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Creating Dialogical Preaching Experiences

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

CREATING DIALOGICAL PREACHING EXPERIENCES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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ABSTRACT

The Protestant Church in the United States has enjoyed a rich history of monological preaching in the local church throughout its history. However, Jesus' ministry, Scripture, and our culture's advancing dialogical pedagogy point to the need for the local church to create dialogical preaching experiences. The age of the internet has also been a driving force in creating circular learning styles that demand the church take notice and discover how this model can be deployed to better shape and grow our people as pastors.

While some argue this is impractical or even altogether unhelpful, others believe that creating dialog again in the church house as was once enjoyed in house churches at the birth of the church, must be done if it is going to continue to engage its culture in a method that effectively discipled emerging generations. The current small group model deployed by many contemporary churches misses the mark in that it does not provide a conduit of real-time engagement with the message.

This project seeks to provide key insights from those leading the way in creating dialogical experiences as well as pastoral perspectives on the issue. An effort is made to point out obstacles as well as provide leadership solutions for how such a shift could be made by training church lay leaders, creating creative sharing opportunities and leveraging technology, and leading toward a long-term dialogical model.

If a dialogical setting were provided for in churches across our country during or after the word is preached, many could be released in ministry to share what the Holy Spirit was speaking to them uniquely in regard to the Word.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Most pastors step into their pulpit each week to persuade their congregations toward embracing God's truth and applying that word to their life. To give their church families an opportunity to respond, some allow for a time of prayer and reflection in their seats; others facilitate a tangible step of answering an altar call or time of prayer in the altar area. Yet, these still both fall short in allowing the body to engage with their pastor and one another in what God is speaking to them regarding the message preached.

The first-century church had no way of getting around not engaging with one another as to what Word was brought; they were in a tight community of house churches. Our drift from a tight community to larger corporate gatherings has caused us to inherently lose a communal, horizontal component in corporate worship when it comes to how we engage with the teaching of God's word, making the discipleship efforts in our churches less effective.

The primary component to this problem is the fixation by preaching pastors to leverage preaching primarily in monologue form. Much like the former limitation of the Bible not being translated in to an accessible language or when it was unable to be printed for church wide consumption, the monological method has created a barrier that has prevented dual communication in weekly corporate worship for much of church history. This has created a binary class system of preacher and laity. The preacher being the producer of all content and the laity being the receiver.

Preaching the word of God has never been the ultimate end; it is merely one of the means. Life transformation through hearing the word of God has always been the ultimate goal. The apostle Paul makes this case with direct brute force when he writes,

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom. 10:14).

While the ends and means might be crystal clear in Scripture, the journey between the two in ecclesiological settings is much murkier. Has the role of preaching changed in regard to the spiritual formation over the years in the American church? Why is preaching in corporate settings seen as secondary in regard to spiritual formation? These questions and more call for an answer in today’s American Church setting, for waiting for each man or woman who enters the pulpit are familiar obstacles that on an ongoing basis sidetrack this intended goal of preaching.

It’s crucial that we dismantle the spiritual formation preaching engine and discover potential flaws in the American evangelical church model. In doing so we will be able to view and discuss obstacles preachers face today in our emerging culture. These components are: how spiritual formation is defined, how preaching is defined, the contrast of how a monological and a dialogic method compare, as well as how preaching is worked in concert with other various spiritual formation components in the local church. Knowing how this spiritual engine works will allow us to bring great effectiveness into the pulpit and the church house as a whole.

Before we approach the deficiencies found in spiritual formation as it relates to preaching, we must first define what exactly spiritual formation is. Suzanne Johnson, in her book, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, defines spiritual formation in the Christian sense as what it means to be “formed as Christians over the

course of a lifetime.”¹ She goes on to note that Christians not only have a one-on-one journey with the Lord in this sanctification process but also within the body of Christ.² Others note that spiritual formation or “spirituality” speaks of God’s transforming work in our lives that are closely linked to spiritual disciplines.³ Johnson goes on to propose that what’s needed in the church today is not necessarily more teaching, but more invitational teaching that invites those that “know” about Christ to begin actually to participate with him.⁴ It would seem that all spiritual disciplines that the Christian has been called to take up for our own growth point to us taking hold of this baton of participating with Christ in establishing his kingdom first in us and then here on earth.

Most believe that while there are spiritual formation dynamics that take place in an individual, much of this takes place in the context of a church body. So, a discussion of what spiritual formation is cannot be absent of how it occurs within the local church. The apostle Paul gave foundational words to spiritual formation when wrote,

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:11-16)

¹ Suzanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

³ Bill Leonard, *Becoming Christian: Dimensions of Spiritual Formation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 20.

⁴ Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, 27.

In the above passage, the apostle Paul points to the primary task of church leadership is to equip the body of Christ “for the work of the ministry.” This formation of our spiritual lives in Christ is shaped by multiple components. However, a keynote must be made that Christian formation “isn’t an aspect of the Christian life; it is the Christian life.”⁵

While conversion is the initial catalyst for the transformational work of Christ, other formative works of Christ-driven spirituality are not tied to a specific linear order. They are organic in nature, happening in spontaneous moments of grace as well as through intentional steps taken by the individual, other believers around them, and ministry deployed by local church leadership. Most of the literature points to spiritual formation dynamics working out of these general categories: conversion, worship, the study of the Bible, prayer, fellowship, and service.⁶

The beginning of every Jesus follower’s journey, happens in hundreds of ways and in hundreds of settings: in one-on-one conversations, in corporate worship services as the gospel is preached, through praying or reading alone, in small group studies, and so on. The list is long. The key is hearing, understanding, and believing in Christ as Lord, and savior.⁷ Examples of one-on-one evangelism is obviously seen in Scripture, but preaching has always played a major part throughout history and even today in winning souls to Christ.

Preaching and conversion converge in two ways. Those that hear the gospel preached and as a result are converted and those that hear the gospel preached and go and

⁵ Leonard, *Becoming Christian*, 21.

⁶ Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*, 3.

⁷ Leonard, *Becoming Christian*, 20.

share the message they have heard. Nothing is more central to the discipleship of a believer than the word of God. James writes that the Bible is much like a mirror informing us of our state and where God is leading us,

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:23-25)

The blessing resulting from our doing is growth in Christ, as we put off the old man and put on the new garment of Christ's righteousness. The practical side of biblical engagement ranges from individual study and exposure to its truths to group learning environments, such as preaching in corporate worship experiences, small group studies, and Sunday school. Add to this now the idea that we are in the throes of a social media explosion now with blogs, podcasts, and messages via video.

Many that come to Christ in a local church setting find their Bible engagement taking place in a corporate worship setting as the word is preached. Most pastors long to see these new believers move from merely consuming Sunday morning sermons to learning to study the Bible themselves. It is imperative that pastors not enable an unhealthy dependence on them as spiritual mentors to the degree that the new believer doesn't learn to fish themselves. Many churches have lowered the bar of the vision and goals for their people's church engagement so as to attract and keep more people. The irony is that there are now more people doing less. We as a church must look to proposed solutions.

While it must be acknowledged that truth and teaching has been shared via the preaching monologue, it is incomplete and carries significant drawbacks. The

monological method has created a detachment of the laity from the articulation of what God is speaking to and through them in corporate worship. A laity that is not given the opportunity to articulate their faith in The Church will in no way be equipped to articulate their faith in the marketplace.

The monological method continues to struggle to keep up with a changing culture that is embracing crowd sourcing over like never before. This inefficiency is no small problem. We have multiple generations in the American church today that have listened to countless hours of preaching, and yet many go on to produce fruitless, unconnected lives in their local church. The church has mistaken attendance as the highest goal and in doing so has missed the mark of seeing true life transformation in its people. A disheartening statistic that points to this truth reveals that while almost all evangelical believers believe they should be sharing their faith, only a third do so.⁸ In another Barna poll, it was noted that only two out of ten Christians were involved in some sort of discipleship activity.⁹ This could be because they are just not going to church. Recent statistics note that 78 million Protestants in America do not even attend church twelve times a year.¹⁰ Another study concluded it was clear that pastors recognize this is an issue because only 1 percent of them believe “today’s churches are doing very well at discipling new and young believers.”¹¹

⁸ “Is Evangelism Going Out of Style?” Barna Research, December 17, 2013, accessed April 16, 2016, <https://barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/648-is-evangelism-going-out-of-style>.

⁹ “New Research on the State of Discipleship,” Barna Research, December 1, 2015, accessed April 16, 2016, <https://barna.org/research/leaders-pastors/research-release/new-research-state-of-discipleship>.

¹⁰ “7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America,” *Church Leaders* December 29, 2015, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html>.

¹¹ “New Research on the State of Discipleship.”

What is also troubling is that Barna, a globally recognized steward of Christian Church Research, does not mention preaching as one of the avenues of spiritual formation in the church.¹² One on one meetings, Sunday School, and small groups have been seen over the years as how the church has sought to mass produce disciples. Yet, for centuries preaching has played a weekly role in the church globally, but what role does it actually play in spiritual formation? These discipleship models that Barna does mention have one component that preaching does not: dialogue.

The lack of dialogue in our modern-day worship services fuels anonymity. Too many walk into their church, have worship and the Word served to them, and then leave without ever connecting relationally with the local church body. This was never what was intended. The church was never to be simply a place where only consumption takes place, but where sharing is enjoyed. This begs the question, why is there a refusal to allow corporate worship services to involve a model embracing a two-way conversation? We have worship going up to heaven, and preaching going down to the people, but for the most part no horizontal discourse in our worship experiences.

Consider another negative of the traditional monological method, the highlighting of the view of only one man or woman. How many gifts of the Spirit through others go untapped because no room or format is given to them in a corporate setting? If a dialogical setting were provided for, during or after the word is preached, many could be released in ministry to share what the Holy Spirit was speaking to them uniquely.

There might be those that argue, ‘Isn’t the pastor supposed to be the expert in the preaching of the Word?’ No doubt this can be the case, but a pastor does not hold the

¹² Ibid.

corner on the market on how a given word is applied to each individual's life. A dialogical setting in a local church doesn't mean the expounded truth has to be lost, but rather simply provides the opportunity for that individual's life to be shared among the body of Christ. Rather than one minister bringing the word, many could be released in such a worship forum to be released in edifying one another as the Lord leads.

CHAPTER TWO: A BRIEF HISTORY OF PREACHING

To understand the state of the Christian American pulpit and where it is potentially headed, one must first know how preaching has evolved and devolved throughout church history. The American pulpit, while varied and vast, comes out of a historical context that reaches back to Christ's own ministry on earth. Thousands of men and women have stepped into the fray of preaching in their time and season to preach the word of God as they understood it and with the method they knew. From the allegorical to the modern historical method, hermeneutical techniques have been as diverse as the methodologies used to deploy these sermons from the pulpit to the pew. The blending of these interpretations and techniques have produced an eclectic display of preaching in today's emerging church culture. Walking briefly through the corridors of history will help us discern where we must go by clearly understanding how and why preaching has developed over time and how preaching has been understood in regard to spiritual formation. If those that preach can better understand what unique role preaching plays in spiritual formation, they will be more apt to craft their preaching in a way as to be successful in this role.

Volumes have been put forth by scholars in an effort to cover the preaching pillars throughout church history. This chapter's speed and depth through history should be defined as far less than a concise survey, but rather as brief snapshots of preaching men that represent an epoch and thousands behind them. One should think of this journey as far above the thirty-thousand-foot view and more like a satellite view of continents of historical preaching.

There is no doubt that preaching has had its place in the mouths of those teaching in synagogues as well as known Old Testament prophets prior to Christ's earthly ministry, but for the purpose of this journey, we will be narrowing our focus from the foundations of Christian preaching beginning in the New Testament. We will then move on to the classical era; of which is noted as the beginning of the fourth century through the dark ages. The next leg of the journey will take us to preaching found during the Reformation. Then we'll end with evangelical preaching beginning in the eighteenth century.

Preaching Defined

The first task we must undertake before beginning this journey is defining what preaching in essence is. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, defines the word "preach" as "to tell people about a particular religion, way of life, system, etc. in order to persuade them to accept it."¹³ Dr. O. C. Edwards, author of *The History of Preaching*, defines the sermon as "a speech delivered in a Christian assembly by an authorized person that applies some point of doctrine usually drawn from a biblical passage, to the lives of the members of the congregation with the purpose of moving them by the use of narrative analogy and other rhetorical devices to accept that application and to act on the basis of it."¹⁴ A key theme to note in both definitions is in the defined purpose: "in order to persuade them to accept" and "for the purposes of moving them ... to accept that application." For our purposes, we will embrace Edwards' limited focus on preaching seeking to persuade believers of Christian "doctrine."

¹³ *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, s.v. "Preach," <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/learner/preach>.

¹⁴ O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 144.

While there are some that specialize in hermeneutics without standing to exult over what's been discovered, a preacher is called upon to work both the dual levers of hermeneutics and homiletics when stepping in to the pulpit. One preaching cannot preach what he or she has not first interpreted rightly or wrongly. As this is the case we will seek to discover, compare and contrast how preachers over time have worked these dualistic levers in making disciples for Christ.

In comparing and contrasting preachers in regard to preaching styles, there are four overarching categories: narrative preachers, inductive preachers, heralding preachers, and teacher preachers.¹⁵ No doubt there have been hybrid versions of these as preachers throughout time have evolved in their own God-given personalities and gifting, adopting and adapting as needed. It will be these four styles that we see rise to the surface as we look at the snapshots of preachers throughout history.

New Testament Preaching

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the first and foremost preacher of the gospel. He himself was the first heralding preacher of the good news. His declaration of being “the way, the truth, and life” (John 14:6)¹⁶ still resounds today. Heralding was not his only method. Jesus also pioneered the narrative style all throughout his ministry as he laid out parable after parable, painting a picture of what the Kingdom of God was like.

¹⁵ Michael Quicke, “History of Preaching,” *Preaching Today*, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/bedrockpreaching/200401.17.html#comments>.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Yet, if we look forward, as the church of Jesus Christ was birthed after his ascension, no one stands taller in the New Testament pulpit than the apostle Paul. The book of Acts finds Paul preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in formal locations (in palaces) as well as informal locations (in the street). The book of Romans finds him extolling the “why” behind our preaching:

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! (Rom. 10:13–15)

Among the other apostles, Paul led the way in preaching as proclamation (the kerygma), bringing to bear the full weight of the gospel onto his hearers.¹⁷ From his own words, we can see that he viewed preaching as passing on the revelation of Christ that had been revealed to him in Scripture as he blatantly points to in his first letter to the Corinthians, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures ...” (1 Cor. 15:3). Preaching to Paul was conveying and seeking to persuade his hearers that which was of “first importance.”

While we do not have the opportunity to read and evaluate what we would now recognize as a sermon given in the apostle’s day (other than the extemporaneous sermons found in the book of Acts), we can see without much difficulty Paul’s sermon writing at work in his written Epistles. Paul was not merely an academic theologian that some have made him out to be, merely putting doctrinal essays to pen for the church eternal, but was a preacher in his own right.¹⁸ His intent is clear that his letters many times were meant to

¹⁷ O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), Kindle location 583.

¹⁸ Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 24.

be read in a worship setting as if he was present declaring these words orally, “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit ... When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan” (1 Cor. 5:3-5).¹⁹

If one views Paul’s Epistles as sermonic, one can quickly surmise that they are quite different from the pre-Pentecost sermons given by Jesus and others whose teaching rested heavily on a narrative style. Paul’s preaching style heavily relied on presenting his sermons as conceptual arguments. This would not have been new in ancient rhetoric training, which consisted of an introduction, narration, argument, and conclusion.²⁰ No doubt these preaching and writing methods would have been taught in his study under Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3). Most of Paul’s missionary sermons followed this similar outline: sharing of a prophecy from the Hebrew Bible, followed by the proclamation that Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy. The claim then is made that the apostles have witnessed this fulfillment; and call on their hearers to respond to Christ accordingly.²¹

The apostle Paul was a forerunner for preachers in two clear ways. Paul opened the door for the allegorical method to be used, such as writing of Adam as being a “type” of Christ. This would go on to be used by preachers such as Origen and others in soon following centuries.²² Another aspect of Paul’s investment in the birth of preaching that cannot be overlooked is his sermon preached on Mars Hill. Paul’s use of the pagan altar

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. 25.

²¹ William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 185.

²² Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 25.

of “The Unknown God” could be considered one of the church’s first illustrated sermons by bringing the gospel forward as the answer to the question that this altar itself poses. He also takes advantage of using Greek pop culture to bear as he reaches for a contemporary poem in his day to bring home his point, “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man” (Acts 17:28-29).

Paul’s use of this secular poem here cannot be overemphasized. In this seemingly small rhetorical act, he opened the door for the throngs of preachers that would follow his lead by using the secular to illustrate the divine. Paul still stands today as not only a pillar and provider of much of Christian doctrine, but also as a pioneer for Christian preachers everywhere.

The Classical Preaching Age

By the third and fourth century, Christian preaching as we know it was being pushed along by the headwaters of culture. Emperor Constantine’s conversion brought church methodology out of what had once been believer’s homes and in its worst days of persecution, out of catacombs and into the high art of the palace.²³ With the Christian church now in prominence, preaching moved from sharing extemporaneously in intimate gatherings to preaching as presentation. Edwin Dargan, once a professor of Homiletics in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky as well as the author

²³ Michael Quicke, “History of Preaching,” *Preaching Today*, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/bedrockpreaching/200401.17.html#comments>.

of the robust text, *The History of Preaching*, notes a similar demand on preaching at the time, “The taste of the times required a certain brilliancy and rhetorical finish, and in order to meet this demand preaching must seek these aids.²⁴ These “aids” were ripe for the taking. Now that Christians were no longer under persecution, Christians were able to enter openly enter into the Roman educational system and learn oratory skills that were once unavailable to them.²⁵ It should finally be noted that this epoch of preaching also found itself with the opportunity to correct heresies that had crept into the church. Inductive preaching, armed with the Greco-Roman schools of thought, was leveraged in a fresh wave that the church had never experienced before.²⁶

Within this adaptation, preachers in the church began to pick up and use rhetorical devices such introductions, a body of points, and conclusions. The preaching took on the form of speeches rather than the off the cuff heralding known previously. While the Eastern church developed the Greek sermon and the Western church developed the Latin sermon, it should be noted that both were formalized written sermons that exercised the deliberate exegesis of Scripture.²⁷ It was during this time that lay preaching fell out quickly as the norm and thus made way for those viewed as professionally trained in theology and rhetoric as the Christian church moved into the bright favor of Roman culture.

²⁴ Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1905), 56-57.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Quicke, “History of Preaching,” 2015.

²⁷ Ibid.

No preacher best stands in glaring prominence during this age as he that was dubbed John Chrysostom (The Golden Mouth), just after his death.²⁸ He was John of Antioch (347-407). Born to wealthy parents in Antioch around 347, John's father (a prominent public servant) died when John was still just an infant. His mother went on to raise him in the church.²⁹ His education as a child was common for his time, but his education in Antioch did offer him the opportunity to study under one of the great rhetoricians of his day, Libanious. He also studied philosophy with Andragatius.³⁰ It must be noted that John was recognized as gifted even by his contemporaries. A modern critic of John's time wrote of John and his eloquence, "the only prose author of this epoch who could stand comparison with Demosthines."³¹ John was around twenty-five years old when his mother died. It was then that John began to study the Scriptures under the mentorship of an old monk for four years and then alone in a cave for another two.³² This notable time of stepping away from his wealth and privilege is most likely the reason for his life of austerity that would follow him in his ministry.

After poor health brought him home to Antioch, his formal ministry began as he was ordained as a deacon in 381 and then as a presbyter in 386 where he took up leading the preaching duties for the church there.³³ John's spiritual gift of teaching was immediately recognized and enjoyed by his congregation. His apparent gifting matched

²⁸ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 70.

²⁹ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, Kindle location 2072.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 41.

³³ Ibid.

with his “tell it like it is” personality made him popular with the masses but despised by other leaders and preachers.³⁴ Chrysostom gave this counsel to those preachers that would follow him in his *Treatise on the Priesthood*: “The primary task is to deliver God’s Word and to look for God’s approval, remaining indifferent to applause and praise.”³⁵

Along with his written and oral eloquence, John’s preaching marked the shift away from the traditional allegorical interpretation of Scripture to a verse by verse literal interpretation. John had been formed by the Antiochian theological schools of thought that had moved away from the allegorical way of dealing with anomalies in Scripture to the more challenging literal interpretation of Scripture head on.

Preaching During the Reformation

The radical transformation of the church that took place during the Reformation was the partnering of the then considered groundbreaking theology of being saved by grace and the communication-multiplying technology of the printing press. The Christian Renaissance pillar Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) edited the first Greek New Testament translated for the purposes of being printed in 1516.³⁶ This translation would bring the Bible one step closer to the common layperson. This was crucial because the gulf between the church and the common believer had grown immense, building on almost a thousand years of the priesthood being professionalized.

³⁴ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, Kindle location 2180.

³⁵ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*. 42.

³⁶ Quicke, “History of Preaching,” 2015.

It would be Martin Luther (1483-1546) who would kick open the door of the Reformation by nailing his Ninety-Five Theses to the cathedral door. To fully understand Luther's impact on preaching, one must first understand Luther's theology. He understood the Word as having "three manifestations: God the Son (the incarnate Word), the Bible (the written Word), and preaching (the proclaimed Word)."³⁷ Luther believed that the preaching of the Word was just as important as the Word itself. This was not only pointed to in his writings but also in the frequency of preaching during his lifetime.³⁸ When Erasmus wrote that the Bible was all any one believer needed, Luther countered that the believer also needed the Holy Spirit. He noted that "the gospel should not be written but shouted; the church "is not a pen-house but a mouth house."³⁹ The driving force behind his view of preaching was that he believed preaching was the method used by God to snatch the elect from destruction.⁴⁰

As Luther found himself in exile for his blatant indictment of the papacy and church leadership as a whole, he took the opportunity to translate Erasmus' newly translated Latin New Testament into the German language. This, combined with the printing press finally brought the average follower of Christ into the age of biblical literacy for the common man and woman.⁴¹

While Luther was certainly a catalyst for the great Reformation in the church and helped bring the Bible to the common man and woman, it must be noted that he also

³⁷ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, Kindle location 6654.

³⁸ Ibid., Kindle location 6693.

³⁹ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 95.

⁴⁰ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 205.

⁴¹ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 93-94.

impacted how preachers preached the Bible. His passion to see the superfluous walls that acted as obstacles to believers coming to Christ to come down was unstoppable. Luther desired to connect more with the young people listening rather than the scholars critiquing.⁴² He was the people's pastor.

It was during the Reformation that there began a resistance among the people to scholasticism that Luther found himself (along with other preachers of his day) moving back to the "ancient homily."⁴³ Luther led a movement of preachers away from rhetorician back to more of his preaching grammarian predecessors such as Origen and Chrysostom.⁴⁴ Stylistically, Luther is noted for not stepping into the pulpit with a robust outline, but merely a few thoughts about what he might want to share. One listener described his evident disorganization as "heroic disorder."⁴⁵ In reading his sermons, one can readily see his practical, down to earth preaching as once again pointing to him being the people's preacher of the Reformation.

Evangelical Preaching

Building off the radical momentum produced by the great reformation, the evangelical preaching movement brought to the world stage heralding preachers from across the denominational spectrum. The desire to break out of old Anglican norms to reach the masses with the gospel brought at first criticism but eventually acclaim.⁴⁶ Many

⁴² Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 205.

⁴³ Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 380.

⁴⁴ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 205.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

renowned preachers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are recognizable names even today: the Wesleys, George Whitfield, Charles Finney, Charles Booth, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody. Today, Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr. are household names even for families that do not consider themselves religious.

Though one could write page upon page for all of these preaching pillars of the faith, for our purposes, we will look briefly at the great George Whitfield. While Whitfield's name is tied closely with Wesley's, as he was in close relationship with him, Whitfield is recognized as one of the leading preaching voices during the great awakening. It was he who transformed for many the idea that revival. From once viewed as an occasional outpouring of grace on a group of people, to that which could be experienced on a "regular basis."⁴⁷

The throngs that greeted Whitfield's revival services in England and the United States were unmatched in his day.⁴⁸ What these crowds were hearing was evangelistic preaching being pioneered. Dr. O. C. Edwards notes his sermon structure, "The sermon was usually based on a short text, and after an introduction on and some background, there was the announcement of the points that would be made. After that, the sermon developed topically, with each of the heads having several subheadings, all leading to a conclusion."⁴⁹ By the time he was preaching out in the fields, he was preaching without any notes. This outlined method could be misinterpreted as dry and structured, but the

⁴⁷ Ibid. 215.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, Kindle location 9885.

⁴⁹ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 215.

enthusiasm that Whitfield brought to the pulpit, catapulted his sermons to the masses and moved them.

It must be noted that Whitfield coupled his passionate preaching with other unique God-given gifts. He is noted as having spoken to over 20,000 people and being heard clearly without the use of amplification. Admirers and even critics noted his ability to convey heartfelt emotion through facial and hand gestures, as well as the tone of voice to leverage his mastery of pathos for his mission to move people toward a decision to follow Christ.⁵⁰ George Whitfield's evangelical preaching style laid the groundwork for many that would follow him in the evangelical movement. Even Billy Graham (the most recognized evangelical preacher in the world) used a similar style as he traveled the world like Whitfield during the twentieth century. Even now, the ripple effect of Whitfield's pioneering evangelistic style is still heard in pulpits today.

CHAPTER THREE: PRESENT DAY PROPOSED SOLUTIONS (CASE STUDIES)

In the Protestant church setting most people are prepared to experience on any given Sunday a monological sermon delivered in a "top-down" delivery method of truth. While this is the traditional model, we must ask ourselves, is this still effective? We now find ourselves in the internet age. In writing on how the internet has changed education, Rupert Wegerif argues that the integration of the internet in our society has transformed the way people learn.¹ Previously, information was most often gleaned from a single source (textbooks, experts, encyclopedias), now information is crowdsourced and gleaned from multiple hubs and outlets of information, both good and bad. This is dialogical

⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹ Rupert Wegerif, *Dialogic: Education for the Internet Age* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 24.

learning as opposed to monological. Wegerif writes that “dialogic assumes that meaning is never singular but always emerges in the play of different voices in dialogue together.”² Wegerif’s thesis is that people have evolved to learn most effectively in dialogue rather than under a monologue of a “one size fits all” style.³

The church does not live in a vacuum outside of pedagogical and technological advances. If Wegerif is correct, how should this dialogic form of learning that our culture has so readily embraced impact how pastors preach? If our society is on the whole learning very differently, must preachers not adapt?

This was a similar question raised by Reuel Howe, pastor and author, who sought to see a partnership take place between the preacher and the laity. In making his case for dialogical preaching in churches across America, Howe argues that there could be an argument made that the monological format that preachers have used for centuries is merely a model followed by those preachers found in Scripture, but is this truly the case?⁴

In the Gospel of Matthew alone there are twenty-nine instances where Jesus’ delivery of truth is either prompted, concluded or wrapped in dialogue.⁵ Jesus leveraged discourse for the pursuit of revealing and delivering the truth. We can clearly see throughout the Gospels that those in deliberation with Christ as teacher played a role as

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 45.

⁵ Matt. 8:19-20, 9:11-13, 9:14-17, 12:1-8, 12:9-14, 12:22-27, 12:38-45, 12:46-50, 13:1-23, 13:24-43, 13:44-58, 15:1-20, 16:5-12, 17:9-13, 17:14-20, 17:24-27, 18:1-35, 19:1-12, 19:16-20:16, 20:20-28, 21:18-22, 21:23-46, 22:15-22, 22:23-33, 22: 34-40, 22:41-23:39, 24:1-2, 24:3-26:2, 26:6-13.

catalysts and platform for truth. Even those with ulterior motives via cornering questions merely proved to provide a delivery system for the truth to be brought to light.

Consider the dialogical sermon replies of the apostle Paul and Peter's Epistles. While they did speak to holistic doctrinal topics, they also spoke to specific details they were being made aware of through messenger and letter form. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-15, Paul speaks to a specific sexual sin being allowed to take place in the church that was not being dealt with. His responses speak to this idea of providing answers and teaching that were driven by issues, questions, and feedback from the local church itself.

There could be some that potentially argue that churches have already created dialogic settings within small groups in their churches as they walk through discussion questions with one another. This engagement is much needed. In fact, Lawrenz writes that fellowship is "one of the essentials of ministry, it links people to each other facilitates soul-shaping through accountability and support."⁶ While this is true, it should be noted that there seems to be a chasm between the time a message is heard in our services and when accountability and support are engaged. Our small group environments are almost never done during, or immediately after a message, but done most often at another time and setting. Thus, only a percentage of those that hear the message are put into an environment where dialogue can take place. This perpetuates people coming into our churches having a sermon preached at them with no outlet in that setting for dialogue about what the Lord is speaking to them and those around them. This also keeps people

⁶ Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*, Ministry Dynamics for a New Century (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 87-88.

from being able to talk about next step application in real time when it is fresh on their minds and while their hearts are tender to what the Holy Spirit has been speaking to them.

As one of the primary activities of the church, preaching has been taught, studied, and written about for hundreds of years. Many libraries could be filled to overflowing with books on and of preaching. Yet, it should be stated emphatically that true preaching does not happen on the clinical pages of study or under the microscope of analysis. It does not take place in the sterile vacuum of theorization. Rather, preaching happens in the tangible, flesh and blood lives of ministers and congregants. One could easily drown in the theoretical texts on preaching and never come close to feeling the joys, pains, challenges, and obstacles associated with preaching in a real ecclesiastical setting. What seems easy and without issue on paper can in moments become frustrating and cumbersome when deployed in a congregational setting as a broad spectrum of personality types and cultures come in to contact.

Before looking to our dialogical case studies, it is important to recognize the present day monological preaching method has helped and transformed lives. Countless gifted preachers and teachers step in to the pulpit utilizing this model each week. For instance, in a recent interview with Pastor and author, David Crabtree, lead pastor of Calvary Church in Greensboro, NC, he revealed his passion for the monological method. After thirty years in one local church as pastor, Crabtree has had to reinvigorate his pulpit and himself to keep an edge in his preaching. Crabtree believes that preaching is one of the main catalysts for producing life-changing moments in people's lives. For instance, he points to men and women responding to calls to ministry or breakthrough growth

moments coming many times as the result of the preaching of the word. He is unapologetically a writer/preacher. His sermons are heavy on narrative and are excellent at “telling the story.” He is known for preaching from a manuscript, but for those that have experienced his preaching, they don’t seem to notice this fact. They do note the fresh angles and the narrative approach he uses to illuminate Scripture.⁷

When asked about providing an EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image Rich, and Connective) experience for his congregations, Crabtree did not seem to take hold.⁸ He did not mention any specific ways he seeks to bring engagement with his listeners. However, he does love to use image rich visuals to use as metaphors. Overall, Pastor David represents a gifted monological style of preaching still prevalent in most pulpits today.

While one might be able to practice preaching in a homiletics course with fellow peers, to go the direction of dialogical preaching one needs to learn in a practical church setting. It is with this in mind that we move from a satellite view of dialogical theory to observing pastors in local contexts that are seeking to deploy dialogical and participatory methods in their preaching. The four pastors that were interviewed on this topic vary in personality type, church culture, and denominational affiliation. Though different in personality and culture, all agreed passionately on this one point: more interaction is needed between the pulpit and the pew.

⁷ David Crabtree, Preaching Interview with Nathan Rouse, Greensboro, NC, February 22, 2016.

⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 37.

Doug Pagitt—Solomon’s Porch

Our first case study is a pastor that is no stranger to dialogical preaching. You might even call him the modern-day father of the method—so much so that he’s written and spoken about the topic extensively.⁹ He literally wrote the book on it. We begin with Pastor Doug Pagitt, pastor of Solomon’s Porch, part of the Emerging Church movement in southern Minneapolis, Minnesota. Solomon’s Porch, planted in 2000, is described by Doug as “a community seeking to live the dreams and love of God in the way of Jesus as a benefit and blessing to the world.”¹⁰

After preaching for a decade in the traditional lecture/monologue style while in full-time ministry, Doug came to the point of believing that the traditional model just did not work. He felt it was hard on the preacher and ineffective for the hearers, “We have more traditional speech-making style sermons out in the world, more than ever before in human history, and we’re still not seeing the spiritual growth we say we are.”¹¹

It was then that Doug moved to what he calls a “dialogical progressive” approach that focuses on ferreting out the thoughts and views of those listening to Scripture or a topic. He believes the benefits of this approach are many. For instance, he believes that monological preaching has an application focus (how do I apply these points?) while the progressive style has an implication focus (how do I fit into this story?). At Solomon’s Porch dialogue is seen as a key to spiritual growth when it comes to every aspect of the

⁹ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

¹⁰ “Solomon’s Porch Intro,” Solomon’s Porch, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.solomonsporch.com/intro/>.

¹¹ Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

church, especially in their corporate gatherings. Their normal weekly gathering averages around 150 congregants. They describe these gatherings as wanting them to be “interactive.” His church describes their setting on their church website: “The set-up of the furniture is in the round to help us engage with one another during the music, prayer, and discussion. So, while it may seem a little odd to face people during church, give it a chance for a while and see how it grows on you.”¹² Notice the words teaching, and preaching aren’t even mentioned.

When asked what his biblical anchors were for moving away from the traditional lecture preaching style, Doug quickly pointed to what’s *not* there, “Other than Paul in the New Testament droning on so long that a kid falls asleep and falls out of the window, and Jesus’ sermon on the Mount, there’s just no evidence in Scripture of anyone preparing a twenty- to thirty-minute or longer sermon like we see put out in over 10,000 churches here in America. It’s just not there.”¹³

In Pagitt’s mind, there is a wealth of biblical understanding, wisdom, and life experience not being tapped into on Sundays—namely, the congregation. He balks at pastors who believe they’re the only one in the room with something valuable to say on a Sunday, “If a pastor says the people he has been teaching for years have nothing of value to add in a church gathering, what does that say about his or her teaching?”¹⁴ For Doug, this comes out of a well-defined ethos that each believer is involved in shaping one another within a church family.

¹² Doug Pagitt, “Solomon’s Porch Intro.”

¹³ Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

¹⁴ Ibid.

To unleash the well of knowledge in his congregation, Pagitt uses various forms of dialogical methods when preaching. For instance, one method often deployed is having the entire community read an entire chapter of the Bible and then asking for initial feedback before jumping into the message. He loves it when there is a mix of believers and unbelievers sharing in this feedback. Dialogical preaching for Pagitt isn't just limited to Sundays, he also utilizes a sermon discussion group where everyone is invited each Tuesday night to curate the message for their upcoming weekly gathering. When not exegeting a passage they might surround the preaching time around a topic and have a panel of two or three talk about that topic. Other times the preachers at Solomon's Porch will open the last ten minutes to ask, "What would you add? What are your thoughts?" They also at times ask four or five other congregants to prepare a five- to seven-minute talk on a topic or Scripture to contribute to the body on a scheduled week.¹⁵

When asked about the challenges a preacher might face that wants to transition to a more dialogical preaching approach, Doug notes that many might find it "hard to let go of the belief that delivering the right content will change someone's life."¹⁶ He believes it's a "mythos that the word aptly spoken will shape and direct the community. We must let that go. We must be willing to let go of our fixation on control."¹⁷ He encourages those that want to make that leap need to first share the "why" behind the decision and "how" they're going to go about it with their church family. He suggests getting started by using a famous passage that most will know something about to help them feel

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

comfortable sharing as you are getting started. He was careful to note that he believes this can work in any room size. From circling up and sharing to leveraging technology for the sending in of thoughts and ideas, many tools can be leveraged to create a dialogical experience.¹⁸

As we wrapped up our time together Doug wanted to be emphatic about one point, “Some confuse my insistence for dialogical preaching as having a low view of preaching. That’s not the case. I just think too highly of preaching to leave it to a monologue. I believe preaching is a communal act, not an individual one.”¹⁹

Bob Hyatt—The Evergreen Community

Bob Hyatt, the church planter of The Evergreen Community Church in Portland, Oregon, has been a huge proponent for dialogical preaching since 2008.²⁰ Heavily influenced by Doug Pagitt’s teaching on the need for dialogical preaching, Bob ended up planting The Evergreen Community with this very method. To potential visitors they describe their unique view of the sermon as,

the work of the community. We are teaching each other. Whoever is leading that morning still has a role in keeping things on track, doing the majority of the talking, but we do our darndest to get others talking to each other as well. In this way, as a community, we wrestle with the Scriptures. We prefer this dialogical approach over the more traditional monologue of one person speaking sermons and feel it helps people learn and stay involved better. The highlight of the morning is responding to what we have heard God say to us in worship, by coming to the Table for communion, and verbally, afterwards, in the wrap up.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bob Hyatt, “Dialogical Preaching,” *Preaching Today*, March 10, 2008, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/energyofsynergy/dialogicalpreaching1.html>.

²¹ “Evergreen Community FAQ,” The Evergreen Community, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://evergreenpdx.org/faqs/>.

Hyatt shared that this picture of a dialogical preaching community all became clear to him when he came to a point of realizing, “I didn’t have to be the one that said the most important thing on a Sunday.”²² He affirms that the body has something to share, “I’m not arguing that the community has to offer 30 minutes of content, but can’t they give 30 seconds?”²³

To draw this content out, Evergreen uses a variety of dialogical methods. One used at times are scattered prayer stations, where the church community can go to a station and write down what God’s speaking to them or share an issue they would like the community to be praying for. This allows not only the pastors to have a pulse on the needs of the people, but also the body to be able to not only be praying for the needs but also speaking God’s word over them and their circumstance.

Leveraging an opening discussion question before the reading of the morning’s text is a common tool used by the pastors of Evergreen Community. Asking a question that they believe the passage of the day is eventually going to answer is seen as an opportunity to prime the dialogue pump at their Sunday gatherings. For example, they might ask the congregation, “What is the most helpful piece of advice you have ever received?” After allowing time for sharing they then make the transition to the passage on the role of God’s word in our lives.²⁴

After making some introductory remarks, Hyatt usually leans back into the body to ask what are the exegetical implications of this passage. Bob believes that the beauty

²² Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

²³ Bob Hyatt, “Dialogical Preaching,” 2008.

²⁴ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

of the community offering these observations is that it allows the body to flex its exegetical muscles instead of being spoon-fed by the pastor all the time.²⁵ He recognizes the unique challenges that dialogical preaching presents to preachers that are used to the traditional lecture style, “Some are afraid someone will say something heretical, and they often do, not just unbelievers, but believers as well.” When someone does say something completely wrong, Hyatt will ask the rest of the community to chime in and he says they tend to correct it in a very gentle way. “I’ve yet to run into a community that doesn’t self-correct. It’s 100% more effective for the body to correct it instead of the preacher bringing the correction. They expect a pastor to say certain things, but when the community does, it has higher impact.”²⁶

After writing and speaking on the dialogical preaching approach, Hyatt recommends to pastors new to the model to cue to the community. He warns not to try and stump the community with Bible knowledge questions, but start with accessible discussion questions that can get the ball rolling.²⁷ Bob believes that room size can absolutely hinder the dialogical method. He has found that when a crowd gets above 120 in attendance, people tend to shut down. Therefore, the community has made the decision that if and when they exceed that number they will move to multiple services.²⁸

²⁵ Bob Hyatt, “Dialogical Preaching,” 2008.

²⁶ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

²⁷ Bob Hyatt, “Dialogical Preaching,” 2008.

²⁸ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

Greg Holder—The Crossing

Pastor Greg Holder is the lead pastor of The Crossing in Chesterfield, Missouri. He took the church through what he calls a “hard reboot.” The Crossing would be considered a mega-church with multiple campuses and online services where he preaches to over three thousand each week.²⁹ Holder shares that his Master’s work in Systems Psychology grounded him in this idea of thinking “how all of us are connected and work together.” This idea bled into his perception of preaching and creating a dialogical communication style that starts with the question, “How do we open the Bible together and hear from God?”³⁰

The Crossing holds that “the anointed teaching of God’s word is the catalyst for change in our lives. This includes the acknowledgment that the Bible is the final authority for our lives and the concept of practical teaching for life-change.”³¹ While Holder does not have his congregation teaching to each other, he does believe that they will think of things that he would not think of, “They might be willing to hear it from an average attendee, when they might not hear it from me.”³²

Practically, Holder uses a variety of methods to create dialogue during The Crossing’s teaching moments. They look to provide weekly “interactions” where the room is engaging with the teacher of the week and with one another. He believes this also helps with the culture’s ever-waning attention span. “It brings energy back into to the

²⁹ Greg Holder, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 14, 2016.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “The Crossing Website,” The Crossing, accessed November 12, 2016, <https://www.wcrossing.org/page/586>.

³² Greg Holder, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 14, 2016.

room, so I usually do it in the middle of the message.”³³ Sometimes the interactions don’t have anything to do with the message. Hitting this point home, Holder shares that “the content is far less important than the process that they are discussing something with one another. Sometimes I’m allowing them to recharge to get them ready to hear something I’m about to say.” An added bonus of this time of small group engagement in the room is that it allows his large auditorium (it seats 1,200) to grow smaller in this community feel.³⁴

These interactions could take many different forms from having a puzzle on the screen and asking groups of three or four to figure it out, to reading a passage out loud to one another and answering a couple of questions. Greg stated that sometimes he would simply stop in his messages and ask, “What do you think?” then allow people to share. He believes that dialogic preaching is about empowering people with the opportunity to give input and feedback. To this, he adds, “There’s an uptick in energy and attention when someone other than me is talking, but the pastor must learn to improvise in the room.” To add to this empowerment, Holder often leaves the main platform and joins the congregation on the main floor to break down “perceived barriers” between myself as the teacher and they as the audience, but that’s not enough. You have to allow them to have a voice.”³⁵

When asked about what obstacles a preacher faces in going down this dialogical path, Holder responds with “being able to gain a comfort level with the unknown.” To

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

combat this, he responds that a preacher must “do his or her homework” so that no matter what direction a question might take you, you have already gone down those roads in your mind. In addressing the fear that pastors might have in losing control of the service, Holder advises to “protect the audience.” He does this in two ways: (1) not shaming someone when a potential poor answer falls short and (2) not going “open mic” on potentially controversial issues.³⁶

For those wanting to make the transition to this type of teaching style, Holder gives some brief counsel, “Consider starting with a small group. Get comfortable with this type of engagement in a smaller setting before trying to conquer a large room.” He also suggests asking narrow questions so that you are better able to get more focused answers. Holder is emphatic that above all you must be able to say, “I don’t know” when you don’t know.

When Greg considers the future of preaching, he believes that church teaching environments are only going to continue in the direction of interactivity, not lessen. While he believes that there will always be a clear and powerful place for the stripped-down moments of teaching from the Bible without the distraction of technology, he also believes that he and other pastors must continue to grow in their ability to leverage technology if they are going to be able to engage in a relevant way in this culture.

David McDonald—Westwinds Community Church

David McDonald, pastor of Westwinds Community Church in Jackson, Michigan, stands on the frontier of participatory and innovative preaching styles in the United

³⁶ Ibid.

States. Westwinds Community Church averages about 1,200 a Sunday and defines their ministry philosophy as holy provocation through contextualization, innovation, and critique.³⁷ McDonald believes that one of the best ways contextualization happens is through engagement in their weekly gatherings. They would define their dialogic approach as creating “do” experiences in their preaching. Len Sweet, author and semiotician, has had a huge impact on McDonald’s life and ministry. Sweet, in his writings on preaching, drives home the need for preachers to deploy an EPIC preaching style, with the “P” being participatory.³⁸ McDonald has made that a mainstay at Westwinds. When asked about what drives this participatory value, McDonald responds,

Church ought to be about what you do. The number of verbs we’re doing in church is minimal these days. We might sit, we might stand, we maybe will sing. We might be more knowledgeable, but our people are not experiencing life change. Church ought to be a practicum. One hundred percent of the time, I’m asking them to do something in the service. I want them to “do,” I don’t necessarily want them to “do with me.” For instance, I might ask them to draw a diagram. That would be enough for me.³⁹

One of the key ways Westwinds tries to create dialogical moments in their teaching time is through utilizing technology. This might range from having those that have questions or input to text their content in at the end of a message to using a project management platform like “Slack” to comb through the post-sermon conversations. McDonald shares that his most favorite tool for this type of engagement is *Facebook Live*. This allows for him to engage at any point in real time with those watching online.

³⁷ “Westwinds Website,” Westwinds Community Church, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://westwinds.org/who-we-are/mission/>.

³⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 82.

³⁹ David McDonald, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 30, 2016.

To help him, he has trained moderators that help “clean up” and “focus” the conversations being had. These moderators would be like trained “altar workers” that help pastor this live medium. McDonald also points out that they rarely have open mic opportunities in their gatherings because of wanting to steward their time and content, “The open mic is death. You don’t do it. Using texting and Facebook allows people to focus their thoughts, rather than going on a rant or forgetting what they wanted to say because they’re all of the sudden embarrassed.”⁴⁰

Westwinds does use some other low-tech ways of engagement. They have used anything from pencil and paper to building small tables around the sanctuary that foster natural engagement. “People instinctively know what to do around a table. They struggle to turn and shift in pews or chairs that are locked in rows,” McDonald remarks. He points out that overall room set up and lighting is key to making people feel comfortable enough to engage.⁴¹

For those preachers wanting to dive into this style, David gives some hard-learned advice, “Don’t memorize your sermon. The idea that the congregation can’t interrupt you is a huge sacred cow that needs to be dismantled. If you want to have a conversation with your audience, you must first be ready to have one. Don’t memorize your sermon!” McDonald differs from some of our other previously mentioned pastors as he believes that room size impacts how much engagement can be fostered between the teacher and the congregation. He shares, “after a couple of hundred people, no one wants someone to interrupt the message. Most audiences don’t want someone to screw it up. We have to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

recognize that our people don't want it (participation) as much as we want it, especially your introverts. You have to know your context."⁴²

McDonald believes the other key for pastors that want to learn to be able to improvise in the room with their sermons is rather than memorizing their messages, they must "have great command of their material, so that you can go any direction the room might take you." Our previously mentioned champion of dialogical preaching, Reuel Howe, sounded a similar call when he wrote, "The kind of preaching we are thinking about calls for even greater preparation because dependence would be upon the relationship rather than upon a manuscript."⁴³ For the Westwinds teaching team, they've learned that the only way to learn is by "getting your reps in." Lastly, David makes the final point that pastors must relax, that every sermon is not "do or die;" "We way overestimate what we're doing in any given Sunday. If you screw up your service, people aren't going to hell. Do your best and keep growing."⁴⁴

Case Study Conclusion

For almost all the pastors interviewed above, the vernacular in their settings varied. Yet, words like progressive conversations, participatory, dialogical, and interactions all point to the heartbeat of creating environments of engagement rather than a one-way monologue. Though many of their doctrinal anchors differ, their methods and

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 88.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

style can easily be used for the cross-training of pastors across denominational lines. They need only be deployed.

There are some key takeaways that rise to the surface after comparing these case studies. First, there are strikingly differing views on what can and cannot be done with a large group of people. Several felt that after a church is over two hundred in attendance that direct dialog with people in the room is ineffective and ill-advised, while others believe the exact opposite to be true, that while there might need to be some adjustments, it can and absolutely must be done.

It was clear throughout this case study research that there was a spectrum of pastoral engagement in guarding against potential distractions and heretical statements in these dialogical interactions. While Pastor Doug Pagitt has a more disengaged view of this, allowing for vast room for disagreement on Scripture, Pastor Greg Holder seeks to filter this out via technology, as in his view this “protects the body.”⁴⁵

A common theme among most of these churches was the use of technology and the belief that pastors must be leveraging up-and-coming technologies for the purpose of engaging in dialog with their people. It appears these churches that are doing this well are constantly seeking to learn new platforms and actively experimenting with new ways to foster these interactive environments.

There is a clear call from these pastors to have a clear direction of where you are wanting to take the room when preaching but not via a memorized script. Over and over there was consistent counsel for pastors to drop the manuscript and memorization and to move toward knowing and understanding your material so that you can go many different

⁴⁵ Greg Holder, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 14, 2016.

directions and thus be a kind of a facilitator in the conversation. The church would do well to continue to learn from these pastors who are willing to be on the bleeding edge of the innovation of preaching in our emerging culture. While the message will never change, our methods must to some degree change as our culture does. Pastors must be willing to climb out of their boxes and change while remaining true to themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR: PREACHING A NEW WAY

Pastors and preachers have been leveraging the monologue in ecclesiastical preaching for hundreds of years. So, it would be understandable if the idea of taking hold of and deploying a new preaching model in a church that has not experienced such a method would feel intimidating. It is with this mind that a pastor who seeks to approach getting out of the monological rut of utilizing a one-way method, will first come back to this fundamental question: am I only seeking to communicate truths or am I wanting to also build the capacity in my hearers for self-discovery and the sharing of those truths?¹ If their answer is the latter, then it will be crucial for that vision and mission to remain paramount in their thinking. Without this firm grasp, the preacher will eventually default to “business as usual” by redeploying the tired one-way communication method that they once used. Only when they truly know and hold to this answer will they be able to persevere and bring about such a change.

For this chapter, we will be exploring potential new ways of utilizing and deploying the dialogical preaching method. To go on this journey toward this type of teaching transformation, pastors must remember the truth that Pastor Bryan Wilkerson points to, “Transformative preaching requires planning, so that vision, intention, and means all find expression. But this requires having a longer view.”²

It is important to note that when mentioning the term “method” here, this should not be seen as a “one-size-fits-all” model, but rather an overarching umbrella that encompasses a host of ideas now known and even those yet to be discovered. One might

¹ Rupert Wegerif, *Dialogic: Education for the Internet Age* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 32.

² Bryan Wilkerson, “Incremental Preaching,” *Leadership Journal* 31, no. 2 (2010): 26.

deploy one or all suggested versions of the ideas presented or maybe create a hybrid version. Many variables will inevitably guide what is and is not effective when deployed in a unique local church setting: the pastor's personal gifting and skill level, the local culture itself, the predominant educational background of the congregation, access to various technological tools, and much more. The key will be the willingness of the pastor to step out and discover what is effective in whatever the local context the preacher finds themselves in.

Dialogic Listening

The monological method utilized by pastors today is not only the status quo for clergy, but it is also the norm for the laity. This one-way communication style has kept its hearers from finding an active role in the church house when it comes to the preacher/hearer relationship. The hearers very well may find volunteer ministry roles in and outside of the church but tend to take a very passive role in regard to listening.

If a dialogical shift is to take place, an initial first step is needed to move pastors from being simply tellers to dialogic listeners. Active listening has long been held as a helpful tool in counseling and relational feedback. This is proactive listening that involves saying back to someone what we believe we have heard them say.

To contrast, dialogic listening has four distinguishing characteristics. While up to this point dialogic listening has been seen as a tool in group conversations, each of these characteristics holds a potential key to creating robust dialogical preaching experiences. Taking these characteristics and integrating them into our preaching events yields a new way for preachers to consider how they might preach with their church rather than at it. Let's look at each of them and see how they might apply.

1. Dialogic listening emphasizes conversation as a shared activity. Usually people focus their attention on their own views in conversation. In dialogic listening the focus is on “our” views and the emerging product of the conversation.³

This emphasizing of conversation being a shared activity rather than merely a vehicle to express our own ideas is crucial for pastors to having a transformed dialogical mindset, moving from seeing the congregation only as recipients to fellow proclaimers. Imagine pastors and preachers beginning to seek to ferret out ideas and thoughts from among their congregation rather than only to deposit them. How many hidden gems of insight are we leaving behind?

2. Dialogic listening stresses an open-ended, playful attitude toward conversation. Modern western culture values “hard” thinking which produces certainty, closure, and control. Speculative, metaphoric, ambiguous thinking is generally devalued. Dialogic listening seeks to recover and tap into the productive creativity of this “softer” style of thinking. In contrast to the “hard” style of most conversations, the “soft” style of dialogic listening requires modesty, humility, trust, and a robust recognition of the other party as a choice-maker.⁴

This “hard” thinking that drives the propositional preaching model leaves no room for engagement or flexibility for new discoveries. What would a playful approach to preaching look like? Dialogical sermons offer a gift of incompleteness. They are not already mapped out, leaving room for fresh turns and unforeseen insights. While the idea could be terrifying to some, another perspective is that it brings adventure back in to the pulpit.

3. In dialogic listening, the parties focus on what is happening between them, rather than each party focusing on what is going on within the mind of the other. Stewart and Thomas say, “instead of trying to infer internal ‘psychic’ states from

³ John Stewart and Milt Thomas, “Summary: ‘Dialogic Listening: Sculpting Mutual Meanings in Bridges Not Walls,’” University of Colorado Conflict Research Consortium, 1997, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.colorado.edu/conflict/transform/stewdial.htm>.

⁴ Ibid.

the talk, when you are listening dialogically you join with the other person in the process of co-creating meaning between you.”⁵

This would be the goal of dialogic preaching, to “join with the other person in the process of co-creating meaning between you.”⁶ This is not to say that from this all meaning becomes subjective and truth now watered down, but it is cultivating the process of discovering meaning together. If rudimentary communication takes two, how much more so does the communication of the good news? Instead, many preachers have sought to deploy mental summations of what their congregations are sensing, feeling, and thinking. While no doubt pastors get this right sometimes, much is left on the table because we cut our congregations out of the process. Along with the declaration, there must be an incorporating of the people. This could take place if we were able to graft in this idea of dialogical listening into our preparation and preaching moments.

4. Dialogic listening focuses on the present (what we are doing now), rather than primarily on future goals (what we will do), or on past events (what we did then). Dialogic listening requires that one be fully present to the process and one’s conversation partner. This attitude of “being in the present” helps each party to unify his or her actions, intentions, and speech. It can also ameliorate power differences.⁷

When a preacher steps into the pulpit with his or her notes there is a weighted lean toward the past. After all, that is when the message notes were written. This is not to say that nothing should be studied or thought through, but rather there needs to be a concerted effort by the preacher to be present in the room, at that moment, with the people, rather than a preconceived moment that has been previously contrived. The Holy Spirit longs to

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

be included not only in the preparation but in the impartation. Preachers must consider how they are dialogically interacting with the Spirit of God when they are preaching as well. Deploying dialogical listening could create the dialogic platform needed to ground us in the present moment with the Holy Spirit and our people.

While we might seek to jump to the question of “how could dialogical listening work practically in a corporate congregational worship setting?” the key is not in the how, but in the what. This is about a changing of our mentality rather than simply seeking a new method. Our methods can adapt over time as needed, but first we need a changing and softening of the mind and heart to believe that those in our church have something valuable to contribute.

Only when our church congregations move from passive to dialogic listening will they be primed for dialogue in and outside of the church. Without it, they’ll remain on disengaged cruise control continuing not to metabolize proclaimed truth.

The Pastor and Improv

The leap from a good idea to practical application is not a stone’s throw in distance, but rather a leap over the Grand Canyon. Before anyone else in the congregation is asked to make this leap, the preacher must first be comfortable with discomfort. They must be willing to step out of their comfort zone. Consider this of most pastors. Most have been studying and preparing for what is essentially a weekly monologue. This is very different from a dialogical interaction preaching environment where the people are now a part of the sermon. The pastor does not have to prepare for random responses that might catch him or her off guard. This is where pastors can take a note from those working in comedic improvisation.

In writing of the principles, leaders can glean from comedians that do improv, Lindsay Lavine shares the thoughts of Charna Halpern, co-founder of iO (formerly Improv Olympic), a theater and training center that launched the careers of several mega-start comedians, “‘Improv helps to get people to work together, where they’re not afraid to make a suggestion,’ she says. It creates a positive working environment, where employees know they can provide ideas without fear that they’ll be shot down.”⁸ She goes on,

In Tina Fey’s bestselling book, *Bossypants*, Fey outlines the rules of improv: Always say “YES, AND ...” meaning, always agree, and add something to the discussion. For example, in an improvised scene with a partner, never say no. If you’re in a boat rowing down the river, you don’t say, “No, we’re folding laundry.” You say, “Yes, and we could really use a paddle instead of my arm.” It adds to the scene, humor can develop, and trust is established between scene partners.⁹

Pastors have the opportunity to build trust with their congregations by being willing to step out of the monological boat of faith and say, “YES, and ...” to how their people might interact and engage with their sermon. For the pastor, improv is the willingness to throw away the script, while still embracing the story. When pastors step into these dialogical experiences, improv can happen in large room discussion, during platform interviews, panel discussions, and much more.

A change of thinking is needed in the mind of the preacher if we are to truly embrace a dialogical model. Many pastors see themselves as writers and have an ideal way they want to communicate the perfect thought. Many are robust in their production

⁸ Lindsay Lavine, “Yes, And ... Improv Techniques To Make You A Better Boss,” *Fast Company*, January 9, 2014, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/3024535/yes-and-improv-techniques-to-make-you-a-better-boss>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

of the preaching portion of their service, going through great lengths to create the perfect environment: using graphics, movie clips, or using specifically chosen music to bring their point home. None of these are harmful; these can and should be used in communicating with our emerging culture. Yet, notice that all these methods are for the most part fixed and decided by the pastor's themselves. They control everything. Laying down this control is perhaps the hardest part of taking up this new model.

To go where the wind of the Spirit might blow in how the people respond to the teaching of Scripture is the aim. Many pastors I have spoken with about the idea of having dialogue in their sermon find themselves deathly afraid of losing control of what up to this point has been a highly-contained part of the service. Yet, the same faith that drives us to preach the gospel can lead and empower us to minister amidst the unpredictable.

Prayer here is key. Such a leap from our routine will require a move from prayerful sermon preparation to praying for Spirit-led interactions. Pastoral spines need to be steeled, and hearts need to be softened as preachers step from behind the pulpit to build bridges with the pew. Rather than pastors preparing only manuscripts, pastors will need to prepare themselves. Like tea steeped in water for a time to bring out the richness of flavor, pastors can immerse themselves in prayer and in the passage or topic of their choosing, ruminating on the truths found there from all angles so they can have a deep well to draw from when questions and comments come from various directions on the text. Time will be key to marinate on the topic at hand so as to take hold of potential rich metaphors that might unlock truths and provide rails for those you're sharing with.

In his book, *Giving Blood*, author and semiotician, Len Sweet points toward a preaching model acronym, EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image Rich, Connective).¹⁰ While not making the leap to dialogic preaching, on the whole Sweet does elicit similar thinking as he points to the emerging generation's desire to be drawn in via participatory messages.

No doubt there will at times be distracting off-topic questions or comments, but as previously discussed, the reward is worth the risk. Dialogical preaching will demand this unique type of preparation as well as an unabashed dependency on the Holy Spirit for discernment and guidance in the coming beautiful and unpredictable ministry that will result.

Leveraging Technology

A dialogical teaching experience comes across as most natural in small groups or classrooms. It is when we seek to introduce the dialogical experience in large group settings that more strategic thought and planning is needed. As stated previously, there are those who believe it's impossible to have an effective dialogic model with over two hundred people.¹¹ There are those who believe the intimidation factor and logistic issues is simply too great. However, the large room perceived barrier can be tackled effectively with various strategies. One of these strategies is the taking advantage of the wealth of technology that is already transforming our culture daily.

¹⁰ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 68.

¹¹ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

Pastors have been leveraging technology to broadcast and televise services for decades. This is not new. What is new is the exponential ease of access that churches and consumers have toward utilizing such tools to expand their online audience via live streaming from various social media platforms. For instance, as this is being written, the worldwide social media phenomenon, Facebook, touts 1.86 billion monthly active users. Their momentum doesn't seem to be slowing. Five new Facebook profiles are added every second.¹² Facebook Live, Facebook's tool that allows individuals to live stream a subscriber's live experience in real time from their smartphone, is being used by more and more churches each week to live-stream their services. However, most of these live-streamed church services are still monological in their method, with the consumer passively engaging in the experience, except for perhaps sharing an emoji or small comment to note they're enjoying the experience. There are numerous current online church models such as Life Church, based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that actively use an online platform where those watching can also share prayer requests and offer questions related to the message via an integrated side chat display.¹³ However, other than an online moderator, there rarely is any direct interaction with the one preaching.

Creating a dialogical preaching experience is not limited to a fixed sermon window. It can also be found in developing conversational moments regarding the content before and after a message. For instance, many churches in the United States are streaming their services live, the pastor or host of the service could set up the message with a dialogical question to prime hearts for the message's direction. This could prompt

¹² "The Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics – Updated April 2017," Zephoria: Digital Marketing, April 3, 2017, accessed October 29, 2017, <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>.

¹³ "Life.Church Online," Life Church, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://live.life.church>.

discussion before and after the message in the room where the church is gathered, conducted online, or a blending of the two. What is important is the creation of dialogue.

What if pastors could create hybrid online/on-campus environments where dialogue could take place in real time? For instance, instead of the pastor opening their message with a rhetorical question and then simply giving their own story, what if there was time for people to collectively share their experience by way of a myriad of mediums: in person at a microphone or note card, by text message, or a social media platform utilizing a unique # (hashtag) or posted poll that could collect input, questions, and comments that could then be read through by the pastor or moderator.

Greg Holder, the Lead Pastor of The Crossing, shares that when he prompts his physical and online campuses for discussion, he makes sure to share the comments from all the various locations to make them feel they're being heard and a part of the overall dialogue.¹⁴ While it would certainly take planned coordination, the model could produce an effective hybrid version of discussion and sharing for those both in the physical and online spaces.

In his pioneering work in the area of dialogical preaching, Howe concludes his thesis for such a model with an added appendix of a verbatim "after the sermon" meeting with congregational members, led by a lay leader in gathering thoughts and perceptions of the content and preaching of the morning's sermon.¹⁵ Here were his questions:

What did the sermon say to you? What difference do you think the message will make in your life, and where did it touch you, and how? Did the preacher's methods, style, language, and illustrations help or hinder the message? Did the

¹⁴ Greg Holder, Interview with Greg Holder on Dialogical and Participatory Preaching at The Crossing, Phone Conference, November 14, 2016.

¹⁵ Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 113-124.

sermon and worship work together or hinder each other? What advice would you give preachers in their communication?¹⁶

While Howe did not do this in real time with the sermon during the worship service, it is dialogic in the sense that it is seeking to engage the message with the expressed thoughts from the congregation. With today's technology and social media platforms, associated questions could be asked online. Social media and text threads could be leveraged for discovering similar content from the church family.

Dialogical sharing need not be confined to only verbal interaction. Contributions church members may have in response to the Word being preached can be shared in countless ways. For example, social media news feeds are flooded with memes. A meme is defined as an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media.”¹⁷ In the past memes were confined to only those who owned and knew how to utilize professional graphic-design tools. Today, smartphone apps, such as Word Swag¹⁸ and Typorama,¹⁹ abound, providing turnkey graphic-design tools and templates solely for creating just such memes. These message development tools have transformed our smartphone-wielding culture into not just message carriers, but content creators. It is worth the journey of discovery to understand how such memes can be used in real time preaching settings as responses to what God is speaking to them. This is not simply a repeating of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “Meme,” November 17, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme>.

¹⁸ “Home Page,” Word Swag, accessed November 17, 2017, <http://www.wordSwag.com>.

¹⁹ “Typorama,” Apperto, accessed November 17, 2017, <http://www.apperto.com/typorama/>.

heard content from the preacher, but original content rising up within them. These could be shared and submitted during and after service in person or online to convey their hearts, and further dialogue among the church family could follow.

The foundational definition of a meme is considered “an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture.”²⁰ The church must be looking at how “memes” are shared in our culture today. Just as new models of cars and trucks come out every year, new “vehicles” of truth are rolling out in society at an even faster rate. Ignoring these new mediums of truth is to idolize method over the message.

Sharing Felt Needs

Consider another opportunity for the congregation to engage with one another during the preaching of the message. The pastor might open the floor to ask the room how the week’s passage of Scripture intersects with their most felt human need. Most pastors tend to reflect on this question in a vacuum as to what these might be. Yet, by opening the service up for opportunities of congregational disclosure on campus and online, the pastor can better apply these scriptural truths to the needs being shared in real time.

Practically, this could be done by creating a natural pause in the service for a standing meet and greet (as many churches practice). This would provide an opportunity for a pastor to sift through what questions or comments that have come in. Dr. David McDonald, the Lead Pastor at West Winds in Jackson, Michigan, shared that he has a moderator that collects these questions all throughout his message and at times he goes

²⁰ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “Meme,” November 17, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme>.

straight to them when he is done preaching without any type of break or preparation. He merely fields the questions on the fly in real time. He states that “a pastor can really build up his credibility by being able to answer questions like that on the fly. Therefore, broad preparation on the topic is crucial.”²¹

Jim Mueller, the Lead Pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Hurst, Texas, extends an open invitation every Tuesday to his church family to meet with him and review the upcoming sermon text. He shares that doing so allows him to know how various lay leaders interpret and encounter the passage. Those in attendance offer numerous metaphors and anecdotes when sharing thoughts from this roundtable discussion. Pastor Jim walks away from this time with a much sharper sense of what his people need, as he continues to prepare his message throughout the rest of the week. Knowing this, he believes his people are writing the message with him whether they would define it that way or not.²²

An after-message question and answer time could also be an opportunity for dialogue between the pastor and the people. While normally the emphasis here is the people looking to the pastor as the expert, the potential for congregational growth becomes exponential if the pastor will take a leap in moving away from being the only one that has anything of value to say in regard to a question in the room.

²¹ David McDonald, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 30, 2016.

²² James Mueller, Interview with Jim Mueller (In Person, June 12, 2017)

Preaching to One Another

In the monological method, so much emphasis is put on the preacher preaching to his or her hearers that the church overlooks the blatant opportunities for the congregation to preach to itself. As has been stated previously, most churches do have some sort of medium for congregational discussion on Scripture through Sunday school and small group models. However, there almost always is a considerable time gap between when the sermon is preached and when the discussion takes place. Many churches have these group models conducting other studies, never referencing the sermon that is given on Sunday. Creating immediate small group interaction during or following the sermon allows the body to process and dialogue what the Holy Spirit is speaking in and through the Word given.

The idea of small group engagement in learning is certainly not a surprise to educators of the up-and-coming millennial generation. Studies have proven that millennials prefer “small group discussions, projects, in-class presentations and debates, peer critiques, and team projects.”²³ The church can learn from this. The writer of Hebrews instructs us to, “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24-25).

An idea to consider would be to give the congregation in corporate worship gatherings opportunities to “preach” to one another by leading them through various questions in real time small groups. Small groups in churches are by no means unique.

²³ Paul Kotz, “Reaching the Millennial Generation in the Classroom,” *Universal Journal of Educational Research* (2016): 163–166.

However, a refreshing take would be to create immediate small groups before, during, or after the message where next step dialogue can take place. Doing so would allow timely engagement on what the Holy Spirit might be speaking to them in regard to the message. Smaller churches have done this, but this can be done in larger venues given there is an invested core of leaders that are willing to invest in such facilitation. Here are some potential discussion questions and prompts that could be leveraged to bring about this effect:

1. What other Scriptures came to mind during the message that you believe would affirm and encourage us as a church family?
2. If you were preaching this sermon, what thought would you have added?
3. What metaphor or illustration would you have used to bring this main truth to light?
4. What are the implications for us as an entire church family if we all began to embrace and live out the truth from today's message?

These are just a few questions that could be used for such an occasion. The point is to move the congregation from merely being hearers to active contributors of the message portion of the service. No doubt, there are those church leaders and congregants that worry of immature or misguided contributors making distracting or unhelpful comments during this time. Honest pastors note their fear of how these might impact young believers or first-time guests. However, the payoff of connection and laity contribution cannot be overstated and far outweighs the potential distractions that would need to be navigated.

As a help, an added tool that can bring understanding and rails to this type of discussion could be laying out weekly standing guidelines that could be communicated in person or by a weekly vision casting video that explains the “why” and the “how” behind this type of dialogic model. Here are some potential guidelines that could be held to: (1) You don’t have to share if you don’t want to; (2) What is shared in a group stays in that group; (3) Be respectful of the groups time by being as concise as possible in your sharing; (4) Avoid trying to give advice or “fix” others in your group; and (5) For the sake of time, let’s choose to stay on topic.

To accomplish small real-time groups such as this in a corporate worship service, it would be helpful to have pre-selected small group leaders that are pre-positioned across the auditorium to help facilitate this time of connection.²⁴ Cultivating and training these group facilitators will be crucial to keep these “on-the-fly” congregational groups on track just as they would be asked to if asked to lead a traditional small group.

This dialogue does not have to happen only in the middle of a service, a pre- or post-sharing opportunity for bringing out congregational dialogue can be done as well. For instance, in an effort to allow his congregation to participate in the art of preaching with him, Pastor Doug Pagitt often asks various congregants that are willing and comfortable to bring a sermon response to the church body the week after a message is presented. The focus as Pagitt mentions is not to critique or praise the sermon, but rather give a personal reflection and contribute additional thoughts that might further edify the

²⁴ Ibid.

body.²⁵ The added time of a week's reflection allows a rich response from many as to how the message resonates with their everyday lives.

Another form of this dialogical method could be to host a panel of congregants that might bring added enrichment to a given topic or passage of Scripture. This again paints the picture that the pastor does not have to be the only expert in the room when it comes to God-directed content. A pastor utilizing this method must guard against coming across as having the "last word" or putting in his opinion too quickly during these types of dialogues because as pastor their words carry such weight they could potentially keep others from investing in the conversation further.

While these guidelines systems can help, above all, pastors must trust the overall maturity of the body and the help of the Holy Spirit to filter out what is helpful and glean what is profitable.

Honest Objections

While scarce in its practice, the idea of dialogical preaching is not new. Many have written on the practice and theory of providing dialogical preaching experiences in corporate gatherings.²⁶ For instance, even before Pagitt's modern, fresh take on this model,²⁷ pastoral theorists were proposing such overhauls over four decades ago.²⁸ Yet,

²⁵ Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

²⁶ Kenton C. Anderson, "Preaching as Dialogue," Bible Study Tools, July 1, 2007, accessed September 22, 2017, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/pastor-resources/archives/preaching-as-dialogue-11547018.html>.

²⁷ Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 55-56.

²⁸ Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 109.

even with the mounting evidence that our society continues to move toward this type of learning model, the church continues to drag its feet in seeking to embrace a new way of “doing church.”

Why is this? The answer is both broad and deep. Most would agree that change is led by pastors in their congregations. It is they that lead the charge in moving or even nudging toward overhauls or incremental change. This could not be truer than with this particular topic.

What would keep pastors from moving in this direction? First, dialogical preaching has not been taught in seminaries, much less modeled by mentors. Most pastors have not been trained or even exposed to such a style of preaching. A pendulum shift such as this could make pastors feel extremely uncomfortable as it shifts their perceived control of the worship experience.

It is not only pastors who must adapt. It is congregations overall that must take hold of a new way. If pastors are unfamiliar with such new territory, the laity is just as bewildered. Though they have experienced such facilitated dialogue in other small group and classroom settings, there can be a general feeling when it comes to preaching that “the pastor is supposed to be the expert; this is what we pay him for!” There no doubt is in the minds of most congregations an emotional safety net with the pastor as “expert,” as there is an assumption the pastor is not going to say anything that would embarrass or derail the church, unlike that uneasy feeling that comes with the thought of the floor being opened up to all comers.

Communication is defined as, “1. a verbal or written message [and] 2. a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of

symbols, signs, or behavior.”²⁹ While the verbal or written message is being nailed down each week in pulpits across North America, the people in the pews are not accustomed to the second definition found above in information being “exchanged.” For many, the idea of sharing in front of a crowd in any way is paralyzing. It could be that people are simply not prepared for their private spiritual journey to be made public in larger settings. It’s simply easier to listen and process internally.

Kenton C. Anderson, Professor of Preaching at ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University in Vancouver, Canada makes note that dialogue preaching is not as motivational:

A well-conceived monologue allows the preacher to control communication such that the impact of the message is intended and deliberate. The best preachers come purposefully with something to proclaim. Limiting dialogue can ensure that the sermon remains locked into the purposes the speaker has in mind without straying off topic toward interesting irrelevancies or even to an alternate or dangerous understanding of the nature of the truth.³⁰

One could also argue that a message’s impact can be blunted by the interruption of the proclamation of the Word, disrupting the flow of thought, timing, and emphasis. What is sought to be proclaimed in these pulpits is of no small note, and seen as precious by those that preach it. The idea of these few moments a week being robbed or diluted a dialogical setting is untenable.

No method is without its criticisms or shortfalls. Pastors looking to move toward a dialogical model must be willing to admit to themselves that there will be some that abhor the very idea of the dialogical model and will push back or leave the church

²⁹ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “communication,” September 25, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>.

³⁰ Kenton C. Anderson, “Preaching as Dialogue,” 2007.

altogether. Acknowledging this before the transformation begins will go far in preparing the hearts and minds of the pastor and his or her leadership team and congregation as a whole.

Leading Toward a Dialogical Model

Putting hands and feet to newly explored preaching theories is a challenge for any pastor. After all, it is not only the pastor involved. There are others to consider, such as board members, staff, and congregation. When implementing any substantial change in an ecclesial setting, a pastor and leadership team must start with the “why.” Pastors are notorious for eating, sleeping, and drinking the dreams and the work of their ministry that they can at times find themselves frustrated when those in their staff and congregations “just don’t get it.”

In his book, *Leading Change Without Losing It: Five Strategies that Can Help You Lead Change When Facing Opposition*, Pastor Cary Nieuwhof shares that there are five categories of people a leader faces when he or she seeks to introduce change: (1) early adopters, (2) early majority, (3) quiet majority, and (4) opponents.³¹ While the first two categories of people many times do not hold up the embracing of the new initiative, the quiet majority and the opponents can slow the momentum needed for the new model’s adoption.

To avoid these momentum killers, a pastor will need to reflect on who might be the natural opponents to going toward this type of dialogical model. Strategic time can be

³¹ Carey Nieuwhof, *Leading Change Without Losing It: Five Strategies That Can Help You Lead Change When Facing Opposition* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing House, 2012), Kindle location 358-368.

spent with these individuals to bring them toward seeing the value, by giving them one-on-one attention. This is especially needed if those that would heavily oppose are considerable influencers in the church. Pastor Jim Rion, Pastor of Westover Hills, San Antonio, Texas shares that “deep seeding” is needed for larger changes of vision such as this with a church body. The “seeding” points to a method of rolling out change to different levels of the church body. The example he gives would be to present in this order: (1) to the staff, (2) to the staff and elders, (3) to the staff, elders, and core leaders, and (4) to the entire congregation. “Layering your message repeatedly with leaders allows there to be people in the room who are not only hearing it for the first time, but a second time, and then those nodding their head in agreement when you finally are presenting to the congregation.”³²

Communicating the “why” will be crucial to all, but especially for those who are hostile to changing the status quo. Painting the picture of “the why” for the leadership and the entire congregation must be about casting a vision of the rewards of the move, as well as giving warnings if the change is not made.³³

In each church, there are driving values that propel the why behind its behaviors and priorities. Knowing and developing these values is crucial to the church’s self-awareness and to create the ability to filter what it will and will not do. If dialogical preaching is going to be the mainstay of a congregation, it will need to move from being an aspirational value to a lived-out value. Bob Hyatt writes this on that very thought:

Even as we've grown, we've loved inviting dialogue into preaching so much that it's become a stated value in our community. As we continue to grow, we're going

³² Jim Rion, Leading Change interview by Nathan Rouse, San Antonio, September 29, 2017.

³³ Nancy Duarte and Patti Sanchez, *Illuminate: Ignite Change Through Speeches, Stories, Ceremonies, and Symbols* (New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2016), 55.

to restructure our community to allow this value of dialogue and interactivity to remain. We're not preaching this way for our community to get to a certain size. We're preaching this way because we find it to be a beautiful thing.³⁴

The list is long when thinking of positive rewards that the dialogical preaching provides: greater participation and engagement, added variety to the worship service, deeper discipleship of the congregation learning to articulate themselves as to what God is speaking to them through Scripture, and a growing joy from sensing that each church family member has something to contribute. These are just a few rewards that can act as examples for casting this vision for having more dialogue in our preaching settings.³⁵

It might seem counter-intuitive, but when casting this vision of a preferred future, warnings need to be given as well. Warnings in the form of posing these questions, “What happens if we don’t make this move? What will we miss out on? What will we lose?” It is here that we can speak honestly as pastors of the continual frustration of being stuck in the one-directional rut that the church has been in, where there’s been a continued dependence on us as the pastor to do all the thinking, and the congregation’s loss of being able to hear what God wants to say to them through others.

As a pastor rolls out to the body the broader vision and the why behind the dialogical model being utilized in services, it will be important to read the body the fine print of the sacrifices that will be encountered.³⁶ The church, in essence, will be stepping out of its comfort zone. Predictability will be lost. Passivity will no longer be the norm. New tools will need to be learned by all as the church takes this leap.

³⁴ Bob Hyatt, “Dialogical Preaching,” *Preaching Today*, March 10, 2008, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/energyofsynergy/dialogicalpreaching1.html>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

When first introducing an entirely new way of doing church to a congregational body it is important that the pastor remember that what might seem as self-evident, is still new and uncharted waters for those hearing about this for the first time. Pastors would do well to guard themselves against disappointment if they sense a lack of excitement regarding the change.

Yet, long before this model ever makes the main platform it's crucial that pastors first take their key stakeholders on a journey to "get there." Communication is needed to move from what is in the pastor's thinking to a practical discussion of how these new preaching environments can be created. After all, most pastors have found themselves in the monological rut along with everyone else. So, grace and patience are needed as we introduce others to this new model.

A key first step could be introducing the initial concept to the pastor's core group of leaders. Most often this is where crucial influencers are found that will be needed later in the journey with the rest of congregation. This can be done several different ways. A pastor may take the core leadership team on a field trip to experience in a church where a dialogical model is being utilized. If distance is an issue, one could leverage technology and watch a video of a similar experience. Seeing the method practiced successfully in some form brings credibility to the model, and avoids those supporting leaders believing this is just a random idea being brought about by the pastor.

Once exposed to the general idea, creating a small lab experience for your core leaders could be helpful. This can be done by creating such an environment in a small service type setting on an off night, or during a casual luncheon or some other gathering. The point is to create a non-threatening experience for those involved. At this point,

neither the participants nor the status quo of Sunday worship has been threatened. Thus, leaving room for potential discovery and enjoyment. Think of this as a test run for all involved. This also gives the preacher an opportunity to practice their new-found craft, and it gives your key leaders a better understanding of how the dialogical model can work and benefit the church. Again, it is much better to sprinkle a new model on them in a controlled, safe environment than to drop this on them on a Sunday morning when it most likely will be a radical departure from the norm.

It is not only leaders that need to be communicated with. There is, of course, the congregation as a whole. A dialogical preacher leading his church into new waters needs to communicate what he or she is doing. Lest his congregation feels they're being manipulated or experimented on. An in-depth explanation of the "why" allows more focus to the benefits rather than the congregation being solely focused on the new model and methods being deployed.

While there are numerous texts on preaching as well as other texts on spiritual formation, there are not many on integrating a new model of doing church that uses a dialogical format across the entire room. Radiant Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, stepped into the waters of the dialogical method by seeking to deploy a real-time dialogical experience in their adult corporate worship gathering. This new environmental initiative that we entitled "Family" was led by myself, Terry Hall (Pastor of Life Groups), and other support team members. The leap into this model demanded adjustments if we were going to keep the church's normal general time frame. After shortening our worship music by one song, and condensing the preached message down to twenty-five minutes, we created another segment of our worship service that deployed

instant small groups throughout the entire sanctuary. We used twenty-five to thirty leaders a week to facilitate connection and “next step” discussion regarding the message.

Granted, there were a few that did not enjoy the in-service small groups and did not return during the series because they did not want the pressure to share. However, the feedback from most was overwhelmingly positive and confirmed what we believed would be the case that most people want more engagement in our worship services.

Rubber-meets-the-road learning was gained in our dialogical church model that we tried in our church for four straight weeks. In an effort to shed light on how we seek to lead change in this area, here is the follow-up correspondence that was sent out to the elder board regarding the endeavor:

As we wrap up our Family series this coming Sunday I wanted to reach out and share my heart regarding this format. I can't tell you how encouraged Terry and I have been in how people have been connected during this series.

One of our members who has been here for several years and a self-professed introvert said regarding the series and Sunday small group format, “I was telling a coworker about how our church has been doing church differently on Sundays, I told her that both Frank and I feel more a part of the church and closer to people than they ever have before. I'm hoping we can do this permanently.” Others have shared that while they were initially hesitant, they wondered why we've never done this before. Remarkably we thought attendance might dip during this series, but it actually went up.

No doubt some feel awkward from the change, but we've already seen the fruit outweigh people's initial reluctance. Here are the continued benefits we see:

1. Brings a small group feel to our large corporate setting
2. Allows discussion and prayer to take place with a given message in real time
3. Allows people to experience a Life Group setting that might not ever give it a chance
4. Releases more leaders to be the “ministers” in the room rather than one person
5. Allows for a “family touch” so people feel heard and prayed for personally
6. Allows us as a church to promote our value that small groups are just as important as Sunday morning
7. Breaks us out of a tired mold of how church is done

Because of all of these benefits, I'd like to lead our church toward walking out this format going forward."³⁷

The board's initial reaction was mixed. While some were excited about its prospects, most were nervous. Most of this came from a fear that we would lose families that did not like it. We recently met and discussed this transition and after some prayer and discussion they seemed to relax and became more open to discovering a path of how to get there over time.³⁸

Pastors would do well to start small. Just as Rome was not built in a day, pastors should avoid feeling as if major overhauls should take place on a single Sunday. Leveraging the above mentioned "why" and the opportunities that could be found in the church experimenting can be helpful in opening the hearts of the church toward trying something new. They must be reminded that the pastor is not experimenting with the biblical message that preachers are called to carry, but simply deploying potential new methods that might allow those truths to be heard and adopted. One could employ the adage used by many pastors when trying to introduce change, "Let's try this. If it doesn't work, we can go back to what wasn't working before." Begin to create a culture of experimentation.

³⁷ Nathan Rouse, "Spiritual Formation and Preaching," (doctoral essay, Portland Seminary, 2016), 9.

³⁸ Nathan Rouse, "Leading a Church Toward a Dialogical Preaching Model," (doctoral field research, Portland Seminary, 2016), 3.

Conclusion

As new generations continue to walk through the doors of our sanctuaries, the Church has an opportunity to proactively adapt to meet their learning style for maximum effectiveness. A recent Barna study revealed the Millennial generation's desire for having an influential voice:

Of utmost importance in leadership relationships with Millennials is to have a strong element of reciprocity—allowing them to shape and influence you even as you shape and influence them. This “reverse mentoring” may be a bit unpredictable in outcome, but it will win you true friends in the younger generation.³⁹

The Protestant church in Western cultures has a unique chance to reflect on the rapid changes taking place in our emerging culture. No longer can churches linger in the past or lean only on tradition for their worship model. No longer can we continue to simply hide behind the idea of not knowing any other way. At every turn, the church can see that our culture is deploying innovative dialogical learning practices because of the changing way in which our culture assimilates and processes information. Healthy churches will not sit on the sidelines of innovation for the sake of not rocking the proverbial boat.

It is not simply committing to ask, “What is not working in the church today?” we can also ask, “What *is* working around us?” The church need not fear new methods. Jesus remains the message. As pastor and author Andy Stanley, writes, “Marry your mission. Date your model. Fall in love with your vision. Stay mildly infatuated with your approach.”⁴⁰

³⁹ “Making Space for Millennials,” Executive Summary (CKN/BARNA GROUP RESEARCH), 2015, 26.

⁴⁰ Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), Kindle location 3342.

On the dialogical model, there has been little hope lent toward the idea of a church-wide implementation of this method. Those who write and speak on the topic do not see a mass epiphany taking place in the Western church.⁴¹ To those, it seems the monological model is too far entrenched in the DNA model of the current local church. However, the model does not have to be written off.

The Millennial generation that stands so strongly against a top-down leadership style and is more aligned with an “everyone has something to bring to the table” mindset, will soon step into senior leadership roles. This, along with the increasing dynamic of the dialogical pedagogy in our society, will at some point cause a tipping point, causing the church-slanted monologue to give way to this innovative model of congregational integration.

A new church reformation can take place in our nation and around the world. We have made strides in utilizing creativity, media, metaphors, and story in our messages. However, while effective, these fall short in engaging our congregations in what they have just heard. This calls for further study and brainstorming as to how we can bring about substantial change in how we “do church” in a way that deploys a dialogical preaching ministry. For it will only be then that we begin to see an all-out integration of preaching into the communal dynamics of spiritual formation overall. We as a church can adapt and adopt new methods to reach future generations if we are going to be faithful to the Great Commission.

⁴¹ Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

CHAPTER FIVE: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The incarnational response of the above written statement is a book proposal for a non-fiction book for pastors and homiletic professors that is entitled, *Preaching Together: From Monologue to Dialogue*. While other alternatives were an option, such as an online curriculum, I chose a non-fiction book format because it is the most widely consumed personal growth medium used by pastors. The book sought to convert the written statement into this format that would expose pastors to the dialogic preaching model and how they might implement such a model in their local church setting. The proposed eight-chapter book seeks to be accessible by using humorous and practical stories, while still bringing substantial educational value. For quality control, the artifact has been professionally edited to help produce the most attractive proposal possible.

CHAPTER SIX: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Book Proposal for:

Title:

Preaching Together: From Monologue to Dialogue

Author:

Nathan Rouse

26814 Autumn Timbers Lane

Cypress, TX 77433

Email: Nathan@LifeAtFaith.tv

Blog: www.NathanRouse.org

Hook: What if preaching was never meant to be a monologue? The church is falling behind in adapting to emerging generations learn and interact with preaching, but there is an answer.

I. The Content

A. Premise

Most Pastors step onto their platforms each week with a prepared one-direction monologue. As a result, The American Church as a whole is falling behind the cultural curve in learning how to create participatory preaching experiences in a society built on dialogue. The purpose of this book is to uncover the dialogical shift taking place in our culture and equip pastors with dialogical preaching tools to adapt.

B. Unique Selling Proposition

If consumers in the target market purchase and read this book, then they will:

- Understand how a shift in our society's overall learning style impacts the church
- Discover how preaching has changed over time
- Challenge the status quo of the current evangelical monologue
- Uncover how other pastors are leveraging dialogical preaching methods
- Learn how to lead their church toward a dialogical model

Because the book will:

- Outline the historical shift of preaching
- Diagnose the growing learning style of our society
- Provide strategic steps toward transitioning toward a dialogical model

C. Overview

The manuscript will be divided into eight distinct chapters.

D. The Manuscript

1. Manuscript status: Four chapters are completed (all are attached to this proposal as sample chapters).
2. Anticipated length: 40,000 words
3. Anticipated manuscript completion date: approximately three months after receiving a commitment from a publisher

II. The Market

A. Characteristics

The audience for this book will be preaching and teaching pastors of Western Protestant Churches, as well as new students of homiletics.

B. Motivations

The audience for this book is made up of pastors that are seeking fresh ways to connect with their congregations and surrounding culture in their preaching.

C. Affinity Groups

1. Lead Pastors
2. Teaching Pastors
3. Homiletic Professors and Students
4. People that attend leadership conferences such as Catalyst and Willow Creek
5. People that attend Creative Pastors Conference

D. Competition

Preaching in the Inventing Age, Doug Pagitt (2014)

III. Author Bio

A. Credentials

I have a B.S. in Church Ministries and Christian Education from Southwestern Assemblies of God University (1998) and an M. Div. in Pastoral Counseling from Southwestern Assemblies of God University (2010). I am currently a Doctoral of Ministry Candidate of Preaching at Portland Seminary in Portland, OR.

After preaching for over 23 years as pastor and retreat speaker. I've had a front row seat to what works in preaching and what doesn't. I currently am the Senior Pastor at Faith Assembly Church, Houston, TX. (500 in attendance)

B. Previous Writing

Non-Stop: Cultivating an Unstoppable Faith in the Midst of Adversity (2015)

Blog (almost 3,000 subscribers): Nathan Rouse: Love, Lead, Write, Repeat. (Copies of my posts are available upon request). I have also had the privilege of blogging for ChurchLeaders.com and MichaelHyatt.com

C. Personal Marketing

I am incredibly active on social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and would create campaigns for publishing. I am also in the process of developing a preaching seminar and workshop that can be deployed at leadership conferences and denominational conference events.

IV. Outline

Chapter 1. The Problem

The first chapter opens with the unglamorous start to my college career. I share how I was wrestling with feeling disconnected in my own preaching in the pastorate and believed there must be a better way. The chapter moves on to reveal the real problem of the continued fixation on monological preaching in today's church.

Chapter 2. The Past

To set up where preaching may be headed, chapter two takes the reader on a brief high-altitude journey of how preaching has developed throughout the history of the church from Christ's own ministry to preaching experienced today.

Chapter 3. The Present

This opens with a humorous story of my discovery. The chapter goes on to outline various case studies of modern day pastors that are seeking to create experiential dialogical preaching experiences in their church settings across the United States.

Chapter 4. The Potential

Theory isn't enough. Chapter four seeks to unpack what forms dialogical preaching could take in a practical setting using various methods and technology. The role of the pastor is now more of a "producer" that brings all parties and

resources together to “produce” the final worship experience. A dialogical preacher is called to just such a production: leveraging technology and new inclusive teaching techniques.

Chapter 5. The Pause

There’s no doubt that such a radical preaching model demands a pause of reflection to examine the obstacles and various arguments that might stand in the way. Here we acknowledge and tackle these issues head on.

Chapter 6. The Passengers

It is one thing for a pastor to go on a journey of preaching transformation. It’s another for the people (the passengers) to go on that journey with them. This chapter seeks to discover how laity experience such changes and what’s needed to help them make the shift.

Chapter 7. The Pilot

Intentional change must be led. To navigate the turbulence of change such as overhauling how preaching has been practiced and experienced. Pastors must pilot and deploy leadership principles to lead such an endeavor. This chapter seeks to practically help in this area.

Chapter 8. The Possibilities

The final chapter looks at the potential future of the church in regard to homiletics. From churches building weekly preaching teams that bring their message as a cast to further virtual reality technology advancements, the future of dialogical preaching is bright.

Dear _____,

I hope this finds you well. I'd like to introduce to you my latest book project, *Preaching Together: Moving from Monologue to Dialogue*, a 40,000-word non-fiction Christian Leadership Book. The book seeks to answer these two questions. First, was preaching always meant to be a monologue. And second, could it be the church is falling behind in adapting to how emerging generations learn and interact with preaching.

As a preacher for over 20 years, pastor of a thriving church, and author of two previous books and contributor to a collective work, I'm excited to bring this work to the marketplace as a resource to pastors.

Please see attached proposal.

Thanks for considering this idea,

Nathan Rouse
Lead Pastor
Faith Assembly Church
DMin. Candidate for Portland Seminary

To Whom It May Interest,

What if preaching was never meant to be simply a monologue? Could it be the church falling behind in adapting to how emerging generations learn and interact with preaching? To answer these questions, I'd like to introduce to you my latest book project, *Preaching Together: Moving from Monologue to Dialogue*, a 40,000-word non-fiction Christian Leadership Book.

Pastors are ferociously devouring leadership books in their pursuit of leadership development and preaching skills. This book offers a fresh approach to preaching while also revealing how to leverage new technology and social media to reinvigorate what, for many, has become a monotonous weekly activity.

Along with being published on **MichaelHyatt.com** and **ChurchLeaders.com**, I've had the privilege of publishing the non-fiction work, *Non-Stop: Cultivating an Unstoppable Faith in the Midst of Adversity*, as well as contributing to another non-fiction work on preaching called, *The Story Lectionary* a collective work orchestrated by well-known author, **Len Sweet**.

I also have an extensive social media platform with almost 2,000 friends on Facebook and over 1,200 followers on Twitter. My current blog goes out to almost 3,000 subscribers.

As a current pastor of a thriving church in Houston, Texas and ministry experience of over 20 years, I'm excited to bring this work to the marketplace as a resource to pastors around the world. Thank you for giving this a look!

Thanks,

Nathan Rouse
Lead Pastor
Faith Assembly Church
DMin. Candidate for Portland Seminary

CHAPTER SEVEN: PERSONAL DISCOVERY

No amount of forethought could have prepared me for what I would discover on this journey in to the dialogical preaching model. The absolute breadth and scope covered in my study of the subject is still staggering when I look back at all that I uncovered: the history of preaching, dialogical pedagogy, principles in leading change, and the new technology I never would have discovered without the catalyst of this project.

I would note that there is a greater understanding on my part as to why the dialogical preaching model has not taken hold in our current preaching culture. Practically, I have continued to find it challenging to implement a potentially pure form of dialogical preaching in my own preaching contexts. One can imagine why there are those that decide to plant their own churches to provide spaces for such radical departures from the status quo. As I alluded to in my written statement, leading practical change is difficult.

Further study can and should be done concerning how the dialogical preaching model can gain more traction at the post graduate level. The allure of the TED Talk type monologue is currently at its zenith, making dialogical group interaction less appealing. Healthy exposure to a wide variety of dialogical preaching methods is the only way that new pastors and graduates will be able to discover such a fresh way of teaching and connecting with a congregation. Faculty involved in developing preaching students must be willing to seek out and discover other methods and models if they are going to empower next generation preachers.

APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: The Problem

“One day everything will be well, that is our hope.
Everything’s fine today, that is our illusion.”
-Voltaire

I call it the Year of the Ramen. When I was dropped off at college for the first time I had one overpowering thought: “I ... am ... broke.” I walked on to Hardin-Simmons University for my first semester of college with \$20 in my pocket, having no idea how I was going to put together the money to pay for college, much less pay for my food that week. After some financial aid gymnastics, I was able to figure out how my tuition and dorm room would be paid for. Figuring out the food thing was another story. Cut to me pushing an aged, wheel-shaking grocery cart down aisle seven at the local Piggly Wiggly. There, sitting on the bottom shelf in three different flavors, sat the answer to my calorie problem: Ramen Noodles. I could buy an entire case for \$2. I was set! The only problem was eating the same thing *every day* gets old—painfully old. Yet, I had no one to blame; I was the one serving it up.

I hit a similar, “I can’t do this anymore” wall a few years ago. I was worn out from not seeing spiritual growth in the people I was preaching to every week. If I’m honest, I was fed up with serving up the same tired method I’d been using for two decades. “There has to be another way ...” I remember mumbling to myself as I threw my backpack in the car after another monotonous Sunday.

It was then that I began a journey of seeking to discover what was missing in my preaching. What I found in the process, was that I wasn’t alone. Countless Pastors I spoke

with felt similarly at a loss as to how to engage their people beyond them simply leaning in to the funny story we happen to throw in to this past week's message.

Most pastors step into their pulpit each week to persuade their congregations to embrace God's truth and apply that word to their life. To give their church families an opportunity to respond, some allow for a time of prayer and reflection in their seats. Others facilitate a tangible step of answering an altar call or time of prayer in the altar area. Yet, these still both fall short in allowing the body to engage with their pastor and one another in what God is speaking to them regarding the message preached.

The first-century church had no way of getting around not engaging with one another as to what Word was brought; they were in a tight community of house churches. Our drift from a tight community to larger corporate gatherings has caused us to inherently lose a communal, horizontal component in corporate worship when it comes to how we engage with the teaching of God's word, making the discipleship efforts in our churches less effective.

The primary component to this problem is the fixation by preaching pastors to leverage preaching primarily in monologue form. Much like the former limitation of the Bible not being translated in to an accessible language or when it was unable to be printed for church wide consumption, the monological method has created a barrier that has prevented dual communication in weekly corporate worship for much of church history. This has created a binary class system of preacher and laity. The preacher being the producer of all content and the laity being the receiver.

All of these pillars of preaching and those that stand behind them would agree that preaching the word of God has never been the ultimate end; it is merely one of the means.

Life transformation through hearing the word of God has always been the ultimate goal. The apostle Paul makes this case with direct brute force when he writes, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom. 10:14).

While the ends and means might be crystal clear in Scripture, the journey between the two in ecclesiological settings is much murkier. Has the role of preaching changed in regard to the spiritual formation over the years in the American church? Why is preaching in corporate settings seen as secondary in regard to spiritual formation? These questions and more call for an answer in today’s American Church setting. For, waiting for each man or woman who enters the pulpit are familiar obstacles that on an ongoing basis side track this intended goal of preaching.

It’s crucial that we dismantle the spiritual formation preaching engine and discover potential flaws in the American evangelical church model. In doing so we will be able to view and discuss obstacles preachers face today in our emerging culture. These components are: how spiritual formation is defined, how preaching is defined, the contrast of how a monological and a dialogic method compare, as well as how preaching is worked in concert with other various spiritual formation components in the local church. Knowing how this spiritual engine works will allow us to bring great effectiveness into the pulpit and the church house as a whole.

Before we approach the deficiencies found in spiritual formation as it relates to preaching, we must first define what exactly spiritual formation is. Suzanne Johnson, in her book, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, defines spiritual

formation in the Christian sense as what it means to be “formed as Christians over the course of a lifetime.”¹ She goes on to note that Christians not only have a one on one journey with the Lord in this sanctification process, but also within the body of Christ.² Others note that spiritual formation or “spirituality” speaks of God’s transforming work in our lives that are closely linked to spiritual disciplines.³ Johnson goes on to propose that what’s needed in the church today is not necessarily more teaching, but more invitational teaching that invites those that “know” about Christ to begin actually to participate with him.⁴ It would seem that all spiritual disciplines that the Christian has been called to take up for our own growth point to us taking hold of this baton of participating with Christ in establishing his kingdom first in us, and then here on earth.

Most believe that while there are spiritual formation dynamics that take place in an individual, much of this takes place in the context of a church body. So, a discussion of what spiritual formation is cannot be absent of how it occurs within the local church. The apostle Paul gave foundational words to spiritual formation when wrote,

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph. 4:11-16)

¹ Suzanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, n.d.), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

³ Bill Leonard, *Becoming Christian: Dimensions of Spiritual Formation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 20.

⁴ Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, 27.

In the above passage, the apostle Paul points to the primary task of Church leadership is to equip the body of Christ “for the work of the ministry.” This formation of our spiritual lives in Christ is shaped by multiple components. However, a keynote must be made that Christian formation “isn’t an aspect of the Christian life; it is the Christian life.”⁵

While conversion is the initial catalyst for the transformational work of Christ, other formative works of Christ driven spirituality are not tied to a specific linear order. They are organic in nature, happening in spontaneous moments of grace as well as through intentional steps taken by the individual, other believers around them, and ministry deployed by local church leadership. Most of the literature points to spiritual formation dynamics working out of these general categories: conversion, worship, the study of the Bible, prayer, fellowship, and service.⁶

The beginning of every Jesus follower’s journey, happens in hundreds of ways and in hundreds of settings, in one-on-one conversations, in corporate worship services as the gospel is preached, through praying or reading The Word, in small group studies, and so on. The list is long. The key is hearing, understanding, and believing in Christ as Lord, and savior.⁷ Examples of one on one evangelism is obviously seen in Scripture, but preaching has always played a major part throughout history and even today in winning souls to Christ.

Preaching and conversion converge in two ways. Those that hear the gospel preached and as a result are converted, and those that hear the gospel preached and go

⁵ Leonard, *Becoming Christian*, 21.

⁶ Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*, 3.

⁷ Leonard, *Becoming Christian*, 20.

and share the message they've heard. Nothing is more central to the discipleship of a believer than the word of God. James writes that the Bible is much like a mirror informing us of our state and where God is leading us,

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:23-25)

The blessing resulting from our doing is growth in Christ as we put off the old man and put on the new garment of Christ's righteousness. The practical side of biblical engagement ranges from individual study and exposure to its truths to group learning environments such as preaching in corporate worship experiences, small group studies, Sunday school. Add to this now the idea that we are in the throes of a social media explosion now with blogs, podcasts, and messages via video. For many that come to Christ in a local church setting find their Bible engagement taking place in a corporate worship setting as the word is preached. Most pastors who feel like me long to see these new believers move from merely consuming Sunday morning sermons to learning to study the Bible themselves. It is imperative that pastors not enable an unhealthy dependence on them as spiritual mentors to the degree that the new believer doesn't learn to fish themselves. Many churches have lowered the bar of the vision and goals for their people's church engagement so as to attract and keep more people. The irony is that there are now more people doing less.

While it must be acknowledged that truth and teaching has been shared via the preaching monologue, it is incomplete and has severe drawbacks. The monological method has created a detachment of the laity from the thinking and articulation of what

God is speaking to and through them in corporate worship. A laity that is not given the opportunity to articulate their faith in The Church will in no way be equipped to articulate their faith in the marketplace.

The monological method continues to struggle to keep up with a changing culture that is embracing crowd sourcing over like never before. This inefficiency is no small problem. We have multiple generations in the American Church today that have listened to countless hours of preaching, and still many go on to produce fruitless, unconnected lives in their local church.

I've not yet met a pastor who does not wrestle with the frustration of not seeing more fruit grow at a more rapid rate in their people. With my people, I've sensed a fixation on the "next" teaching, series, or topic, with little application of what we've already covered taking place. It's an addiction to the new without applying the old. Can you relate? Without knowing the answer, we simply press on doing what we've always even if we inwardly know what we're doing isn't really working.

We've mistaken attendance as the highest goal and in doing so has missed the mark of seeing true life transformation in its people. A disheartening statistic that points to this truth reveals that while almost all evangelical believers believe they should be sharing their faith, only a third do so.⁸ In another Barna poll, it was noted that only two out of ten Christians were involved in some sort of discipleship activity.⁹ This could be

⁸ "Is Evangelism Going Out of Style?" Barna Research, December 17, 2013. Accessed April 16, 2016. <https://barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/648-is-evangelism-going-out-of-style>.

⁹ "New Research on the State of Discipleship," Barna Research, December 1, 2015. Accessed April 16, 2016. <https://barna.org/research/leaders-pastors/research-release/new-research-state-of-discipleship>.

because they're just not going to church. Recent statistics note that 78 million Protestants in America don't even attend church twelve times a year.¹⁰ Another study concluded it was clear that pastors recognize this is an issue because only 1 percent of them believe "today's churches are doing very well at discipling new and young believers."¹¹

What is also troubling is that Barna, a globally recognized steward of Christian Church Research, doesn't even mention preaching as one of the avenues of spiritual formation in the church.¹² One-on-one meetings, Sunday school, and small groups have been seen over the years as how the church has sought to mass produce disciples. Yet, for centuries preaching has played a weekly role in the church globally, but what role does it actually play in spiritual formation? These discipleship models that Barna mentions all have one component that preaching does not: dialogue.

The lack of dialogue in our modern-day worship services fuels anonymity. Too many walk into their church, have worship and the Word served to them, and then leave without ever connecting relationally with the local church body. This was never what was intended. The church was never to be simply a place where only consumption takes place, but where sharing is enjoyed. This begs the question, why is there a refusal to allow corporate worship services to involve a model embracing a two-way conversation? We have worship going up to heaven, and preaching going down to the people, but for the most part no horizontal discourse in our worship experiences.

¹⁰ "7 Startling Facts: An Up Close Look at Church Attendance in America," *Church Leaders* December 29, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2016. <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/139575-7-startling-facts-an-up-close-look-at-church-attendance-in-america.html>.

¹¹ "New Research on the State of Discipleship."

¹² *Ibid.*

Consider another negative of the traditional monological method, the highlighting of the view of only one man or woman. How many gifts of the Spirit through others go untapped because no room or format is given to them in a corporate setting? If a dialogical setting were provided for, during or after the word is preached, many could be released in ministry to share what the Holy Spirit was speaking to them uniquely.

There might be those that argue, ‘Isn’t the pastor supposed to be the expert in the preaching of the Word?’ No doubt this can be the case, but a pastor does not hold the corner on the market on how a given word is applied to each individual’s life. A dialogical setting in a local church doesn’t mean the explicated truth has to be lost, but rather simply provides the opportunity for that individual’s life to be shared among the body of Christ. Rather than one minister bringing the word, many could be released in such a worship forum to be released in edifying one another as the Lord leads.

CHAPTER 2: THE PAST

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”
—Søren Kierkegaard

There are not many churches that can boast of having a neon sign over their entrance. If you want to see the exception take Highway 183 North from Abilene, Texas about thirty minutes and you’ll see just such a sign in the small town of Anson at the Jesus Saves Baptist Church. The sign boasts the eternal truth ... (you guessed it) ...

JESUS SAVES! The sign has not only been a beacon of hope to all those who pass, it's been the marker for when I turn left for my Papa's farm.

When visiting my grandparents as a kid during summer and winter breaks, I spent many a Sunday morning and night attending worship there. Traditional Baptist hymns were the weekly fare along with a pulpit-gripping, Bible-waving, preaching style that west Texas Baptists were accustomed to then. To contrast, after heading back to the city of Houston, I'd find myself back under the pastoral preaching of a more academic teaching style of a recent doctoral graduate that was quieter and more conservative in nature. Later on in high school I attended a church where the pastor was infinitely more animated and passionate in how he sought to connect with his congregation, at times running back and forth on the platform waving his arms in a frenzy. If you're like me, you've seen every style of preaching under the sun and sometimes wondered, where did that come from?

To understand the state of the Christian American pulpit and where it is potentially headed, one must first know how preaching has evolved and devolved throughout church history. The American pulpit, while varied and vast, comes out of a historical context that reaches back to Christ's own ministry on earth. Thousands of men and women have stepped into the fray of preaching in their time and season to preach the word of God as they understood it and with the method they knew. From the allegorical to the modern historical method, hermeneutical techniques have been as diverse as the methodologies used to deploy these sermons from the pulpit to the pew. The blending of these interpretations and techniques have produced an eclectic display of preaching in today's emerging church culture. Walking briefly through the corridors of history will

help us discern where we must go by clearly understanding how and why preaching has developed over time and how preaching has been understood in regard to spiritual formation. If those that preach can better understand what unique role preaching plays in spiritual formation, they will be more apt to craft their preaching in a way as to be successful in this role.

Volumes have been put forth by scholars in an effort to cover the preaching pillars throughout church history. This chapter's speed and depth through history should be defined as far less than a concise survey, but rather as brief snapshots of preaching men that represent an epoch and thousands behind them. One should think of this journey as far above the thirty-thousand-foot view and more like a satellite view of continents of historical preaching.

There is no doubt that preaching has had its place in the mouths of those teaching in synagogues as well as known Old Testament prophets prior to Christ's earthly ministry, but for the purpose of this journey, we will be narrowing our focus from the foundations of Christian preaching beginning in the New Testament. We will then move on to the classical era, from the beginning of the fourth century through the dark ages. The next leg of the journey will take us to preaching found during the Reformation, then we'll end with evangelical preaching beginning in the eighteenth century.

Preaching Defined

The first task we must undertake before beginning this journey is defining what preaching in essence is. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, defines the word "preach" as "to tell people about a particular religion, way of life, system, etc. in order to

persuade them to accept it.”¹³ Dr. O. C. Edwards, author of *The History of Preaching*, defines the sermon as “a speech delivered in a Christian assembly by an authorized person that applies some point of doctrine usually drawn from a biblical passage, to the lives of the members of the congregation with the purpose of moving them by the use of narrative analogy and other rhetorical devices to accept that application and to act on the basis of it.”¹⁴ A key theme to note in both definitions is in the defined purpose: “in order to persuade them to accept” and “for the purposes of moving them...to accept that application.” For our purposes, we will embrace Edwards’ limited focus on preaching seeking to persuade believers of Christian “doctrine.”

While there are some that specialize in hermeneutics without standing to exult over what’s been discovered, a preacher is called upon to work both the dual levers of hermeneutics and homiletics when stepping in to the pulpit. One preaching cannot preach what he or she has not first interpreted rightly or wrongly. As this is the case we will seek to discover, compare and contrast how preachers over time have worked these dualistic levers in making disciples for Christ.

In comparing and contrasting preachers in regard to preaching styles, there are four overarching categories: narrative preachers, inductive preachers, heralding preachers, and teacher preachers.¹⁵ No doubt there have been hybrid versions of these as preachers throughout time have evolved in their own God-given personalities and gifting,

¹³ *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, s.v. “Preach.”
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/learner/preach>.

¹⁴ O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 144.

¹⁵ Michael Quicke, “History of Preaching,” *Preaching Today*, Accessed November 23, 2015,
<http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/bedrockpreaching/200401.17.html#comments>.

adopting and adapting as needed. It will be these four styles that we see rise to the surface as we look at the snapshots of preachers throughout history.

New Testament Preaching

Our Lord, Jesus Christ was the first and foremost preacher of the gospel. He himself was the first heralding preacher of the good news. His declaration of being “the way, the truth, and life” (John 14:6) still resounds today. Heraldng was not his only method, Jesus also pioneered the narrative style all throughout his ministry as he laid out parable after parable; painting a picture of what the Kingdom of God was like.

Yet, if we look forward, as the church of Jesus Christ was birthed after his ascension, no one stands taller in the New Testament pulpit than the apostle Paul. The book of Acts finds Paul preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in formal locations (in palaces) as well as informal locations (in the street). The book of Romans finds him extolling the “why” behind our preaching:

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! (Rom. 10:13-15)

Among the other apostles, Paul led the way in preaching as proclamation (the kerygma), bringing to bear the full weight of the gospel onto his hearers.¹⁶ From his own words, we can see that he viewed preaching as passing on the revelation of Christ that had been revealed to him in Scripture as he blatantly points to in his first letter to the Corinthians, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our

¹⁶ O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), Kindle location 583.

sins in accordance with the Scriptures ...” (1 Cor. 15:3). Preaching to Paul was conveying and seeking to persuade his hearers that which was of “first importance.”

While we do not have the opportunity to read and evaluate what we would now recognize as a sermon given in the apostle’s day (other than the extemporaneous sermons found in the book of Acts), we can see without much difficulty Paul’s sermon writing at work in his written Epistles. Paul was not merely an academic theologian that some have made him out to be, merely putting doctrinal essays to pen for the church eternal, but was a preacher in his own right.¹⁷ His intent is clear that his letters many times were meant to be read in a worship setting as if he was present declaring these words orally, “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit...When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan” (1 Cor. 5:3-5).¹⁸

If one views Paul’s Epistles as sermonic, one can quickly surmise that they are quite different from the pre-Pentecost sermons given by Jesus and others whose teaching rested heavily on a narrative style. Paul’s preaching style heavily relied on presenting his sermons as conceptual arguments. This would not have been new in ancient rhetoric training which consisted of an introduction, narration, argument, and conclusion.¹⁹ No doubt these preaching and writing methods would have been taught in his study under Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3). Most of Paul’s missionary sermons followed this similar outline: sharing of a prophecy from the Hebrew Bible, followed by the proclamation that

¹⁷ Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 24.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 25.

Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy. The claim then is made that the apostles have witnessed this fulfillment; and call on their hearers to respond to Christ accordingly.²⁰

The apostle Paul was a forerunner for preachers in two clear ways. Paul opened the door for the allegorical method to be used such as writing of Adam as being a “type” of Christ. This would go on to be used by preachers such as Origen and others in soon following centuries.²¹ Another aspect of Paul’s investment in the birth of preaching that deserves our attention to is his sermon preached on Mars Hill. Paul’s use of the pagan altar of “The Unknown God” could be considered one of the church’s first illustrated sermons by bringing the gospel forward as the answer to the question that this altar itself poses. He also takes advantage of using Greek pop culture to bear as he reaches for a contemporary poem in his day to bring home his point, “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man” (Acts 17:28-29).

Paul’s use of this secular poem here cannot be overemphasized. In this seemingly small rhetorical act, he opened the door for the throngs of preachers that would follow his lead by using the secular to illustrate the divine. Paul still stands today as not only a pillar and provider of much of Christian doctrine, but also as a pioneer for Christian preachers everywhere.

²⁰ William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 185.

²¹ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 25.

The Classical Preaching Age

By the third and fourth century Christian preaching as we know it was being pushed along by the headwaters of culture. Emperor Constantine's conversion brought church methodology out of what had once been believer's homes and in its worst days of persecution, out of catacombs and into the high art of the palace.²² With the Christian church now in prominence, preaching moved from sharing extemporaneously in intimate gatherings to preaching as presentation. Edwin Dargan, once a professor of Homiletics in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky as well as the author of the robust text, *The History of Preaching*, notes a similar demand on preaching at the time, "The taste of the times required a certain brilliancy and rhetorical finish, and in order to meet this demand preaching must seek these aids."²³ These "aids" were ripe for the taking. Now that Christians were no longer under persecution, Christians were able to enter openly enter into the Roman educational system and learn oratory skills that were once unavailable to them.²⁴ It should finally be noted that this epoch of preaching also found itself with the opportunity to correct heresies that had crept into the church. Inductive preaching, armed with the Greco-Roman schools of thought, was leveraged in a fresh wave that the church had never experienced before.²⁵

²² Michael Quicke, "History of Preaching," *Preaching Today*, Accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/bedrockpreaching/200401.17.html#comments>.

²³ Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1905), 56-57.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Quicke, "History of Preaching", 2015.

Within this adaptation, preachers in the church began to pick up and use rhetorical devices such as introductions, a body of points, and conclusions. The preaching took on the form of speeches rather than the off-the-cuff heralding known previously. While the Eastern church developed the Greek sermon and the Western church developed the Latin sermon, it should be noted that both were formalized written sermons that exercised the deliberate exegesis of Scripture.²⁶ It was during this time that lay preaching fell out quickly as the norm and thus made way for those viewed as professionally trained in theology and rhetoric as the Christian church moved into the bright favor of Roman culture.

No preacher best stands in glaring prominence during this age as he that was dubbed, John Chrysostom (The Golden Mouth), just after his death.²⁷ He was John of Antioch (347-407). Born to wealthy parents in Antioch around 347, John's father (a prominent public servant) died when John was still just an infant. His mother went on to raise him in the church.²⁸ His education as a child was common for his time, but his education in Antioch did offer him the opportunity to study under one of the great rhetoricians of his day, Libanius. He also studied philosophy with Andragatius.²⁹ It must be noted that John was recognized as gifted even by his contemporaries. A modern critic of John's time wrote of John and his eloquence, "the only prose author of this epoch who could stand comparison with Demosthenes."³⁰ John was around twenty-five years old

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 70.

²⁸ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, Kindle Location 2072.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

when his mother died. It was then that John began to study the Scriptures under the mentorship of an old monk for four years and then alone in a cave for another two.³¹ This notable time of stepping away from his wealth and privilege is most likely the reason for his life of austerity that would follow him in his ministry.

After poor health brought him home to Antioch, his formal ministry began as he was ordained as a deacon in 381 and then as a presbyter in 386 where he took up leading the preaching duties for the church there.³² John's spiritual gift of teaching was immediately recognized and enjoyed by his congregation. His apparent gifting matched with his "tell it like it is" personality, made him popular with the masses, but despised by other leaders and preachers.³³ Chrysostom gave this counsel to those preachers that would follow him in his *Treatise on the Priesthood*: "The primary task is to deliver God's Word and to look for God's approval, remaining indifferent to applause and praise."³⁴

Along with his written and oral eloquence, John's preaching marked the shift away from the traditional allegorical interpretation of Scripture to a verse by verse literal interpretation. John had been formed by the Antiochian theological schools of thought that had moved away from the allegorical way of dealing with anomalies in Scripture to the more challenging literal interpretation of Scripture head on.

³¹ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 41.

³² Ibid.

³³ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*. Kindle location 2180.

³⁴ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*. 42.

Preaching During the Reformation

The radical transformation of the church that took place during the Reformation was the partnering of the then considered groundbreaking theology of being saved by grace and the communication multiplying technology of the printing press. The Christian Renaissance pillar Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) edited the first Greek New Testament translated for the purposes of being printed in 1516.³⁵ This translation would bring the Bible one step closer to the common layperson. This was crucial because the gulf between The church and the common believer had grown immense, building on almost a thousand years of the priesthood being professionalized.

It would be Martin Luther (1483-1546) would kick open the door of the Reformation by nailing his Ninety-Five Theses to the cathedral door. To fully understand Luther's impact on preaching, one must first understand Luther's theology. He understood the Word as having "three manifestations: God the Son (the incarnate word), the Bible (the written Word), and preaching (the proclaimed Word)."³⁶ Luther believed that the preaching of the word was just as important as The Word itself. This was not only pointed to in his writings but also in the frequency of preaching during his lifetime.³⁷ When Erasmus wrote that the Bible was all any one believer needed, Luther countered that the believer also needed the Holy Spirit. He noted that "the gospel should not be written but shouted; the church "is not a pen-house but a mouth house."³⁸ The driving

³⁵ Quicke, "History of Preaching." 2015.

³⁶ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, Kindle Location 6654.

³⁷ Ibid., Kindle location 6693.

³⁸ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 95.

force behind his view of preaching was that he believed preaching was the method used by God to snatch the elect from destruction.³⁹

As Luther found himself in exile for his blatant indictment of the papacy and church leadership as a whole, he took the opportunity to translate Erasmus' newly translated Latin New Testament into the German language. This, combined with the printing press finally brought the average follower of Christ into the age of biblical literacy for the common man and woman.⁴⁰

While Luther was certainly a catalyst for the great reformation in the church and helped bring the Bible to the common man and woman, it must be noted that he also impacted how preachers preached the Bible. His passion to see the superfluous walls that acted as obstacles to believers coming to Christ to come down was unstoppable. Luther desired to connect more with the young people listening rather than the scholars critiquing.⁴¹ He was the people's pastor.

It was during the Reformation that there began a push back among the people to scholasticism that Luther found himself (along with other preachers of his day) moving back to the "ancient homily."⁴² Luther led a movement of preachers away from rhetorician back to more of his preaching grammarian predecessors such as Origen and Chrysostom.⁴³ Stylistically, Luther is noted for not stepping into the pulpit with a robust outline, but merely a few thoughts about what he might want to share. One listener

³⁹ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 205.

⁴⁰ Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 93-94.

⁴¹ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 205.

⁴² Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 380.

⁴³ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 205.

described his evident disorganization as “heroic disorder.”⁴⁴ In reading his sermons, one can readily see his practical, down to earth preaching as once again pointing to him being the people’s preacher of the Reformation.

Evangelical Preaching

Building off the radical momentum produced by the great reformation, the evangelical preaching movement brought to the world stage heralding preachers from across the denominational spectrum. The desire to break out of old Anglican norms to reach the masses with the gospel brought at first criticism, but eventually acclaim.⁴⁵ Many renowned preachers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century are recognizable names even today: The Wesleys, George Whitfield, Charles Finney, Charles Booth, Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody. Today, Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr. are household names for even families that do not consider themselves religious.

Though one could write page upon page for all of these preaching pillars of the faith, for our purposes, we will look briefly at the great George Whitfield. While Whitfield’s name is tied closely with Wesley’s as he was in close relationship with him, Whitfield is recognized as one of the leading preaching voices during the great awakening. It was he that transformed for many the idea that revival. Once viewed as an occasional outpouring of grace on a group of people, to that which could be experienced on a “regular basis.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 216.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 215.

The throngs that greeted Whitfield's revival services in England and the United States were unmatched in his day.⁴⁷ What these crowds were hearing was evangelistic preaching being pioneered. Dr. O. C. Edwards notes his sermon structure, "The sermon was usually based on a short text, and after an introduction on and some background, there was the announcement of the points that would be made. After that, the sermon developed topically, with each of the heads having several subheadings, all leading to a conclusion."⁴⁸ By the time he was preaching out in the fields, he was preaching without any notes. This outlined method could be misinterpreted as dry and structured, but the enthusiasm that Whitfield brought to the pulpit, catapulted his sermons to the masses and moved them.

It must be noted that Whitfield coupled his passionate preaching with other unique God-given gifts. He is noted as having spoken to over 20,000 people and being heard clearly without the use of amplification. Admirers and even critics noted his ability to convey heartfelt emotion through facial and hand gestures, as well as the tone of voice to leverage his mastery of pathos for his mission to move people toward a decision to follow Christ.⁴⁹ George Whitfield's evangelical preaching style laid the groundwork for many that would follow him in the evangelical movement. Even Billy Graham (the most recognized evangelical preacher in the world) used a similar style as he traveled the world like Whitfield during the twentieth century. Even now, the ripple effect of Whitfield's pioneering evangelistic style is still heard in pulpits today.

⁴⁷ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, Kindle location 9885.

⁴⁸ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 215.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: THE PRESENT

“If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.”
— Margaret Fuller

Some things are better left in the past. Maybe you can relate. Recently, while rummaging through an old box of keepsakes I ran across an old cassette tape with my name scribbled on the label. Tracking down a cassette player proved to be the real challenge. After much searching in the back of the church supply closet, I found the device now known as the Ancient of Days. I wish I hadn't. What I thought might be a pleasant trip down memory lane, turned in to painful regret as I listened to one of my first sermons I ever preached. In short, it was terrible. While listening I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. What I lacked in knowledge (and that was a lot), I made up for in zeal and passion. After listening, I wanted to write an apology note to every single person that was put through that traumatic event.

Thankfully, that's not the end of the story. While I know I have a long way to go in my preaching, I'm grateful for the men and women that had a hand in my growth as a preacher over time. Even today, I'm constantly finding myself challenged by learning what others are doing today to engage their congregations as they preach. On a regular basis, I'm constantly reminded how God has gifted the church with such a breadth of personality and gifting in the area of preaching.

In the Protestant church setting, most people are prepared to experience on any given Sunday a monological sermon delivered in a “top-down” delivery method of truth. While this is the traditional model, we must ask ourselves, is this still effective? We now find ourselves in the internet age. In writing on how the internet has changed education, Rupert Wegerif argues that the integration of the internet in our society has transformed the way people learn.⁵⁰ Previously, information was most often gleaned from a single source (textbooks, experts, encyclopedias), now information is crowdsourced and gleaned from multiples hubs and outlets of information, both good and bad. This is dialogical learning as opposed to monological. Wegerif writes that “dialogic assumes that meaning is never singular but always emerges in the play of different voices in dialogue together.”⁵¹ Wegerif’s thesis is that people have evolved to learn most effectively in dialogue rather than under a monologue of a “one size fits all” style.⁵²

The church does not live in a vacuum outside of pedagogical and technological advances. If Wegerif is correct, how should this dialogic form of learning that our culture has so readily embraced impact how pastors preach? If our society is on the whole learning very differently, must preachers not adapt?

This was a similar question raised by Reuel Howe, pastor and author, who sought to see a partnership take place between the preacher and the laity. In making his case for dialogical preaching in churches across America, Howe argues that there could be an argument made that the monological format that preachers have used for centuries is

⁵⁰ Rupert Wegerif, *Dialogic: Education for the Internet Age* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 24.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

merely a model followed by those preachers found in Scripture, but is this truly the case?⁵³

In the Gospel of Matthew alone there are twenty-nine instances where Jesus' delivery of truth is either prompted, concluded or wrapped in dialogue.⁵⁴ Jesus leveraged discourse for the pursuit of revealing and delivering the truth. We can clearly see throughout the Gospels that those in deliberation with Christ as teacher played a role as catalysts and platform for truth. Even those with ulterior motives via cornering questions merely proved to provide a delivery system for the truth to be brought to light.

Consider the dialogical sermon replies of the apostle Paul and Peter's epistles. While they did speak to holistic doctrinal topics, they also spoke to specific details they were being made aware of through messenger and letter form. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-15, Paul speaks to a specific sexual sin being allowed to take place in the church that was not being dealt with. His responses speak to this idea of providing answers and teaching that were driven by issues, questions, and feedback from the local church itself.

There could be some that potentially argue that churches have already created dialogic settings within small groups in their churches as they walk through discussion questions with one another. This engagement is much needed. In fact, Lawrenz writes that fellowship is "one of the essentials of ministry, it links people to each other facilitates

⁵³ Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 45.

⁵⁴ Matt. 8:19-20, 9:11-13, 9:14-17, 12:1-8, 12:9-14, 12:22-27, 12:38-45, 12:46-50, 13:1-23, 13:24-43, 13:44-58, 15:1-20, 16:5-12, 17:9-13, 17:14-20, 17:24-27, 18:1-35, 19:1-12, 19:16-20:16, 20:20-28, 21:18-22, 21:23-46, 22:15-22, 22:23-33, 22:34-40, 22:41-23:39, 24:1-2, 24:3-26:2, 26:6-13.

soul-shaping through accountability and support.”⁵⁵ While this is true, it should be noted that there seems to be a chasm between the time a message is heard in our services and when accountability and support are engaged. Our small group environments are almost never done during, or immediately after a message, but done most often at another time and setting. Thus, only a percentage of those that hear the message are put into an environment where dialogue can take place. This perpetuates people coming into our churches having a sermon preached at them with no outlet in that setting for dialogue about what The Lord is speaking to them and those around them. This also keeps people from being able to talk about next step application in real time when it is fresh on their minds and while their hearts are tender to what the Holy Spirit has been speaking to them.

As one of the primary activities of the church, preaching has been taught, studied, and written about for hundreds of years. Many libraries could be filled to overflowing with books on and of preaching. Yet, it should be stated emphatically that true preaching does not happen on the clinical pages of study or under the microscope of analysis. It does not take place in the sterile vacuum of theorization. Rather, preaching happens in the tangible, flesh and blood lives of ministers and congregants. One could easily drown in the theoretical texts on preaching and never come close to feeling the joys, pains, challenges, and obstacles associated with preaching in a real ecclesiastical setting. What seems easy and without issue on paper can in moments become frustrating and

⁵⁵ Mel Lawrenz, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation*, Ministry Dynamics for a New Century (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 87-88.

cumbersome when deployed in a congregational setting as a broad spectrum of personality types and cultures come in to contact.

Before looking to our dialogical case studies, it important to recognize the present day monological preaching method has helped and transformed lives. Countless gifted preachers and teachers step in to the pulpit utilizing this model each week. For instance, in a recent interview with Pastor and author, David Crabtree, lead pastor of Calvary Church in Greensboro, NC, he revealed his passion for the monological method. After thirty years in one local church as pastor, Crabtree has had to reinvigorate his pulpit and himself to keep an edge in his preaching. Crabtree believes that preaching is one of the main catalysts for producing life-changing moments in people's lives. For instance, he points to men and women responding to calls to ministry or breakthrough growth moments coming many times as the result of the preaching of the word. He is unapologetically a writer/preacher. His sermons are heavy on narrative and are excellent at "telling the story." He is known for preaching from a manuscript, but for those that have experienced his preaching, they don't seem to notice this fact. They do note the fresh angles and the narrative approach he uses to illuminate Scripture.⁵⁶

When asked about providing an EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image Rich, and Connective) experience for his congregations, Crabtree did not seem to take hold.⁵⁷ He did not mention any specific ways he seeks to bring engagement with his listeners. However, he does love to use image rich visuals to use as metaphors. Overall, Pastor

⁵⁶ David Crabtree, Preaching Interview with Nathan Rouse, Greensboro, NC, February 22, 2016.

⁵⁷ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 37.

David represents a gifted monological style of preaching still prevalent in most pulpits today.

All of this is especially true as it pertains to discovering effective dialogical and participatory methodologies. While one might be able to practice preaching in a homiletics course with fellow peers, to go the direction of dialogical preaching, one needs participants that are not preachers. It is with this in mind that we move from a satellite view of dialogical theory to observing pastors in local contexts that are seeking to deploy dialogical and participatory methods in their preaching. The four pastors that were interviewed on this topic vary in personality type, church culture, and denominational affiliation. Though different in personality and culture, all agreed passionately on this one point: more interaction is needed between the pulpit and the pew.

Doug Pagitt – Solomon’s Porch

Our first case study is a pastor that is no stranger to dialogical preaching. You might even call him the modern-day father of the method. So much so that he’s written and spoken about the topic extensively.⁵⁸ He literally wrote the book on it. We begin with Pastor Doug Pagitt, pastor of Solomon’s Porch, part of the Emerging Church movement in southern Minneapolis, Minnesota. Solomon’s Porch, planted in 2000, is described by Doug as “a community seeking to live the dreams and love of God in the way of Jesus as a benefit and blessing to the world.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

⁵⁹ “Solomon’s Porch Intro,” Solomon’s Porch, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.solomonsporch.com/intro/>.

After preaching for a decade in the traditional lecture/monologue style while in full-time ministry, Doug came to the point of believing that the traditional model “just did not work.” He felt it was hard on the preacher and ineffective for the hearers, “We have more traditional speech-making style sermons out in the world more than ever before in human history, and we’re still not seeing the spiritual growth we say we are.”⁶⁰

It was then that Doug moved to what he calls a “dialogical progressive” approach that focuses on ferreting out the thoughts and views of those listening to Scripture or a topic. He believes the benefits of this approach are many. For instance, he believes that monological preaching has an application focus (how do I apply these points?) while the progressive style has an implication focus (how do I fit into this story?). At Solomon’s Porch dialogue is seen as a key to spiritual growth when it comes to every aspect of the church, especially in their corporate gatherings. Their normal weekly gathering averages around 150 congregants. They describe these gatherings as wanting them to be “interactive.” His church describes their setting on their church website: “The set-up of the furniture is in the round to help us engage with one another during the music, prayer, and discussion. So, while it may seem a little odd to face people during church, give it a chance for a while and see how it grows on you.”⁶¹ Notice the words teaching, and preaching aren’t even mentioned.

When asked what his biblical anchors were for moving away from the traditional lecture preaching style, Doug quickly pointed to what’s *not* there, “Other than Paul in the New Testament droning on so long that a kid falls asleep and falls out of the window, and

⁶⁰ Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

⁶¹ Doug Pagitt, “Solomon’s Porch Intro.”

Jesus' sermon on the Mount, there's just no evidence in Scripture of anyone preparing a twenty- to thirty-minute or longer sermon like we see put out in over 10,000 churches here in America. It's just not there."⁶²

In Pagitt's mind, there is a wealth of biblical understanding, wisdom, and life experience not being tapped in to on Sundays—namely, the congregation. He balks at pastors who believe they're the only one in the room with something valuable to say on a Sunday, "If a pastor says the people he has been teaching for years have nothing of value to add in a church gathering, what does that say about his or her teaching?"⁶³ For Doug, this comes out of a well-defined ethos that each believer is involved in shaping one another within a church family.

To unleash the well of knowledge in his congregation, Pagitt uses various forms of dialogical methods when preaching. For instance, one method often deployed is having the entire community read an entire chapter of the Bible and then asking for initial feedback before jumping into the message. He loves it when there is a mix of believers and unbelievers sharing in this feedback. Dialogical preaching for Pagitt isn't just limited to Sundays, he also utilizes a sermon discussion group where everyone is invited each Tuesday night to curate the message for their upcoming weekly gathering. When not exegeting a passage they might surround the preaching time around a topic and have a panel of two or three talk about that topic. Other times the preachers at Solomon's Porch will open the last ten minutes to ask, "What would you add? What are your thoughts?"

⁶² Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

⁶³ Ibid.

They also at times ask four or five other congregants to prepare a five- to seven-minute talk on a topic or Scripture to contribute to the body on a scheduled week.⁶⁴

When asked about the challenges a preacher might face that wants to transition to a more dialogical preaching approach, Doug notes that many might find it “hard to let go of the belief that delivering the right content will change someone’s life.”⁶⁵ He believes it’s a “mythos that the word aptly spoken will shape and direct the community. We must let that go. We must be willing to let go of our fixation on control.”⁶⁶ He encourages those that want to make that leap need to first share the “why” behind the decision and “how” they’re going to go about it with their church family. He suggests getting started by using a famous passage that most will know something about to help them feel comfortable sharing as you are getting started. He was careful to note that he believes this can work in any room size. From circling up and sharing to leveraging technology for the sending in of thoughts and ideas, many tools can be leveraged to create a dialogical experience.⁶⁷

As we wrapped up our time together Doug wanted to be emphatic about one point, “Some confuse my insistence for dialogical preaching as having a low view of preaching. That’s not the case. I just think too highly of preaching to leave it to a monologue. I believe preaching is a communal act, not an individual one.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Bob Hyatt -The Evergreen Community

Bob Hyatt, the church planter of The Evergreen Community Church in Portland, Oregon, has been a huge proponent for dialogical preaching since 2008.⁶⁹ Heavily influenced by Doug Pagitt's teaching on the need for dialogical preaching, Bob ended up planting The Evergreen Community with this very method. To potential visitors they describe their unique view of the sermon as,

the work of the community. We are teaching each other. Whoever is leading that morning still has a role in keeping things on track, doing the majority of the talking, but we do our darndest to get others talking to each other as well. In this way, as a community, we wrestle with the Scriptures. We prefer this dialogical approach over the more traditional monologue of one person speaking sermons and feel it helps people learn and stay involved better. The highlight of the morning is responding to what we have heard God say to us in worship, by coming to the Table for communion, and verbally, afterwards, in the wrap up.⁷⁰

Hyatt shared that this picture of a dialogical preaching community all became clear to him when he came to a point of realizing, "I didn't have to be the one that said the most important thing on a Sunday."⁷¹ He affirms that the body has something to share, "I'm not arguing that the community has to offer 30 minutes of content, but can't they give 30 seconds?"⁷²

To draw this content out, Evergreen uses a variety of dialogical methods. One used at times are scattered prayer stations, where the church community can go to a station and write down what God's speaking to them or share an issue they would like the

⁶⁹ Bob Hyatt, "Dialogical Preaching," *Preaching Today*, March 10, 2008, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/energyofsynergy/dialogicalpreaching1.html>.

⁷⁰ "Evergreen Community FAQ," The Evergreen Community, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://evergreenpdx.org/faqs/>.

⁷¹ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

⁷² Bob Hyatt, "Dialogical Preaching", 2008.

community to be praying for. This allows not only the pastors to have a pulse on the needs of the people, but also the body to be able to not only be praying for the needs, but also speaking God's word over them and their circumstance.

Leveraging an opening discussion question before the reading of the morning's text is a common tool used by the pastors of Evergreen Community. Asking a question that they believe the passage of the day is eventually going to answer is seen as an opportunity to prime the dialogue pump at their Sunday gatherings. For example, they might ask the congregation, "What is the most helpful piece of advice you have ever received?" After allowing time for sharing they then make the transition to the passage on the role of God's word in our lives.⁷³

After making some introductory remarks, Hyatt usually leans back into the body to ask what are the exegetical implications of this passage. Bob believes that the beauty of the community offering these observations is that it allows the body to flex its exegetical muscles instead of being spoon fed by the pastor all the time.⁷⁴ He recognizes the unique challenges that dialogical preaching presents to preachers that are used to the traditional lecture style, "Some are afraid someone will say something heretical, and they often do, not just unbelievers, but believers as well." When someone does say something completely wrong, Hyatt will ask the rest of the community to chime in and he says they tend to correct it in a very gentle way. "I've yet to run into a community that doesn't self-correct. It's 100% more effective for the body to correct it instead of the preacher

⁷³ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

⁷⁴ Bob Hyatt, "Dialogical Preaching", 2008.

bringing the correction. They expect a pastor to say certain things, but when the community does, it has higher impact.”⁷⁵

After writing and speaking on the dialogical preaching approach, Hyatt recommends to pastors new to the model to cue to the community. He warns not to try and stump the community with Bible knowledge questions, but start with accessible discussion questions that can get the ball rolling.⁷⁶ Bob believes that room size can absolutely hinder the dialogical method. He has found that when a crowd gets above 120 in attendance, people tend to shut down. Therefore, the community has made the decision that if and when they exceed that number they will move to multiple services.⁷⁷

Greg Holder – The Crossing

Pastor Greg Holder is the lead pastor of The Crossing in Chesterfield, Missouri. He took the church through what he calls a “hard reboot.” The Crossing would be considered a mega-church with multiple campuses and online services where he preaches to over three thousand each week.⁷⁸ Holder shares that his Master’s work in Systems Psychology grounded him in this idea of thinking “how all of us are connected and work together.” This idea bled into his perception of preaching and creating a dialogical

⁷⁵ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

⁷⁶ Bob Hyatt, “Dialogical Preaching”, 2008.

⁷⁷ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

⁷⁸ Greg Holder, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 14, 2016.

communication style that starts with the question, “How do we open the Bible together and hear from God?”⁷⁹

The Crossing holds that “the anointed teaching of God’s word is the catalyst for change in our lives. This includes the acknowledgment that the Bible is the final authority for our lives and the concept of practical teaching for life-change.”⁸⁰ While Holder does not have his congregation teaching to each other, he does believe that they will think of things that he would not think of, “They might be willing to hear it from an average attendee, when they might not hear it from me.”⁸¹

Practically, Holder uses a variety of methods to create dialogue during The Crossing’s teaching moments. They look to provide weekly “interactions” where the room is engaging with the teacher of the week and with one another. He believes this also helps with the culture’s ever-waning attention span. “It brings energy back into to the room, so I usually do it in the middle of the message.”⁸² Sometimes the interactions don’t have anything to do with the message. Hitting this point home, Holder shares that “the content is far less important than the process that they are discussing something with one another. Sometimes I’m allowing them to recharge to get them ready to hear something I’m about to say.” An added bonus of this time of small group engagement in the room is

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “The Crossing Website,” The Crossing, accessed November 12, 2016, <https://www.wcrossing.org/page/586>.

⁸¹ Greg Holder, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 14, 2016.

⁸² Ibid.

that it allows his large auditorium (it seats 1,200) to grow smaller in this community feel.⁸³

These interactions could take many different forms from having a puzzle on the screen and asking groups of three or four to figure it out, to reading a passage out loud to one another and answering a couple of questions. Greg stated that sometimes he would simply stop in his messages and ask, “What do you think?” then allow people to share. He believes that dialogic preaching is about empowering people with the opportunity to give input and feedback. To this, he adds, “There’s an uptick in energy and attention when someone other than me is talking, but the pastor must learn to improvise in the room.” To add to this empowerment, Holder often leaves the main platform and joins the congregation on the main floor to break down “perceived barriers” between myself as the teacher and they as the audience, but that’s not enough. You have to allow them to have a voice.”⁸⁴

When asked about what obstacles a preacher faces in going down this dialogical path, Holder responds with “being able to gain a comfort level with the unknown.” To combat this, he responds that a preacher must “do his or her homework” so that no matter what direction a question might take you, you have already gone down those roads in your mind. In addressing the fear that pastors might have in losing control of the service, Holder advises to “protect the audience.” He does this in two ways: (1) not shaming

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

someone when a potential poor answer falls short and (2) not going “open mic” on potentially controversial issues.⁸⁵

For those wanting to make the transition to this type of teaching style, Holder gives some brief counsel, “Consider starting with a small group. Get comfortable with this type of engagement in a smaller setting before trying to conquer a large room.” He also suggests asking narrow questions so that you are better able to get more focused answers. Holder is emphatic that above all you must be able to say, “I don’t know” when you don’t know.

When Greg considers the future of preaching, he believes that church teaching environments are only going to continue in the direction of interactivity, not lessen. While he believes that there will always be a clear and powerful place for the stripped-down moments of teaching from the Bible without the distraction of technology, he also believes that he and other pastors must continue to grow in their ability to leverage technology if they are going to be able to engage in a relevant way in this culture.

David McDonald—Westwinds Community Church

David McDonald, pastor of Westwinds Community Church in Jackson, Michigan, stands on the frontier of participatory and innovative preaching styles in the United States. Westwinds Community Church averages about 1,200 a Sunday and defines their ministry philosophy as holy provocation through contextualization, innovation, and critique.⁸⁶ McDonald believes that one of the best ways contextualization happens is

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Westwinds Website,” Westwinds Community Church, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://westwinds.org/who-we-are/mission/>.

through engagement in their weekly gatherings. They would define their dialogic approach as creating “do’ experiences in their preaching. Len Sweet, author and semiotician, has had a huge impact on McDonald’s life and ministry. Sweet, in his writings on preaching, drives home the need for preachers to deploy an EPIC preaching style, with the “P” being participatory.⁸⁷ McDonald has made that a mainstay at Westwinds. When asked about what drives this participatory value, McDonald responds,

Church ought to be about what you do. The number of verbs we’re doing in church is minimal these days. We might sit, we might stand, we maybe will sing. We might be more knowledgeable, but our people are not experiencing life change. Church ought to be a practicum. One hundred percent of the time, I’m asking them to do something in the service. I want them to “do,” I don’t necessarily want them to “do with me.” For instance, I might ask them to draw a diagram. That would be enough for me.⁸⁸

One of the key ways Westwinds tries to create dialogical moments in their teaching time is through utilizing technology. This might range from having those that have questions or input to text their content in at the end of a message to using a project management platform like “Slack” to comb through the post-sermon conversations. McDonald shares that his most favorite tool for this type of engagement is *Facebook Live*. This allows for him to engage at any point in real time with those watching online. To help him, he has trained moderators that help “clean up” and “focus” the conversations being had. These moderators would be like trained “altar workers” that help pastor this live medium. McDonald also points out that they rarely have open mic opportunities in their gatherings because of wanting to steward their time and content,

⁸⁷ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 82.

⁸⁸ David McDonald, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 30, 2016.

“The open mic is death. You don’t do it. Using texting and Facebook allows people to focus their thoughts, rather than going on a rant or forgetting what they wanted to say because they’re all of the sudden embarrassed.”⁸⁹

Westwinds does use some other low-tech ways of engagement. They have used anything from pencil and paper to building small tables around the sanctuary that foster natural engagement. “People instinctively know what to do around a table. They struggle to turn and shift in pews or chairs that are locked in rows”, McDonald remarks. He points out that overall room set up and lighting is key to making people feel comfortable enough to engage.⁹⁰

For those preachers wanting to dive into this style, David gives some hard-learned advice, “Don’t memorize your sermon. The idea that the congregation can’t interrupt you is a huge sacred cow that needs to be dismantled. If you want to have a conversation with your audience, you must first be ready to have one. Don’t memorize your sermon!”. McDonald differs from some of our other previously mentioned pastors as he believes that room size impacts how much engagement can be fostered between the teacher and the congregation. He shares, “after a couple of hundred people, no one wants someone to interrupt the message. Most audiences don’t want someone to screw it up. We have to recognize that our people don’t want it (participation) as much as we want it, especially your introverts. You have to know your context.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

McDonald believes the other key for pastors that want to learn to be able to improvise in the room with their sermons is rather than memorizing their messages, they must “have great command of their material, so that you can go any direction the room might take you.” Our previously mentioned champion of dialogical preaching, Reuel Howe, sounded a similar call when he wrote, “The kind of preaching we are thinking about calls for even greater preparation because dependence would be upon the relationship rather than upon a manuscript.”⁹² For the Westwinds teaching team, they’ve learned that the only way to learn is by “getting your reps in.” Lastly, David makes the final point that pastors must relax, that every sermon is not do or die; “We way overestimate what we’re doing in any given Sunday. If you screw up your service, people aren’t going to hell. Do your best and keep growing.”⁹³

Common Thread

For almost all the pastors interviewed above, the vernacular in their settings varied. Yet, words like: progressive conversations, participatory, dialogical, and interactions, all point to the common thread of creating environments of engagement rather than a one-way monologue. Though many of their doctrinal anchors differ, their methods and style can easily be used for the cross-training of pastors across denominational lines. They need only be deployed.

There are some key takeaways that rise to the surface after comparing these case studies. First, there are strikingly differing view on what can and cannot be done with a

⁹² Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue*, (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 88.

⁹³ Ibid.

large group of people. Several felt that after a church is over two hundred in attendance that direct dialog with people in the room is ineffective and ill-advised, while others believe the exact opposite to be true. That while there might need to be some adjustments, it can and absolutely must be done.

It was clear throughout this case study research that there was a spectrum of pastoral engagement in guarding against potential distractions and heretical statements in these dialogical interactions. While Pastor Doug Pagitt has a more disengaged view of this, allowing for vast room for disagreement on Scripture, Pastor Greg Holder seeks to filter this out via technology as in his view this “protects the body.”⁹⁴

A common theme among most of these churches was the use of technology and the belief that pastors must be leveraging up and coming technologies for the purpose of engaging in dialog with their people. It appears these churches that are doing this well are constantly seeking to learn new platforms and actively experimenting with new ways to foster these interactive environments.

There is a clear call from these pastors to have a clear direction of where you are wanting to take the room when preaching, but not via a memorized script. Over and over there was consistent counsel for pastors to drop the manuscript and memorization and to move toward knowing and understanding your material so that you can go many different directions and thus be a kind of a facilitator in the conversation. The church would do well to continue to learn from these pastors who are willing to be on the bleeding edge of the innovation of preaching in our emerging culture. While the message will never

⁹⁴ Greg Holder, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 14, 2016.

change, our methods must to some degree change as our culture does. Pastors must be willing to climb out of their boxes and change while remaining true to themselves.

CHAPTER 4: THE POTENTIAL

“It's not about what it is, it's about what it can become.”
— Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

My wife just turned forty. Don't tell her I told you. Just a few weeks ago I set aside a day to celebrate her passing the four decade mark. I wanted her to have an adventure that she would never forget. So, I came up with three gifts. Two of them have the potential of boring you, but one is another story. For that one, I took her skydiving! Don't worry, she had already mentioned the idea a few years ago, so she was game. The morning of the big leap we pulled up to a small airfield just outside of Houston, Texas. She immediately stepped into a “Safe Jump Orientation” (which they immediately said they could not guarantee) and within forty-five minutes was boarding a small plane for her first free fall. We watched. She Jumped. She landed. We rejoiced!

When I asked her how she felt leading up to the jump, she said “I didn't feel nervous until he opened the side door and told me I needed to step out of the plane on to the jump step. Then I thought, “What am I doing!” “But, it was totally worth it!” she said. Maybe you can't relate to jumping out of a plane, but you can probably relate to taking a risk and realizing an amazing pay off. In this chapter, I want to take you on a journey of seeing the communal potential in your local church if you deploy even a portion of a dialogical preaching model in your church.

Pastors and preachers have been leveraging the monologue in ecclesiastical preaching for hundreds of years. So, it would be understandable if the idea of taking hold of and deploying a new preaching model in a church that has not experienced such a method would feel intimidating. It is with this mind that a pastor who seeks to approach getting out of the monological rut of utilizing a one-way method, must first come back to this fundamental question: Am I only seeking to communicate truths or am I wanting to also build the capacity in my hearers for self-discovery and the sharing of those truths?⁹⁵ If their answer is the latter, then it will be crucial for that vision and mission to remain paramount in their thinking. Without this firm grasp, the preacher will eventually default to “business as usual” by redeploying the tired one-way communication method that they once used. Only when they truly know and hold to this answer will they be able to persevere and bring about such a change.

For this chapter, we will be exploring potential new ways of utilizing and deploying the dialogical preaching method. To go on this journey toward this type of teaching transformation, pastors must remember the truth that Pastor Bryan Wilkerson points to, “Transformative preaching requires planning, so that vision, intention, and means all find expression. But this requires having a longer view.”⁹⁶

It is important to note that when mentioning the term “method” here, this should not be seen as a “one size fits all” model, but rather an overarching umbrella that encompasses a host of ideas now known and even those yet to be discovered. One might deploy one or all suggested versions of the ideas presented or maybe create a hybrid

⁹⁵ Rupert Wegerif, *Dialogic: Education for the Internet Age* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 32.

⁹⁶ Bryan Wilkerson, “Incremental Preaching” *Leadership Journal* 31, no. 2 (2010): 26.

version. Many variables will inevitably guide what is and is not effective when deployed in a unique local church setting: the pastor's personal gifting and skill level, the local culture itself, the predominant educational background of the congregation, access to various technological tools, and much more. The key will be the willingness of the pastor to step out and discover what is effective in whatever the local context the preacher finds themselves in.

Dialogic Listening

The monological method utilized by pastors today is not only the status quo for clergy, but it is also the norm for the laity. This one-way communication style has programmed its hearers to fail many times to find an active role in the church house when it comes to the preacher/hearer relationship. The hearers very well may find volunteer ministry roles in and outside of the church, but tend to take a very passive role in regard to listening.

If a dialogical shift is to take place, an initial first step is needed to move pastors from being simply tellers to dialogic listeners. Active listening has long been held as a helpful tool in counseling and relational feedback. This is proactive listening that involves saying back to someone what we believe we have heard them say.

To contrast, dialogic listening has four distinguishing characteristics. While up to this point dialogic listening has been seen as a tool in group conversations, each of these characteristics holds a potential key to creating robust dialogical worship experiences. Taking these characteristics and integrating them into our preaching events yields a new way for preachers to consider how they might preach with their church rather than at it. Let's look at each of them and see how they might apply.

1. Dialogic listening emphasizes conversation as a shared activity. Usually people focus their attention on their own views in conversation. In dialogic listening the focus is on “our” views and the emerging product of the conversation.⁹⁷

This emphasizing of conversation being a shared activity rather than merely a vehicle to express our own ideas is crucial for pastors to having a transformed dialogical mindset, moving from seeing the congregation only as recipients to fellow proclaimers. Imagine pastors and preachers beginning to seek to ferret out ideas and thoughts from among their congregation rather than only to deposit them. How many hidden gems of insight are we leaving behind?

2. Dialogic listening stresses an open-ended, playful attitude toward conversation. Modern western culture values “hard” thinking which produces certainty, closure, and control. Speculative, metaphoric, ambiguous thinking is generally devalued. Dialogic listening seeks to recover and tap into the productive creativity of this “softer” style of thinking. In contrast to the “hard” style of most conversations, the “soft” style of dialogic listening requires modesty, humility, trust, and a robust recognition of the other party as a choice-maker.⁹⁸

This “hard” thinking that drives the propositional preaching model leaves no room for engagement or flexibility for new discoveries. What would a playful approach to preaching look like? Dialogical sermons offer a gift of incompleteness. They are not already mapped out; leaving room for fresh turns and unforeseen insights. While the idea could be terrifying to some, another perspective is that it brings adventure back in to the pulpit.

3. In dialogic listening, the parties focus on what is happening between them, rather than each party focusing on what is going on within the mind of the other. Stewart and Thomas say, “instead of trying to infer internal ‘psychic’ states from

⁹⁷ John Stewart and Milt Thomas, “Summary: ‘Dialogic Listening: Sculpting Mutual Meanings in Bridges Not Walls,’” University of Colorado Conflict Research Consortium, 1997, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.colorado.edu/conflict/transform/stewdial.htm>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

the talk, when you are listening dialogically you join with the other person in the process of co-creating meaning between you.”⁹⁹

This would be the goal of dialogic preaching, to “join with the other person in the process of co-creating meaning between you.”¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that from this all meaning becomes subjective and truth now watered down, but it is cultivating the process of discovering meaning together. If rudimentary communication takes two, how much more so does the communication of the good news? Instead, many preachers have sought to deploy mental summations of what their congregations are sensing, feeling, and thinking. While no doubt, pastors get this right sometimes, how much do we miss because we cut our congregations out of the process? Along with the declaration, there must be an incorporation of what is preached. This could take place if we were able to graft in this idea of dialogical listening into our preparation and preaching moments.

4. Dialogic listening focuses on the present (what we are doing now), rather than primarily on future goals (what we will do), or on past events (what we did then). Dialogic listening requires that one be fully present to the process and one’s conversation partner. This attitude of being-in-the-present helps each party to unify his or her actions, intentions, and speech. It can also ameliorate power differences.¹⁰¹

When a preacher steps into the pulpit with his or her notes there is a weighted lean toward the past; after all that is when the message notes were written. This is not to say that nothing should be studied, or thought through, but rather there must be a concerted effort by the preacher to be present in the room, at that moment, with the people, rather than a preconceived moment that has been previously contrived. The Holy Spirit longs to

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

be included not only in the preparation but in the impartation. Preachers must consider how they are dialogically interacting with the Spirit of God when they are preaching as well. Deploying dialogical listening could create the dialogic platform needed to ground us in the present moment with the Holy Spirit and our people.

While we might seek to jump to “how could dialogical listening work practically in a corporate congregational worship setting?” The key is not in the how, but in the what. We must begin this as a changing of mentality rather than simply seeking a new method. No doubt our methods need to adapt and change; they must. We must, however, have a change and softening of the mind and heart that those in our church have something valuable to contribute.

Only when our church congregations move from passive to dialogic listening will they be primed for dialogue in and outside of the church. Without it, they’ll remain on disengaged cruise control continuing not to metabolize proclaimed truth.

The Pastor and Improv

The leap from a good idea to practical application is not a stone’s throw in distance, but rather a leap over a massive canyon. Before anyone else in the congregation is asked to make this leap, the preacher must first be comfortable with discomfort. They must be willing to step out of their comfort zone. Consider this of most pastors. Most have been studying and preparing for what is essentially a weekly monologue. This is very different from a dialogical interaction preaching environment where the people are now a part of the sermon. The pastor does not have to prepare for random responses that might catch him or her off guard. This is where pastors can take a note from those working in comedic improvisation.

In writing of the principles leaders can glean from comedians that do improv, Lindsay Lavine shares the thoughts of Charna Halpern, co-founder of iO (formerly Improv Olympic), a theater and training center that launched the careers of several mega-start comedians, “‘Improv helps to get people to work together, where they’re not afraid to make a suggestion,’ she says. It creates a positive working environment, where employees know they can provide ideas without fear that they’ll be shot down.”¹⁰² She goes on,

In Tina Fey’s bestselling book, *Bossypants*, Fey outlines the rules of improv: Always say “YES, AND ...” meaning, always agree, and add something to the discussion. For example, in an improvised scene with a partner, never say no. If you’re in a boat rowing down the river, you don’t say, “No, we’re folding laundry.” You say, “Yes, and we could really use a paddle instead of my arm.” It adds to the scene, humor can develop, and trust is established between scene partners.”¹⁰³

Pastors have the opportunity to build trust with their congregations by being willing to step out of the monological boat of faith and say, “YES, and ...” to how their people might interact and engage with their sermon. For the pastor, improv is the willingness to throw away the script, while still embracing the story. When pastors step into these dialogical experiences, improv can happen in large room discussion, during platform interviews, panel discussions, and much more.

A change of thinking must take place in the mind of the preacher to truly embrace a dialogical model. Many pastors see themselves as writers and have an ideal way they want to communicate the perfect thought. Many are robust in their production of the

¹⁰² Lindsay Lavine, “Yes, And ... Improv Techniques To Make You A Better Boss,” *Fast Company*, January 9, 2014, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/3024535/yes-and-improv-techniques-to-make-you-a-better-boss>.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

preaching portion of their service, going through great lengths to create the perfect environment: using graphics, movie clips, or using specifically chosen music to bring their point home. None of these are harmful; these can and should be used in communicating with our emerging culture. Yet, notice that all these methods are for the most part fixed and decided by the pastor's themselves. They control everything. Laying down this control is perhaps the hardest part of taking up this new model.

To go where the wind of the Spirit might blow in how the people respond to the teaching of Scripture is the aim. Many pastors I have spoken with about the idea of having dialogue in their sermon find themselves deathly afraid of losing control of what up to this point has been a highly-contained part of the service. Yet, cannot the same faith that drives us to preach the gospel lead and empower us to minister amidst the unpredictable?

Prayer here is key. Such a leap from our routine will require a move from prayerful sermon preparation to praying for Spirit-led interactions. Pastoral spines need to be steeled, and hearts need to be softened as preachers step from behind the pulpit to build bridges with the pew. Rather than pastors preparing only manuscripts, pastors should rather prepare themselves. Like tea steeped in water for a time to bring out the richness of flavor, pastors can immerse themselves in prayer and in the passage or topic of their choosing, ruminating on the truths found there from all angles so they can have a deep well to draw from when questions and comments come from various directions on the text. Time must be given to marinate on the topic at hand so as to take hold of potential rich metaphors that might unlock truths and provide rails for those you're sharing with.

In his book, *Giving Blood*, author and semiotician, Len Sweet points toward a preaching model acronym, EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image Rich, Connective).¹⁰⁴ While not making the leap to dialogic preaching, on the whole, Sweet does elicit similar thinking as he points to the emerging generation's desire to be drawn in via participatory messages.

No doubt there will at times be distracting off-topic questions or comments, but as previously discussed, the reward is worth the risk. Dialogical preaching will demand this unique type of preparation as well as an unabashed dependency on the Holy Spirit for discernment and guidance in the coming beautiful and unpredictable ministry that will result.

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY

A dialogical teaching experience comes across as most natural in small groups or classrooms. It is when we seek to introduce the dialogical experience in large group settings that more strategic thought and planning is needed. As stated previously, there are those who believe it's impossible to have an effective dialogic model with over two hundred people.¹⁰⁵ There are those who believe the intimidation factor and logistic issues is simply too great. However, the large room perceived barrier can be tackled effectively with various strategies. One of these strategies is the taking advantage of the wealth of technology that is already transforming our culture daily.

¹⁰⁴ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 68.

¹⁰⁵ Bob Hyatt, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, September 28, 2016.

Pastors have been leveraging technology to broadcast and televise services for decades. This is not new. What is new is the exponential ease of access that churches and consumers have toward utilizing such tools to expand their online audience via live streaming from various social media platforms. For instance, as this is being written, the worldwide social media phenomenon, Facebook, touts 1.86 billion monthly active users. Their momentum doesn't seem to be slowing. Five new Facebook profiles are added every second.¹⁰⁶ Facebook Live, Facebook's tool that allows individuals to live stream a subscriber's live experience in real time from their smartphone, is being used by more and more churches each week to live-stream their services. However, most of these live-streamed church services are still monological in their method, with the consumer passively engaging in the experience, except for perhaps sharing an emoji or small comment to note they're enjoying the experience. There are numerous current online church models such as Life Church, based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that actively use an online platform where those watching can also share prayer requests and offer questions related to the message via an integrated side chat display.¹⁰⁷ However, other than an online moderator, there rarely is any direct interaction with the one preaching.

Creating a dialogical preaching experience doesn't have to be limited to a fixed sermon window. It can also be found in developing conversational moments regarding the content before and after a message. For instance, many churches in the United States are streaming their services live, the pastor or host of the service could set up the message

¹⁰⁶ "The Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics – Updated April 2017," Zephoria: Digital Marketing, April 3, 2017, accessed October 29, 2017, <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Life.Church Online," Life Church, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://live.life.church>.

with a dialogical question to prime hearts for the message's direction. This could prompt discussion before and after the message in the room where the church is gathered, conducted online, or a blending of the two. What is important is the creation of dialogue.

What if pastors could create hybrid online/on-campus environments where dialogue could take place in real time? For instance, instead of the pastor opening their message with a rhetorical question and then simply giving their own story, what if there was time for people to collectively share their experience by way of a myriad of mediums: in person at a microphone or note card, by text message, or a social media platform utilizing a unique # (hashtag) or posted poll, that could collect input, questions and comments that could then be read through by the pastor or moderator.

Greg Holder, the Lead Pastor of The Crossing, shares that when he prompts his physical and online campuses for discussion, he makes sure to share the comments from all the various locations to make them feel they're being heard and a part of the overall dialogue.¹⁰⁸ While it would certainly take planned coordination, the model could produce an effective hybrid version of discussion and sharing for those both in the physical and online spaces.

In his pioneering work in the area of dialogical preaching, Howe concludes his thesis for such a model with an added appendix of a verbatim "after the sermon" meeting with congregational members led by a lay leader in gathering thoughts and perceptions of the content and preaching of the morning's sermon.¹⁰⁹ These were his questions:

What did the sermon say to you? What difference do you think the message will make in your life, and where did it touch you, and how? Did the preacher's

¹⁰⁸ Greg Holder, Dialogical Preaching interview, by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 14, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 113-124.

methods, style, language, and illustrations help or hinder the message? Did the sermon and worship work together or hinder each other? What advice would you give preachers in their communication?¹¹⁰

While Howe did not do this in real time with the sermon during the worship service, it is dialogic in the sense that it is seeking to engage the message with the expressed thoughts from the congregation. With today's technology and social media platforms, associated questions could be asked online. Social media and text threads could be leveraged for discovering similar content from the church family.

Dialogical sharing need not be confined to only verbal interaction. Contributions church members may have in response to the Word being preached can be shared in countless ways. For example, social media news feeds are flooded with memes. A meme is defined as an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media."¹¹¹ In the past memes were confined to only those who owned and knew how to utilize professional graphic-design tools. Today, smartphone apps, such as Word Swag¹¹² and Typorama,¹¹³ abound; providing turnkey graphic-design tools and templates solely for creating just such memes. These message development tools have transformed our smartphone wielding culture into not just message carriers, but content creators. It is worth the journey of discovery to understand how such memes can be used in real time preaching settings as responses to what God is speaking to them. This is not simply a repeating of

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "Meme", November 17, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme>.

¹¹² "Home Page," Word Swag, accessed November 17, 2017, <http://www.wordSwag.com>.

¹¹³ "Typorama," Apperto, accessed November 17, 2017, <http://www.apperto.com/typorama/>.

heard content from the preacher, but original content rising up within them. These could be shared and submitted during and after service in person or online to convey their hearts and further dialogue among the church family could follow.

The foundational definition of a meme is considered “an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture.”¹¹⁴ The church must be looking at how “memes” are shared in our culture today. Just as new models of cars and trucks come out every year, new ‘vehicles’ of truth are rolling out in society at an even faster rate. Ignoring these new mediums of truth is to idolize method over the message.

SHARED FELT NEEDS

Consider another opportunity for the congregation to engage with one another during the preaching of the message. The pastor might open the floor to ask the room how the week’s passage of Scripture intersects with their most felt human need. Most pastors tend to reflect on this question in a vacuum as to what these might be. Yet, by opening the service up for opportunities of congregational disclosure on campus and online, the pastor can better apply these scriptural truths to the needs being shared in real time.

Practically, this could be done by creating a natural pause in the service for a standing meet and greet (as many churches practice). This would provide an opportunity for a pastor to sift through what questions or comments that have come in. Dr. David McDonald, the Lead Pastor at West Winds in Jackson, Michigan, shared that he has a moderator that collects these questions all throughout his message and at times he goes

¹¹⁴ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “Meme”, November 17, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme>.

straight to them when he is done preaching without any type of break or preparation. He merely fields the questions on the fly in real time. He states that “a pastor can really build up his credibility by being able to answer questions like that on the fly. Therefore, broad preparation on the topic is crucial.”¹¹⁵

Jim Mueller, the Lead Pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Hurst, Texas, extends an open invitation every Tuesday to his church family to meet with him and review the upcoming sermon text. He shares that doing so allows him to know how various lay leaders interpret and encounter the passage. Those in attendance offer numerous metaphors and anecdotes when sharing thoughts from this roundtable discussion. Pastor Jim walks away from this time with a much sharper sense of what his people need as he continues to prepare his message throughout the rest of the week. Knowing this, he believes his people are writing the message with him whether they would define it that way or not.¹¹⁶

An after-message question and answer time could also be an opportunity for dialogue between the pastor and the people. While normally the emphasis here is the people looking to the pastor as the expert, the potential for congregational growth becomes exponential if the pastor will take a leap in moving away from being the only one that has anything of value to say in regard to a question in the room.

¹¹⁵ David McDonald, Dialogical Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 30, 2016.

¹¹⁶ James Mueller, Preaching interview by Nathan Rouse, Orcas Island, June 12, 2017.

PREACHING TO ONE ANOTHER

In the monological method, so much emphasis is put on the preacher preaching to his or her hearers, that the church overlooks the blatant opportunities for the congregation to preach to itself. As has been stated previously, most churches do have some sort of medium for congregational discussion on Scripture through Sunday school and small group models. However, there almost always is a considerable time gap between when the sermon is preached, and when the discussion takes place. Many churches have these group models conducting other studies, never referencing the sermon that is given on Sunday. Creating immediate small group interaction during or following the sermon allows the body to process and dialogue what the Holy Spirit is speaking in and through the Word given.

The idea of small group engagement in learning is certainly not a surprise to educators of the up and coming millennial generation. Studies have proven that millennials prefer “small group discussions, projects, in-class presentations and debates, peer critiques, and team projects.”¹¹⁷ The church can learn from this. The writer of Hebrews instructs us to, “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24-25).

An idea to consider would be to give the congregation in corporate worship gatherings opportunities to “preach” to one another by leading them through various questions in real time small groups. Small groups in churches are by no means unique.

¹¹⁷ Paul Kotz, “Reaching the Millennial Generation in the Classroom” *Universal Journal of Educational Research* (2016): 163–166.

However, a refreshing take would be to create immediate small groups before, during, or after the message where next step dialogue can take place. Doing so would allow timely engagement on what the Holy Spirit might be speaking to them in regard to the message. Smaller churches have done this, but this can be done in larger venues given there is an invested core of leaders that are willing to invest in such facilitation. Here are some potential discussion questions and prompts that could be leveraged to bring about this effect:

1. What other Scriptures came to mind during the message that you believe would affirm and encourage us as a church family?
2. If you were preaching this sermon, what thought would you have added?
3. What metaphor or illustration would you have used to bring this main truth to light?
4. What are the implications for us as an entire church family if we all began to embrace and live out the truth from today's message?

These are just a few questions that could be used for such an occasion. The point is to move the congregation from merely being hearers to active contributors of the message portion of the service. No doubt, there are those church leaders and congregants that worry of immature or misguided contributors making distracting or unhelpful comments during this time. Honest pastors note their fear of how these might impact young believers or first-time guests. However, the payoff of connection and laity contribution cannot be overstated; and far outweighs the potential distractions that would need to be navigated.

As a help, an added tool that can bring understanding and rails to this type of discussion could be laying out weekly standing guidelines that could be communicated in person or by a weekly vision casting video that explains the “why” and the “how” behind this type of dialogic model. Here are some potential guidelines that could be held to: (1)

You don't have to share if you don't want to; (2) What is shared in a group stays in that group; (3) Be respectful of the groups time by being as concise as possible in your sharing; (4) Avoid trying to give advice or "fix" others in your group; and (5) For the sake of time, let's choose to stay on topic.

To accomplish small real-time groups such as this in corporate worship service, it would be helpful to have pre-selected small group leaders that are pre-positioned across the auditorium to help facilitate this time of connection.¹¹⁸ Cultivating and training these group facilitators will be crucial to keep these "on the fly" congregational groups on track just as they would be asked to if asked to lead a traditional small group.

This dialogue does not have to happen only in the middle of a service, a pre or post sharing opportunity for bringing out congregational dialogue can be done as well. For instance, in an effort to allow his congregation to participate in the art of preaching with him, Pastor Doug Pagitt often asks various congregants that are willing and comfortable to bring a sermon response to the church body the week after a message is presented. The focus as Pagitt mentions is not to critique or praise the sermon, but rather give a personal reflection and contribute additional thoughts that might further edify the body.¹¹⁹ The added time of a week's reflection allows a rich response from many as to how the message resonates with their everyday lives.

Another form of this dialogical method could be to host a panel of congregants that might bring added enrichment to a given topic or passage of Scripture. This again paints the picture that the pastor does not have to be the only expert in the room when it

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

comes to God-directed content. A pastor utilizing this method must guard against coming across as having the “last word” or putting in his opinion too quickly during these types of dialogues because as pastor their words carry such weight they could potentially keep others from investing in the conversation further.

While these guidelines systems can help, above all pastors must trust the overall maturity of the body and the help of the Holy Spirit to filter out what is helpful and glean what is profitable.

CHAPTER 5: THE PAUSE

“Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress.”
-Mahatma Gandhi

I know what it’s like to try things and fail. You might call me an expert. I have experimented in ministry and discovered the sting of something not going over the way I hoped it would many times. In 2014, I created a discipleship opportunity for our church family that sought to walk our church through the basics of what it means to be not only a disciple of Jesus but a disciple maker of Jesus. While the church embraced the new teaching series at first, when the realization came that I wanted them to take tangible steps toward pouring in to others, it flopped. Why? No one wanted to do it. Oh, there were a few that jumped in and I was grateful, but for the most part, it was a resounding dud.

Trying a new way can be daunting, especially if you have experienced the jading effect of swings and misses in ministry. Stepping up to the plate to create a new preaching model in your local setting is not easy and there are some honest objections to the dialogical preaching model, as have been described. Let’s pause for a moment and look at them.

While scarce in its practice, the idea of dialogical preaching is not new. Many have written on the practice and theory of providing dialogical preaching experiences in corporate gatherings.¹²⁰ For instance, even before Pagitt’s modern, fresh take on this

¹²⁰ Kenton C. Anderson, “Preaching as Dialogue” Bible Study Tools, July 1, 2007, accessed September 22, 2017, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/pastor-resources/archives/preaching-as-dialogue-11547018.html>.

model,¹²¹ pastoral theorists were proposing such overhauls over four decades ago.¹²² Yet even with the mounting evidence that our society continues to move toward this type of learning model, the church continues to drag its feet in seeking to embrace a new way of “doing church.”

Why is this? The answer is both broad and deep. Most would agree that change is led by pastors in their congregations. It is they that lead the charge in moving or even nudging toward overhauls or incremental change. This could not be truer than with this particular topic.

What would keep pastors from moving in this direction? First, dialogical preaching has not been taught in seminaries, much less modeled by mentors. Most pastors have not been trained or even exposed to such a style of preaching. A pendulum shift such as this could make pastors feel extremely uncomfortable as it shifts their perceived control of the worship experience.

It is not only pastors who must adapt. It is congregations overall that must take hold of a new way. If pastors are unfamiliar with such new territory, the laity is just as bewildered. Though they have experienced such facilitated dialogue in other small group and classroom settings, there can be a general feeling when it comes to preaching that “the pastor is supposed to be the expert; this is what we pay him for!” There no doubt is in the minds of most congregations an emotional safety net with the pastor as “expert,” as there is an assumption the pastor is not going to say anything that would embarrass or

¹²¹ Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 55-56.

¹²² Reuel Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue*. (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1967), 109.

derail the church, unlike that uneasy feeling that comes with the thought of the floor being opened up to all comers.

Communication is defined as, “1. a verbal or written message [and] 2. a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.”¹²³ While the verbal or written message is being nailed down each week in pulpits across North America, the people in the pews are not accustomed to the second definition found above in information being “exchanged.” For many, the idea of sharing in front of a crowd in any way is paralyzing. It could be that people are simply not prepared for their private spiritual journey to be made public in larger settings. It’s simply easier to listen and process internally.

Kenton C. Anderson, Professor of Preaching at ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University in Vancouver, Canada makes note that dialogue preaching is not as motivational,

A well-conceived monologue allows the preacher to control communication such that the impact of the message is intended and deliberate. The best preachers come purposefully with something to proclaim. Limiting dialogue can ensure that the sermon remains locked into the purposes the speaker has in mind without straying off topic toward interesting irrelevancies or even to an alternate or dangerous understanding of the nature of the truth.¹²⁴

One could also argue that a message’s impact can be blunted by the interruption of the proclamation of the Word, disrupting the flow of thought, timing, and emphasis. What is sought to be proclaimed in these pulpits is of no small note, and seen as precious by those

¹²³ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “communication”, September 25, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>.

¹²⁴ Kenton C. Anderson, “Preaching as Dialogue,” 2007.

that preach it. The idea of these few moments a week being robbed or diluted in a dialogical setting is untenable.

No method is without its criticisms or shortfalls. Pastors looking to move toward a dialogical model must be willing to admit to themselves that there will be some that abhor the very idea of the dialogical model and will push back or leave the church altogether. Acknowledging this before the transformation begins will go far in preparing the hearts and minds of the pastor and his or her leadership team, and congregation as a whole.

CHAPTER 7: THE PILOT

“Innovation—the heart of the knowledge economy—is fundamentally social.”
— Malcolm Gladwell

Dropping ten thousand feet faster than my stomach could handle, I gripped the arm rests of my seat and looked up to my mom with both a question and declaration, “Are we going to die?” and “I think I’m going to throw ...” My mother’s intuition had already kicked in, and before I knew it my head was being shoved into an airline vomit bag. (She definitely earned her mother’s pay that night). We were on a red-eye flight from California to Texas when we ran smack dab into a massive thunderstorm and were tossed around like my dog Sarge’s play toy.

Though I was only seven at the time, I clearly remember my mom squeezing my hand (cutting off the circulation) as she looked up and prayed, “God, please don’t let us die.” (I don’t recommend saying this audibly in front of your kids. It doesn’t calm a kid down.) However, the immediate benefit was that I began to pray along with her, believing that if we teamed up we were bound to get a faster response from the Lord. We must have gotten through, because we soon safely landed with a collective applause from all passengers, and I asked my mom to release the death grip she had on my hand. An added memory of that experience was just how calm the pilot seemed to be through it all, his voice never wavering or cracking as he spoke to us over the intercom.

It is just such sure-handed navigation that is needed if a pastor is going to pilot his people through the turbulent air of change. Putting hands and feet to newly explored preaching theories is a challenge for any pastor. After all, it is not only the pastor involved; there are others to consider, such as board members, staff, and congregation.

When implementing any substantial change in an ecclesial setting, a pastor and leadership team must start with the “why.” Pastors are notorious for eating, sleeping, and drinking the dreams and the work of their ministry that they can at times find themselves frustrated when those in their staff and congregations “just don’t get it.”

In his book, *Leading Change Without Losing It: Five Strategies that can Help You Lead Change When Facing Opposition*, Pastor Cary Nieuwhof shares that there are five categories of people a leader faces when he or she seeks to introduce change: (1) early adopters, (2) early majority, (3) quiet majority, and (4) opponents.¹²⁵ While the first two categories of people many times do not hold up the embracing of the new initiative, the quiet majority and the opponents can slow the momentum needed for the new model’s adoption.

To avoid these momentum killers, a pastor must reflect on who might be the natural opponents to going toward this type of dialogical model. Strategic time can be spent with these individuals to bring them toward seeing the value, by giving them one-on-one attention. This is especially needed if those that would heavily oppose are considerable influencers in the church. Pastor Jim Rion, Pastor of Westover Hills, San Antonio, Texas shares that “deep seeding” is needed for larger changes of vision such as this with a church body. The “seeding” points to a method of rolling out change to different levels of the church body. The example he gives would be to present in this order: (1) to the staff, (2) to the staff and elders, (3) to the staff, elders, and core leaders, and (4) to the entire congregation. “Layering your message repeatedly with leaders

¹²⁵ Carey Nieuwhof, *Leading Change Without Losing It: Five Strategies That Can Help You Lead Change When Facing Opposition* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing House, 2012), Kindle location 358-368.

allows there to be people in the room who are not only hearing it for the first time, but a second time, and then those nodding their head in agreement when you finally are presenting to the congregation.”¹²⁶

Communicating the “why” will be crucial to all, but especially for those who are hostile to changing the status quo. While facts and data are crucial, the most effective tool is using a story that illuminates the “why” behind where you are going. Here is just one example.

For several years I led our church toward a massive renovation of our aging church campus. While I had page upon page of items that needed to be fixed or overhauled to get us where we needed to be, I decided instead to use a story that pointed to the “why” behind it all. I shared with our core leaders and eventually our church family about how in the late 1800s my great, great grandfather left his saw mill in northern Arkansas with a wagon load of wood for the sole purpose of finding a place in south Texas near family to build a church with that wood that would last long after he did. After feeling blessed with his own sawmill, he saw this as a way to give back to the Lord’s work on earth. Little did I know that one day I would be asked to preach in that same church, to stand on the very foundation that he laid. I shared with our congregation that we never know how God is going to use our investments for the future. The story resonated deeply with the people. I believe this is because it tapped in to the desire that is found in every one of us: we all want to leave a mark that lasts in our lives. Stories have the power to bring life to potentially drab, dry, numbers and statistics.

¹²⁶ Jim Rion, Leading Change interview by Nathan Rouse, San Antonio, September 29, 2017.

Painting the picture of “the why” for the leadership and the entire congregation must not be about casting a vision of the rewards that will be found in the move, it must also give warnings if the change is not made¹²⁷—warnings in the form of posing these questions, “What happens if we don’t make this move? What will we miss out on? What will we lose?” It is here that we can speak honestly as pastors of the continual frustration of being stuck in the one-directional rut that the church has been in, where there has been a continued dependence on us as the pastor to do all the thinking, and the congregation’s loss of being able to hear what God wants to say to them through others.

In that same renovation vision, I gently rang particular warning bells if the church did not take hold of this opportunity to do what needed to be done with the church’s long list of deferred maintenance: mounting debt would be incurred, that debt would most likely be paid for by the next generation, and finally the church would find itself continuing to invest more and more in buildings rather than people. The “why” must be defined by wins and warnings.

In each church, there are driving values that propel the why behind its behaviors and priorities. Knowing and developing these values is crucial to the church’s self-awareness and to create the ability to filter what it will and will not do. If dialogical preaching is going to be the mainstay of a congregation, it must move from being an aspirational value to a lived-out value. Bob Hyatt writes this on that very thought,

Even as we’ve grown, we’ve loved inviting dialogue into preaching so much that it’s become a stated value in our community. As we continue to grow, we’re going to restructure our community to allow this value of dialogue and interactivity to

¹²⁷ Nancy Duarte and Patti Sanchez, *Illuminate: Ignite Change Through Speeches, Stories, Ceremonies, and Symbols* (New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2016), 55.

remain. We're not preaching this way for our community to get to a certain size. We're preaching this way because we find it to be a beautiful thing.¹²⁸

The list is long when thinking of positive rewards that the dialogical preaching provides: greater participation and engagement, added variety to the worship service, deeper discipleship of the congregation learning to articulate themselves as to what God is speaking to them through Scripture, and a growing joy from sensing that each church family member has something to contribute. These are just a few rewards that can act as examples for casting this vision for having more dialogue in our preaching settings.¹²⁹

As a pastor rolls out to the body the broader vision and the why behind the dialogical model being utilized in services, it will be important to read the body the fine print of the sacrifices that will be encountered.¹³⁰ The church, in essence, will be stepping out of its comfort zone. Predictability will be lost. Passivity will no longer be the norm. New tools will need to be learned by all as the church takes this leap.

When first introducing an entirely new way of doing church to a congregational body it is important that the pastor remember that what might seem as self-evident, is still new and uncharted waters for those hearing about this for the first time. Pastors must guard themselves against disappointment if they sense a lack of excitement regarding the change.

Yet, long before this model ever makes the main platform it's crucial that pastors first take their key stakeholders on a journey to "get there." Communication is needed to

¹²⁸ Bob Hyatt, "Dialogical Preaching," (*Preaching Today*, March 10, 2008), <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/energyofsynergy/dialogicalpreaching1.html>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

move from what is in the pastor's thinking to a practical discussion of how these new preaching environments can be created. After all, most pastors have found themselves in the monological rut along with everyone else. So, grace and patience are needed as we introduce others to this new model.

A key first step could be introducing the initial concept to the pastor's core group of leaders. Most often this is where crucial influencers are found that will be needed later in the journey with the rest of congregation. This can be done several different ways. A pastor may take the core leadership team on a field trip to experience in a church where a dialogical model is being utilized. If distance is an issue, one could leverage technology and watch a video of a similar experience. This is the method I used with our leaders when seeking their buy in toward leveraging a more dialogical preaching experience in our services. I rounded up clips of just such examples of pastors using these methods and highlighted the engagement that was evident. Seeing the method practiced successfully in some form brings credibility to the model, and avoids those supporting leaders believing this is just a random idea being brought about by the pastor.

Once exposed to the general idea, creating a small lab experience for your core leaders could be helpful. This can be done by creating such an environment in a small service type setting on an off night, or during a casual luncheon or some other gathering. The point is to create a non-threatening experience for those involved. At this point, neither the participants nor the status quo of Sunday worship has been threatened. Thus, leaving room for potential discovery and enjoyment. Think of this as test runs for all involved. This also gives the preacher an opportunity to practice their new-found craft, and it gives your key leaders a better understanding of how the dialogical model can

work and benefit the church. Again, it is much better to sprinkle a new model on them in a controlled, safe environment than to drop this on them on a Sunday morning when it most likely will be a radical departure from the norm.

It is not only leaders that need to be communicated with. There is, of course, is the congregation as a whole. A dialogical preacher leading his church into new waters needs to communicate what he or she is doing. Lest his congregation feels they're being manipulated or experimented on. An in-depth explanation of the "why" allows more focus to the benefits rather than the congregation being solely focused on the new model and methods being deployed.

While there are numerous texts on preaching as well as other texts on spiritual formation, there are not many on integrating a new model of doing church that uses a dialogical format across the entire room. Radiant Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, stepped into the waters of the dialogical method by seeking to deploy a real-time dialogical experience in their adult corporate worship gathering. This new environmental initiative that we entitled "Family" was led by myself, Terry Hall (Pastor of Life Groups), and other support team members. The leap into this model demanded adjustments if we were going to keep the church's normal general time frame. After shortening our worship music by one song, and condensing the preached message down to twenty-five minutes, we created another segment of our worship service that deployed instant small groups throughout the entire sanctuary. We used twenty-five to thirty leaders a week to facilitate connection and "next step" discussion regarding the message. Granted, there were a few that did not enjoy the in-service small groups and did not return during the series because they did not want the pressure to share. However, the

feedback from most was overwhelmingly positive and confirmed what we believed would be the case that most people want more engagement in our worship services.

Rubber meets the road learning was gained in our dialogical church model that we tried in our church for four straight weeks. In an effort to shed light on how we seek to lead change in this area, here is the follow-up correspondence that was sent out to the elder board regarding the endeavor:

As we wrap up our Family series this coming Sunday I wanted to reach out and share my heart regarding this format. I can't tell you how encouraged Terry and I have been in how people have been connected during this series.

One of our members who has been here for several years and a self-professed introvert said regarding the series and Sunday small group format, "I was telling a coworker about how our church has been doing church differently on Sundays, I told her that both Frank and I feel more a part of the church and closer to people than they ever have before. I'm hoping we can do this permanently." Others have shared that while they were initially hesitant, they wondered why we've never done this before. Remarkably we thought attendance might dip during this series, but it actually went up.

No doubt some feel awkward from the change, but we've already seen the fruit outweigh people's initial reluctance. Here are the continued benefits we see:

1. Brings a small group feel to our large corporate setting
2. Allows discussion and prayer to take place with a given message in real time
3. Allows people to experience a Life Group setting that might not ever give it a chance
4. Releases more leaders to be the "ministers" in the room rather than one person
5. Allows for a "family touch" so people feel heard and prayed for personally
6. Allows us as a church to promote our value that small groups are just as important as Sunday morning
7. Breaks us out of a tired mold of how church is done

Because of all of these benefits, I'd like to lead our church toward walking out this format going forward."¹³¹

¹³¹ Nathan Rouse, "Spiritual Formation and Preaching." (doctoral essay, Portland Seminary, 2016), 9.

You will notice I made an effort to share specific stories of feedback from our congregation to add to the positive narrative of how the series went, knowing the board was skeptical because it was so different.

Honestly, the board's initial reaction was mixed. While some were excited about its prospects, most were nervous. Most of this came from a fear that we would lose families that did not like it. We recently met and discussed this transition and after some prayer and discussion they seemed to relax and became more open to discovering a path of how to get there over time.¹³²

Pastors would do well to start small. Just as Rome wasn't built in a day, pastors should avoid feeling as if major overhauls should take place on a single Sunday. Leveraging the above mentioned "why" and the opportunities that could be found in the church experimenting can be helpful in opening the hearts of the church toward trying something new. They must be reminded that the pastor is not experimenting with the biblical message that preachers are called to carry, but simply deploying potential new methods that might allow those truths to be heard and adopted. One could employ the adage used by many pastors when trying to introduce change, "Let's try this. If it doesn't work, we can go back to what wasn't working before." Begin to create a culture of experimentation.

CONCLUSION

This past week I met a vibrant young college student named David, who just joined our church family. He came bounding up to me after the service with a smile and

¹³² Nathan Rouse, "Leading a Church Toward a Dialogical Preaching Model" (doctoral field research, Portland Seminary, 2016), 3.

his arms outstretched wanting a hug. He got one. He then proceeded to tell me what I know I needed to hear if I am going to help pastor the coming generation, “I wanted you to know how excited I am to be a part of this church—not just being a part of Faith by serving in some role that needs to be filled, but being a part by actually contributing to what God is doing in and through all of us here together.” To me, that is the win and the goal. I need a constant reminder in all of my pastoral leadership, that I am not out to do this epic thing alone but to create something together with my church family. We are not only in this together, we should be creating this dialogical experience together.

As new generations continue to walk through the doors of our sanctuaries, we must find ourselves proactively adapt to meet their learning style for maximum effectiveness. A recent Barna study revealed the Millennial generation’s desire for having an influential voice:

Of utmost importance in leadership relationships with Millennials is to have a strong element of reciprocity—allowing them to shape and influence you even as you shape and influence them. This “reverse mentoring” may be a bit unpredictable in outcome, but it will win you true friends in the younger generation.¹³³

The Protestant church in Western cultures has a unique opportunity as it reflects on the rapid changes in our emerging culture. No longer can churches linger in the past or lean only on the monological tradition for their worship model. No longer can we continue to simply hide behind the idea of not knowing any other way. At every turn, The church can see that our culture is deploying innovative dialogical learning practices because of the

¹³³ “Making Space for Millennials,” Executive Summary (CKN/BARNA GROUP RESEARCH), 2015, 26.

changing way in which our culture assimilates and processes information. The church must not sit on the sidelines of innovation for the sake of not rocking proverbial boat.

It is not simply committing to ask, “What is not working in the church today?” we must also ask “What *is* working around us?” The church need not fear new methods. Jesus remains the message. As pastor and author Andy Stanley, writes, “Marry your mission. Date your model. Fall in love with your vision. Stay mildly infatuated with your approach.”¹³⁴

On the dialogical model, there has been little hope lent toward the idea of a church-wide implementation of this method. Those who write and speak on the topic do not see a mass epiphany taking place in the Western Church.¹³⁵ To those, it seems the monological model is too far entrenched in the DNA model of the current local church. However, the model does not have to be written off.

The Millennial generation that stands so strongly against a top-down leadership style and is more aligned with an ‘everyone has something to bring to the table’ mindset, will soon step into senior leadership roles. This, along with the increasing dynamic of the dialogical pedagogy in our society, will at some point create a tipping point, causing the church slated monologue to give way to this innovative model of congregational integration.

A new church reformation must take place in our nation and around the world. We have made strides in utilizing creativity, media, metaphors, and story in our messages.

¹³⁴ Andy Stanley. *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Zondervan, n.d.), Kindle location 3342.

¹³⁵ Doug Pagitt, Dialogical Preaching Interview by Nathan Rouse, Raleigh, November 2, 2016.

However, while effective, these fall short in engaging our congregations in what they have just heard. There must be further study and brainstorming as to how we can bring about substantial change in how we “do church” in a way that deploys a dialogical preaching ministry. For it will only be then that we begin to see an all-out integration of preaching into the communal dynamics of spiritual formation overall. We as a church must adapt and adopt new methods to reach future generations if we are going to be faithful to the Great Commission. We can and we must.

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