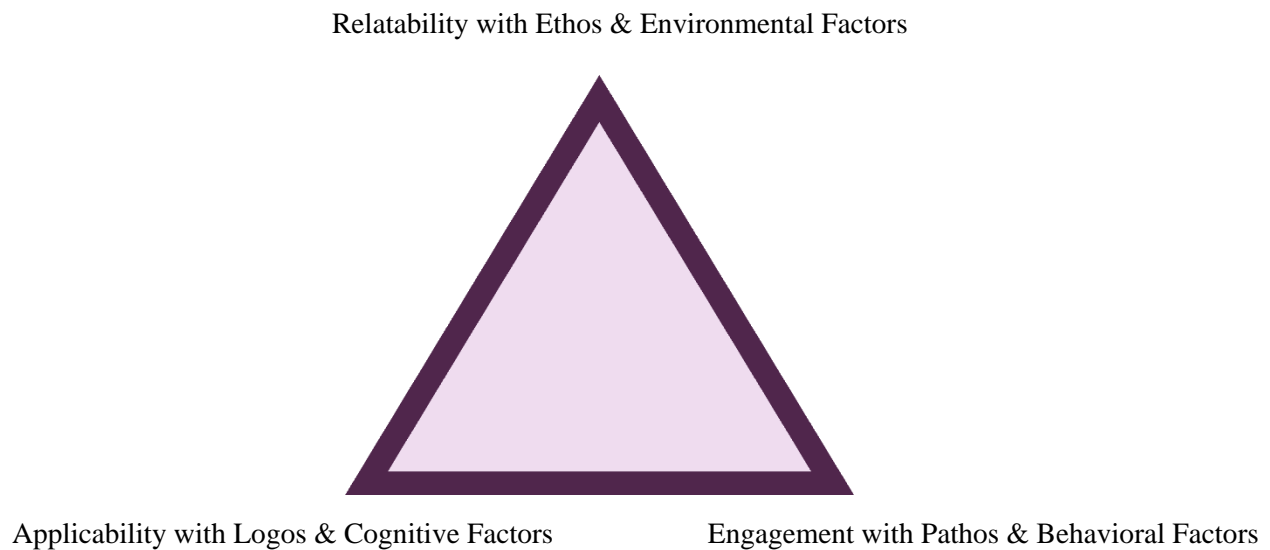
All sermon listeners are influenced by the three rhetorical appeals (Allen & Mulligan, 2009) and are also affected by their social context (Bandura, 1986). In Chapter Two and Figure 3, this research aligned the elements of rhetorical appeal with factors of social cognition to argue that ethos is also an environmental function, logos is also a cognitive function, and pathos is also a behavioral function. The results of RQ1 identified how the theme of Relatability fostered a stronger connection to ethos, while the theme of Applicability was associated more with the concepts and patterns of logos, and the theme of Engagement leaned more into pathos. This study now proposes integrating these findings and previously shared Rhetorical (Figure 1), Social Cognition (Figure 2), and Theme (Figure 4) Triangles to create a new Sermon Listener Motivation Triangle (Figure 5). This proposed triangle captures the holistic individual and social influence of rhetorical appeal on listeners in the context of motivation, and this premise places

the Research themes alongside the Rhetorical Appeals and Social Cognitions that primarily influence them:

- Relatability with Ethos and Environmental Factors
- Applicability with Logos and Cognitive Factors
- Engagement with Pathos and Behavioral Factors

Figure 5

The Sermon Listener Motivation Triangle



Although this study did not attempt to explain how transportation in preaching enables belief change, it appears to have identified why transportation is present in sermons. Previous proposals such as epistemic monitoring (Richter et al., 2009; Schroeder et al., 2008) counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000), and mental simulation (Johnson et al., 1993) each proposed valid reasons why transportation worked. However, specific to preaching, this study's findings allude to three other reasons why transportation appears to occur among evangelical

listeners. Participants perceived transportation and were positively motivated when the message either stimulated dynamic emotional responses (Green et al., 2004), an awakening (Clore & Schnall, 2005), or helped listeners identify with a story or its characters (Oatley, 1994; Mar & Oatley, 2008).

Theoretical Implications

There is currently a variety of research available on the ways in which rhetorical appeal affects how listeners pay attention. However, there exists minimal research on how rhetorical appeal specifically embedded in a preacher's narrative message influences listeners' motivation to act on the sermon. The modern study of persuasion appeared to be unevenly skewed towards quantitative approaches, which restricts narrative (Green & Brock, 2000). Fisher (1985) defined narrative as all verbal and nonverbal interpretations assembled systematically to create meaning. Sermons fit the description of narratives, because typically, preaching unfolds like a story of an event in time (Lowry, 2001). This qualitative study confirms the power of sermon storytelling to affect listeners in making positive change.

I don't know where the growth would happen if I didn't have sermons that I was listening to. Like, I, I genuinely, um, I think it's essential for Christians to be listening to people preach the word regularly. I don't know that I would be able to focus on the Lord or, um, speaking into other people's lives very well, if I didn't have sermons being poured into me. I wouldn't have a lot to pour out of me if I wasn't being filled by other people.

(Becca)

This qualitative study builds on previous research by revealing a variety of approaches to amplify this power of sermon storytelling within the themes of Relatability, Applicability, and

Engagement. Though several prior studies have verified that narratives possess persuasive effects, it remained crucial to understand how and what conditions impacted these effects (Hoeken & Fiekers, 2014). The findings of this study in Chapter Four identified 13 specific conditions that help set up sermons to successfully persuade listeners. This study's exploration was conducted through the lens of narrative transportation, which holds the capacity to produce transformative experiences for listeners' attitudes, behaviors, intentions, and beliefs (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Just as Christ's disciples saw in the stories of Jesus more than simple narratives and built their lives on them, these same scriptural narratives are meant to motivate listeners today toward action (Mohrman, 2019). This study revealed how participants process narratives and what conditions have to be met for transportation and motivation to occur.

Previous research has examined transportation and its effects in fields such as entertainment, health, education, civic policies, and advertisements (Graaf et al., 2016; Cho et al., 2014; Lindsey-Warren & Ringler, 2021), but this study adds to the existing body of knowledge because it introduces transportation into the world of preaching. Consequently, narrative persuasion has now been shown to be effective in the pulpit. This power can be experienced in sermons that place the audience inside stories such as the exodus from Egypt, the creation and fall of man, or the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Bagg, 2021). Many of this study's participants shared stories of this experience, and quotes from Naomi in the review of RQ2 findings and from Robin in Chapter Four are examples that highlight this phenomenon.

Very importantly, this study also suggests that the benefits and positive impact of transportation are ongoing and do not end when the sermon has concluded. Practically all of the participants expressed their gratitude, because doing the interviews helped them reflect on the

good things in their lives or brought to light areas that they needed to work on. There were lots of tears as they shared stories of how sermons had played pivotal roles in helping them deal with shame, addictions, abusive environments, tragedy, dark seasons of bareness, marital problems, racial hostilities, and their struggles to find purpose, among others. All participants were still experiencing the influence of preaching's rhetorical appeal on their motivations and were still walking with God through life's many uncertainties. They each shared stories of restoration, healing, second chances, gratitude, love, and more.

Practical Implications

Particularly illuminating for the evangelical community are the findings of IQ15: "What role does your attitude play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?" Most participants strived not to let their attitudes affect them but confessed that they did end up playing a significant role regarding how they connect with, process, and act on the lessons of sermons. Most practicing evangelicals approach this question with the perspective that they would like to separate their attitudes from their experience of ingesting God's word, but they realize that their past experiences and attitudes do creep in and significantly affect the listening experience. Fisher (1985) found that storytelling involved not just the narrator but also the listener, whose narrative experience was being influenced by factors from the past. Gaarden and Lorensen (2013) explained that listeners ascribed meaning to the sermon partly through their experience-based interpretation, and this study confirms this in the evangelical community, as participants brought their past life experiences and attitudes into sermons and their interpretation of them.

It shouldn't matter but sometimes I'll go in and I'll, you know, depending on what's going on, I might be in a funk or whatever and God has a way of checking you. I try not to allow it, but I'm human <laugh>". (Zola)

The study subsequently asked many participants a follow-up question: "During those moments when you are struggling to listen to the sermon due to your attitude, are there certain things that help you reconnect?" Participants across the board highlighted four important things that helped shift their attitude so that they could receive the word: Worship, Welcome, Prayer, and Participation. The act of singing during worship helped participants focus on God and his perspective, rather than their issues and human viewpoints. The act of being welcomed warmly by volunteers at the door, or taking a few moments during service to greet each other, prompted participants to feel special or to actively focus on being positive. Moments of prayer during the service allowed participants to confront their attitudes and talk to God about their struggles. Encouraging listener participation pulled them out of distracting thinking patterns and into the present so that they could pay attention to the sermon. Preachers who fostered participation asked participants to do things like bring out their Bibles, read the verses, take notes, raise their hands, sing along, say something to their neighbor, and more.

Participants expressed the importance of feeling a personal connection (ethos) with the preacher. Many shared that they had grown to know their ministers over time and consequently could implicitly trust them. This begged the question of how guest preachers or mass media preachers who were not personally known by the listeners could build a connection with them. Several participants were therefore asked the follow-up question: "Are there ways unfamiliar guest ministers or digital preachers can establish a connection?" Their answers revealed that for

traveling, visiting, or digital preachers, ethos can be established through personal stories woven into a strong biblical message. In this digital age when many sermons are being posted online to reach more people, preachers need to recognize the need to quickly connect or bond with listeners who may not know them personally. Ong (1982) postulated that due to the impact of technology on modern society, there is now a necessity to integrate orality into contemporary communication through traditions such as storytelling. Personal stories amplify authenticity, while a strong emphasis on scripture instead of personal opinions amplifies trust. Two participant comments are showcased below as examples:

Absolutely. Um, it starts with how they structure their sermon or message, as this is gonna be sort of our introduction to them. They should give us a little window into their life, maybe like a little personal story, so we feel like, "All right, I now know this preacher a bit more, they are not a total stranger." Their sermon should contain aspects that make the audience feel like they are part of the TV or guest preacher's extended family. Including some kind of anecdote or humor that relates to the topic also helps us feel more connected. Um, hopefully, if they can then show some authenticity, and come across as an authority in what they are saying, now there's even a bit of a connection between the two of us. (David)

I don't remember what the word is called, but a person who is like, "Show me before I believe it." There's a word for it, but it escapes me right now. And sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not very good. But in the instance of a traveling preacher, well, they would have to just use the scripture to explain their position on what they're talking about. And now, at my age and with my experience, it's so much more important to me than in my

past. I'm done with people trying to explain to me from a place of emotions why the body of Christ must do this or do that. Show me in the Bible, show me the scripture, why you are saying what you're saying. So, for visiting pastors, for a pastor that I don't know that I'm watching on TV, that would be my basis. (Jennifer)

Interestingly, while some consider pathos to be the most reliable mode of persuasion for narratives (Wolfe, 2016), and others have argued for the primacy of ethos in sermons (Gaarden & Lorensen, 2013; McDaniel, 2006), the evangelical community appears to prioritize the appeal of logos. One of this study's seven categories uncovered how participants were only persuaded to act on sermons that they perceived to be biblically based. This category encompassed the code of Scripture is Paramount, which pinpointed how evangelicals above all else prioritize the infallibility and inerrancy of the Word (logos). Many participants felt that over the past few years there had been an increase in speakers declaring their personal socio-political or intellectual opinions from the pulpit rather than sharing the unadulterated word of God. Numerous participants made it clear that they could discipline themselves to sit through most sermons even when the delivery (pathos) was unengaging or there was no connection (ethos) to the preacher. However, once they felt that a sermon was not based on scripture, they would "unplug" no matter how great the pathos or ethos was.

Delimitations and Limitations

While this study will help ministers and communicators at large better understand how their messages influence listeners' motivation, its findings were impacted by certain delimitations and limitations. The delimitations will be discussed first, as these are boundaries intentionally established for this study to provide a well-defined scope and to create a greater

focus for the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). The limitations will be discussed after, and these are the constraints and potential weaknesses placed on this study by external factors out of the researcher's control (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Both the internally placed delimitations and externally induced limitations influence the findings and provide opportunities for future research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2010).

This qualitative narrative design study focused on how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influenced evangelical listeners' motivation in Savannah, Georgia. The data was collected over three months from 34 participants who shared their experiences and stories in response to semi-structured interview questions. One delimitation was the challenge of using the narrative design approach at the expense of other considered possibilities such as phenomenology, case study, and ethnography. Using the narrative design approach involved collecting vast amounts of information from participants to clearly grasp their story's context. Due to the fluid nature of storytelling, many participants did not share their stories in a linear way. They would often jump around and sometimes go on tangents before landing on their specific idea. This meant that asking follow-up questions, following along intently, and digging deeper was necessary to ascertain their specific intentions. This voluminous data gathering process required lengthy investments of time and energy, plus a keen sense to identify which material was appropriate for the story without getting buried in the details (Liberty University, 2021). This eventually led to the discovery of pertinent information from participants' many tangents while coding, since the entirety of the participant's thinking could be ascertained across all of the questions. Employing other research approaches may have been more linear or introduced other perspectives, but despite its challenges, by using the safeguards discussed in

Chapter Three, narrative research remained this study's most suitable approach, as it sought to understand participants' experiences and how these influenced their sermon listening and motivation (Patton, 2015). The study examined the rhetorical appeal of narrative sermons using narrative descriptions specifically from its listeners.

Another delimitation was the focus on the evangelical demographic in a specific geographical location. This study could have widened its scope to examine the entire Christian community across the United States, but due to the constraints of time and resources, plus this researcher's background, specific exclusions were made. The choice to focus on evangelical participants in Savannah, Georgia created a more manageable and relevant focus with which to execute a more thorough examination. This study sought to compensate for this delimitation by ensuring that within Savannah's evangelical community, the participants themselves represented different demographics, various churches, and several potential perspectives.

An additional delimitation lies in the decision to pursue this study through the lens of the Narrative Transportation theory. The results might have differed if other theories were employed. To dampen the impact of this delimitation, this study included Alderfer's ERG Motivation theory (1969), Ong's Psychodynamics of Orality (1982), and Fisher's Narrative Paradigm (1985) in its framing process. A constraint also exists because of the focus on the influence of narrative sermons specifically due to their rhetorical appeal. However, this was controlled by introducing a more holistic approach to rhetorical appeal, since sermon listeners are influenced by both personal and communal factors. Instead of exploring rhetorical appeal only through the individual persuasive means of ethos, logos, and pathos, the additional context of social cognition was also introduced.

One limitation of this study was the reluctance of some churches and individuals to assist due to a current evangelical sub-culture and perception regarding academia in America. Among the several churches contacted at the beginning, a few of the gatekeepers were apprehensive, and one elected not to provide permission to reach out to members of their congregation. He was conflicted about the field of communications, because he felt it focused on “human theories” that were not necessarily relevant to preaching, since preaching involved “letting the Holy Spirit speak through you.” Furthermore, he believed that scholars were focused on judging how effective speakers were, yet only God could really judge the effectiveness of preachers. Though this researcher carefully used both scripture and their own evangelical identification to clarify those assumptions, the gatekeeper ultimately decided not to proceed. This study’s intention was never to judge preachers nor to trivialize the necessity of divine inspiration, as it is evident that we are saved through what the world sees as the “foolishness of preaching” (1 Corinthians 1:21), and this is an act of spiritual intervention (Ephesians 2:8-9). Rather, this study’s curiosity lies in how the rhetorical appeal embedded in these sermons influences listeners’ motivation so that they can be doers of the Word, not just hearers (James 1:22-26). This researcher came across this hesitation to participate a few other times as well, as some evangelicals were suspicious of academia, assuming it was primarily “left-leaning liberal ideology” preventing Christianity from developing freely. This assumption was uncovered earlier in the literature review, for instance, when Allen and Mulligan (2009) remarked that numerous theologians and preachers resisted an empirical evaluation of sermons because of concerns that feedback from humans compromised the divine gospel. Consequently, they declined to accept scholastic exploration, such as rhetorical appeal or other evaluations of preaching and how people respond to it. This limitation

is heightened by current political and post-COVID situations, with some evangelicals feeling that their faith and opinions are under attack (Cox, 2023; Mitchell, 2022).

Another limitation of this study lies in the timing, as it took place during a period when vigorous debates were going on about COVID challenges, such as social distancing and physically returning to work. Several potential participants ended up opting out because they felt uncomfortable meeting in person and also had reservations about meeting virtually. They felt that their privacy stood a higher chance of being violated with corporate virtual recording software such as Zoom versus a personal audio recorder that they could authenticate. This is not entirely shocking, considering recent corporate data breaches such as the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal (Hinds et. al., 2020). And some other potential participants, though they were willing, ended up not following through because their workplaces were now requiring them to return to work physically, which placed extra pressure on them with issues such as childcare or homeschooling. This resulted in them canceling scheduled appointments and eventually not participating due to time constraints or feelings of being overwhelmed.

Future Research

The delimitations and limitations discussed previously provide potential areas for future research. The influence of preached sermons' rhetorical appeal on evangelical listeners' motivation can be explored through alternative qualitative approaches such as phenomenology, case study, and ethnography. For instance, this researcher considered using an ethnographic approach to explore sermons shared online, the social media posts surrounding them, and the opinions expressed. Also, this study can be conducted through the lens of another relevant communication theory in order to see how it would impact the results. For instance, this

researcher considered an unconventional route of utilizing Social and Behavior Change Communication, which is currently used predominantly in the health industry to promote positive behavior change. Furthermore, this study can be explored using quantitative or mixed methodology to focus on more quantifiable findings such as the weight of each rhetorical appeal's influence on listeners' motivation. In addition, the demographics of participants can be widened to include other Christian denominations beyond evangelicals. For instance, the more structured liturgical worship of Catholics would potentially introduce different participant perspectives, and therefore different results.

For this study in its present state, a few codes did not quite fit into any pattern and appear to be outliers, and it would be interesting to explore these in future research. The three primary outlier codes identified by participants include first, that the building's environment plays a role in how participants connect with the sermon; second, that technology allows participants to revisit the sermons, which influences their original experiences; and third, that some participants experienced a strong connection between worship and the Word, which in turn affected how particular messages moved them. Exploring the impact that music can have on the sermon is therefore worth exploring. Additionally, future research into this study's methodological implications regarding the three reasons why transportation appears to happen for evangelical listeners would also be beneficial.

Conclusion

This narrative qualitative study contributed to the age-old preachers' debate about what makes for effective preaching by exploring the rhetorical narratology of preaching and establishing that rhetorical appeal in sermons influences evangelical listener motivation. This

research offered a more holistic perspective by taking into context both the personal inferences and societal influences of rhetorical appeal, and it furthermore addressed a problem that was previously unclear regarding how rhetorical appeal motivated evangelical listeners to act by identifying three themes, seven categories, 13 conditions, and 32 codes. The three identified themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement were aligned with ethos, logos, and pathos, respectively, and furthermore integrated with Environmental, Cognitive, and Behavioral functions to create the Sermon Listener Motivation Triangle (Figure 5). This study strove to incorporate balance regarding the place of the preacher, the sermon, and the audience, keeping in mind God's desire for humans to experience divine transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This chapter entwined the themes of Relatability, Applicability, and Engagement to help answer this study's three research questions. The results for RQ1 show that rhetorical appeal does affect evangelical listener motivation. The findings for RQ2 show that narrative storytelling does affect evangelical listener motivation. The results for RQ3 indicate that listeners are subconsciously making the connection between the narrative and rhetorical aspects of sermons, which work together to influence their motivation. Participants are not scrutinizing sermons to figure out which appeal is superior, but rather prefer sermons that integrate all appeals. Consequently, preachers should strive to use the credibility of ethos, the reason of logos, and the compassion of pathos to build bridges between people's personal experiences and God's transformational assurance. A surprising discovery was that participants considered the social impact of community to be limited, especially when compared to other influences, such as their attitudes. This is because evangelicals see themselves as personally responsible and answerable

to God for their actions. Participant responses confirmed that they experienced narrative transportation through becoming lost in the sermon and were more predisposed to its persuasive influence. Preaching influenced people because it changed their perspectives, which moved them to change their minds. This influence occurred because the spoken words introduced God and His supremacy into their world. This study consequently concludes that effective sermons are not just mere stories, but rather are rhetorical narratives that bond a divine message with human communication in order to achieve an objective. This study's corroboration of preaching's collaborative nature between the perfectly divine and the imperfectly human is shared in the hope of helping preachers prepare scripturally authentic sermons and communicate in engaging ways that inspire change.

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APPENDIX A: SCREENING FORM

Your Name (This will not be made public) _____

Your Contact Information – Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name of your current church _____

How long have you been a member? _____

Please check the option that best describes you.

Do you consider yourself an evangelical Christian? Yes or No

What's your age? 18-30 years, 31-40 years, 41-50 years, 51-60 years, or 61+ years

How often do you attend church? Weekly, Bi-Weekly, Monthly, or Infrequently

How do you attend church most of the time? In-Person or Online

How often do you listen to sermons? Daily, Weekly, Bi-Weekly, or Monthly

What's your gender? Male or Female

What's your marital status? Married or Single

What's your race or ethnic background? White, Black or African American, Hispanic or

Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific

Islander, or Mixed

What's your education? High School, Some College, College Graduate, or Postgraduate

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: The Influence of Preaching’s Rhetorical Appeal on Evangelical Listeners’ Motivation.

Principal Investigator: Nicholas Oji, Doctoral Candidate, School of Communication and the Arts, Liberty University.

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a self-identifying adult evangelical, 18 years of age or older, who listens in-person to their church sermons and has been a member of their church in Savannah for at least one year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners’ motivation at evangelical churches in Savannah, Georgia. Rhetorical appeal can be described as forms of effective communication that make it persuasive.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an interview, that will take no more than one hour. You can choose to have your interview conducted either in-person or over Zoom, at a day, time, and venue convenient for you. Please note that the interview will be audio-recorded.
2. The audio recording of your interview will be transcribed and shared with you to confirm accuracy. This process of checking for accuracy will take a maximum of 30 minutes. You will have the freedom to share additional thoughts when reviewing the transcript.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include helping communicators invigorate the pulpit with sermons that effectively connect with the audience and inspire change. Additionally, this study may shed light on the persuasive effect of sermons on people, and what role factors like communication modes, social influence, and storytelling play in the listeners’ change of attitude and intentions.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After seven years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer. After seven years, all recordings will be deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Nicholas Oji. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sandra Romo, at [REDACTED].

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 IRB. Our physical address is

Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is [REDACTED], and our email address is [REDACTED].

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, 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.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

December 2, 2022

Freepoint Church
[REDACTED]

Savannah, GA. [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. [REDACTED],

I am writing to seek your permission to conduct research and interviews at Freepoint Church. This research is a requirement for partial fulfillment of my doctoral program at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to examine how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation, in Savannah, Georgia.

The proposed data collection method will be interviews with 3 to 8 willing members. Participants will be sharing their stories about how sermons influence their motivation to change their behavior. Please will you assist me with identifying any members whom you think will be interested? Additionally, I have created announcements that can be included in your weekly bulletin, emailed, or posted on the church's social media page as you see fit.

Attached for your review is the interview guide I plan on using to engage with participants. I plan to collect data during a 6-week period between January 2023 and March 2023. Before I can conduct this research, I must have permission from the appropriate

gatekeeper. I respectfully request you provide me with confirmation so I may conduct this research.

Sincerely,

Nick Oji

Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University.



APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about your experience at your church.
2. Tell me about the culture of your church.
3. What sermon message from your church has impacted you significantly?
4. What was most memorable about this sermon?
5. Over the past six weeks, which church sermon did you find the most memorable?
6. What about this sermon touched you considerably?
7. While you were listening to the sermon, what emotions were you experiencing?
8. Were there specific ways the sermon shifted your perspective?
9. Did you make any changes in your life due to the sermon?
10. What role does your connection to the preacher play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?
11. What role does the support from others play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?
12. What role does the sermon content play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?
13. What role does your previous life experience play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?
14. What role does the delivery's emotional experience play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?
15. What role does your attitude play when it comes to church sermons motivating you?
16. What are your favorite aspects of preaching in general?

17. What about preaching typically makes you do some soul-searching?
18. How has preaching influenced your behavior?
19. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E: EMAIL ANNOUNCEMENT

Hi,

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University and need participants for my research. The purpose of my research is to examine how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation in Savannah, Georgia. Participants will be sharing their stories about how sermons affect their motivation to change their behavior.

The interview will require about an hour of your time. This will be arranged at your convenience via Zoom or in person at a location of your choice. Additionally, the audio recording of your interview will be transcribed and shared with you to confirm accuracy. This process of checking for accuracy will take a maximum of 30 minutes.

If you are an evangelical adult, 18 and older, who has been a member of your church for over a year and listens weekly to the sermons, your insights could prove extremely valuable. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click the following link to complete a brief survey [Oji_Screening Form.docx](#).


A consent document is attached to this email or if you prefer a hard copy, it will be given to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

I will be happy to share more details with you or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Nick Oji

Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University.



APPENDIX F: SOCIAL MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Communication degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to better understand how the rhetorical appeal of preached sermons influences evangelical listeners' motivation in Savannah, Georgia. To participate, you must be a local evangelical adult, 18 or older, who has been a member of your church for at least one year and listens weekly to the sermons in person. Participants will be interviewed for about an hour. Additionally, the audio recording of your interview will be transcribed and shared with you to confirm accuracy. This process of checking for accuracy will take a maximum of 30 minutes. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click the following link to complete a brief survey [Oji Screening Form.docx](#). A consent document will also be provided via email where you can learn more and confirm if you are interested.

APPENDIX G: CHURCH BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

Nick Oji, a doctoral candidate at Liberty University, needs participants for his research.

Participants will be sharing their stories about how preaching influences their motivation to change their behavior. The interview will require about an hour of your time at your convenience via Zoom or in-person at a location of your choice. Additionally, the audio recording of your interview will be transcribed and shared with you to confirm accuracy. This process of checking for accuracy will take a maximum of 30 minutes.

If you are an adult, 18 and older, who has been a church member for over a year and listens weekly to the sermons in-person, your insights could prove extremely valuable. Contact Nick at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] to participate and find out more. A consent form will be provided to you explaining more details of my study.