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# The Effectiveness of Utilizing Various Memory Cues in the Preaching Event at Sandy Plains Baptist Church in Shelby, North Carolina

Garin Hill  
*Gardner-Webb University*

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**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UTILIZING VARIOUS MEMORY CUES  
IN THE PREACHING EVENT AT  
SANDY PLAINS BAPTIST CHURCH IN SHELBY, NORTH CAROLINA**

**A PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY  
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**BY:  
GARIN H. HILL  
MAY 9, 2015**

**APPROVAL FORM**

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UTILIZING VARIOUS MEMORY CUES  
IN THE PREACHING EVENT AT  
SANDY PLAINS BAPTIST CHURCH IN SHELBY, NORTH CAROLINA

GARIN H. HILL

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Faculty Advisor)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Field Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_ (D.Min. Director)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## DEDICATION

This volume is dedicated with love and gratitude to the storytellers who have shaped my life. Most especially...

To my mom, Nelda Hill... your life's story is one of consistency and love, and I cannot say thank you enough for all you have given me.

To my brother, Trevor Hill... had I been given the choice the world over, my story could not have offered a finer brother or better friend.

To my grandparents, most especially Papaw Mack... who never met a friend or stranger who didn't hear a story or four about the grandchildren.

To my dad, E.C. Hill... if you remember, this book has long since been dedicated to you – some 17 years ago at Christmas. Thanks for making the ordinary stories of life teem with purpose and the grace of God. May my sons have a father whose life and stories embody the love of Jesus, just as your sons are blessed to have.

To Rachel, Isaac, and Eli... loving you is the penultimate privilege of my life. The laughter and love you give me is such a gift. For that, and for all the stories we've yet to tell... thank you.

And to the First and Best Storyteller of all... to the One who is still creating the world and shaping us into Your image of boundless love and matchless grace – may every story I tell reflect the love You showed us in Your Son, whose very life embodied the greatest story ever told.

With deep love and gratitude...

- GHH

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A work of this scope simply does not happen without the gracious gift of time and energy that many have dedicated to this project. I owe each of them my deepest thanks for their support and assistance along the way...

Thank you Sandy Plains Baptist Church for your willingness to support me these last few years as I have pursued this degree. This journey has been a long one, and your continued interest in my progress and studies has given me much-needed encouragement along the way. Thank you, also, for your willingness to participate in this project. Thank you to everyone who listened to sermons and filled out surveys, and thanks most especially to my focus group for the extra mile you walked with me. To our entire community of faith, I am ever so grateful.

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Thank you to others who invested energy and support throughout this project. I am so very grateful to the consultation of Dr. Jeff Labban who made my analysis possible. Furthermore, I am very appreciative to Ms. Debbie Wall for her great generosity of time and energy to edit this document with incredible speed and insight. Thank you, Debbie! To the staff of the John Dover Library at GWU who kept this project afloat with research tactics and information – I owe you! To Divinity School staff members Lisa Hollifield and Kheresa Harmon, thank you for helping me with all those necessary logistical matters – I really appreciate your contribution to this process! And to my fellow GWU cohorts – thank you; your support and encouragement mean more than I can say!

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## **ABSTRACT**

Every Sunday pastors across the spectrum attempt to preach in memorable ways. So if traditional wisdom is actually true – most churchgoers forget the sermon immediately upon leaving church – then does that qualify as *memorable*? While realizing no sermon lingers forever, this project explores ways to give the sermon a longer shelf life in the parishioner's memory. Specifically, by utilizing picture, story, and object lesson in various sermons, this experiment conducted at Sandy Plains Baptist Church in Shelby, North Carolina, examines which memory cues (if any) are most effective in keeping the sermon fixed in the long-term memory of its hearers.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

What is the nature of good preaching? Is excellence in the pulpit simply an ability graciously bestowed from Heaven, or is it something that can be learned? To this end, Barbara Brown Taylor offers a keen perspective: “Preaching is finally more art than science. It is alchemy, in which tin becomes gold and yard rocks become diamonds under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is a process of transformation for both preacher and congregation alike...”<sup>1</sup> With these poignant words, Taylor brings into focus the mystery of the sacred calling of preaching. Ultimately preaching relies dependently and exclusively on the power of the Spirit of God to act in the heart and mind of the hearer; no doubt the most effective Gospel proclaimers discover this truism early in their vocational lives. But while “gold” and “diamonds” eventually result from the work of God through sermon, the preacher, to be sure, has an important role to play: diligent contribution of that which is to be transformed. More to the point, this “art” that is “alchemy” cannot take place without, initially, a sermon yielded to the power of God; and the sacred task of birthing this sermon is at once the weekly burden and privilege of the Gospel proclaimer.

Consequently, if the communicative power of a sermon is – at least in part – the responsibility of the preacher, then preparation for such a sacred task must address several fundamental questions: How can preaching serve as a catalyst for the transformation of the congregation? How can the preacher make the sermon engaging for the listener? How can the preacher help “make the Bible

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1993), 91.

come alive”<sup>2</sup> so that the spoken word lives on in the hearts and minds of the hearers? What rhetorical devices, when utilized, have proven most effective in persuading individuals, audiences, and congregations to adopt a certain paradigm or theological understanding? Ultimately, every preacher’s task is to reflect on such concerns as these with humility and integrity as we seek to hone our craft to the best of our abilities.

As a pastor whose job and calling it is week-in and week-out to prepare and deliver meaningful sermons, I admit questions like the aforementioned follow me around like a little cat.<sup>3</sup> To the casual observer, preaching might largely be defined at its core as religious public speaking. Certainly, proclaiming the Gospel carries much more weight and nuance than merely standing up in front of a crowd and giving a talk. When the Spirit of God is invited into the writing, preaching, and hearing of the spoken word, the result surely embodies more than just a “speech.” Having said that, however, elements of public speaking as a general discipline do, in fact, form the framework of Gospel preaching. Consequently, those of us who preach on a weekly basis would be wise to investigate what implements reside in the rhetorical tool-belts of presenters of all stripes, and then employ these implements to our own ends. For example, speakers and storytellers have utilized linguistic devices such as memory cues for centuries. How could pastors, then, utilize these same memory strategies to preach more effective, life-giving sermons? That question – in all its

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald Allen, et. al., *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts On Faith* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 50.

complexity – has served as the springboard for my personal and professional growth, and consequently formed the framework for this particular experimental undertaking.

### **Ministry Setting**

Sandy Plains Baptist Church was founded in the year 1854, and the current facilities still reside on the original grounds donated over 160 years ago. The church building and grounds are situated just outside the city limits of Shelby, North Carolina, a town itself located approximately sixty miles west of Charlotte in a part of Cleveland County called New House. Local knowledge and a recent in-depth ministry profile<sup>4</sup> reveal the sociological make-up of the five-mile area surrounding Sandy Plains Baptist Church.<sup>5</sup> The following statistics represent important summary information provided by the Precept Group in the church's ministry profile:

- Approximately 7,000 people reside within a five-mile radius of Sandy Plains, and “this represents a 15% increase since 1990 (as compared to a 21% growth in the United States as a whole).”<sup>6</sup>
- The church is located in a rural part of Cleveland County, with most households being comprised of “Caucasian, married families.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Precept Group. *Ministry Area Profile: Prepared for Sandy Plains Baptist Church, Shelby, North Carolina, ID#38468:83104 (Irvine, CA: 2008).*

<sup>5</sup> Though the profile itself was prepared in 2008, a five-year “projection” served as a key part of the study; thus the data cited should reflect a reasonably accurate assessment of 2013 statistics.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry Area Profile, Summary Sheet.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

- The average household income in the area is just over \$46,000, about \$20,600 lower than the national average.<sup>8</sup>
- The average age of a person within five miles of Sandy Plains Baptist Church is 39.0 years. The most predominant age groups in the area include “Survivors” (ages 27 – 47), comprising 29% of the populace; and “Boomers” (ages 48 – 65), making up 23%.<sup>9</sup>
- The average formal education level around Sandy Plains Baptist Church is “very low,” with college graduates<sup>10</sup> accounting for 17.8% of the population (adults over age 25), in contrast to a national average of 30.7%.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding Sandy Plains specifically, the average attendance on a given Sunday morning hovers in the 60 – 90 range, and in several ways the church falls in line with the sociological profile of the larger New House community. Like the broader five-miles radius surrounding the church, Sandy Plains is comprised largely of persons of the “Survivor” and “Boomer” age range, many of whom are the children of deceased former members and/or are the parents of younger children. Additionally, most attenders come from Caucasian families in which the adults are or have been married (i.e. widowed), and because most church

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Summary Sheet. The age breakdowns and generation titles used in this profile are certainly adequate for a ministry report of the surrounding community; however, when the survey of our congregation was developed (see Appendix C), slight modifications proved necessary.

<sup>10</sup> Associate’s degrees or higher.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry Area Profile, 8.



members live in close proximity to the church, the majority of congregation members would unquestionably consider themselves to live in a “rural” area.<sup>12</sup>

For all the similarities our congregation shares with the surrounding area – Sandy Plains is distinct from the local area in some ways as well. For example, concerning education, the average level of schooling attended by church members reflects a number closer to the national average (of college matriculation) of 30.7%, rather than the 17.8% of the surrounding area. Consequently, average household incomes are higher as well. This level of schooling dissimilarity is evident in that two of the three primary sources of current or former employment in our congregation – health care, education, and self-run businesses – typically require at least an Associate’s degree. Furthermore, several of those who are self-employed and own a business, while not occupationally mandated, still received a degree in a field related to their respective industry.

While numerical statistics are informative about the church’s setting, the nature of this undertaking demands acknowledging that the context of Sandy Plains Baptist Church goes beyond mere numbers. More to the point, the identity of Sandy Plains Baptist Church largely revolves around the “big events” she undertakes each year; perhaps that is the case for most churches, but many of those have on-going ministries for which the church is often known (and thus through which she identifies herself). At Sandy Plains, while on-going

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<sup>12</sup> Small in population to be sure, the nearby towns of Shelby, Forest City, and Boiling Springs are by no means considered metropolitan areas. However, their population densities compared to that of New House lend themselves to be considered locally as the “urban” parts of Cleveland and Rutherford counties, as opposed to the “rural” area surrounding the church facilities.

opportunities like Bible studies and worship definitely comprise an important part of the church's ministry, for the most part the seminal annual programs prove to be particularly distinctive trademarks. Specifically, these events traditionally include an annual barbeque; a Come to Bethlehem Christmas nativity; Vacation Bible School; a Fall Festival; Sandy Plains University;<sup>13</sup> and a Sports Clinic Outreach. As such, understanding the culture and context of our church begins with recognizing our "big-event" identity, and ultimately its place in the midst of a doctoral experiment measuring week-to-week memory retention.

In further considering this project's setting, the theological undercurrent of Sandy Plains Baptist Church could be described as generally "conservative," though the congregation as a whole believes "moderately" about some issues whether they realize it or not. For example, Sandy Plains elects nine deacons (on a rotational basis) to serve a congregation of 80 – 110 active members in addition to approximately ten members who are considered shut-ins. As of 2015, of those nine current deacons, four of them are women; this assuredly reflects a moderate philosophy in the Baptist tradition. However, in regards to political and social issues (e.g. gun control, homosexuality, abortion, immigration, and government assistance programs), the vast majority of congregants lean towards viewpoints that are typically considered more conservative in nature.

In a different vein, the preaching context in which this project took place inevitably influenced the trajectory of the results. In other words, in my five years as pastor of Sandy Plains leading up to this project, the church heard me preach upwards of 200 sermons. Consequently, a worship context existed

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<sup>13</sup> A twice-a-year educational forum that focuses on various topics suggested by the congregation and selected by the pastor.

wherein the congregation had heard my preaching repeatedly and thus expected a certain approach to the preaching moment. The four sermons that comprised this project, then, were not preached in a vacuum, but followed on the heels of the more than 200 sermons that preceded them. On a positive note, this means the proclaimer and congregation had developed a certain level of trust and rapport with one another. As Mary Alice Mulligan reports in her comprehensive study *Believing in Preaching*, the trust a congregation feels with a pastor significantly increases its ability and willingness to engage a sermon.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the trust already brokered in the preacher/parishioner relationship in my project setting created the opportunity for closer reflection on the sermon than might otherwise have been given.

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<sup>14</sup> Mulligan, 67.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A simple description of my project is this: I employed rhetorical devices – in particular, memory cues – in the midst of four different sermons spread across a period of eight weeks. The goal was to determine which, if any, memory cues are most effective in helping congregation members recognize the main point of the sermon a week later on a corresponding survey. More specifically, I preached one sermon illustrating the “governing theological theme”<sup>15</sup> (GTT) with a picture; one “control” sermon using no such devices; one sermon illustrating the GTT with a story; and one sermon illustrating the GTT with an object lesson. My purpose, again, was to conclude which rhetorical device would prove most effective at Sandy Plains as an aid to remember the sermon a week later.

In addition to the sermons and the surveys, I employed the help of a focus group at the outset of the project. The basic purpose of this group was to give some greater depth to the analysis portion of the project, and subsequent sections of this document will examine its function in much greater detail.

In regards to the surveys themselves, it specifically deserves noting that “recognition” and “recall” are different. Rather than recall information from thin air, the anonymous survey instruments<sup>16</sup> asked participants to *recognize* – or pick from a group of choices – the previous week’s themes. The simple reasoning behind this: life is recognition-based. In other words, we apply biblical truths to

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<sup>15</sup> Danny West, “Doctor of Ministry – Ministry of Preaching Seminar” (lecture, Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, NC, January 11, 2013). This phrase used by Dr. West in the cited classroom lecture – as well as other lectures that followed – is a descriptive moniker connoting the main idea of the sermon.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix C.

our lives, not from the vacuum of recall, but when our life experiences dictate we recognize Scripture's application to our current situation. The following sections of this report will examine more specific details concerning process and analysis; but at its heart, this doctoral experiment aimed at determining what people remember when the pastor proclaims the message.

### **Ministry Question and Project Goals**

While directly applicable to my ministry setting, and particularly cultivated in the soil of my sermon preparation over the course of the last five years especially, my specific interest in this project actually developed several years ago – in college. As a part of the debate team, as well as a frequent guest speaker at campus events and churches in the area, I began asking questions like: “What does successful rhetorical influence look like?” and “Does persuasion happen in an instant or over the course of time?”

Several years later, as the pastor of a church with a weekly platform to speak in a way others find persuasive, I continue to maintain that – be it on the debate floor or in the pulpit – the truest testament of compelling, persuasive speech is not its ability to convince in the moment but to sustain a particular way of thinking over the course of time. When it comes to pulpit ministry specifically, ultimate success, as previously mentioned, comes through the power of the Spirit of God. Paul said as much in 1 Corinthians: “...My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of

power.”<sup>17</sup> Having begun with that assumption, however, there remains work to be done – alchemy, as it were! Preaching is, after all, the amalgam of the movement of God and the diligent effort of the proclaimer. If we as pastors take our calling and jobs seriously, we must painstakingly attempt to weave a sermon together each week that leaves its mark. Consequently, this project crystallized for me and the ministry question that demanded an answer became: *how can the proclaimer, through use of rhetorical devices such as memory cues, help congregation members to retain the sermon longer in their minds and hearts?*

The importance of memorable, persuasive preaching cannot be overstated. As Thoreau has famously said, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”<sup>18</sup> In simpler terms, people hurt and need help. In our culture, constant pressures such as high job performance, school, family systems (dysfunctional as they often are), community interactions, and engaging in social justice take a great toll on many who participate in them. As pastors, we are burying our collective heads in the sand if we do not recognize the sum pressure of these interactions is often too great for most people to handle, and this lack of peace saturates the culture in such a ubiquitous way that it has assuredly made its way into our communities of faith as well. The people who walk through the doors of Sandy Plains Baptist Church each week need help. Occasionally this need is visibly evident, but most of the time the desperation is more “quiet”; regardless, hearing Good News in such circumstances is of paramount importance. Furthermore, this Good News needs to be “portable,” lest it remain

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:4 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>18</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, in the Thoreau eServer, accessed March 8, 2014, <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden1a.html>.

echoing only in the sanctuary as the clock strikes noon on Sunday. Though parishioners obviously have constant access to such faith-anchors as the Scriptures, prayer, and Christian friendships, the pastor can give them yet another spiritual mooring in the storm of life by preaching a sermon with power, efficacy, and memorability.

With such constant, pressing concerns permeating the lives of those around us, this research sought to give people handles to remember and integrate the lessons of Scripture into their day-to-day lives. More to the point, *the goal of this project was to determine specifically which (if any) rhetorical devices – pictures, stories, or object lessons – help give the congregants in my setting the clearest path to remembering the proclaimed Word of God.* This goal stood tall as the primary aim of the project, and the critical analysis section of this report gives a detailed examination of the success of this experimental objective.

Beyond this primary aim, though, from the outset I anticipated a few ancillary results; however, most of the following hypotheses would only solidify as the months pass after the writing of this document:

- This project would increase my personal awareness of how effectively I communicate the GTT, whether I use rhetorical devices or not.
- This project would help condition me to pay particular attention in sermon preparation to the immediacy of the illustration to the situation at hand.
- This project would train the congregation members of Sandy Plains Baptist Church to listen more closely for memory cues.
- This project would prompt more weekly (Monday – Saturday) conversation about the previous week's sermon topic.

- This project would not only inform the way I preach going forward – a primary objective – but would also encourage the congregation to pay more attention to the power of story in their daily lives.

Again, these hypotheses represented more anticipated secondary outcomes rather than primary, measurable results intended to form the crux of the experiment. Ideally my preaching – at some level – elicited these ancillary results before this project began,<sup>19</sup> but my contention remains that this project will continue to bear itself out in my ministry in the years to come. Ultimately, the conclusion piece of this report speaks in greater detail to future benefits.

### **Project Calendar**

The following detailed project calendar served as the general framework for this experimental undertaking:

#### *July 31, 2014– October 4, 2014*

- Applied for and completed institutional review exam
- Recruited focus group members; explained their role, responsibilities, and consent requirements
- Created and printed consent forms to be distributed to focus group participants<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For example, I hope I *already* have a deep awareness of how well I am communicating the GTT.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A.



- Created and printed consent forms to be distributed for bi-weekly surveying of the congregation as a whole<sup>21</sup>
- Developed the basic framework of the four sermons that served as the basis for surveying the congregation<sup>22</sup>
- Developed the basic framework of the four instruments for surveying the congregation<sup>23</sup>

*Week Preceding Sunday, October 5, 2014*

- Developed and refined 1<sup>st</sup> sermon with GTT embodied as picture memory cue<sup>24</sup>

*Saturday, October 4, 2014 → Meeting with Focus Group*

- Signed consent forms for digital recording of information
- Discussed prior sermons they remembered, why they remembered them, and life-situations at the time they heard the sermon
- Administered VARK learning-styles inventory<sup>25</sup>

*Sunday, October 5, 2014*

- In morning worship, preached 1<sup>st</sup> sermon with GTT embodied as picture memory cue

*Week Preceding Sunday, October 12, 2014*

- Developed the survey instrument that would evaluate memory of the previous week's sermon (i.e. the picture sermon)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix D.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix D1.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B1.

Sunday, October 12, 2014

- Ten minutes before morning worship, distributed (and subsequently collected) congregational consent forms and surveys concerning the previous week's (10/5/14) picture sermon

Week Preceding Sunday, October 19, 2014

- Developed and refined 2<sup>nd</sup> sermon with GTT not embodied as any particular memory cue (i.e. created the control sermon)<sup>27</sup>

Sunday, October 19, 2014

- In morning worship, preached 2<sup>nd</sup> sermon with GTT not embodied as any particular memory cue (i.e. preached control sermon)

Week Preceding Sunday, October 26, 2014

- Developed the survey instrument that would evaluate memory of the previous week's sermon (i.e. the control sermon)<sup>28</sup>

Sunday, October 26, 2014

- Ten minutes before morning worship, distributed (and subsequently collected) outstanding congregational consent forms and surveys concerning the previous week's (10/19/14) control sermon

Week Preceding Sunday, November 2, 2014

- Developed and refined 3<sup>rd</sup> sermon with GTT embodied as story memory cue<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix C1.

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix D2.

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix C2.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix D3.

Sunday, November 2, 2014

- In morning worship, preached 3<sup>rd</sup> sermon with GTT embodied as story memory cue

Week Preceding Sunday, November 9, 2014

- Developed the survey instrument that would evaluate memory of the previous week's sermon (i.e. the story sermon)<sup>30</sup>

Sunday, November 9, 2014

- Ten minutes before morning worship, distributed (and subsequently collected) outstanding congregational consent forms and surveys concerning the previous week's (11/2/14) story sermon

Week Preceding Sunday, November 16, 2014

- Developed and refined 4<sup>th</sup> sermon with GTT embodied as object lesson memory cue<sup>31</sup>

Sunday, November 16, 2014

- In morning worship, preached 4<sup>th</sup> sermon with GTT embodied as object lesson memory cue

Week Preceding Sunday, November 23, 2014

- Developed the survey instrument that would evaluate memory of the previous week's sermon (i.e. the object lesson sermon)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix C3.

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix D4.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix C4.

Sunday, November 23, 2014

- Ten minutes before morning worship, distributed (and subsequently collected) congregational outstanding consent forms and surveys concerning the previous week's (11/16/14) object lesson sermon

Weeks following November 23, 2014

- Compiled all survey information into a singular Microsoft Excel® file, then transferred all compiled data into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences® (SPSS) software for detailed data output
- Analyzed and evaluated data; recorded analysis
- Reflected on observations; drew conclusions; considered professional and personal development
- Destroyed all hard copies of individual datum (i.e. surveys), as well as any focus group information that could be connected to individual persons

### **Detailed Project Description**

Undertaking a project of this scope goes well beyond the bounds of my expertise, so from the outset I sought help in developing the methods of experimentation and evaluation. In previous doctoral classes Dr. Danny West and Dr. Guy Sayles, in particular, helped me to refine the size of this undertaking; and Dr. Gerald Keown gave me the opportunity to consider relevant biblical passages that would ultimately serve as the theological underpinnings for the study. More to the point, my first task in this project was determining what memory cues would be evaluated, and by design this process began in August of

2012 upon my entry into the doctorate of ministry program itself. Initially I was chiefly intrigued with the power of story in sermon, and while affirming that pursuit, Dr. West keenly suggested – in the midst of the image-laden culture in which we live – that I consider adding a picture element to the evaluation. With story and picture variables then confirmed, the experiment began to take shape based around different learning styles. Eventually the object lesson component was added, as a natural complement to the others and a way to ‘round out’ an experiment on different styles of learning in the sermonic moment. Ultimately, it was Dr. Jeff Labban who helped me determine the necessity of the final “control” piece of the puzzle; and the project thus had its basic framework.

Before implementing the project proper, however, I wanted to run a pilot study to help me iron out some of the inevitable experimentation flaws. So even though the official project itself was not slated to begin until the fall of 2014, I conducted a pilot study in the Fall of 2013 as a precursor to the larger endeavor. With the gracious blessing of Dr. Sayles, I employed one of my semester-long ministry supervision learning goals as a scaled-down version of this current research, focusing then on the picture element only. I discovered in the midst of that study that some of my experimental methodology needed revision. While the pilot experiment was not “officially” part of this research, it decidedly helped to guide the ultimate organization and procedural tactics of this project; consequently, this report will occasionally reference this initial study for its contribution in those regards.

Upon conferring again (on multiple occasions) with Dr. David Carscaddon and Dr. Labban about my experimental methodology, the time for choosing a

focus group had come. The purpose of the focus group would primarily be two-fold: One, the group would serve the general purpose of providing some qualitative feedback in the midst of this heavily quantitative project. More specifically, I would ask the focus group to recall any two or three sermons they had heard and remembered in the past. My goal would be to elicit three pieces of information: *what* they remember; *why* they remember it; and was there anything going on in their lives at the time that sparked this particular memory. As a second purpose, the focus group would add another layer to the learning styles dimension of the project. In this regard, the group would take the VARK<sup>®</sup> Learning Styles Inventory<sup>33</sup> which would indicate their preferred style of learning: visual, auditory, reading, and/or kinesthetic. By tracking the focus subjects and their respective learning styles throughout the study, my hope was to see how closely correlated learning types and sermon memory were in this setting. More precisely, the picture sermon was designed to appeal to visual learners, the story to auditory learners, and the object lesson to kinesthetic learners. Would this pattern hold true in the experiment? The detailed information provided by the focus group would help me determine the validity of this hypothesis.

When recruiting a focus group, special consideration was given most especially to three separate variables: age, gender, and willingness (and availability) to participate both in the focus group and in the entirety of the 8-week project. Consequently, I attempted to pick a diverse group (in regards to age and gender, anyway) who were also consistent attenders. Upon the

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<sup>33</sup> See Appendix B1.

recommendation of Dr. Keown to develop a focus group of 12-15 people, I drafted seventeen persons in hopes that 12-15 of them would actually attend. After determining who the seventeen would be (aforementioned considerations taken into account), I sent them a letter<sup>34</sup> requesting their participation on Saturday morning, October 4, 2014.

On that morning of October 4, all seventeen invitees and I gathered in our fellowship building, and we began the meeting as all Baptist gatherings should, with prayer and food. After a robust breakfast of Deb's livermush<sup>35</sup> biscuits and sliced fruit, the participants filled out the necessary consent forms, both for the focus group time as well as for the overall eight-week experience. Next, each group member was assigned a number that would be his or her moniker throughout the entirety of the study. On all upcoming inventories and surveys, each focus group member would write said number, enabling me to track each person's survey information.

Following number designation, the seventeen subjects each filled out a VARK<sup>36</sup> inventory and subsequently graded his/her own paper with an answer key provided. Parents of the two children under age thirteen helped with the addition. Finally, after collecting the learning style questionnaire, our focus group time ended with the most involved part of the focus process – sermon recall. While the critical analysis section of this paper goes into greater detail

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<sup>34</sup> See Appendix B2.

<sup>35</sup> A staple food of the New House diet, primarily comprised of liver and corn meal. It's better than it initially sounds!

<sup>36</sup> It deserves noting the VARK inventory was developed by Dr. Neil Fleming for use in business and the private sector, as well as free application when used in the university setting. Permission for distribution was conferred with personal email confirmation.

about some particular sermons that group members recalled and *why* they recalled them, suffice to say this was the most enjoyable and enlightening part of our focus group meeting. Some remembered sermons I had preached – after all, they were given the choice to choose any homilies they wanted, and mine were likely the most recent they had encountered – but delightfully some recollected sermons from many years past. In fact, one member talked about a sermon she heard 50 years ago! In the end, this discussion proved informative and sincerely was a highlight of the entire experiment.

Having secured the initial focus group data on October 4, the next task was to begin the sermon delivery the next morning. Fortunately in the weeks leading up to that first sermon on October 5, I had been working on developing the general framework of the sermons, though the manuscript for the October 5 offering was not complete until the last days leading up to that Sunday.<sup>37</sup> Among the available resources, Ronald Allen's book, *Patterns of Preaching*<sup>38</sup> served as a particularly helpful guide in the "construction" of the sermons. More specifically, my four sermons would follow a pattern which essentially combined elements of two chapters in the book: Chapter 10, *The Form of the Text Shapes the Form of the Sermon*; and Chapter 11, *Four Pages of the Preacher*. Consequently, the general flow of the four sermons would follow this pattern...

#### I. Introduction (*not* a story)

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<sup>37</sup> As the calendar noted, the details of the sermons themselves were not fleshed out until the week of the respective sermons, but developing the outline was a longer process that began in the months before the project proper.

<sup>38</sup> Ronald J. Allen, ed., *Patterns of Preaching*, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998), 73-86.



- II. Problem in the text
- III. Problem for us
- IV. Resolution in the text
- V. Resolution for us
- VI. Conclusion → making use of the memory cues: 1. picture, 2. control, 3. story, and 4. object lesson, respectively

Further, each of the four sermons would make use of the sanctuary's video screen through the respective services, though in a more scaled-down way than normal. In other words, regularly in sermons I have employed such learning aids as pictures and/or videos. For each of the four sermons in this experiment, however, the PowerPoint® would primarily display the Scriptures at the appropriate times, as well as slides that aided in the introduction.<sup>39</sup> The exception to this rule was that our frequently-used church's logo and a cross picture<sup>40</sup> were shown each week, and obviously the "picture" would be shown at the end of the corresponding "picture" sermon on October 5.

On the morning of October 5 specifically, attendance was about average (around 75), aided by the outside temperature conducive for our older members coming to church. I wore a tie but left the suit jacket in my office during worship. Part of the reason for this decision was that I do that about half the time anyway, but largely it was because the temperature in the sanctuary was extremely hot that morning, to the extent that several folks were fanning themselves... in

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendices D6 – D9 for the slides used in each sermon.

<sup>40</sup> Picture accessed on July 22, 2014. <http://ckaroli.deviantart.com/art/Cross-sunset-67477526>. Used by permission under Creative Commons attribution license.

October! As a result of this “no jacket” decision on the first Sunday, to follow suit,<sup>41</sup> I decided to forego wearing the jacket the following seven Sundays as well.

As people walked into the sanctuary that Sunday morning, our ushers distributed the consent forms<sup>42</sup> at the front door. As per the recommendation of Dr. Carscaddon, there were different permission documents for adults and for children under age 18. Additionally, it should be noted that most of the consent forms (which only needed to be signed once) for the entire experiment were filled out either during the focus group meeting on October 4 or on the morning of Sunday, October 5. Though the calendar section above mentions they were distributed on multiple occasions, only persons who had not previously signed the documentation turned them in after October 5.

The sermon<sup>43</sup> that morning– which would serve as the first in the series of four homilies over eight weeks – was the proclamation in which the GTT was embodied with a picture. This sermon, entitled *If It Had Been a Snake...*, focused on the Scripture found in John 4 where Jesus encounters the woman at the well. The basic premise of the sermon was, like the narrative in John 4, that the presence and power of God is at work right in front of us, recognizable if we would only pay attention to what God is doing in our midst. After explicating the problem and the solution found in the text and what it means for our own lives, I concluded by showing the congregation a picture of a sunset<sup>44</sup> that I took directly across the street from the church. The sunset, as the GTT was meant to convey,

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<sup>41</sup> Or lack thereof, as the pun seemingly demands.

<sup>42</sup> See Appendices A1 – A2.

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix D1.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix D5.

was a microcosm of an under-recognized display of the power of God right before our eyes. The sermon concluded around the 27-minute mark, the invitation and benediction were shared, and the congregation was dismissed.

Over the course of the next few days, I developed the survey<sup>45</sup> that would be passed out on Sunday, October 12, assessing the congregation's recognition of the 'picture sermon' delivered on October 5. The critical analysis section details all the considerations that went into producing the survey; but to foreshadow that assessment a bit, developing this evaluation tool was more difficult than I initially thought it would be! On Sunday, October 12, the surveys were distributed to the congregation as they entered the sanctuary, most about ten minutes before worship began. As they would with every survey for tracking purposes, the focus group members wrote the number (assigned them in the focus group meeting) at the top of their papers. With the assistance of our youth minister and another college volunteer, 32 valid<sup>46</sup> surveys<sup>47</sup> were collected and given back to me upon their completion.

On Sunday, October 19, we gathered together for worship as I prepared to deliver the second of the four sermons in the experiment. Temperatures had recently been in the 70°s; however, the coolness of this 50° day combined with the rain outside resulted in an attendance that was less than average (below 60). Despite the weather's inconsiderate lack of cooperation with my experiment, the ultimate analysis would prove that the number of surveys completed would

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix C1.

<sup>46</sup> A "valid" survey is any survey where the respondent did NOT mark, "I wasn't here," as opposed to invalid surveys where the results could not be tabulated due to non-attendance. (In other words, people cannot remember what they did not hear!)

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix E1.

remain consistent across the weeks, regardless of the attendance. Beyond the surveys, though, I predicted the low numbers and darker room (with no sun shining in) would affect the survey results. The critical analysis section of this paper further addresses these concerns in all their apparent prematurity.

The sermon<sup>48</sup> itself that morning, again, was the second in the series of four in this project designed to test recognition. In particular, this sermon would use *no* memory cue at the end to underscore the GTT of the sermon as a whole; in other words, this was the control sermon. Dr. Labban had advised me about the necessity of this step to establish a baseline against which to measure. This sermon, called *Finding a Lost Identity*, examined the scene in Luke 8:26-39 where Jesus encounters the Gerasene demoniac. The GTT of the sermon was, as the Gerasene demoniac and the townspeople both discovered, that the darkness and evil in our life – despite all our best intentions – is not manageable by our efforts; but the singular and unmatched power of God *can* set us free from that oppression. Again since this was the control variable, the sermon did not conclude with a specific memory cue; instead, the sermon ended around the 25-minute mark with a general admonition: “Be not afraid. Be set free.” After an invitation hymn and a benediction, the congregation was dismissed.

Over the next seven days, I developed the assessment instrument<sup>49</sup> that would be used the next weekend; and thus on Sunday, October 26, the congregation took the survey targeting the control sermon they had heard the week before (October 19). Again these surveys were dispersed and collected in

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix D2.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix C2.

turn with help from the ushers and other volunteers. Despite the inclement weather and resultant poor attendance the week before, administration of the control survey still yielded 33 valid surveys<sup>50</sup>, the most of any of the four!

With the experimentation halfway completed – two of the four sermons preached and surveys administered – I felt a renewed sense of energy, the light at the end of the experimentation tunnel was growing a bit brighter. Unfortunately, my momentum that week was soon upended by some shocking news: a life-long integral member of our church, a 44-year old (very healthy) father of three, and a close friend of mine was diagnosed with cancer.<sup>51</sup> Already on the heels of another active member having been in the hospital for several weeks, the news of our friend’s diagnosis hung in the air that next Sunday morning, November 2. It was a poignant time – the kind of time where we are especially reminded of the community we have together – and definitely deserves mentioning as part of the “context” of worship that day. The temperature around the beginning of the service (11:00 AM) was approximately 39°, but there was an above-average attendance despite the crisp air outside. Because there were very few clouds in the sky, the bright sun shone through the windows and added some much-needed energy to what could have otherwise been a very melancholy feeling in the sanctuary that day.

The sermon<sup>52</sup> that Sunday morning, November 2, was the third of four in this doctoral research; and this offering would use story as the concluding GTT

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<sup>50</sup> See Appendix E1.

<sup>51</sup> I asked for and received permission to share this personal information.

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix D3.

memory cue. The sermon, entitled *The Words We Long to Hear*, examined the story of Zacchaeus found in Luke 19:1-9. The GTT of the sermon was intended to mirror that of the story of Zacchaeus, that ultimately superficial pursuits like wealth, good looks, skill, and popularity do not determine our value in Jesus' eyes. Following the hybrid pattern developed from, *The Form of the Text Shapes the Form of the Sermon*, and the *Four Pages of the Preacher*, I concluded the sermon with a personal story of a time I myself got caught up in believing my value was tied to my proficiency (in preaching, no less); but how God desires more for me and all of us. The sermon itself was a bit longer than its predecessors; this one lasting approximately 31½ minutes. The worship service was then concluded following an invitation hymn and benediction prayer.

As in the previous weeks, the next few days found me preparing the next survey to be distributed. As such on Sunday, November 9, with the help of ushers and volunteers, the survey about the previous week's sermon (November 2) was administered; this instrument would assess their memories regarding the story sermon they had heard the week before. In the end, 28 valid surveys<sup>53</sup> were received.

At last, Sunday, November 16, had arrived: the morning the fourth and final sermon in the experiment would be preached. Like November 2, the temperature the morning of the 16 of November was quite cold. Though it did not rain that day, the sunshine apparently could not rouse all out of bed and thus attendance remained below 60. The sermon<sup>54</sup> that morning, which would serve

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<sup>53</sup> See Appendix E1.

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix D4.

as the last in the series, was the proclamation in which the GTT was represented with an object lesson. This sermon, *A Proverb Worth Remembering*, focused on the Biblical passage in John 8 where Jesus encounters the woman caught in adultery. As the three homilies before it, this sermon followed the pattern of moving from problem to resolution, this one by discussing the Pharisees and their desire to condemn the woman. The GTT, as Jesus pointed out to the religious leaders that day, was that we are all guilty of sin and need to set down the rocks we are so prone to want to hurl at others.

In order rightly to capture the spirit of the object lesson and appeal to the kinesthetic learners, before worship I collected several baseball-sized rocks and brought them into the sanctuary in a bucket. At the end of the sermon, to engage the object lesson memory cue, I told the congregation we had a special opportunity. As a part of the normal reflection time following the sermon, they would be given the chance to participate in something not so normal! I walked down the middle aisle with my bucket and handed out rocks to the person on the end of the pew. As the directions I gave specified,<sup>55</sup> each person was to hold the rock in his/her hands and feel the weight of it. Then, after a few moments to reflect on forgiveness, the rock was to be passed to the next person on the pew, and so on until it reached the end. A very awe-inspiring moment at the conclusion – one which I *did not* plan myself – was when the persons on the end of the aisles began dropping the rocks loudly on the floor once they were done reflecting. It was truly a meaningful time. In the end, the sermon lasted

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<sup>55</sup> Again, see Appendix D4 for more accurate wording.

approximately 30½ minutes; and after an invitation hymn and the benediction, the service was concluded.

Finally, the time had arrived to wrap up the experimentation part of the project as our church gathered on Sunday, November 23, for Bible study and worship. While parishioners entered the sanctuary about ten minutes before the worship hour, my volunteers and I handed out the concluding survey<sup>56</sup> I had spent the week developing; this last survey instrument reviewed the object lesson sermon preached the week prior (Sunday, November 16). The 25 valid surveys<sup>57</sup> were subsequently collected. At the end of the service that day participants were invited to pick up a copy of my debriefing statement,<sup>58</sup> a document IRB regulations mandate I distribute, which simply explained what the experiment measured.

As the aforementioned calendar section explicates, the last and most crucial piece of the project came in the weeks following the close of the testing proper. During this time, I compiled all survey information into a singular Microsoft Excel® file; then I transferred all compiled data into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences® (SPSS) software for detailed data output. After evaluating the data and recording the analysis, I reflected on my observations concerning all facets of the project. In addition, I drew conclusions, considered what these conclusions meant for my professional and personal development, and in the end destroyed all hard copies of individual datum (i.e. surveys), as well

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<sup>56</sup> See Appendix C4.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix E1.

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix A5.



as any focus group information that could be connected to individual persons. All results, evaluations, analyses, reflections, and conclusions can be found in the final two chapters of this volume.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

An experiment of this nature must have a strong grounding theologically if it is to have any true significant influence in a church setting. Consequently, a thorough discourse of a theologically-appropriate framework is in order, and the following chapter addresses this concern in very specific ways. More to the point, biblical analyses from both the Old and New Testaments can shed light on the nature of memorable communication on behalf of God in the Scriptures. Additionally, a brief overview of a few noteworthy proclaimers throughout history will round out the discussion.

#### **Biblical Reflection**

The pages of Scripture are littered with examples of those persons who used stories, visuals, and object lessons in an attempt to sear the Word of God into the mind and soul of the hearer. Accordingly, this project concentrates specifically on passages in which the primary biblical personality *intends* his audience to hear, remember, and be changed by his words and/or actions, much like a preacher intends such an outcome for his/her congregation in sermon. To be sure, “intention” is hard to measure, but can be concluded by context and, at times, through explicit statement of such an intent. For the purposes of this undertaking, these biblical examples will be divided into three sub-categories: Moses, Ezekiel, and then finally reflections on the teachings of Jesus himself.

### *Old Testament – Moses*

Perhaps some of the clearest examples of a person in Scripture communicating in such a way as to evoke memory of what was said, and subsequently to elicit action, are Moses' encounters with Pharaoh as recorded in Exodus chapters five through twelve. In the series of encounters as a whole, the initial confrontation involving the sign of the snakes<sup>59</sup> and the ensuing plagues both theologically embody "object lessons"; whereby, the speaker (Moses) wants the hearer (Pharaoh) to witness some physical symbol, then remember and respond. More specific discussion in particular about "signs" is forthcoming, but from the outset the word signs can be defined as "any aspect of the physical world that is deliberately selected to *inform, instruct or remind* someone."<sup>60</sup> (Italics added.) In this regard, Moses speaks and thus intends for Pharaoh to hear, perceive the words, remember the accompanying signs, and act accordingly. Consequently, because the "signs" passages and the "plagues" passages are so similar in nature,<sup>61</sup> this manuscript will not set out to analyze the entire sign/plague drama, but rather use the Exodus 7:8-13 "sign" passage as a microcosm of the scene as a whole, touching on the plague commentary when necessary.

As the scenario unfolds, the text describes how Moses and his brother Aaron return to Egypt after a long absence, having been commissioned by and on

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<sup>59</sup> Exodus 7:8-13.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel A. Meier, "Signs and Wonders," Desmond Alexander and David Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 756.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "Exodus," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I, Ed. by David L. Petersen, et. al., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 739. The similarities between "signs" and "plagues" lead commentators like Brueggemann, at times, to use the terms interchangeably.

behalf of Yahweh (YHWH) to tell the Pharaoh: “Let my people go...”<sup>62</sup> To his own detriment, Pharaoh responds, “Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.”<sup>63</sup> Consequently, what proceeds is a series of signs and wonders that serve as an attempt to dissuade Pharaoh from his hard-heartedness and compel him to release the people of God to freedom.

Unfortunately, Pharaoh displays his stubbornness from the very beginning, and pairs his cruelty along with it. Upon Moses’ first attempt at freeing God’s people, Pharaoh increases the Hebrews’ work load by forcing them to gather straw together, which had been previously provided for them; however, despite these new physical demands, Pharaoh requires them to make the same quota of bricks for Egyptian constructions.<sup>64</sup> Understandably, the Hebrew people are none too happy with their new obligations. Moses cries out to YHWH for help, claiming that now both the Egyptians *and* the Hebrews are not listening; and God again sends Moses to Pharaoh – this time with a sign meant to capture Pharaoh’s attention. The detailed account is recorded in Exodus 7:8ff:

<sup>8</sup>The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>9</sup>“When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a wonder,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.’” <sup>10</sup>So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. <sup>11</sup>Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. <sup>12</sup>Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron’s staff swallowed up

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<sup>62</sup> Exodus 5:1. Unless otherwise noted, this and all subsequent Scripture quotations come from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>63</sup> Exodus 5:2.

<sup>64</sup> Exodus 5:6ff.

theirs. <sup>13</sup>Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.<sup>65</sup>

Moses needs Pharaoh's attention, and hopes this miraculous show of power would indeed "inform, instruct, and remind" Pharaoh of the seriousness of the commands of YHWH. To drive home the point, God bestows upon Moses the authority to conjure "signs" (אוֹתוֹת, transliterated *oth*) and "wonders", (מִפְתִּים, transliterated *mophetim*). This phrase "signs and wonders" first appears as a word pair in Exodus 7:3, then is repeated throughout the biblical corpus. Despite its prevalence in other places in the Bible, however, the exodus event (specifically) remains the stack-pole around which the "signs and wonders" notion is built. More to the point, of the ten references to "signs and wonders" in Deuteronomy, "seven... cite explicitly the exodus tradition of God's mighty actions."<sup>66</sup> Tull goes so far as to say, "This phrase, repeated frequently in Deuteronomy, and in Nehemiah, Psalms, and Jeremiah, *summarizes* deliverance from Egypt."<sup>67</sup> (Italics added.)

Why are signs and wonders even used at all from the outset of the exodus account, and why are they so important? In short, works of magic are respected in Egypt. They are a type of power currency, as it were. Newsome adds, "The ancient Egyptians put great faith in works of magic. Many a magical charm could

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<sup>65</sup> Exodus 7:8-13.

<sup>66</sup> Brian Russell, "Signs and Wonders," Katharine Sakenfeld, et. al., eds., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, S-Z*, Vol. 5, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 251.

<sup>67</sup> Patricia Tull, "Signs in the OT," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, S-Z*, Vol. 5, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 251.

be spoken to guard against harmful threats.”<sup>68</sup> Surely enough, when Moses approaches the throne of Pharaoh, signs and wonders are quickly demanded.

As such, Moses, as recounted in Exodus 7:8ff above, reveals the first sign of YHWH’s power by turning Aaron’s staff into a snake. Though no singular explanation exists as to precisely why a snake is the sign of choice, Hoffmeier contends it is because snakes represent power in Egypt.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, Pharaoh makes a request using the power currency in Egypt (i.e. magic); and Moses responds not only in the power currency, but also with a *power symbol* to boot! Decidedly, YHWH understands exactly what snakes represent in the land of Egypt; and when he grants Moses this magical clout, Pharaoh is sure to take offense: “For Aaron’s staff to turn into a snake is nothing less than a direct challenge to Pharaoh’s power.”<sup>70</sup>

As the text above indicates, in one sense Pharaoh is prepared for Moses’ conjuring, for “then Pharaoh summon[s] the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, [do] the same by their secret arts.”<sup>71</sup> Both parties have the power to produce a snake from a staff! The “snakes” Moses and the magicians produce, however, are not typical serpents as indicated in the Mt. Horeb scene in Exodus 4:2ff, a preview to the current encounter. In chapter 4, YHWH turns Moses’ staff into a נָחָשׁ, transliterated *nakhash*. In the Exodus 7

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<sup>68</sup> James D. Newsome, *Exodus*, Interpretation Bible Studies, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 20.

<sup>69</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 154-155.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 197.

<sup>71</sup> Exodus 7:11.

encounter with Pharaoh, however, the staffs become נָחָשׁ, transliterated *tannin*.

While *nakhash* is “one of several Hebrew words that refer to the suborder [of] ‘ordinary’ snakes,”<sup>72</sup> *tannin* implies something much more foreboding. Durham comments:

This word too is generally translated ‘serpent,’ but as it clearly designates a different kind of reptile, the term should be rendered differently. Apart from its three occurrences here, *tannin* occurs in the OT a dozen times and refers in most of these occurrences to a reptile of terrifying size, a sea-monster, even a dragon... At the very least, a snake of awesome appearance and perhaps size seems intended here, a ‘frightful’ or ‘monstrous’ snake.<sup>73</sup>

The face-off ends, to borrow a phrase from Brueggemann, in a “stalemate”<sup>74</sup> of sorts, with both parties producing terrifying monsters. What a scenario this must have been to witness in person! Almighty YHWH, though, will not allow the contest to end in a stalemate and thus commands Aaron’s *tannin* to consume the monsters produced by Pharaoh’s magicians. Pharaoh’s clout undoubtedly offers no match for the unlimited power of YHWH, the God of the Hebrews.

In considering the significance of this passage as a whole, the “sign of the serpent” pericope does well to represent the overall theme of the plagues themselves. Enns asserts the idea concisely: “This one brief incident embodies the main elements of the plagues that follow: God shows his power and Pharaoh resists the obvious conclusion that he is no match for the God of Israel.”<sup>75</sup> The

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<sup>72</sup> Newsome, 29.

<sup>73</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 3, (Dallas: Word, Inc. 1989), 91.

<sup>74</sup> Brueggemann, 740.

<sup>75</sup> Enns, 196.

signs, just like the stories, pictures, or object lessons in a sermon, only serve as symbols to draw attention to something more significant than the item itself. Specifically in Exodus 7:8ff, the power of Aaron's *tannin* to consume those of the court magicians illustrates the literary technique of foreshadowing. "The only other use of the verb 'swallow' in Exodus occurs in 15:12, where it refers to the swallowing of the Egyptians in the depths of the earth beneath the sea."<sup>76</sup> Fretheim concludes, "As signs... their intent is not finally to leave observers with mouths open in amazement. Having gotten peoples' attention, they point toward [the] future..."<sup>77</sup> The signs and wonders recalled in Exodus 7 and in the chapters that follow (i.e. the snake episode, as well as the ten plagues) are meant to impress in Pharaoh's memory and heart the mighty power of the God of the Hebrews. Alas, faith history records that Egypt's king refuses to listen, and his whole country suffers the terrible consequences.

Of note in a larger sense, though clearly the character Moses in the text seeks to persuade the character Pharaoh to "let [God's] people go," the *intention* to connect to memory lies not only amongst the players in the story itself, but also in the way the account is generally recorded in the biblical corpus. To wit, Johannes Pederson argues the entire Moses-Pharaoh scene itself comprises a drama of sorts, all for the express purpose of looming largely in the narrative history of Israel.<sup>78</sup> Brueggemann summarizes this idea: "the episodes in the plague narrative are highly stylized, repetitive, and culminate in dramatic force.

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<sup>76</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991) 113.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>78</sup> Johannes Pederson, *Israel: It's Life and Culture*, Vol. III-IV, (Denmark: Dyva & Jeppesen, 1940), 728-737.



This liturgic exercise (which has as its intention the incorporation of the young into the memory) need not have been slavishly disciplined about ‘what happened’ in any specific detail.”<sup>79</sup> In this view, the Exodus narrative still speaks directly to the rationale behind this doctoral undertaking, though in a different sense. Rather than just the characters within the story employing story/object lessons to encourage memory in other characters in the narrative, the *account itself* seeks to render memorability as it is passed down throughout the generations. Clearly, in more than one sense, the exodus is a story to remember!

### *Old Testament – Ezekiel*

While the story of Moses and the exodus narrative represent a definitive example of symbols intended for commitment to memory,<sup>80</sup> they do not stand alone in the Hebrew canon as illustrations of such. In addition, the Scriptures detailing the words and actions of the prophets also employ great symbolism and garner significant attention for their unorthodox object lessons. Ezekiel, for example, famously communicates the Word of God through unconventional means, and a representative passage of his methods is found in the twenty-fourth chapter of the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, is introduced in the first chapter of the book as a member of those exiled in the Babylonian conquest of 597 BCE.<sup>81</sup> In the fifth year following deportation, Ezekiel begins having visions from God concerning the

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<sup>79</sup> Brueggemann, 722.

<sup>80</sup> To speak of modern preachers, illustrations functionally serve a similar role, as symbols intended for commitment to the memory of the hearer.

<sup>81</sup> Ezekiel 1:1ff.

fate of God's people, and Ezekiel is thus commissioned as a prophet and is instructed by YHWH exactly how he should "communicate" with the people. More to the point, "engaging in a series of symbolic acts, the prophet [becomes] a sign prefiguring certain doom for Jerusalem."<sup>82</sup> In his commentary on Ezekiel, Duguid combines pieces of the phrase above to claim that Ezekiel's "sign-acts," as outlandish as they no doubt seemed, "were a regular part of the way prophets went about their business."<sup>83</sup> The purpose of such acts, in Lang's view, was "to provide a dramatic visual aid to increase the impact of the message."<sup>84</sup> Modern proclaimers of the Gospel attempt as much every Sunday, though times and methods have definitely morphed throughout the generations. Perhaps Ezekiel's actions were not too out-of-the-ordinary after all, especially for one known as a prophet of the Lord!

Conceivably Ezekiel is best-known for the sign-acts he performs in Ezekiel 4:1-8; more specifically, the prophet lies on his left side for 390 days, then on his right side 40 days as a depiction of the punishment for the sins of Israel and Judah. Furthermore, YHWH commands Ezekiel to cook his food over human excrement, but ultimately is "cut some slack" when God, upon hearing Ezekiel's complaining, allows him to use cow dung instead. For the purposes of this project, however, the Ezekiel 4 passage will yield to a later passage found in the Ezekiel 24 because, quite simply, "there is no textual evidence that these symbolic

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<sup>82</sup> Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2005), 1.

<sup>83</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 92.

<sup>84</sup> Bernhard Lang, "Street Theater, Raising the Dead, and the Zoroastrian Connection in Ezekiel's Prophecy," in *Ezekiel and His Book*, ed. Johan Lust, (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1986), 305.

acts [found in Ezekiel 4] were performed publicly. Unlike other symbolic acts, in which the audience asks for an interpretation, no audience here responds to Ezekiel's actions."<sup>85</sup> Undoubtedly there are competing interpretations of this passage, my own included, that would lean towards an understanding that *does* assume Ezekiel 4 describes public activity. Despite those inclinations, however, Ezekiel 24 *definitively* involves public proclamation and sign-acts; thus, the chapter twenty-four passage serves as a stronger foundation for a project concerning object lessons in sermon and how they enrich memory.

Ezekiel 24 actually contains not just one but two strong symbolic instances where the prophet communicates the messages of God in an illustrative way. In the outset of this chapter, the Word of the Lord comes to the prophet and informs him that Jerusalem itself is under attack. The words of the text describe, “<sup>1</sup>In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: ‘<sup>2</sup>Mortal, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.’”<sup>86</sup> The threefold repetition of the words “this...day” is meant to underscore the importance of the fact that the violence has taken place in the present.<sup>87</sup> The anticipation of this event has been building for a while and now comes to a head in chapter 24. Blenkinsopp claims, “All of the prophetic activity recorded in the previous

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<sup>85</sup> Odell, 53.

<sup>86</sup> Ezekiel 24:1-2.

<sup>87</sup> Odell, 311.

chapters leads up to this moment of judgment.”<sup>88</sup> God’s people have been disobedient, and Jerusalem now suffers the consequences.

The first oracle found in Ezekiel 24 is an allegory uttered to a “rebellious house,” (v.3) underscoring the already-set-in-motion judgment of YHWH. Commonly referred to as (something along the lines of) the “Parable of the Boiling Pot,” this metaphor, broken up into three sections,<sup>89</sup> contains the parable itself (vv.3-5), then two subsequent statements of woe (vv.6-8, vv.9-14, respectively) further elucidating the oracle. Indeed, this allegory stands as a powerful image of the consequences of the “house of Israel’s”<sup>90</sup> actions; no doubt modern preachers would relish creating word-pictures so rich and memorable as those of Ezekiel in this passage (this modern preacher included)!

The parable proper (vv.3-5) takes the form of a song, and indeed is one of “bitter irony,”<sup>91</sup> for it is “perhaps a popular ditty sung by cooks preparing a sumptuous meal”;<sup>92</sup> but the meaning behind YHWH’s song will offer no reason to celebrate. The parable/allegory (or מַשָּׁל, transliterated *mashal*) speaks of preparing a stew; but unlike the paltry provisions described the last time Ezekiel was commissioned to prepare food (see: the sign-act described in chapter 4), *this* meal described in chapter 24 speaks of the finest meat. More specifically the

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<sup>88</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990) 102.

<sup>89</sup> Odell, 312-315.

<sup>90</sup> Term employed by Leslie Allen describing the “unrepentant family of... exilic representatives of Israel, who shared the rebellious spirit of the Judeans in the homeland.” Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 29, (Dallas: Word, Inc. 1989), 59.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>92</sup> Katheryn P. Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. VI, Ed. by David L. Petersen, et. al., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1333.

*masal* instructs the hearer to, “Put in... all the good pieces, the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with choice bones.”<sup>93</sup>

Quickly, however, the tenor of the parable changes from that of a celebratory festival meal to that of woe and despair. Jerusalem is described as the “bloody city” (v.6, and again in v.9) whose iniquities have not gone unnoticed by YHWH. Though the details and structure of this allegory remain complex, “the point of the parable is that YHWH is in charge of the military operations and that the king of Babylon functions as a servant or vassal carrying out his orders to besiege the city and threaten the lives of its citizens and refugees.”<sup>94</sup> Why then is the city being overrun, and why the image of blood used to describe such atrocities? Though the breaking of ritualistic sacrificial laws is hinted at in v.7, “Ezekiel’s primary concern is with the judicial murders that have filled the city with the blood of innocent men, women, and children (ch. 22; Ezekiel 7:23).”<sup>95</sup> Because of this oppression and disobedience, the first and second woes assure the hearer, “The difficult process [of]... burning away the scum and removing the rust... will continue until the dirt is scoured away, but in the meantime nothing inside the pot will survive. Judgment on the bloody city will then be complete.”<sup>96</sup>

As proclaimers of God’s words in the twenty-first century, preachers would do well to employ Ezekiel’s model of story to communicate difficult truths. Of course, Ezekiel is not the only biblical voice to engage metaphor in order to deliver memorable, challenging messages (cf. 2 Samuel 12:1-15, Matthew 23:1ff,

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<sup>93</sup> Ezekiel 24:4.

<sup>94</sup> Allen, 59.

<sup>95</sup> Odell, 314.

<sup>96</sup> Blenkinsopp, 104.

passages throughout Revelation, etc.). Having said that, while embracing Ezekiel's communication method may be desirable regarding the first section of Ezekiel 24, his technique remains unenviable when considering vv.15-27. In this passage following the pot parable and subsequent woes, the text describes the symbolism of the death of Ezekiel's wife.

In this second major unit of the Ezekiel 24 text, the Bible records the following:

<sup>15</sup>The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>16</sup>Mortal, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. <sup>17</sup>Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your upper lip or eat the bread of mourners. <sup>18</sup>So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded.<sup>97</sup>

Having been tasked with uttering a harsh and foreboding parable of destruction, now Ezekiel must bear witness to the ultimate wage of sin and “sacrifice his wife on the altar of his prophetic vocation.”<sup>98</sup> If Ezekiel found lying on his side for more than a year difficult, surely that sacrifice pales in comparison to YHWH's latest pronouncement. This newest sign-act becomes particularly memorable when it prescribes Ezekiel, diverging from typical bereavement protocol of the day, to display no outward signs of bereavement. “He is not to mourn; there are to be no tears, no audible sighing and moaning of the kind still in evidence at funerals in the Middle East, no covering the head with dust and ashes, no veiling the lower part of the face, no going barefoot.”<sup>99</sup> Further, “He

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<sup>97</sup> Ezekiel 24:15-18.

<sup>98</sup> Allen, 60.

<sup>99</sup> Blenkinsopp, 104.

must also abstain from taking part in the funeral meal.”<sup>100</sup> As if it were not enough for Ezekiel to lose the “delight of his eyes” (v.16), he must also endure such circumstances without a proper outlet for his grief.

Though the focus of this present undertaking prevents extensive critique of these matters, this command from YHWH raises some rather difficult interpretive and theological issues, if all this comes to pass simply for the purpose of a metaphor. Could not the symbolism of the “imminent loss of... [the Temple], which would go unmourned”<sup>101</sup> have been communicated in a different, less-drastring way? Or at minimum, could not Ezekiel at least have been allowed “the mourning rituals which would have honored her life [and] acknowledged who she was... [so that] their community [could have] come together in grief, despair, and hope of healing?”<sup>102</sup> While scholarship continues to ask such questions, the fact remains that Ezekiel’s (and/or his wife’s) sign-act here in Ezekiel 24 serves as a powerful metaphor for the sorrow wrought on Jerusalem as a consequence of disobedience.

Whatever conclusions one might draw on the hermeneutical nuances of Ezekiel 24:15-24, the text indicates that the plan works. This sign/act gets the attention of the people:

<sup>19</sup>Then the people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting this way?” <sup>20</sup>Then I said to them: The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>21</sup>Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and your heart’s desire; and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. <sup>22</sup>And you shall do as I have done...<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. And clearly Ezekiel is not Baptist.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Darr, 1345.

<sup>103</sup> Ezekiel 24:19-22.

The death of the wife of Ezekiel no doubt remained burnt into the memory of the people from that day forward as a symbol of the power of YHWH in the face of waywardness. Though undoubtedly at great cost for everyone involved, Ezekiel's latest object lesson proves quite possibly to be the most memorable of all.

### *New Testament – Jesus*

While the Hebrew Bible contains several examples of metaphor utilized to communicate the Word of God, no one in all of Scripture stands out as a master illustrator quite like Jesus himself. Undoubtedly, Christ's didactic method hails as the standard by which all other teaching is measured, and His ability to paint word-pictures remains unparalleled to this day. As persons who walk to the pulpit every Sunday and seek to communicate Scripture in memorable, picturesque, and effective ways, we ministers seek to employ Jesus' method – while never truly repeatable – can (and very well should) inform our proclamation of the Good News. Consequently, a thorough examination of Jesus' illustrative teaching style is in order, highlighted using a text in which Christ explains *why* He uses such a mysterious yet memorable approach. To wit, the Parable of the Sower found in the fourth chapter of Mark shall serve as our instructive guide.

In order to understand the particular parable text in Mark 4 that embodies Jesus' didactic technique, and to get to the heart of a project revolving around memory and story, a detailed discussion of the general nature of parables proves necessary. The English word parable comes from the Greek word *παράβολε*,



meaning, “Something that serves as a model or example pointing beyond itself for later realization.”<sup>104</sup> Adams further comments that the word parable in Greek is “formed from *para*, alongside of [plus] *ballo*, to throw... The image of a parable is something thrown alongside rather than something thrown across the path that will cause a person to stumble. In other words, a parable gets at an idea indirectly.”<sup>105</sup>

While these dictionary/reference book definitions are informative, discovering the full meaning of the word parable proves difficult and as a result, has been debated and discussed through the centuries, not just in brief entries, but in entire books dedicated to the subject. Moreover, the considerations remain on-going. From Aristotle (“A parable is a story that might have happened, but did not happen”),<sup>106</sup> to this project’s author himself (“A parable is a story that uses understandable circumstances to communicate something true about God’s kingdom”),<sup>107</sup> historical scholars and church leaders alike have added their definitions alongside those of the dictionaries as an explication of Jesus’ primary didactic method. Among the many designations to consider, C.H. Dodd’s deserves primary consideration: “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or

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<sup>104</sup> Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 759.

<sup>105</sup> James R. Adams, *From Literal to Literary: The Essential Reference Book for Biblical Metaphors*, 2nd ed., (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 207.

<sup>106</sup> Sharon Dowd, *Reading Mark*, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2000), 38.

<sup>107</sup> Definition offered by Garin Hill in a sermon preached at Sandy Plains Baptist Church, Shelby, NC. October 7, 2012.

strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”<sup>108</sup>

Beyond the various definitions of the *word* “parable” stands the just-as-important *function* of a parable, and its implications for this project cannot be overstated. In other words, can a parable (or an illustration, in this experiment) serve to carry the message of the text? What an imperative question for this experiment! At debate for some time in American preaching culture is what is the best way – or the only proper way, some would argue – to communicate the truth of Scripture within sermon. Certain preachers and scholars such as Haddon Robinson and Richard Mayhue, as well as those in the current Nine Mark movement, have for years promoted the verse-by-verse, expository manner of preaching. As a result, this paradigm has filtered throughout more traditionally “conservative” seminaries; and consequently many in the contemporary generation of preachers ascribe to this methodology. In Robinson’s own words, “The type of preaching that most effectively lays open the Bible so that men are confronted by its truth is expository preaching.”<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, Mayhue adds, “One’s study falls short of the goal... [if] principlizing the biblical text... is omitted or slighted.”<sup>110</sup> While some preachers use this style to great effect, the drawback remains that, in certain circles, preaching ostensibly is not even considered “biblical” if the proclaimer *does not* walk verse-by-verse and take great care to distill the text of its “A, B, C” principles.

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<sup>108</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1935), 16.

<sup>109</sup> Haddon Robinson, “What is Expository Preaching,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 131, No. 521, (January, 1974), 57.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching,” *Master’s Seminary Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (September, 1990), 122.

Parables, on the other hand, embody a different way of communicating “truth.”<sup>111</sup> Leonard Sweet has coined the word, “narraphors” as a combination of narrative and metaphor. They are story-pictures, or modern day parables as it were. In Sweet’s words, “Narraphors do more than tell the truth; in Jesus’ hands *they are the truth.*”<sup>112</sup> (Italics added.) Obviously, this method of communication stands in stark contrast to a verse-by-verse approach but is no less potent in its transformative power. Furthermore, if Jesus’ frequent usage of such a technique is any indication as to the appropriate nature of story, perhaps it can be even *more* transformative than other methods. Sweet further highlights the contrast in the two approaches by adding:

Traditional textual exegesis is based on mining the ore of words to excavate the gems of ‘biblical principles,’ a biblical panning for nuggets of wisdom in one massive stream of words. Biblical semiotics, by contrast, is a form of spelunking the Scriptures while surfing the Spirit for resonant images and stories by which to live and for which to die in Christ.<sup>113</sup>

Parables were powerful and memorable off the tongue of Christ Jesus, and the modern-day proclaimer who stands in His methodological shadow finds him/herself in excellent rhetorical company.

Regarding parables, one more general point deserves mentioning from the research of Dan Via. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, allegories and parables have served rhetoricians as vehicles for communicating a particular message. Via, however, slightly differentiates between the two rhetorical devices. Via keenly

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<sup>111</sup> The irony that Jesus’ own didactic methodology would be frowned upon in some academic circles in this country does not go unnoticed; however, this project’s goal does not lend itself to an in-depth discussion concerning the benefits and drawbacks of using the expository method to convey “truth.”

<sup>112</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014), 67.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 22.

observes that allegories depend upon a referent and thus necessitate additional familiarities to make connections. Parables, on the other hand, can apprise the hearer of new information without requiring other outside knowledge.<sup>114</sup> This distinction also speaks to the previous methodology discussion, as stories create their own “universe” and are not necessarily bound by the historical context of the storytellers. In Via’s own words, “A number of Jesus’ parables are in a strict sense literary [works of art] and... because of this they are not just illustrations of ideas and cannot have the immediate connection with Jesus’ historical situation which is customarily attributed to them.”<sup>115</sup> Stories, it seems, can carry power well beyond their original telling.

Indeed, the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:1-20 is one such timeless, compelling story, containing both allegory and parable. The parable proper is sandwiched between a discussion about the true kindred of Jesus at the close of Mark 3, and further examples of parables are seen (e.g. growing seed, mustard seed) as Mark 4 continues. It is hardly a coincidence that Jesus will explain the reason for the parables, and then go on to share several more examples with his followers. The pericope itself opens with some introductory words about the crowds that seemingly always follow Jesus wherever he goes. Having floated out onto the water in a borrowed boat, Jesus shares the memorable parable of a sower scattering seed on various types of earth (vv.3-8). In these verses, Jesus describes concisely yet cogently the different levels of receptivity in hardpan, rocky, thorny, and fertile ground. Later in vv.14-20, consistent with the theme

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<sup>114</sup> Dan Otto Via, Jr. *The Parables*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 7.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, x.

throughout Mark's Gospel of the disciples' lack of understanding, Jesus has to explain the meaning of this particular parable. Though the disciples undoubtedly welcome this clarification here, they are typically not so lucky as to merit further parable elucidation in other instances. In modern phraseology, the disciples were assuredly glad to "take it while they could get it!"

Whether hearing the parable for the first time or reading it in depth for the hundredth time, the studious learner recognizes the power of the parable is evident immediately. Beyond merely comprehending a principle that Jesus' teaching means to communicate about receptivity to the Gospel, one vividly sees in the mind's eye the sower tossing the grain; and the *story itself* embodies the meaning. Sweet's narraphor definition proves decidedly accurate. What's more, and certainly ironic in the face of other empirically minded traditions, the vague nature of certain aspects of this parable *contributes to* (rather than detracts from) the efficacy and potency of the story. For example, the identity of the sower is mentioned at the outset and never cited again.<sup>116</sup> Marcus's perspective on this stylistic choice acknowledges that the "sower...sets the whole narrative in motion and so cannot be considered incidental to its action."<sup>117</sup> More to the point, rather than the lack of clarity around the sower's identity exemplifying an oversight or error of this parable, Marcus contends the opposite is true. The evangelist's failure to identify the sower is a "gap" – an *intentionally* vague piece of

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<sup>116</sup> Robert Guelich, *Mark*. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 34A. (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 192.

<sup>117</sup> Joel Marcus, "Blanks and Gaps in the Markan Parable of the Sower," *Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 254.

information – meant to push the reader to conclude that the sower could invoke multiple personas at the same time.<sup>118</sup>

For a project acutely concerned with the efficacy and memorability of Jesus' parables in the minds of the hearers, the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4 proves especially valuable when considering the text surrounding the parable and the subsequent explanation. More specifically, a cluster of three verses (vv.10-12) sandwiched in between the parable itself (4:1-9) and its clarification (4:13-20) speak to the heart of the reason behind the parables. The biblical text states:

<sup>10</sup>And when he was alone, those around him with the Twelve asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup>He said to them, "To you the mystery of the kingdom of God has been given, but to those outside all things come in riddles, <sup>12</sup>that is, 'seeing they see but do not perceive and hearing they hear but do not understand. If they did, they would repent and be forgiven.'" <sup>119</sup>

When the disciples ask Jesus pointedly about the reason behind his methodology, He tells them His words reveal the mysteries of the kingdom. As to what the "mystery" specifically is, the text is unclear. Williamson offers two suggestions: one, "mystery" could be translated as a genitive of apposition, rendering "the kingdom itself as a mystery"; or, the secret of the kingdom of God can be understood as Jesus himself.<sup>120</sup> Culpepper adds to the latter offering by citing Paul, that this revelation of divine knowledge has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.<sup>121</sup> Garland offers a summary statement either way, that "*mystery* may convey to us something that cannot be explained or understood," but it does not

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 262.

<sup>119</sup> Guelich, 199. (Author's translation of Mark 4:10-13.)

<sup>120</sup> Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark*, Interpretation, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1983), 92.

<sup>121</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2007), 139.

“refer to something unknowable.” Rather, it is something that “can only be communicated by divine revelation.”<sup>122</sup> Divine revelation, it seems, becomes clearer through storytelling, at least it does in the teachings of Jesus.

If proper exegetical care is not taken concerning this text and the revelation of these mysteries, one could come to a conclusion that Jesus employed parables *intentionally to confuse* the hearer about the kingdom of God; for the purpose clause of v.12 could be read in this manner. Surely this is not the objective of the Christ, and decidedly we who preach His Gospel are not called to further veil the mysteries God has made known! Though reams of paper have been expended discussing the exact meaning of Mark 4:12, our purposes warrant concise and cogent conclusions, and to this end Guelich’s translation as cited above proves especially informative. Jesus’ parables reveal the mysteries of the kingdom for those who accept His words and seek to believe. For others, parables only serve to cloud already muddy waters, for one cannot simply intellectually man-handle matters meant to be uncovered only through faith. Surely one of the best summaries I have read of why Jesus speaks in story comes from a respected pastor and church leader; my ministry supervisor Guy Sayles offers<sup>123</sup> the following words:

Jesus’ answer was, in effect, that he taught in parables because the crowds failed to understand him... They had hardened themselves against any life-changing impact of Jesus’ words. Parables were a way for Jesus to speak meaningfully to those who wanted to hear him receptively, but they were also a way to leave in their confusion those who listened to him only for what we might call ‘entertainment value.’ Those who were impressed by his wisdom and charmed by the poetic richness of his teaching, but who

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<sup>122</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 157.

<sup>123</sup> In response to the Matthew 13:1-23 version of this parable.

were unwilling to invest themselves in the kingdom he described, would not be able to understand his parables.<sup>124</sup>

Jesus, as the master teacher, wanted those who originally followed Him and those of us who, centuries later, also follow Him to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The richness and compelling nature of the parables always point to something deeper than themselves. The power they carry can indeed guide those of us “biblical storytellers” who preach week-to-week in the twenty-first century as we hope to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom to the faithful people of God.

### *Summary of Biblical Reflection*

Moses, Ezekiel, and Jesus of Nazareth offer us but a glimpse into the world of signs, stories, and imagery in the Bible. The frequent and effective use of this symbolism by faithful followers of God in Scripture sheds light on the inherent natural power of these rhetorical devices. As a weekly proclaimer, I definitely hope my sermons can tap into the memorability and impact of the messages of our biblical forbearers. The precedent has been set and the example given. The opportunity, it seems, is ripe for the picking.

### **Historical Reflection**

Throughout the centuries, preachers of every cultural and denominational stripe have attempted to preach poignant sermons that connect with their hearers on deeply spiritual levels. In particular, some of these proclaimers have

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<sup>124</sup> Guy Sayles, *Matthew: Living as Disciples of Jesus*, Annual Bible Study, (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006), 89.



embraced memorable rhetorical techniques such as invoking story, image, and object lesson to further solidify the GTT of their respective sermon. While surveying an exhaustive list of such preachers goes beyond the scope of this project, highlighting a few who have excelled in sharing such illustrations proves quite germane. Those who merit current consideration include John Chrysostom, Bernard of Clairvaux, Ulrich Zwingli, and ultimately some notable modern voices as well.

*John Chrysostom (347 CE – 407 CE)*

Beyond Christ himself, the definitive standard-bearer for preaching in the first several hundred years of Christendom was John Chrysostom. Born in Antioch in 347, John rose to prominence in his late 30s and early 40s, ultimately becoming the Archbishop of Constantinople in 397. John's preaching was so much revered that his admirers granted him the surname "Chrysostom," a moniker that means, "Golden-mouthed."<sup>125</sup> Chrysostom was a compelling speaker; in fact, "the people were so spell-bound that pickpockets were able to ply their trade with great success. He was so popular with the people at his first preaching station that he had to be kidnapped in order to move him to a new post."<sup>126</sup> Most assuredly, few among us preach with such excellence as to merit a kidnapping! Quite simply, he is regarded as the best preacher of the age, or most ages, for that matter. "Judged by his character, by his sermons as we have them,

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<sup>125</sup> Christian Classics Ethereal Library. "John Chrysostom." *History of the Christian Church, Volume III: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity. CE 311-600*, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc3.iii.xiii.x.html?highlight=de,sacerdotio#highlight>.

<sup>126</sup> Clyde E. Fant, Jr., William Pinson Jr., and Donald Hammer, *20 Centuries of Great Preaching: An Encyclopedia of Preaching*, Vol. 1, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 53.

and by his work and influence, John Chrysostom has been always, and with singular agreement among critics, esteemed one of the greatest preachers of all time.”<sup>127</sup>

One of Chrysostom’s greatest strengths was his ability to keep the attention of the audience, as the pickpockets apparently recognized. He did so, in part, through utilizing illustrations to great effect. To this end, Fant comments, “Chrysostom was not lacking in descriptive abilities. Scarcely a page of his sermons goes by without some allusion or illustration. The modern art of illustrating was unknown in his day, but comparisons and similes of the highest order fill his sermons.”<sup>128</sup>

For example, in his sermon *The Sixth Instruction*, Chrysostom addresses the issue of people leaving the churches and his subsequent bitter disappointment. He compares his own dissatisfaction in these circumstances with that of a farmer who labors diligently but whose labors are “no more productive than a stone.” He conjures the mental image of a farmer bending over an unyielding stalk of corn or wheat and shaking his head in bitter disappointment. Especially in a day when illustrations were not in vogue, what a poignant word-picture! No wonder Chrysostom stands as one of the greatest preachers of all time, and no wonder many try to emulate his rhetorical example.

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<sup>127</sup> Edwin C. Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), 91.

<sup>128</sup> Fant, 59.

*Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 CE – 1153 CE)*

St. Bernard was born late in the eleventh century into a family of nobility. His home life definitely affected him deeply as evidenced by the order, influence, and devotion he grew to embody, found first in his mother.<sup>129</sup> St. Bernard was so compelling that his influence in the twelfth century, and subsequent ones as well, arose from his “magnetic personality, lively imagination, rich culture, and heart glowing with love for God and man.”<sup>130</sup> St. Bernard is most well known as the founder and abbot of the convent of Clairvaux (Clear Valley), which had previously been called “Wormwood” and was popularly avoided as a “seat of robbers.”<sup>131</sup> William of St. Thierry recounts, however, that under St. Bernard’s and the convent’s influence, “the hills began to distil sweetness, and fields, before sterile, blossomed and became fat under the divine benediction.”<sup>132</sup>

Not only known for his kindness and impeccable character, St. Bernard was also one of the most influential preachers of his time, as well. Fant asserts, “Bernard was one of the most distinguished French preachers of all time. His sermons made him known as the most splendid orator of his age.”<sup>133</sup> However splendidly Bernard communicated, though, at times he stretched the meaning of the biblical text by employing “fanciful” allegory,<sup>134</sup> no doubt an attempt to connect deeply with his hearers. In one such sermon, St. Bernard compares

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>130</sup> Christian Classics Ethereal Library. *St. Bernard of Clairvaux*. “History of the Christian Church, Volume V: The Middle Ages. CE 1049-1294,” accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc5.ii.x.v.html?highlight=bernard,clairvaux#highlight>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Fant, 145.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

“charity” and “obedience” to “beautiful garments” one would wear.<sup>135</sup> The mental picture of putting on these virtues echoes Paul’s words to the Colossians (3:12). No doubt this kind of imagery arrested Bernard’s hearers throughout his ministry.

*Ulrich Zwingli (1484 CE – 1531 CE)*

Ulrich Zwingli was born the first day of the year in 1484, a mere seven weeks after the birth of Martin Luther,<sup>136</sup> in whose historic shadow Zwingli would stand for all history.<sup>137</sup> Zwingli had the benefit of great access to educational opportunities, and his parents saw fit to provide those for him first at Wesen, then a Latin school at Basle, then eventually at the University of Vienna from 1500 to 1502.<sup>138</sup>

Ultimately Zwingli matriculated, and his subsequent preaching and teaching had a wide berth of influence. Fant notes that far fewer of Zwingli’s sermons exist than do other preachers of his time (notably John Calvin), for Zwingli was not privileged to have a stenographer record his discourses.<sup>139</sup> “To keep his sermons alive and relevant” with personality and humor, Zwingli preached without a manuscript.<sup>140</sup> As a pastor myself who preaches week-in and week-out, experience has taught me that the message comes across disingenuous

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>136</sup> Luther’s place in history undoubtedly dwarfs that of Zwingli; however, Zwingli is cited here for his penchant for lively and memorable preaching.

<sup>137</sup> Christian Classics Ethereal Library. “Ulrich Zwingli.” *History of the Christian Church, Volume VII: Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation*, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc8.iv.ii.ii.html?highlight=zwingli#highlight>.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Clyde E. Fant, Jr., William Pinson Jr., and Donald Hammer, *20 Centuries of Great Preaching: An Encyclopedia of Preaching*, Vol. 2, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 85-86.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 86.

and ethereal if, like Zwingli, one *does not* add a bit of personal touch and humor to the proclamation.

In one extant sermon entitled “Concerning Steadfastness and the Perseverance in Goodness,” Zwingli employs a story to great effect when speaking of the virtue of steadfastness. More specifically, he recounts the Roman Cornelius Scipio who, beyond the bounds of protocol, forces the convening Italian war counsel to take arms and defend their home, Rome. Of Scipio, Zwingli says, “He maintained such steadfastness in all things until his death. In short, no virtue is a virtue if it is not executed in steadfastness.”<sup>141</sup> No doubt, those who heard Zwingli’s compelling words and relatable story were moved to action by it, and most decidedly this comparison stuck in their memories for years to come.

### *Twentieth Century Proclaimers and Beyond*

As one peruses the incredibly gifted preachers of the last twenty centuries, the task of delimiting the excellent storytellers to just a few is almost laughable. The creativity and genius of our fathers and mothers in proclamation cannot be merely summarized concisely, but one *can* get an idea of just how much good, memorable, illustrative preaching has existed throughout Christendom. To be sure, the preaching of those in past centuries has led us to discover in modern times a new bevy of imaginative proclaimers, all standing on the shoulders of those who preceded them.

The imaginative, creative, memorable preaching of pastors like Barbara Brown Taylor, Fred Craddock, Frederick Buechner, Eugene Lowry, Thomas Long,

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 93.

and Gardner Taylor (just to name a few) has riveted hearers for decades. Now with the ubiquity of books and Internet podcasts, their sermons will no doubt remain on “repeat” for years to come.

For example, Barbara Brown Taylor has a way of preaching a sermon that comes right up, sits down beside us, and beseeches that we listen in the same way we would to a tale of yesteryear spoken from a loving grandfather. Almost mystically, her words feel familiar, even if we have never heard them before, and because of that they get close enough to affect us, sometimes before we even realize it. In her sermon “The Cheap Cure,” Taylor recalls watching the fireworks over the East River in New York City, drawing the reader/hearer into the scene as a friend would over coffee. Ultimately, she turns the conversation to freedom, what it means, and how Naaman experienced it in the biblical text in 2 Kings 5.<sup>142</sup> The way she interlaces story with theme and text is just exquisite; no wonder her sermons are so beloved!

Additionally, Craddock’s ability to turn an ordinary conversation into the hinge on which the entire sermon swings is unparalleled. In “Back to Basics,” Craddock reminds us of the importance of remembering what has happened to us so we will remember how God has shaped our lives. In the end of his homily, Craddock recalls a conversation with a Londoner who tells him of the tragedy her life has been; however, she will not forget her past, because it reminds her of what the Lord has done for her.<sup>143</sup> What powerful words Craddock employs!

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<sup>142</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home by Another Way*, (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1999), 157-163.

<sup>143</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 14.

A further example is Frederick Buechner's uniquely insightful ability to paint words and scenes that come alive on the canvases in the minds of the hearers. He is a wordsmith of the highest order. In his, "A Room Called Remember," Buechner opens the sermon with this poetic prose:

Every once in a while, if you're like me, you have a dream that wakes you up. Sometimes it's a bad dream – a dream in which the shadows become so menacing that your heart skips a beat and you come awake to the knowledge that not even the actual darkness of the night is as fearsome as the dreamed darkness, not even the shadows without as formidable as the shadows within.<sup>144</sup>

The power of Buechner's words, emphatically, lies not just in the rich and prosaic way he shares them, but also in their ability to grab readers and draw them into just such a scene. All have undoubtedly awoken from such a dream at some point, and Buechner has an uncanny ability to bring the hearer back there in thought and spirit. His is a unique gift, and it is no wonder that his images stick with such force in the mind of those that enjoy his sermons.

The future looks bright for those of us who stand on the shoulders of giants such as Chrysostom, St. Bernard, Zwingli, Taylor, Craddock, Buechner, and others of their class. They set the bar high, and we should consider their imagination and, inasmuch as it elevates our own proclamation, incorporate this creativity into our own philosophies of preaching. To this end, a paraphrase of Whitman's words seems apropos: The powerful play goes on... what verse will we contribute?<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember: Uncollected Pieces*, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992), 1.

<sup>145</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Aveline Press, 1931, Original pub. date, 1860), 281.

## CHAPTER 4

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

To get at the heart of the analysis of this project in an orderly fashion, the following critical evaluation chapter will be divided into three major sections, each corresponding to the three divisions of this project that necessitate assessment. First, this research project leaned heavily on quantitative data output in its results; thus, a thorough discussion of the compiled data is in order. Which sermons *were* most memorable? Which survey questions were most frequently answered correctly? Did the women remember differently than the men, or the did teenagers remember more than the adults? These and other related questions will be addressed in the outset. Next, an examination of the focus group data will shed more light on the qualitative elements of this experiment, considering what kinds of sermons these parishioners recall and how well these participants scored on the surveys. Finally, an assessment of the effectiveness of the instruments used is in order, for the rest of the project essentially rests on the validity of the pieces used to run the experiment. More specifically, the consent forms, the learning styles inventory, the sermons, and the surveys themselves will be evaluated in light of the data gathered. This final “instruments” section will also briefly evaluate the processes themselves (i.e. where the testing occurred and who would distribute the surveys). In all three of these sections, “critical evaluation” will be understood as both the statistics



estimated as “critical” information,<sup>146</sup> as well as what those same statistics might be saying in a general sense. Ultimately, however, this particular section will stop short of drawing major inferences, and the crux of the general conclusions will be drawn in the next chapter.

### **Compiled Data Analysis**

An accurate analysis of any compiled data<sup>147</sup> must first clarify the assumptions made about the data itself. First, because of the nature of this project (i.e. done in a small, local church setting), the parameters for testing were not quite as “clean” as they would have been were this research being done for a company or university trying to generalize results that could be adapted across settings. In other words, and perhaps this is a given understanding for doctor of ministry experiments, the sample size to which I had access (about thirty persons per survey) would ideally be much larger for a project that yielded what could be considered universal results. These narrow parameters particularly come into play when the analysis outcomes are broken down into age ranges. For example, only two persons between the ages of 0 – 12 completed the picture survey<sup>148</sup> – hardly enough to claim valid results on what *all* children under age 13 remember about sermons with pictures! As such, at the behest of Dr. Labban and his practiced experimental expertise, for some of the analysis I decided to reduce the number of age groups, making five groups into three.

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<sup>146</sup> In other words, out of the thousands of data points that could be compared, the fact that one datum point is compared with another exhibits critical evaluation in and of itself.

<sup>147</sup> See Appendix E for the compiled data in its entirety.

<sup>148</sup> See Appendix E2.

More specifically, the surveys each week began by asking the participants two descriptive questions, “What is your gender?” and “What is your age range?” For the age category, the choices were: A. 0 – 12, B. 13 – 19, C. 20 – 35, D. 36 – 55, or E. 56 and up. In an effort to more-fully validate the results, in the analysis I combined the 0 – 12 age range results with those of the 13 – 19 range; in addition, I pooled the 20 – 35 year-old results with those from the 36 – 55 year-old group. Consequently, I am left with three groups: 0 – 19, 20 – 55, and 56 and up. The drawback of this approach is obvious: 20 year-olds may not have much in common with their fellow 55 year-old churchgoers, and so on. However, the combinations yield bigger sample sizes, and thus the results for a given category have more validity because there are simply more people. Throughout the rest of this analysis, when I am referring to this combined three-category age breakdown, I will refer to this as the “beta set.” The results broken down into the original five categories of age range will be the “alpha set.”

Another draw back of the sample size and setting is that I have treated the total 118 valid surveys<sup>149</sup> as 118 “separate” surveys, as though they are completely disconnected, answered by 118 different people.<sup>150</sup> Obviously, the same 30 people (approximately) have taken the same four different surveys. In other words, survey “46” might be related to survey “92” in that the same person took it; however, aside from the focus group members who wrote their respective

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<sup>149</sup> It should be noted the data reveals that the first question, “What was the theme,” actually had 119 total respondents over the course of four surveys (as shown in Appendix E12). Certainly that number is to some degree a result of researcher error. The most plausible explanations are either a coding mistake, or in the story survey someone answered only that question and it was not discovered in data entry. Either way, it deserves mentioning that there is the addition of the one answer in the story survey results.

<sup>150</sup> See Appendix E1.

numbers on each survey, there is no reliable way to determine which surveys were done by the same people. While consultants like Dr. Labban admit this similitude between surveys should not affect the outcomes *that* much, it still deserves noting that the 118 valid surveys do cross over with one another.

Regarding the total number of surveys taken, one more item deserves consideration. If the average worship turnout even on a poorly-attended Sunday was 60 persons, why then were there only 162 (valid plus invalid) surveys completed over the entire eight-week course of the experiment? The answer to that question, simply, is unknowable at this point in the analysis. Speculation would estimate that some of the attendees were too young to fill out the surveys – children under eight years of age, for example. Perhaps other persons knew they had not attended the previous week and their information would be considered invalid. Unfortunately, perhaps some did not fill out a survey simply because they did not want to, did not understand it, or arrived after the surveys had already been distributed and reclaimed. In the end, all hypotheses about this trend remain estimated guesses, so the analysis instead stands firmly on the data provided by the surveys that *were* completed.

### *Answering THE Question*

Having exposed some internal shortcomings of the experiment's assumptions, the basic question remains: in this project, *which memory cue was most effective in helping the parishioner remember the sermon a week later?* Ironically, much to my complete surprise, the data reveals that the *control* sermon, with no concluding memory cue, yielded the highest mean (average) of

correct answers of the four sermons. This research implemented a scale from 0 – 5, “0” being the minimum, no correct answers on a given survey and “5” being the maximum, 5 correct answers on a survey. The mean score of correct answers for the control sermon was 3.42, followed by the picture sermon at 3.13, the story sermon at 2.79, and the object lesson sermon at 2.52.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, by leaning heavily on the quantitative data provided in the appendices, a detailed analysis of the nuances of these results is in order, as well as an examination of some of the specific category breakdowns.

Appendices E7 – E10 display the compiled survey answers as a histogram, and the charts offer a good visual representation of the score distribution.<sup>152</sup> The two surveys with the highest averages, control and picture, were top heavy in their scoring, with both surveys having 12 respondents correctly remember all five questions on their respective surveys. Five correct answers given by 12 persons represents approximately 37% of the total number of respondents who took those surveys – a healthy number.<sup>153</sup> In contrast, the two lower average surveys, story and object lesson, had a more even distribution with no more than seven persons on either survey totaling the same score. In the end, the 37% of those that answered all five questions correctly in the first two surveys drops to around a paltry 20% on the last two assessments<sup>154</sup>... a significant difference!

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<sup>151</sup> See Appendix E1 for scores as well as standard deviation.

<sup>152</sup> Additionally, Appendix E6 shows the results in their numerical form, combined into one chart.

<sup>153</sup> See Appendix E6.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

Along similar lines, it is interesting to note the total number of valid respondents who completed the surveys: 33 for the control, 32 for the picture, 28 for the story, and 25 for the object lesson sermon.<sup>155</sup> Two interesting correlations appear from these data: First, the more people who took the survey, the higher the average score; this generalization respectively held true for all four surveys. Secondly, a scan of the histograms seems to indicate for the most part that the lower the number of survey respondents, the more evenly distributed their scores. While it is difficult to absolutely affirm these similarities to be *causal*, the correlation seems more than just coincidence.

An interesting trend arises when considering the results of the experiment over/against the order in which the sermons were heard and surveys were taken.<sup>156</sup> More to the point, the surveys with the highest mean scores were the first two that were taken on October 12 and October 26. As the research continued, later iterations of the survey, given on November 9 and November 23, *declined* in mean score. In other words, the surveys at the beginning of the experiment yielded better scores than did those at the end. This result is indeed strange because normally, the opposite is true! Typically as persons go through a research project, respondents improve upon tasks they are asked to repeat; in theory, this progress would *especially* be true when one is aware the researcher is running an experiment on remembering last week's sermon. Ostensibly, a

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<sup>155</sup> See Appendix E1.

<sup>156</sup> This particular conclusion was pointed out by my consultants on experimentation, the invaluable doctors Labban and Carscaddon.

tendency to “plan ahead” could arise.<sup>157</sup> Especially considering the aforementioned information, completing the same kind of survey four times would not traditionally see a significant drop-off from the beginning to the end; however, the difference in the control mean (3.42) and the object lesson mean (2.52) was almost a full “correct answer.” Clearly, the variables of the sermons and/or surveys themselves are likely responsible for this vast average difference, though other possible affecting factors will be discussed in the upcoming sections.

### *Results Breakdown by Particular Questions*

When considering further delineation of the experiment, examining three particular categories proves necessary: an all-groups breakdown by particular questions, a questions breakdown by gender and age, and a cross-survey comparison. Regarding the particular questions, Appendix E11 charts the specific percentages of correct answers for all the surveys combined. For example, on the 118 valid surveys covering all four of the sermons added together, 59.3% of people (or 70 persons) answered the question “What was the title?” correctly. Of note, both “What could the summary statement be?” and “What practical application could be taken?” share a correct-answer ratio within only 2% of the 59.3%.<sup>158</sup> While these approximate percentages would seem to indicate a certain amount of regularity, a breakdown of the individual surveys as seen in Appendices E2 – E5 tells a different story. More to the point, “What could be the

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<sup>157</sup> After the experiment was completed, one congregation member told me a spouse tried to do exactly that!

<sup>158</sup> In other words, the summary statement question was answered at 58.5%, and the practical application question was answered at 61%. Both of these fall within 2% of title’s 59.3%.

summary statement?” (answered at 58.5%) *appeared* to be remembered at the same general consistency as the title (59.3%) and application (61.0%) questions. A closer look at the individual surveys, though, reveals that upwards of 73% of people answered the summary question correctly concerning the control sermon,<sup>159</sup> while a meager 37.5% answered it correctly concerning the picture sermon. Consistent that is not!

In considering the five questions in an overall sense, one question was answered correctly more often than the other four by a wide margin: “What was the primary Scripture passage of last week’s sermon?” Likewise, one question was answered *incorrectly* more often than the others, also by a significant difference: “What was the theme of last week’s sermon?” Determining the reasons for these disparities is conjecture at best, but I do have an educated guess at a contributing factor to both discrepancies. The theme question may have been plagued by the simple fact that, beyond circling one’s gender and age, it was the first question on the assessment. It seems common knowledge to this researcher that people of all ages have a tendency to recognize and recall information more effectively when given a few moments to think about it. This is the memory version of “warming up the car” if you will. As we ruminate more fully on such details like, among others, where we were sitting, what songs had already been sung, and what color tie the pastor was wearing, we place ourselves more fully in the moment and are better able to bring back stored information. I wonder if the memory is “warmed up enough” on the first question! Clearly such

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<sup>159</sup> See Appendix E3.

“warming up” will only take a subject so far in recalling information, but this could be a possible explanation for some disparities.

A couple of factors might contribute to the Scripture question being correctly answered most frequently. First, the subjects had already answered two questions, had seen the multiple choices, and had been given at least the opportunity to recall specifics about the setting that would aid in remembering the sermon. In other words, their memories had a chance to warm up. More important than that, however, is the amount of time and frequency each specific Scripture was “on display.”<sup>160</sup> In each of the four sermons the title (survey question 2) was printed in the bulletin and then, though meant to be relevant throughout, was referenced at the beginning of each sermon in an introduction. The theme (question 1), the summary statement (question 4), and the practical application (question 5) could be understood at the end of the sermons by listening throughout, but this information was not necessarily apparent in the middle of the sermon before all conclusions had been drawn. The Scripture (question 3), however, was “on display” throughout the course of the entire sermon. As has already been mentioned and as appendices D1 – D4 demonstrate, the basic structure of the sermons used the flow of the narrative text on which to sail. To be sure, the Scripture was seen on the screen, heard aurally when read, and was discussed and referenced throughout the homily. Consequently, perhaps the test subjects more easily recognized this information a week later as a result of this “more frequent” contact with the biblical text.

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<sup>160</sup> ...beyond that of the other five questions.



### *Results Breakdown by Gender and Age*

When considering the information as broken down by gender and age, the data yielded simply fascinating results. To aid the discussion, the subsequent analyses will all reference the beta set, and the following labels will be given to the age groups therein: 0 – 19 will be called the “Younger” group; 20 – 55 will be called the “Median” group; 56 and up will be called the “Seasoned” group. More than in previous divisions, the format of this particular section will frequently reference the appendices to compare and contrast relevant data.

In a general sense, the Younger group and the Seasoned group typically scored about the same on the theme, title, and summary categories, though notably the Seasoned set did not outpace the Younger group in any of the five categories.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, the Median group was by far the strongest at answering the questions, as they consistently scored well above the average for all the groups together. Specifically, Medians were approximately 20% above the total mean on the summary and the application questions, 17% above mean on the theme, and 12% above mean on title and Scripture. As a group, Medians had a higher average than both the Younger and the Seasoned groups on *each* of the five questions.

As previously mentioned, the question that had the highest overall mean total of correct answers was the Scripture question.<sup>162</sup> On the four surveys combined, the Seasoned group answered, “What was the primary Scripture passage of last week’s sermon?” correctly 63% of the time, well above their next

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<sup>161</sup> See Appendix E12.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

highest percentage at 50% for the title. The Younger group answered this question accurately at a rate of 75%, and the Median group remembered the Scripture an impressive 87% of the time! Additionally, the standard deviation for this question was also lowest (or nearly that) for all three groups, meaning the answers on this question had less variance than did those for any of the other four questions. This was consistently the easiest answer to recognize a week later.

Beyond the Scripture question, the two best-scoring categories for each group were the following: Younger answered application at a 67% consistency rate and the title question at 54%. The Medians, again with a strong showing, remembered the application choices at 80% and the summary of the last week's sermon at a consistency of 78%. The Seasoned group recalled the title 50% of the time and the summary at a pace of 46%.<sup>163</sup> Clearly each group had their strengths, though notably *theme* was not among them for any of the three groups!

When examining the results through the lens of gender breakdown, what jumped out at the researcher immediately was the overall memory of the females compared with their male counterparts.<sup>164</sup> More to that end, the women outscored the men by 8% on the theme, 17% on the title, 12% on the summary, and 10% on the application. Only on the Scripture question did the men score higher than the women, and that was only by a 3% margin (76% vs. 73%). Additionally, on most questions (four of five) the females' standard deviation was about equal to or smaller than that of the men, thus the same results for the women would have a reasonable chance of being repeated in further studies.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> See Appendix E14.

This overall female “supremacy,” however, did not hold true for all age categories. An examination of Appendix E13 reveals Median males more readily remembered than their female counterparts in the categories of theme, title, and Scripture (though theme and Scripture were close). To be fair, Median women did outscore the men in the summary (by 12%) and the application (by 7%) categories, and scored very well overall by answering three of the five questions at a rate at or above 83%. For comparison’s sake, the average school student who scores 83% or more on a pop quiz concerning information they heard once a week ago would likely claim to be satisfied with the results – the Median women should, too!

In considering the entire beta set, the Seasoned men did not do well on these surveys in general.<sup>165</sup> In only one instance (Scripture) did they score above 50%, and in three of the four other categories (theme, title, and application) they scored in the 30% – 40% range. Furthermore, they did not remember the title nearly as accurately as their female counterparts (21% points difference); however, in the other four categories, the Seasoned male and female percentages were relatively close (i.e. within 5%).

Likewise, the Younger group had their ups and downs.<sup>166</sup> The males did not do well on the theme, title, and summary (all in the 30%s), but their 56% recognition of the application and astounding 81% memory of the Scripture prove they were in fact paying attention! The Younger women, for their part, did well on the surveys by scoring 50% or above on *all* questions, and more specifically an

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<sup>165</sup> See Appendix E13.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

excellent 88% mark on title and application. Unfortunately, their sample size of only eight completed assessments may not be considered large enough to be representative, though their outstanding scores are worth mentioning. Clearly, the few Younger females who *did* hear the sermons were taking careful mental notes!

### *Cross-Survey Comparisons*

To get an accurate critical analysis of the beta set's performance on particular surveys, a comparison of the general survey information<sup>167</sup> over/against the particular sermon-surveys<sup>168</sup> is in order. Surely time and circumstance dictate that comparisons cannot be examined across all iterations of the individual survey data, but examining the highlights and particular discrepancies among the results can give a true sense of the meaning behind the numbers.

When comparing the picture sermon's survey results<sup>169</sup> with the standard means on all the surveys, the picture survey had a much higher than average answer for the title question at 81% vs. the mean 59% for the same question on the four surveys combined. In contrast, the summary question was recognized at a much lower than average rate (38%) than its overall mean of 58%. Both of these statistics hint at an inconsistency in this particular sermon and/or survey.

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<sup>167</sup> See Appendix E12.

<sup>168</sup> See Appendices E15 – E18, respectively.

<sup>169</sup> See Appendix E15.

When comparing the general survey results (Appendix E12) to the control survey results in Appendix E16, it is obvious why the control surveys yielded the highest mean score of all four of the sermons assessed. The seasoned group, which due to their group size *strongly* swayed any set of results, answered the control survey questions correctly at a pace well beyond their own average for the four surveys combined. More to the point, though their typical 40% application answers hovered around 33% for this question, all four *other* questions were at or well-above their typical trends. Specifically on this control survey, the Seasoned group was 15% above their own average on theme, exactly the same as their four-sermon average for title (50%), 12% above their normal Scripture-question pace, and 12% above their usual mean on the summary question as well. These numbers for the Seasoned cluster, coupled with other strong showings from both the Younger and the Median groups, meant *every* total average score for this survey was higher than the overall mean. In other words, for all three groups combined, every question on the control survey was more frequently answered correctly, on average, than those same questions were answered for the four surveys combined. This statistic is especially impressive considering the excellent control surveys make up a quarter of those total results! In the end, all this data helps explain how these well-remembered control assessments yielded the best scores overall, including the aforementioned 3.42 (out of 5.0) correct answer mean – surprising, but true!

When comparing the story survey<sup>170</sup> results with the overall data, Medians did not fare as well on *any* of the five questions as their general survey results; this disparity undoubtedly weighed down the overall average. The Seasoned group, for their part, did not do particularly well on the theme and title, but did extremely well on the Scripture and summary questions (73% on both) – well above their standard averages. If in no other way, this 73% summary stat was surprising in that the Younger and the Seasoned groups usually score pretty closely on that question (both at 46%)... but not on this particular survey! The Younger group's 20% was among their lower scores on any of the surveys; of course, only five Younger people took the quiz at all, so that number certainly played a part! Additionally, it should be noted that only 39% of all respondents recognized the title question correctly on the story survey; whereas, the average on all 118 surveys was 59%. Again, this difference may indicate the presence of a bad question (or perhaps more accurately, a non-memorable title).

Finally, when comparing the overall beta set results in Appendix E12 to the results from the object lesson survey,<sup>171</sup> the picture (or object lesson, as it were) was not a pretty one. On the whole, the summary was the only question remembered above the typical mean, and that was merely an uptick of 2% (60% vs. the normal 58%). All other questions were apparently not as memorable, as the title and Scripture were both 11% below average, and the correct application answers were recognized at a 5% below-normal pace also. Surprisingly, the Scripture category was well below its typical mean, falling within 5% points of the

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<sup>170</sup> See Appendix E17.

<sup>171</sup> See Appendix E18.

summary (64% to 60%, respectively); traditionally in the overall mean scores that gap ranged from 75% (Scripture) to 58% (summary), a 17% margin. By far, though, the biggest misstep of a question on this survey was the theme, weighing in at a 24% correct answer rate, when 46% was the typical overall mean. This analysis appears even worse when one considers that part of the reason the 46% was so low in the first place is that it includes that object lesson's 24% mark! To expound upon the theme debacle, the Youngers scored a paltry 14% (38% typical average), the Medians answered at 33% (63% average), and the Seasoned group remembered at a 22% mean (35% average). Clearly this question (or sermon) was lacking somewhere!

In general, the compiled data analysis results are fascinating, and while it is impossible to ascertain exactly why or how the surveys were answered as they were, the results can help one draw some important conclusions about the data, all of which will be addressed in the next and final chapter of this report.

### **Focus Group Analysis**

When considering the focus group outcomes, the two-division system of survey results and previous sermon memory will illustrate relevant quantitative and qualitative data obtained in the course of this project.

### *Quantitative Survey Results*

To continue in the vein of the quantitative analysis from the previous section, the focus group itself yielded some intriguing results. First, the basic information deserves citation: Appendices B3 and B4 delineate statistics for the

17 members of the focus group. Of note, eight members were male and nine were female. By age, two were 0 – 12 years old, four were 13 – 19 years old, three were 20 – 35 years old, five were 36 – 55 years old, and three were 56 years old and above. Appendix B3 enumerates each member's particular learning style, and Appendix B4 puts these numbers in an easy-to-visualize form. Note the overall prevalence of the kinesthetic learning style, with 8 out of 17 testing kinesthetic as their strongest learning style, and 6 others claiming it as their second strongest style of the four (i.e. visual, aural, reading/writing, and kinesthetic). In other words, 14 of 17 (or 82%) of the focus group participants harbor a preference for kinesthetic learning experiences. What's more, 5 of the 6 participants in the Younger beta set lean in the kinesthetic direction; clearly the younger generation prefers a tactile pedagogical methodology.

The second most prevalent learning style among the focus group was visual. Appendix B4 indicates that eight of the 17 members had visual learning in their "top two," with the Median group containing all three of the participants who ranked visual learning number one. To round out the group, six members identified either the aural or reading/writing categories as their first or second learning style strength.

Particularly revealing concerning to the focus group is Appendix B6 which cross-compares learning styles with the four surveys taken based on their respective sermons. In this appendix, "N" represents the number of focus group persons with a particular strongest learning style in attendance on a given day. So for example in the first data column, there were two visual learners who took the picture survey, one aural learner, three read/write learners, and seven



kinesthetic learners, for a total of 13 focus group members who took the picture survey. Consequently, there were 16 total focus group persons who took the control survey, 14 who took the story survey, and 11 who took the object lesson survey; their individual learning style breakdowns comprise these totals.

A closer look at these data prove telling. The highest mean survey, not surprising considering the entire church data set, was the control survey, with an average of 3.94 correct answers given (again, out of a possible 5.0).<sup>172</sup> Following suit again with the larger church results, the picture survey yielded the second highest mean score among the focus group, specifically for these 17 members at a rate of 3.85 out of a possible 5.0 correct answers. Likewise, story was third, answered at a pace of 3.36, and the object lesson survey was answered correctly at the lowest average, coming in at a mean score of 2.36 out of 5.0.

Upon keen examination of the control survey scores, noteworthy is the fact that 16 out of 17 focus group members took this survey; whereas, the object lesson survey – with its underwhelming 2.36 average – only had 11 focus group members contribute to its score.<sup>173</sup> Is it a coincidence, then, that like the entire church results overall, the highest score occurred when the most focus group members were there to take the test, and the lowest score occurred when the fewest number of focus participants were in attendance? I do not believe it was coincidence. More to the point, a perusal of Appendix B5 indicates the specifics regarding exactly which six focus group members did not submit a valid object lesson survey. On previous surveys, four of the six had scored rather well;

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<sup>172</sup> See Appendix B5.

<sup>173</sup> See Appendix B6.

conceivably, their attendance definitely would have affected the object lesson scores in a positive manner. Now would their presence have shifted the scores *that* much, raising the 2.36 mean an entire point and a half to then measure more akin to the other averages? No, probably not; but it yet remains an enlightening notion to consider the possible results had all 17 focus group members taken the object lesson survey.

When considering other focus group statistics, even a cursory comparison of Appendices B3 and B5 reveals that the focus group members' scores seem to reflect the scores of the larger collective data in other ways not previously mentioned. From an age breakdown standpoint, for example, the Median group was the by far the strongest, as proven by the several 4.0 and 5.0 scores on Appendix B5. Similarly as with the entire church data set, the Seasoned group struggled somewhat, and the Younger group scored on the scale somewhere between their older sets of counterparts.

Considering how individual clusters within the focus group fared, the results led this researcher to be both pleased in some senses and incredibly confused in others. More specifically, concerning the eight group members whose learning style included visual recognition in their top two, six of those eight persons were a part of the Median group.<sup>174</sup> A comparison between Appendices B3 and B5 uncovers that five of the six Median visual learners submitted valid picture surveys; of those five visual learners, *all of them* scored a perfect 5.0 on the picture survey. Additionally, two particular focus group members tested aural as their strongest learning style tendency. Both those

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<sup>174</sup> See Appendix B3.

participants submitted valid story surveys, and both scored 5.0 out of 5.0 on this survey... a small sample but big success!

For all the success of the other surveys, the object lesson survey, like in the group at large, went inexplicably awry. Appendix B6 demonstrates, for example, the steady decline of the reading/writing learners' survey totals as the weeks marched on through the experiment. The picture total was a noteworthy 3.67 mean, the control a 3.50 average, the story a 3.33 mean; however, the object lesson score fell *drastically* to a 2.00 level. This result is particularly surprising considering three of the four read/write learners scored kinesthetic as their second strongest learning preference.

Despite these statistics, however, nothing is quite as puzzling as the results posted from the kinesthetic learners. Again, the kinesthetic learning style describes eight of the 17 focus group members in a primary sense, with six more claiming kinesthetic as their secondary penchant; a total of 14 of 17 members learn kinesthetically! These numbers notwithstanding, even the kinesthetic learners – like the larger church data set – answered the object lesson survey at an alarmingly low rate! More specifically, the total mean for *all* focus group members taking the object lesson survey was an experiment-low 2.36 (lower by nearly a full point than the next closest story survey).<sup>175</sup> Assuredly, the kinesthetic learners did not fare much better than the overall mean, themselves ringing in at an average of 2.50, their lowest average of all four of the surveys, too. Of all groups, one would assume the kinesthetic learners would perhaps resonate with the object lesson sermon/survey – apparently not!

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<sup>175</sup> See Appendix B6.

Within the focus group, the results were so different, in fact, that it deserves special notation in this analysis. More specifically, Appendices B7 and B8 draw a comparison between surveys. As Appendix B7 reveals, ten people in the focus group took both the highest-scoring control survey and the lowest – scoring object lesson survey; since those surveys were definitely taken by the same ten people, certain head-to-head statistics can be measured. Among them, the 3.80 control mean versus the 2.60 object lesson mean is significant... as Appendix B8 shows (in the shaded boxes), it is “statistically significant” as the shaded number falls below the .05 demarcation. In other words, .045 can be conceived as a percentage, so there is only a 4.5% chance this result would ever change were this same experiment run again. Said another way, the contrast between these two surveys is so significant that there is a 95.5% chance the results would be repeated were this experiment itself repeated. That result above 95%, in data analysis, is considered “statistically significant.” This conclusion *does* assume the variables would remain the same upon experiment repetition, but the data is indeed “significant” nonetheless.

In the end, this quantitative data does compel this researcher to mention one further quantitative comparison. Specifically, Appendix B9 cites data that makes proper researchers happy: data that can truly be compared across the entirety of the experiment – the only data in the whole project that *does* fall into that category, actually. More to the point, Appendix B9 shows the results of the seven focus group members who attended all eight weeks and thus completed all four valid surveys. The chart displays a mean that compares apples to apples – the same persons, the same learning styles, and *generally* the same variables

brought to each sermon and survey moment. Even though the data set number contained only seven participants, their statistics were noteworthy. In particular, these numbers indicate the control sermon/survey was still recognized at a high rate, but for once that mark was not the highest of all surveys. To this particular end, the *picture* survey received the highest mean – an impressive 4.57 out of 5.0. By comparing Appendices B3 and B5, one can determine that six of these seven individuals have kinesthetic as one of their top two learning styles, and four of the seven have some kind of visual/kinesthetic combination. Pictures, it seems, do have a role to play in aiding sermon retention!

### *Qualitative Sermon Memory Data*

From a personal standpoint, this project was both gratifying and fascinating, and one of the more enjoyable stones to overturn was the focus group experience on Saturday, October 4. By way of reminders, after the forms and learning styles inventory were completed, the group interview portion of that meeting involved focus group members sharing the following: two or three sermons they remember from months and/or years past, what they remember about the sermons, and what was going on at that point in life that may have made them recall that sermon in particular. Most definitely, I am grateful for the group members' willingness to share their stories and have them be recounted here in a confidential yet substantive manner. The discussion shared around the tables that morning was enlightening, and some of those findings merit examination here.

One child in our group remembered a sermon at a camp he attended the year before. The pastor apparently showed a video of people dancing; and the sermon itself was about focusing on God when it is difficult to maintain concentration, a good lesson to learn for this kinesthetic learner! His cohort, who is about the same age, mentioned, not a sermon, but a classroom discussion about Jonah and the whale. When asked what was so memorable about it, the participant replied, “We kept going over the story, and I had heard it before.” For this reading/writing learner, repetition in church, like in school, was important for his memory.

A teenaged girl in our group mentioned one sermon I had preached on diversity about six weeks before the meeting. She stated the world in which she lives as a teenager is one that constantly urges fitting in with everyone else to the exclusion of those who do not. The issues in Ferguson, MO, and elsewhere, served as the springboard in that sermon to discuss the importance of harmony amidst diversity. It is absolutely encouraging to this researcher that youth in our churches wrestle with difficult subjects such as these in the midst of a varied, complex world.

In addition, this particular focus group member also mentioned a sermon delivered by a female guest preacher, Merianna Neely,<sup>176</sup> who visited our church a couple of years ago. In her sermon, Rev. Neely spoke, among other things, about her struggle as a female in a church leadership role, and how she had to lean into God’s plan for her and trust the Lord to guide her path. Herself a young, aspiring female, our focus member resonated deeply with Rev. Neely’s words; and two

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<sup>176</sup> Name used with permission.

years later they still resonated with her. Life experience, it seems, played a large role in her remembering that particular sermon.

And speaking of life experience resonating in a sermon making that sermon memorable, another focus group member, a male from the 20 – 35 year old age range, mentioned three sermons that struck a personal chord. One, he too reflected on the sermon concerning Ferguson, MO, diversity, and race; and this sermon proved memorable to him, especially as a bi-racial member of our faith community. Additionally, this focus group member mentioned another sermon he had watched online, an Andy Stanley video, in which Stanley spoke about marriage. In that sermon, Stanley took two jars of colored balls, struck them together, and spoke about how the issues we bring to marriage spill out when two lives collide. Our focus group member, a kinesthetic/visual learner, was impacted by this particular way of communicating the message, especially since he himself was considering a marriage proposal in the not-too-distant future!

Lastly, he also recalled a sermon preached at Easter in the Spring of 2014. In particular, this member recalled the context in which the sermon was preached: I delivered that sermon on the due date (Easter Sunday) of our stillborn daughter who had died in the womb at thirty-six weeks. When it comes to remembering a sermon, it seems that what is going on in the *listener's* life does not hold exclusive power to create memory; but what is going on in the *proclaimer's* life can also make a significant impact on the hearers as well. As it were, three or four of the focus group members mentioned this particular sermon, so this conclusion draws merit from a few different contributors as well.

Another participant in our group also mentioned the Easter sermon, as a family member's death still weighed heavily on his mind and heart. Moreover, this member, a visual/kinesthetic learner himself, mentioned a sermon in which the preacher, our youth minister, did a demonstration with a pitcher of water and some Cheerwine. The visual imagery definitely remained in his memory!

Two focus group members from the Median group, one male and one female, both tested read/write as their strongest learning style and kinesthetic as their secondary preference. Each of them recalled sermons in which the proclaimer told a powerful story, both filled with emotion. In fact, one of the sermons was preached more than a decade ago at our church, and it still rings true in the hearer's heart. Interestingly, both participants also recalled another sermon, and what stood out to each of them this time was a particular phrase that was repeated over and over again. One of them was, "If you can't say something nice... try harder;"<sup>177</sup> and that primary sermon-mantra also served as the title for that particular homily. Indeed titles, as the surveys showed, can make a difference in recall!

Interestingly, one teenaged male in our group recalled a sermon that was specific to his life situation – but unlike those previously cited, the sermon was not targeted at a precise event in the life of the individual but of the collective. More accurately, this kinesthetic/aural learner remembered a sermon preached right after we had an event at church that was widely considered to be a disappointment. As it happened I had the chance to preach that sermon, and I took that opportunity to attempt to reframe what we did as it related to our main

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<sup>177</sup> Another gem from our youth minister!



priorities. Though only preached a few weeks prior to the focus group meeting, this listener remembered that sermon and felt it helped to reinterpret a lackluster response to our work in our community. Sermons, undeniably, are for the individual *and* for the faith community!

Further, in July before this meeting on October 4, I had preached a sermon about forgiveness; and as a couple of Median group members mentioned, that particular sermon stood out in their minds. Not surprisingly, all of us deal with forgiveness of someone in our lives; sometimes concerning a family member or a friend. Often even forgiving ourselves for events in our own past can serve as an issue to resolve. Consequently, a sermon about such a personal matter understandably stays in one's memory. Specific to this sermon, those focus group members both tested as a combination of aural/visual,<sup>178</sup> so perhaps their memory was not only aided by the fact that the message was personal to their lives, but also because I brought a suitcase with me on the platform and spoke about anger and forgiveness in terms of what one "packs in his/her suitcase." Feasibly, the visual image of the suitcase aided to enhance their memory of that particular homily. Furthermore, the aural/visual learner recalled a sermon preached about a year previously that had dealt with the subject, "Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?" The subject was personal to her and, like forgiveness, personal to many of us.

One member of our focus group, a Median-aged male, was not shy about sharing with the group his preference for being a visual learner, and as his VALK score confirmed, he was telling the truth. It was definitely his strongest

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<sup>178</sup> One was aural/visual, and the other was visual/aural.

preference!<sup>179</sup> As such, he recalled a sermon about the biblical text in Luke 15 when I showed a picture on the screen of Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son." This picture, which he mentioned specifically, walked alongside some regrettable decisions in his past to help seal that particular message in his mind and heart. Additionally, this member also mentioned the 2014 Easter sermon and its connection with the life situation of the proclaimer.

Another participant, a kinesthetic/visual female in the Median group, recalled three sermons during our time together; all three included some kind of visual aid to grab the congregation's attention. In one, the pastor threw seed out onto the congregation, representing the job of the Sower in Mark 4.<sup>180</sup> The focus member twice mentioned her concern for the janitors! Also, this member mentioned a sermon wherein the pastor had ten apples with him on the pulpit; in the middle of a sermon, he apparently ate one of the apples (slowly) down to the core. In the end, he tossed the core into the offering plate as a representation of what we often give God. As a person who struggles with finances, she was certainly influenced, and frankly, I would have been, too! Finally, this member also recalled the forgiveness/suitcase sermon, and she specifically remembered a quote that was put on the screen, "Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."<sup>181</sup> Clearly, for this kinesthetic/visual learner, object lessons leave their mark.

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<sup>179</sup> Followed by kinesthetic as his secondary learning style.

<sup>180</sup> This was not me, but now having heard it, I really want to try it!

<sup>181</sup> Though I believe I attributed that quote in the sermon to Nelson Mandela, I have since learned that it was likely first said by Gautama Buddha.

One reading/writing primary learner, with a secondary preference for kinesthetic instruction, recalled a sermon I preached where I took on the persona of an innkeeper. Upon hearing his description, it is not clear *exactly* to which sermon he is referring,<sup>182</sup> as I believe I have used that technique three or four times in my Sandy Plains Baptist Church tenure. He did mention how this out-of-the-ordinary method of delivery was particularly appealing to him. Additionally, this Seasoned gentleman had an uncle who preached a sermon about the “maidens and their lanterns,” presumably in Matthew 25, a sermon which was preached shortly after the passing of his mother. The phrase, “They are closing the door,” was used in a story, and the expression lingered in his memory for years to come after the sermon. Surely, a life’s experience helped to solidify this sermon in his memory.

Further, a Seasoned female in the group recalled two sermons in particular, both of which left her with an “image” to remember in recesses of her mind. In one sermon, I donned a pair of Superman socks in the pulpit, complete with inscribed red “S” and matching cape.<sup>183</sup> Though I do remember wearing them, I myself cannot even recall the context for doing so, but apparently it made an impression on the listener as I described our desire for a hero whom we have found in Jesus. This group member went on to recount another sermon where I told a story about a foolish teenaged version of myself who decided to climb out of a sunroof hole on a car, only to accidentally crack the sunroof on the way back inside. This parishioner remembered the general point of the story revolving

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<sup>182</sup> I should have asked him to clarify in the meeting, but alas, I did not.

<sup>183</sup> Indeed, the socks themselves have a cape. They are amazing.

around learning from our mistakes but still suffering the consequences. Indeed, this aural/kinesthetic learner heard, watched, and remembered.

Perhaps one of the most powerful sermons recalled in our focus group time together recounted a sermon preached in 1959.<sup>184</sup> As this Seasoned female shared, the pastor preached a sermon on Mother's Day that year about Moses, about having children, and about the love of a mother. In particular, this woman remembers she and two friends listening to the sermon intently as all of them wanted, but none of them yet had, children. The pastor's encouragement, "God has a plan for you," stuck with her throughout the years as she waited and waited. Eventually she had a child, and the sermon stays with her these many years later.

Finally, though certainly not the most powerful or transformative sermon recalled on that Saturday morning, October 4, two focus group members, a male and a female, mentioned a sermon that deserves notation here, if for no other reason than the uniqueness of the situation. Both persons were not only focus group participants, but both also happened to be on the search committee that called me to Sandy Plains Baptist Church. In the focus group time, both of them mentioned the sermon I preached and sent the committee on video, one about the woman at the well in John 4. What deserves mentioning, in this researcher's estimation, is the fact that I preached that sermon much more recently;<sup>185</sup> however, the version they both remembered was the video version, *not* the live version. It appears, then, that the sermon itself carries a certain amount of cache, but what the sermon means in specific circumstances can also help make the

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<sup>184</sup> Yes, more than 50 years ago!

<sup>185</sup> Three years ago versus more than six years ago when they first heard it.

sermon more memorable. Again, the group members did mention the sermon, the first video version; and the uniqueness of the situation deserves notation here.

Overall, as cited previously, the focus group meeting was one of the highlights of the entire experiment. To hear what matters to people and *why* it matters is so fascinating for someone who seeks to deliver messages of hope and encouragement each week. Of course, the point of the exercise in every respect was to glean information about what the participants remember and why. As a sidebar, however, it is at once humbling, flattering, and overwhelming to hear congregants mention something in particular that I preached which had an impact on their lives and hearts. Truly this calling is a sacred duty, one that any of us who proclaim week to week can never take lightly. As Dr. West is wont to say, each week our job is to “give ‘em heaven!” Most certainly, such hope is persistently needed.

### **Instrument and Process Assessment**

In addition to the quantitative data as well as the focus group information, the instruments utilized and the processes employed merit keen assessment. More specifically, this section will briefly examine the effectiveness of consent forms, the VALK learning styles inventory, the sermons themselves, the surveys, and other process-oriented factors such as evaluation place and time.

The consent forms and debriefing statements were basically a standard form of granting permission, with nothing too difficult or out of the ordinary in

their creation or utilization.<sup>186</sup> Essentially, these forms took shape via a combination of three different sources of information: the experienced consultation of Dr. David Carscaddon, the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) own consent form,<sup>187</sup> and, primarily, my own fashioning of statements appropriate for my particular setting. Upon Dr. Carscaddon's recommendation, both adult and child (under age 18) forms were used; and though legally the children could not sign their own forms, Appendices A2 and A4 indicate I did ask them to *read* the form, just so they could be aware of what was happening.

As far as the learning styles inventory was concerned, the easy-to-employ VARK instrument developed by Neil Fleming and Charles Bonwell was a godsend.<sup>188</sup> The visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic learning styles this assessment measured aligned precisely with the objectives of my experiment; thus, the focus group analysis would have been *severely* lacking were it not for this tool. In addition, not only did the scoring of the assessment allow for an efficient focus group meeting, but the ability to evaluate "learning style strength" for both primary and secondary education preferences, as the last sections have shown, proved to be a germane element of the overall focus group assessment. Again, the VARK learning styles inventory was an important piece of this project, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have utilized it!

One of the more demanding pieces of this experimental puzzle was the task of developing the sermons that would be heard and subsequently tested.

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<sup>186</sup> See Appendices A1 through A5.

<sup>187</sup> The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) had a brief consent form for participants to sign when completing the IRB certification. A few of their general ideas were utilized in the development of this project's consent forms.

<sup>188</sup> See Appendix B1.

Most decidedly, the difficulty in the sermon development manifested itself in two ways: in general Baptist-like alliterative terms: conclusion and consistency. First, came the ultimate task of finding a picture/control ending/story/object lesson to conclude each respective homily. Fortunately, I had been preparing the sermon texts and conclusions in my mind for more than a year before ultimately employing them in my experimentation. Actually, the object lesson conclusion (i.e. dropping the stones) was actually the first of the four slotted for usage. With the control sermon, obviously there would be no “conclusion” in particular, as with the other three; so I elected to use the “assess your life” challenge when formulating that particular sermon. With the picture and story sermons, especially since these results would ultimately be published, I wanted to find a personal picture and story that would connect with the congregation in a meaningful way. The idea to show the photo of the sunset for the picture sermon presented itself readily. Ultimately, after considering other options for quite some time, I chose the story concerning my preaching class in seminary to conclude the story homily. All memory cues were meant to encapsulate the GTT – some were apparently more effective than others!

Secondly, an earnest challenge arose in maintaining independent variable consistency throughout the four sermons. In other words, I consciously endeavored to keep the sermons *as similar as possible* to maintain the validity of the dependent variables (i.e. the four sermon conclusions). This particular task definitively disrupted the balanced ecosystem that is my sermon construction each week, as I often found myself changing what I would typically do in a sermon to accommodate uniformity for my project. More to the point, where I

am used to utilizing stories and illustrations throughout my sermons wherever they are necessary, the composition of four similar sermons in this experiment did not allow that luxury.

In the end, despite my efforts for consistency, a true critical analysis would declare I fell short of my desired goal. As previously mentioned in chapter two, the sermons were, as devised, all four similar in general style and structure. All four employed the basic format of introduction, problem in the text, problem for us, resolution in the text, resolution for us, and conclusion. All four engaged a biblical text found in the Gospels, and all four explored a narrative where Jesus had an encounter with someone who would be considered an outcast.<sup>189</sup> All four made use of PowerPoint slides to display the Scripture, and none (except obviously the picture sermon) utilized any pictures save our church logo and a picture of a cross commonly used during our closing invitation hymn and benediction.

Unfortunately, despite my efforts, I still did not maintain uniformity as precisely as I would have liked. Unquestionably, some of the variables were unavoidable (e.g. weather, attendance, and church member circumstances, for example); but even within the sermons themselves, over which I had sole control, I was not exactly consistent! For example, while the time allotted to each sermon was intended to be consistent within 60 seconds or so, the length of the sermons varied outside that one-minute window. On the backside of the experiment, one cannot help but question whether that affected the memory of the hearers. Was

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<sup>189</sup> By way of reminder: Picture sermon – woman at the well in John 4; Control sermon – Gerasene demoniac in Luke 8; Story sermon – Zacchaeus in Luke 19; Object Lesson sermon – woman caught in adultery in John 8.



it coincidence that the picture and control sermons were by far the most memorable, and by far the shortest? Not to be ignored, the apparently memorable control sermon was a full 5½ minutes shorter than the often-forgotten object lesson sermon, and a perceptible 6½ minutes briefer than the story homily!

Furthermore, though I tried to have consistency in the way that I titled each sermon, ultimately I am not sure I was successful. For example, as already alluded to in the “cross-survey comparisons” sub-section of this chapter, the picture’s title was recognized at an impressive 81%, while the mean for that category was 59% on the four surveys combined.<sup>190</sup> In contrast, by comparing Appendices E12 and E17, we see the story title was recalled at 20% *below* its typical average. In regards to these two cases, though it cannot be known for sure, the significant difference in data likely came from an inconsistency in the sermon’s connection to its own title. My objective for all of them was to make the titles allude to the overall GTT summary, but not give it away!<sup>191</sup> For whatever reason – researcher error the most likely culprit – Sandy Plains Baptist Church members remembered, “If It Had Been a Snake...” *significantly* better than the other titles, and “The Words We Long to Hear” was recalled even drastically less so;<sup>192</sup> that, obviously, is not the consistency I hoped to achieve!

The goal of consistency sought after in the sermons held true for the surveys as well, and in this regard was a little easier to manage. As an

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<sup>190</sup> See Appendix E15.

<sup>191</sup> After all, on the subsequent surveys, the title question would precede three others questions that I did not want to be concluded by simply remembering the title.

<sup>192</sup> To wit, as I myself was typing them in, I remembered the picture title, yet forgot the story sermon designation. Perhaps the crowd was right!

examination of Appendices C1 – C4 reveals (correct answers designated in **bold**), the questions remained constant, yet the recognition choices changed. As the pilot study executed in the first semester of ministry supervision showed me,<sup>193</sup> one *cannot* change the survey questions mid-stream. Accordingly, these project surveys reflected consistency in their questions. Furthermore, as previously discovered in the pilot study, the questions about age and gender became imperative for this study because separating answers into categories largely drove the data and its subsequent analysis. Also, the answer choices “I don’t remember” and “I wasn’t here” prove *vital* important; otherwise, people guess at the correct answers, and the administrator has no way to determine who actually remembered the answer versus who was just shooting in the dark.

Within the cross-survey answers, I tried to be particularly consistent in the way I worded said answers. For example, the primary Scripture passage choices sound similar in all four surveys (like “Jesus heals a possessed man in Luke 8”). Further, the application answers begin with “I should...” and call the respondent to recall what they were asked to do. Again, giving constant examples for possible answers was the key to maintaining the integrity of the dependent variables.

Perhaps the most significant challenge on the surveys was to establish three “lines of answers” so earlier questions did not give away the answer to later questions. For example, if there were only one thread of correct answers and the other “wrong” choices were random answers, then one could simply look for the pattern in the answers. In fact, one member undeniably answered as honestly as

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<sup>193</sup> Again, thanks to the gracious latitude of Dr. Sayles.

possible, but later told me she considered that someone could do that!

Consequently, this researcher took care to establish, not just consistency across surveys, but consistency within surveys as well.

Finally, a brief word deserves mentioning about the process as a whole. As already mentioned, the testing itself was definitely aided by lessons gleaned from the pilot study, for it was there I learned the true value of consistency! Unlike originally planned (until the pilot study), there was simply no way to survey the congregation in their individual Sunday school classes. Aside from the fact that I could not run fast enough between the classes to actually administer the survey before the lesson began, the variables in multi-site testing were too numerous to count! Decidedly, assessing the members as they came into the sanctuary was the better course of action. That being said, I still needed help to distribute and collect the surveys. Certainly, there was *general* consistency about who issued and subsequently collected the surveys, as well as exactly how long parishioners were allotted to take the assessment; but these are the kinds of variables that frankly cannot be controlled to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree. In any research, indeed, one looks for consistency, but the nature of church and life is *not* consistent; thus we do the best we can, making room in the analysis for the caveat of humanity

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In the end, what do all these statistics mean, both those quantitative data and their qualitative counterparts? What conclusions can we draw from this research? Even in the face of unexpected results, most especially from the object lesson and control surveys, the experiment still yielded viable results matching memory cues and corresponding learning styles. More specifically, as mentioned in the quantitative survey results section of the critical analysis,<sup>194</sup> the focus group data showed that the visual learners typically did very well on the “visual” survey (i.e. the picture sermon), and primarily-aural learners tended to remember the story sermon.<sup>195</sup> These results stand as helpful information and speak to the urgency of variety in preaching, and the possibility that said variety can in some ways “target” specific learners.

Having said that, on the heels of an experiment like this, one must also conclude that such “targeting” is not an exact science and that, like teachers in school, preachers would be wise to prepare over the course of a year with multiple learning styles in mind. Despite the fact that visual learners remembered the picture and aural learners tended to do well with story, for whatever reason, the kinesthetic learners were not quarantined in their “object lesson area” so easily. To wit, 14 of the 17 focus group members were kinesthetic learners, and the object lesson sermon tanked! Admittedly, I was personally disappointed about that outcome, as I hoped that particular sermon would be one of the more

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. footnote 161.

<sup>195</sup> This was most especially true for Median participants. For a review, compare Appendices B3 and B5.

memorable ones, especially considering the significant number of kinesthetic learners in the room. Undoubtedly, either kinesthetic learning does not translate 1:1 to the object lesson, or that particular sermon or survey itself did not meet its goal of being memorable.

In the end, when making an over-arching evaluation on *the* big result of this experiment (i.e. the control sermon proving to be the most memorable), I believe the most important critique that can be concluded ultimately says something *positive* rather than negative. In other words, while I may be disappointed with the results of the overall survey averages,<sup>196</sup> I think *the fact that the control sermon was the most remembered homily primarily tells us that sermons with minimal illustrations and memory cues can be effective in sticking in the hearer's memory.* I confess, I would have doubted that statement from the outset of this experiment, but the finalized results compel me to reconsider. To clarify further, however, I do not believe the outcomes definitively state that the control sermon was “the best way” to preach and that memory cues should be abandoned altogether. In particular, the focus group sermon-sharing disproves that notion altogether. In a general sense, what sermons were remembered in the October 4 gathering? Sermons with memory cues were recounted. From a pastor scattering seed to a woman's story about her ministry struggles, from a piece of luggage to a broken sunroof, from Superman socks to Cheerwine – memory cues litter the minds of God's people as we recall sermons of the past.

An interesting endeavor into future experimentation would involve testing recent memory (as in “last Sunday” like this experiment did) over/against a

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<sup>196</sup> The object lesson survey, most especially. See Appendix E1 to review.

longer view of recalling past sermons, preached months and years ago.

Consequently, the question in *that* experiment would be thus: what is the breaking point when the control sermons give way in one's recall to the memory cue sermons? Even now, my experiment has run its course and conclusions are being drawn, but if the time parameters of experimentation allowed it, now which of the four, if any, sermons would Sandy Plains Baptist Church recognize most precisely if given a survey? Would the control sermon's mean still trump that of the object lesson so soundly? Truly, it would be interesting to discover!

Whatever the answer to those hypothetical questions, this researcher takes heart in the fact that memory in a moment does not necessarily translate to recall when the chips are down and the hearer needs a word from the Lord. Sermons can fail,<sup>197</sup> and that's okay. In fact, the evidence suggests that sermons like the object lesson homily where the story is told and a memory cue is used – despite how they may be remembered or forgotten exactly one week later – are the *kinds* of sermons that stick around in the memory and are recalled when the time is ripe. If the focus group data proves informative, and I believe it does, kinesthetic and visual learners especially remember these sermons. In fact, by observing both the qualitative and quantitative data in this study, it seems that the *most* memorable sermons are the ones that meet two qualifications: one, and most importantly, a sermon that relates to what is going on in the life of the hearer at the given moment; and two, not to be overlooked, a sermon that contains a memory cue that further helps connect said sermon to the person's particular style of learning.

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<sup>197</sup> ..In the mind of the preacher, anyway. It is impossible to conceive of what God is doing in the mind and heart of His servants.

When considering the groups of people who fared best in this particular experiment, I am ultimately unsure why the data trended as it did. Though the females did fare better than the males across all ages, this conclusion did not necessarily hold true for the Median group. In a general sense, age seems to be a *much* more solid indicator of score than does gender. In other words, within the confines of this experiment, the mean differences were significantly smaller between opposite genders than they were among varying ages. At times, the differences in age-group answers were vast. For example, in the beta set, neither males nor females in the Median range scored lower than 62% on any of the five questions; whereas, the Seasoned group only had one question score among them that was *above* 62%, and that was the Seasoned females that recognized at a 63% rate on the Scripture question.<sup>198</sup>

Why, then, did the Median group score so much better than the other two? Unfortunately, there are a myriad of answers to that question, and none of them would prove definitive without further testing. Could it be that since I myself am in the Median age group, that I am communicating with my own generation in a more memorable way than I am the Younger and Seasoned members of our congregation? More to the point, how did my design of the sermons and the surveys affect how a particular group scored? In other words, did I use references or comments in the sermons that the Medians understood, but made the Seasoned group have to pause for a moment? Did I ask a question on a survey that was perfectly clear to a 40 year-old female, but a 13 year-old boy had to read two or three times to understand the meaning? The possibilities to this

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<sup>198</sup> See Appendix E13.

end, of course, are limitless; but a conscientious response to these data demands that, going forward, I stay vigilant about that potential pitfall.

As I continue to reflect upon general challenges of this experiment, I do not lack for more examples from which to draw. First and foremost, as has been stated, it is often hard to tell if discrepancies in the data stem from the valid results of the experiment, which I hope in large part they do, or if diverging scores reflect a mistake in the consistency of the sermons or the surveys. Furthermore, and along those same lines, variables of all shapes and sizes were difficult to manage. What did Sandy Plains Baptist Church members walk through the door carrying the morning of the control sermon? Maybe they needed to hear a sermon about being set free from managing the darkness in life! How did the temperature of the room or the way they were given the surveys affect the outcomes? Newly-developing emotional intelligence research suggests that even the brightness of a room affects a myriad of biological responses in the body, including mood.<sup>199</sup> How could that have played a role in the ultimate outcomes? And to force the “validity of the data” question to a place I cannot really know fully, were people honest in answering to the best of *only* their own knowledge on the surveys, or were answers pooled together in any regard?<sup>200</sup> Certainly I do believe in the overall validity of the data, but accounting for all the extraneous variables in an experiment such as this is truly an insurmountable task!

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<sup>199</sup> Gilles Vandewalle and Sharon Schwartz, et. al. “Spectral Quality of Light Modulates Emotional Brain Responses in Humans,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/45/19549.full>.

<sup>200</sup> Not in a malicious way, surely – but as someone wondered aloud about a particular answer, could a close-by friend have responded with a possible answer?



When I consider the thought of engaging in an experiment like this again, or if someone else were to run it in a different setting, I cannot overstate the value of focus group members and what they add to the experiment. As I have stated before, and I cannot say it enough, I am so grateful for their dedication to this process; and getting a cohort of people involved in qualitative experimentation is key for a project such as this. To be fair, asking people to attend eight weeks in a row without missing represents an arduous request, especially considering average active church attendance is now somewhere between one or two times per month;<sup>201</sup> however, for those who do commit to the process, their participation proves invaluable. Moreover, as the focus group taught me, to achieve the most effective results of true sermon memory, ascertaining some working knowledge of knowing *why* people remember sermons is paramount. In this experiment the focus group helped shed light on that information; but if that net could be cast more widely, memory could be gauged even more effectively on the conclusions side of the experimentation.

In contemplating how this project affected my ministry setting and how it was personally significant to me, I think it raised awareness in our entire church about the power of preaching. Especially for myself and the focus group, as we reflected on the power of sermon in our lives, we recognized more fully the value of current weekly sermons. Is this not one of the secrets grandparents understand better than anyone else as they think about their own children and now their grandchildren? In reflecting on the past, we learn to treasure the

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<sup>201</sup> David Odom, "RIP, Average Attendance," Faith and Leadership Institute at Duke University, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/rip-average-attendance>.

present more fully. My hope is that Sandy Plains Baptist Church recognizes how corporate worship has enriched their lives in days gone by; and that appreciation for the sermon, the music, the prayers, the giving, the fellowship – all of it – can be more fully realized in the present. After all, this week’s sermon (or special music time, or Sunday school lesson...) just might be the event they would reference a year from now as playing a significant role in life and memory.

Furthermore, this project was personally significant to me in that it reminded me of a truth I have known for a while, but the research revealed it in new, humbling, life-giving ways. More specifically, like many, for my entire life I have desired to perform what I do week-in and week-out in an above-average way. From school to sports, from spelling bees to Scripture memory, I have wanted to give exceptional effort and achieve exceptional results. I confess, this desire has at times bordered on<sup>202</sup> perfectionism, to the point that I often believe I am “in charge” of all matters in my purview and can usually “figure out” what will happen. If I work hard enough and give maximum effort, I will be the best; and the outcomes will reflect this “perfection.” If I plan precisely enough and maintain control throughout a situation, I can practically manufacture desired results.

This project, however, has reminded me in welcomed and fresh ways that I am not “in charge” of the sermons I preach; and reencountering that grace thankfully lifts some misguided, unnecessary weight from my shoulders! I can give maximum effort. I can desire to be an excellent preacher, work diligently on homilies, and deliver sermons with flawless prose. Ultimately, though, all my

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<sup>202</sup> Or more accurately, jumped WELL over into...

sweat, determination, perfection, and planning are *not* what give a sermon its clout. The Spirit of the Living God gives the sermon power, and my efforts are but the mere vehicle that creates space for God to work in each hearer's heart. Going into this experiment, I assumed the control sermon would quickly be forgotten with its "boring" lack of memory cues. Moreover, I "just knew" the object lesson sermon would be the most memorable – after all, I had worked extremely hard on it, "figured out" that it would be the best, and had manufactured it to match most precisely with the learning styles I surmised to be most present in the room. How surprised I was, then, when the *opposite* of both those assumptions proved to be the case, and with nothing less than cold, hard data as evidence! Truly, sermons may be the *product* of the effort of the proclaimer, but their *power* (and memorability) lies solely in the capable and everlasting hands of God. What a wonderful lesson of humility and grace I needed to learn!

And finally, what bearing does this project have on my future ministry endeavors? For better or for worse, I am now firmly entrenched each week in asking myself the question, "How can I make this sermon more memorable?" I think a very concrete approach to this query involves continuing to lean on the data discovered in this experiment, and to allow it to inform my preaching going forward. This approach encompasses *many* ideas, but certainly a few float to the top. For example, knowing now that certain groups of people (be they female, Seasoned, aural learners, whatever...) learn in specific ways, I can use that knowledge to help me craft sermons to connect with different groups across the spectrum. More to the point, the Seasoned group remembers the title and

summary at a higher rate than other aspects of the homily, how can that idea inform my preparation? The pastor can consequently design a sermon in such a way that it reinforces the title throughout the entirety of the sermon and embodies the summary in the end. Who knows, perhaps Seasoned parishioners are likely to keep a bulletin in their Bibles and look at it the rest of the week.<sup>203</sup> In other words, if I know something like having a clear and memorable title can actually help memory retention, then I will absolutely try to use that information!

In the end, despite what particular sermons or surveys may be remembered at the highest mean, one inescapable fact remains: the Scripture is recalled more frequently than anything else if the preacher works diligently to place it at the center of the sermon and allows it to drive the GTT train to its proper station. The Scripture is remembered, and that fact supersedes age and gender and even learning style. In other words: *tell the stories*. In the final analysis, the biblical text carries its own weight and does not need to be codified with a memory cue in order to be remembered. In fact, it is almost as though the words of the Scriptures themselves are somehow “living and active”<sup>204</sup> beyond what we humble proclaimers would try to add to them. And there it is again, the alchemy.

So then by grace, may all our “tin” continue to help make God’s deeds known to His servants; and may even our humble “yard rocks” help reveal God’s glorious power again among His people, now and forevermore.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Which is, again, yet another variable that *could* have affected the results of this experiment, one for which I cannot account!

<sup>204</sup> cf. Hebrews 4:12.

<sup>205</sup> cf. Psalm 90:16.

## Appendix A1: Adult Consent Form

*Please read the following consent form. If you would be willing to participate in Garin's doctoral project and agree to the terms below, please sign your name at the bottom. Thank you very much!*

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I have freely chosen to participate in Garin Hill's doctoral project. As such, I understand the following:

- All the information I share is confidential. My general age-range and gender may be associated with results in publication, but my name as an identifier will never be used.
- Once all the data is compiled and analyzed, and once Garin completes this project, any survey associated with this project will be destroyed.
- My participation in this group is completely voluntary, and declining to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Choosing not to participate will not affect my church membership or my relationship to Sandy Plains Baptist Church in any way.
- If I choose, I may withdraw from this research at any time. I also understand if I choose to participate that I may decline to answer any question that I am not comfortable answering.
- If I have any questions or concerns about my participation in this project, I can contact our pastor and the administrator of this group, Garin Hill, at any time.

\*\*By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the above statements and understand them. If I am unclear, I have asked for more information for clarification. I consent to voluntarily participate in this study, and for Garin Hill to use my confidential answers in his research.\*\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's date

## Appendix A2: Child Consent Form

*Please read the following consent form. If you would be willing for your child to participate in Garin's doctoral project and agree to the terms below, please sign your name at the bottom. Thank you very much!*

**STUDENTS** — *Your parent must legally sign this form; however, please read it yourself and understand what is being asked of you in this experiment.*

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I will allow my child to participate in Garin Hill's doctoral project. As such, I understand the following:

- All the information my child shares is confidential. My child's general age-range and gender may be associated with results in publication, but his/her name as an identifier will never be used.
- Once all the data is compiled and analyzed, and once Garin completes this project any survey associated with this project will be destroyed.
- Any participation in this group is completely voluntary, and declining to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Choosing not to participate will not affect my child's church membership or his/her relationship to Sandy Plains Baptist Church in any way.
- If I choose, I may withdraw my child from this research at any time. I also understand if I allow him/her to participate that my child may decline to answer any question that our family is not comfortable answering.
- If I have any questions or concerns about my child's participation in this project, I can contact our pastor and the administrator of this group, Garin Hill, anytime.

**\*\*By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the above statements and understand them. If I am unclear, I have asked for more information for clarification.**

I consent to allow my child to participate in this study, and for Garin Hill to use my child's confidential answers in his research.\*\*

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Child's Name (Please Print)

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Parent's Signature

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Today's date

### Appendix A3: Focus Group – Adult Consent Form

*Please read the following consent form. If you would be willing to participate in Garin's doctoral project and agree to the terms below, please sign your name at the bottom. Thank you very much!*

I have freely chosen to participate in Garin Hill's doctoral project. As such, I understand the following:

- During the interview portion of this focus group, the stories about sermons I share will be recorded digitally by Garin to be used in his further analysis.
- All the information I share is confidential, including the digital recordings, the learning styles quiz, and all subsequent surveys. My general age-range and gender may be associated with results in publication, but my name as an identifier will never be used.
- Today I will be assigned a number that I will write on future surveys. That number will only be used to associate my learning style with how I answer survey questions. My name will never be published or associated with this number in any public way.
- Once all the data is compiled and analyzed, and once Garin completes this project, all the digital recordings, quizzes, and surveys associated with this project will be destroyed.
- While the administrator (Garin) promises confidentiality, and while confidentiality will be heavily stressed in this group session, I understand I share my memories with other group members. Group confidentiality can be stressed and clearly requested, but the administrator cannot ultimately promise absolute confidentiality when so many other people are involved.
- My participation in this group is completely voluntary, and declining to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Choosing not to participate will not affect my church membership or my relationship to Sandy Plains Baptist Church in any way.
- If I choose, I may withdraw from this research at any time. I also understand if I choose to participate that I may decline to answer any question that I am not comfortable answering.
- If I have any questions or concerns about my participation in this project, I can contact our pastor and the administrator of this group, Garin Hill, at any time.

**\*\*By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the above statements and understand them. If I am unclear, I have asked for more information for clarification. I consent to voluntarily participate in this study, and for Garin Hill to use my confidential answers in his research.\*\***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's date

### Appendix A4: Focus Group – Child Consent Form

*Please read the following consent form. If you would be willing for your child to participate in Garin's doctoral project and agree to the terms below, please sign your name at the bottom. Thank you very much!*

**STUDENTS** → *Your parent must legally sign this form; however, please read it yourself and understand what is being asked of you in this experiment.*

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I will allow my child to participate in Garin Hill's doctoral project. As such, I understand the following:

- During the interview portion of this focus group, the stories about sermons my child shares will be recorded digitally by Garin to be used in his further analysis.
- All the information my child shares is confidential, including the digital recordings, the learning styles quiz, and all subsequent surveys. My child's general age-range and gender may be associated with results in publication, but his/her name as an identifier will never be used.
- Today my child will be assigned a number that he/she will write on future surveys. That number will only be used to associate his/her learning style with how he/she answers survey questions. My child's name will never be published or associated with this number in any public way.
- Once all the data is compiled and analyzed, and once Garin completes this project, all the digital recordings, quizzes, and surveys associated with this project will be destroyed.
- While the administrator (Garin) promises confidentiality, and while confidentiality will be heavily stressed in this group session, I understand my child shares his/her memories with other group members. Group confidentiality can be stressed and clearly requested, but the administrator cannot ultimately promise absolute confidentiality when so many other people are involved.
- Any participation in this group is completely voluntary, and declining to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Choosing not to participate will not affect my child's church membership or his/her relationship to Sandy Plains Baptist Church in any way.
- If I choose, I may withdraw my child from this research at any time. I also understand if I allow him/her to participate that my child may decline to answer any question that our family is not comfortable answering.
- If I have any questions or concerns about my child's participation in this project, I can contact our pastor and the administrator of this group, Garin Hill, at any time.

**\*\*By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the above statements and understand them. If I am unclear, I have asked for more information for clarification. I consent to allow my child to participate in this study, and for Garin Hill to use my child's confidential answers in his research.\*\***

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Child's Name (Please Print)

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Parent's Signature

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Today's date



## **Appendix A5: Debriefing Statement**

### **Garin Hill's Doctoral Research**

*Thank you so much for your help in my doctoral project! Sandy Plains Baptist Church, you have been so gracious in your help over the past 3 years, and specifically your participation in these last 2 months of research has been invaluable. I could not have done it without you, so thank you!*

*I wanted to take a minute and summarize what the research we have done together is all about. As you know, you have taken 4 surveys over the past 2 months that have tested what you recognize about the previous week's sermon. The idea being tested is, which memory cue helps congregation members remember a sermon best. In other words, each of the 4 sermons was very similar in length, genre of biblical text used, place the sermons were preached, etc. The main difference in the sermons involved what memory cue was used at the end of the sermon to help you remember it. When used at the conclusion of a sermon, which is most effective at helping you recognize the main idea of last week's sermon: a story, a picture, an object lesson, or none of the above? The answer was undoubtedly different for each individual, but my research is curious to know, what do the numbers say as a whole?*

*The analysis itself is yet to be done, but that has been the focus of the research. That's what you are helping me determine, so thank you! My intention is to analyze the results and summarize them in my final thesis. Assuming I finish on time (which I certainly hope to!), the results will be published next spring in the library at Gardner-Webb. I plan on purchasing a copy for the church to keep in our church library, if you are ever interested in reading the project in its entirety.*

*Again, thank you for your help in research, as I could not have done it without you! May God bless each of us, our church, and this community as we continue to tell the stories of the faithfulness of God. Thank you again!*

*Grace and peace...*

*Garin*

## Appendix B1: VARK Learning Styles Inventory



### The VARK Questionnaire (Version 7.8)

#### How Do I Learn Best?

Choose the answer which best explains your preference and circle the letter(s) next to it. Please circle more than one if a single answer does not match your perception. Leave blank any question that does not apply.

1. You are helping someone who wants to go to your airport, the center of town or railway station. You would:
  - a. go with her.
  - b. tell her the directions.
  - c. write down the directions.
  - d. draw, or show her a map, or give her a map.
2. A website has a video showing how to make a special graph. There is a person speaking, some lists and words describing what to do and some diagrams. You would learn most from:
  - a. seeing the diagrams.
  - b. listening.
  - c. reading the words.
  - d. watching the actions.
3. You are planning a vacation for a group. You want some feedback from them about the plan. You would:
  - a. describe some of the highlights they will experience.
  - b. use a map to show them the places.
  - c. give them a copy of the printed itinerary.
  - d. phone, text or email them.
4. You are going to cook something as a special treat. You would:
  - a. cook something you know without the need for instructions.
  - b. ask friends for suggestions.
  - c. look on the Internet or in some cookbooks for ideas from the pictures.
  - d. use a good recipe.
5. A group of tourists want to learn about the parks or wildlife reserves in your area. You would:
  - a. talk about, or arrange a talk for them about parks or wildlife reserves.
  - b. show them maps and internet pictures.
  - c. take them to a park or wildlife reserve and walk with them.
  - d. give them a book or pamphlets about the parks or wildlife reserves.
6. You are about to purchase a digital camera or mobile phone. Other than price, what would most influence your decision?
  - a. Trying or testing it.
  - b. Reading the details or checking its features online.
  - c. It is a modern design and looks good.
  - d. The salesperson telling me about its features.
7. Remember a time when you learned how to do something new. Avoid choosing a physical skill, eg. riding a bike. You learned best by:
  - a. watching a demonstration.
  - b. listening to somebody explaining it and asking questions.
  - c. diagrams, maps, and charts - visual clues.
  - d. written instructions – e.g. a manual or book.

8. You have a problem with your heart. You would prefer that the doctor:
- gave you a something to read to explain what was wrong.
  - used a plastic model to show what was wrong.
  - described what was wrong.
  - showed you a diagram of what was wrong.
9. You want to learn a new program, skill or game on a computer. You would:
- read the written instructions that came with the program.
  - talk with people who know about the program.
  - use the controls or keyboard.
  - follow the diagrams in the book that came with it.
10. I like websites that have:
- things I can click on, shift or try.
  - interesting design and visual features.
  - interesting written descriptions, lists and explanations.
  - audio channels where I can hear music, radio programs or interviews.
11. Other than price, what would most influence your decision to buy a new non-fiction book?
- The way it looks is appealing.
  - Quickly reading parts of it.
  - A friend talks about it and recommends it.
  - It has real-life stories, experiences and examples.
12. You are using a book, CD or website to learn how to take photos with your new digital camera. You would like to have:
- a chance to ask questions and talk about the camera and its features.
  - clear written instructions with lists and bullet points about what to do.
  - diagrams showing the camera and what each part does.
  - many examples of good and poor photos and how to improve them.
13. Do you prefer a teacher or a presenter who uses:
- demonstrations, models or practical sessions.
  - question and answer, talk, group discussion, or guest speakers.
  - handouts, books, or readings.
  - diagrams, charts or graphs.
14. You have finished a competition or test and would like some feedback. You would like to have feedback:
- using examples from what you have done.
  - using a written description of your results.
  - from somebody who talks it through with you.
  - using graphs showing what you had achieved.
15. You are going to choose food at a restaurant or cafe. You would:
- choose something that you have had there before.
  - listen to the waiter or ask friends to recommend choices.
  - choose from the descriptions in the menu.
  - look at what others are eating or look at pictures of each dish.
16. You have to make an important speech at a conference or special occasion. You would:
- make diagrams or get graphs to help explain things.
  - write a few key words and practice saying your speech over and over.
  - write out your speech and learn from reading it over several times.
  - gather many examples and stories to make the talk real and practical.



## The VARK Questionnaire Scoring Chart

Use the following scoring chart to find the VARK category that each of your answers corresponds to. Circle the letters that correspond to your answers

e.g. If you answered b and c for question 3, circle V and R in the question 3 row.

| Question | a category | b category | c category | d category |
|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 3        | K          | V          | R          | A          |

## Scoring Chart

| Question | a category | b category | c category | d category |
|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1        | K          | A          | R          | V          |
| 2        | V          | A          | R          | K          |
| 3        | K          | V          | R          | A          |
| 4        | K          | A          | V          | R          |
| 5        | A          | V          | K          | R          |
| 6        | K          | R          | V          | A          |
| 7        | K          | A          | V          | R          |
| 8        | R          | K          | A          | V          |
| 9        | R          | A          | K          | V          |
| 10       | K          | V          | R          | A          |
| 11       | V          | R          | A          | K          |
| 12       | A          | R          | V          | K          |
| 13       | K          | A          | R          | V          |
| 14       | K          | R          | A          | V          |
| 15       | K          | A          | R          | V          |
| 16       | V          | A          | R          | K          |

## Calculating your scores

Count the number of each of the VARK letters you have circled to get your score for each VARK category.

|                                      |                      |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Total number of <b>V</b> s circled = | <input type="text"/> |
| Total number of <b>A</b> s circled = | <input type="text"/> |
| Total number of <b>R</b> s circled = | <input type="text"/> |
| Total number of <b>K</b> s circled = | <input type="text"/> |

## Appendix B2: Focus Group Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ ,

I hope this letter finds you well today. The summer is winding down, school has started, and that means most of our lives will be a little busier, but tis the season, right?

It's because of this new school year that I wanted a few moments of your time. If you are receiving this letter, it is because I would like your help with the 1<sup>st</sup> part of my doctor of ministry project/thesis that will commence this Fall. I am only sending this to 10-15 folks, so I hope you can help! Officially, I would like for you to be a part of a focus group. On **Saturday morning, October 4<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m.** in the fellowship building at church, could you join me for a couple hours (or less)? Your task will be very simple, and what I'd like you to help me with is...

- Fill out a couple of consent forms, because that is what you have to do when you run an official experiment. ☺
- Take a learning styles survey that indicates which way you learn best.
- Respond aloud (which I will record) to the following: Think of 2 sermons that you remember from any time in the past (last week, years ago, whenever)... and share what you remember, why you remember them, and – if you can remember – was there something going on in your life at the time that aided in your remembering these particular sermons?
- Commit, to the best of your ability, to attend the Sunday worship services at Sandy Plains, particularly from October 5<sup>th</sup> through November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Would you be willing to help? I truly hope you can! If so, could you let me know if you are willing and able to come on **October 4<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m.**? We'll only be there for a couple hours at most. Please note as you are deciding that, if you choose to participate, the recording is for *my purposes only* and – though your responses may be published in my final analysis – your name will not be attached to your answers and will not appear anywhere in my paper!

To let me know if you can help, you can text or call me @ 704.\*\*\*\*\*, you can email me at \*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com, or you can see me at church and let me know. For payment, you will receive a breakfast-y biscuit and my enduring appreciation. (I mean, who could pass that up, right?) Please let me know one way or the other, but I hope the answer will be yes!

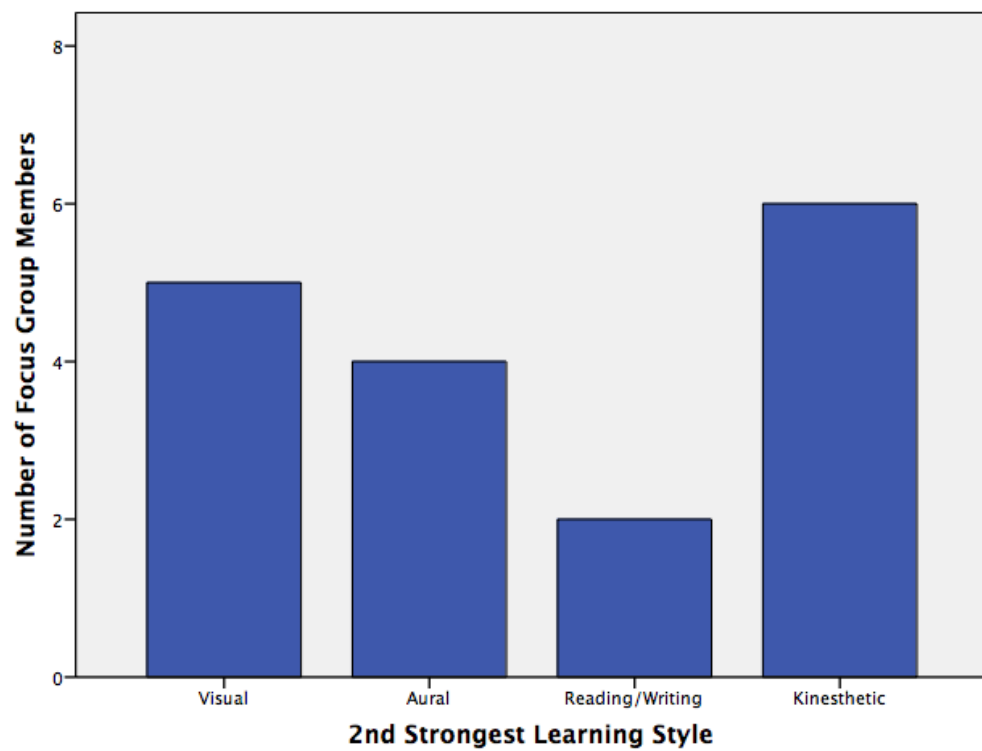
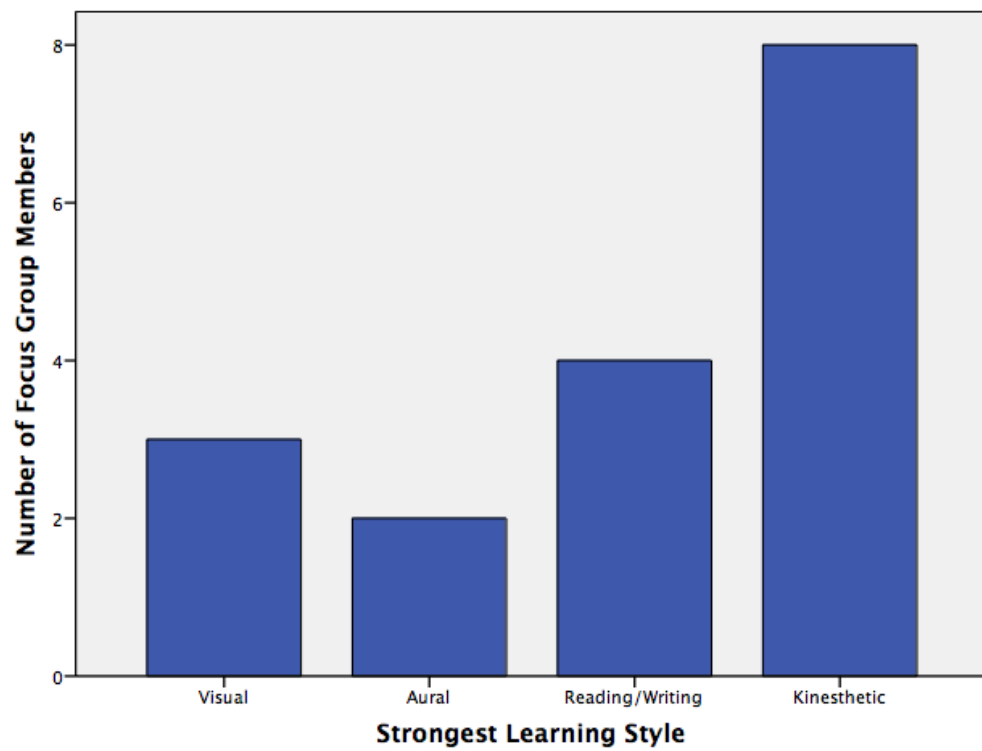
Thanks so much for your time, and I look forward to seeing you soon and being together with all of you on October 4<sup>th</sup>! Have a great week...

With hope,

**Appendix B3: Basic Focus Group Info - Genders, Ages, Learning Styles**

| <b>Focus Group Member Number</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age Range</b> | <b>Strongest Learning Style</b> | <b>2nd Strongest Learning Style</b> |
|----------------------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1.0                              | Male          | 0 - 12           | Kinesthetic                     | Aural                               |
| 2.0                              | Male          | 0 - 12           | Read/Write                      | Aural                               |
| 3.0                              | Female        | 13 - 19          | Kinesthetic                     | Visual                              |
| 4.0                              | Female        | 13 - 19          | Kinesthetic                     | Read/Write                          |
| 5.0                              | Female        | 13 - 19          | Kinesthetic                     | Visual                              |
| 6.0                              | Male          | 13 - 19          | Kinesthetic                     | Aural                               |
| 7.0                              | Male          | 20 - 35          | Visual                          | Kinesthetic                         |
| 8.0                              | Male          | 20 - 35          | Kinesthetic                     | Visual                              |
| 9.0                              | Female        | 20 - 35          | Read/Write                      | Kinesthetic                         |
| 10.0                             | Male          | 36 - 55          | Read/Write                      | Kinesthetic                         |
| 11.0                             | Female        | 36 - 55          | Visual                          | Aural                               |
| 12.0                             | Male          | 36 - 55          | Visual                          | Kinesthetic                         |
| 13.0                             | Female        | 36 - 55          | Aural                           | Visual                              |
| 14.0                             | Female        | 36 - 55          | Kinesthetic                     | Visual                              |
| 15.0                             | Female        | 56 & Up          | Aural                           | Kinesthetic                         |
| 16.0                             | Male          | 56 & Up          | Read/Write                      | Kinesthetic                         |
| 17.0                             | Female        | 56 & Up          | Kinesthetic                     | Read/Write                          |

*Out of 17 Total Focus Group Members...*



### Appendix B5: Focus Group - Survey Scores

| Focus Group Member Code | Picture | Control | Story  | Object Lesson |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|--------|---------------|
| 1.0                     | 4.0000  | 3.0000  | 1.0000 | 1.0000        |
| 2.0                     | 5.0000  | 3.0000  | 1.0000 | 1.0000        |
| 3.0                     | 2.0000  | 4.0000  |        |               |
| 4.0                     | 4.0000  | 5.0000  | 5.0000 | 5.0000        |
| 5.0                     | 4.0000  | 5.0000  | 2.0000 | 0.0000        |
| 6.0                     |         | 3.0000  | 1.0000 | 2.0000        |
| 7.0                     |         | 5.0000  |        |               |
| 8.0                     | 5.0000  | 5.0000  | 5.0000 | 4.0000        |
| 9.0                     |         | 5.0000  | 5.0000 | 5.0000        |
| 10.0                    | 5.0000  | 4.0000  | 4.0000 |               |
| 11.0                    | 5.0000  | 5.0000  | 3.0000 |               |
| 12.0                    | 5.0000  | 3.0000  | 5.0000 | 5.0000        |
| 13.0                    | 5.0000  | 5.0000  | 5.0000 |               |
| 14.0                    | 5.0000  | 4.0000  | 4.0000 | 3.0000        |
| 15.0                    |         |         | 5.0000 | 0.0000        |
| 16.0                    | 1.0000  | 2.0000  |        | 0.0000        |
| 17.0                    | 0.0000  | 2.0000  | 1.0000 |               |
| Total                   | 3.8462  | 3.9375  | 3.3571 | 2.3636        |



## Appendix B6: Focus Group - Learning Styles Crossed With Surveys

| Strongest Learning Style |                | Picture | Control | Story   | Object Lesson |
|--------------------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|
| Visual                   | N              | 2       | 3       | 2       | 1             |
|                          | Mean           | 5.0000  | 4.3333  | 4.0000  | 5.0000        |
|                          | Std. Deviation | 0.00000 | 1.15470 | 1.41421 |               |
|                          | Minimum        | 5.00    | 3.00    | 3.00    | 5.00          |
|                          | Maximum        | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00          |
| Aural                    | N              | 1       | 1       | 2       | 1             |
|                          | Mean           | 5.0000  | 5.0000  | 5.0000  | 0.0000        |
|                          | Std. Deviation |         |         | 0.00000 |               |
|                          | Minimum        | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00    | 0.00          |
|                          | Maximum        | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00    | 0.00          |
| Reading/Writing          | N              | 3       | 4       | 3       | 3             |
|                          | Mean           | 3.6667  | 3.5000  | 3.3333  | 2.0000        |
|                          | Std. Deviation | 2.30940 | 1.29099 | 2.08167 | 2.64575       |
|                          | Minimum        | 1.00    | 2.00    | 1.00    | 0.00          |
|                          | Maximum        | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00          |
| Kinesthetic              | N              | 7       | 8       | 7       | 6             |
|                          | Mean           | 3.4286  | 3.8750  | 2.7143  | 2.5000        |
|                          | Std. Deviation | 1.81265 | 1.12599 | 1.88982 | 1.87083       |
|                          | Minimum        | 0.00    | 2.00    | 1.00    | 0.00          |
|                          | Maximum        | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00          |
| Total                    | N              | 13      | 16      | 14      | 11            |
|                          | Mean           | 3.8462  | 3.9375  | 3.3571  | 2.3636        |
|                          | Std. Deviation | 1.72463 | 1.12361 | 1.78054 | 2.11058       |
|                          | Minimum        | 0.00    | 2.00    | 1.00    | 0.00          |
|                          | Maximum        | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00    | 5.00          |

**Appendix B7: Control and Object Lesson Paired Survey Comparison**

| <b>Paired Survey Comparison</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b># of surveys in common</b> | <b>Std. Deviation</b> | <b>Std. Error Mean</b> |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Control                         | 3.8000      | 10                            | 1.13529               | .35901                 |
| Object Lesson                   | 2.6000      | 10                            | 2.06559               | .65320                 |

**Appendix B8: Survey Comparison Showing "Statistical Significance"**

| Compared Surveys |   | Mean Difference | Std. Error | Sig. <sup>b</sup> | 95% Confidence |             |
|------------------|---|-----------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------|
|                  |   |                 |            |                   | Lower Bound    | Upper Bound |
| 1                | 2 | .571            | .481       | .280              | -.605          | 1.748       |
|                  | 3 | 1.286           | .680       | .108              | -.379          | 2.950       |
|                  | 4 | 1.857*          | .738       | .045              | .052           | 3.662       |
| 2                | 1 | -.571           | .481       | .280              | -1.748         | .605        |
|                  | 3 | .714            | .644       | .310              | -.862          | 2.291       |
|                  | 4 | 1.286           | .808       | .163              | -.692          | 3.263       |
| 3                | 1 | -1.286          | .680       | .108              | -2.950         | .379        |
|                  | 2 | -.714           | .644       | .310              | -2.291         | .862        |
|                  | 4 | .571            | .297       | .103              | -.156          | 1.299       |
| 4                | 1 | -1.857*         | .738       | .045              | -3.662         | -.052       |
|                  | 2 | -1.286          | .808       | .163              | -3.263         | .692        |
|                  | 3 | -.571           | .297       | .103              | -1.299         | .156        |

**Appendix B9: Means for Focus Group Who Took All Surveys**

| <b>Survey</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std.<br/>Deviation</b> | <b># of Focus Group<br/>Members</b> |
|---------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Picture       | 4.5714      | .53452                    | 7                                   |
| Control       | 4.0000      | 1.00000                   | 7                                   |
| Story         | 3.2857      | 1.88982                   | 7                                   |
| Object Lesson | 2.7143      | 2.05866                   | 7                                   |

## Appendix C1: Picture Survey

Instructions: *Please help Garin with his doctoral project by filling out the following brief survey. Circle only ONE answer under each question, please...*

*\*Special note - If you were not here or don't remember, no problem! Please don't ask your neighbor, just mark whatever answer is accurate for you. Thanks for your help!*

### General Info:

#### What is your gender?

A.  
Female

B.  
Male

#### What is your age range?

A.  
0 - 12

B.  
13 - 19

C.  
20 - 35

D.  
36 - 55

E.  
56 & above

#### Question #1: What was the theme of last week's sermon?

|                               |   |   |                  |               |
|-------------------------------|---|---|------------------|---------------|
| A.                            | B.  | C.  | D.               | E.            |
| Knowing that God will provide | Believing in Jesus will help see us through | <b>Seeing the work of God right in front of you</b> | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #2: What was the title of last week's sermon?

|                     |                               |                           |                  |               |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| A.                  | B.                            | C.                        | D.               | E.            |
| Believing is Seeing | <b>If It Had Been a Snake</b> | His Eye is on the Sparrow | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #3: What was the primary Scripture passage of last week's sermon?

|  |                                     |   |                  |               |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|------------------|---------------|
| A.   | B.                                  | C.  | D.               | E.            |
| Jesus instructs the disciples in Matthew 6 | Peter performs a miracles in Acts 3 | <b>Jesus encounters a woman in John 4</b> | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #4: What could be the summary statement of last week's sermon?

|  |   |   |                  |               |
|--|---|---|------------------|---------------|
| A.   | B.  | C.  | D.               | E.            |
| We have to believe God will provide before we can see it | <b>The work and beauty of God are on display right in front of us</b> | The power of God can work through us, too | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #5: What practical application could be taken last week's sermon?

|   |   |  |                  |               |
|---|---|--|------------------|---------------|
| A.  | B.  | C.   | D.               | E.            |
| <b>I should pay attention to what God is doing right in front of me</b> | I should strengthen my belief in the provision of God | I should pray that God's spirit would make my faith stronger | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

## Appendix C2: Control Survey

Instructions: *Please help Garin with his doctoral project by filling out the following brief survey. Circle only ONE answer under each question, please...*

*\*Special note - If you were not here or don't remember, no problem! Please don't ask your neighbor, just mark whatever answer is accurate for you. Thanks for your help!*

### General Info:

#### What is your gender?

- |        |      |
|--------|------|
| A.     | B.   |
| Female | Male |

#### What is your age range?

- |        |         |         |         |            |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|------------|
| A.     | B.      | C.      | D.      | E.         |
| 0 - 12 | 13 - 19 | 20 - 35 | 36 - 55 | 56 & above |

#### Question #1: What was the theme of last week's sermon?

- |                                  |  |  |                  |               |
|----------------------------------|--|--|------------------|---------------|
| A.                               | B.                                       | C.   | D.               | E.            |
| God's Spirit desires to teach us | <b>God's power frees us from bondage</b> | The way of Jesus is the only way to heaven | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #2: What was the title of last week's sermon?

- |                                |                               |                                |                  |               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| A.                             | B.                            | C.                             | D.               | E.            |
| <b>Finding a Lost Identity</b> | Walking Along the Narrow Road | What Was That Whisper I Heard? | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #3: What was the primary Scripture passage of last week's sermon?

- |  |  |  |                  |               |
|--|--|--|------------------|---------------|
| A.                                       | B.   | C.   | D.               | E.            |
| Jesus instructs his disciples in John 14 | Paul talks about the Holy Spirit in Romans 8 | <b>Jesus heals a possessed man in Luke 8</b> | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #4: What could be the summary statement of last week's sermon?

- |  |  |   |                  |               |
|--|--|---|------------------|---------------|
| A.   | B.   | C.  | D.               | E.            |
| <b>God's power to heal us is greater than evil powers in the world</b> | Accepting Jesus' love is the only way to have eternal life | God whispers wisdom to us, if we will only listen | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

#### Question #5: What practical application could be taken last week's sermon?

- |   |   |  |                  |               |
|---|---|--|------------------|---------------|
| A.  | B.  | C.   | D.               | E.            |
| I should accept the salvation God offers me through Jesus | I should ask the Spirit of God what is best before deciding | <b>I should admit I have evil places in my life &amp; allow God to heal me</b> | I can't remember | I wasn't here |

### Appendix C3: Story Survey

Instructions: *Please help Garin with his doctoral project by filling out the following brief survey. Circle only ONE answer under each question, please...*

*\*Special note - If you were not here or don't remember, no problem! Please don't ask your neighbor, just mark whatever answer is accurate for you. Thanks for your help!*

#### General Info:

##### **What is your gender?**

A.

Female

B.

Male

##### **What is your age range?**

A.

0 - 12

B.

13 - 19

C.

20 - 35

D.

36 - 55

E.

56 &amp; above

#### **Question #1: What was the theme of last week's sermon?**

A.

God turns our sorrow  
into joy

B.

**God values us  
because we are His  
children**

C.

Jesus has a plan for  
our lives

D.

I can't remember

E.

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #2: What was the title of last week's sermon?**

A.

Who Knew That Was  
in the Plan?

B.

Beauty for Ashes

C.

**The Words We  
Long to Hear**

D.

I can't remember

E.

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #3: What was the primary Scripture passage of last week's sermon?**

A.

**Jesus befriends a  
man known as a  
sinner in Luke 19**

B.

Paul explains the will  
of God in Romans 8

C.

Jesus teaches the  
disciples in Mark 4

D.

I can't remember

E.

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #4: What could be the summary statement of last week's sermon?**

A.

Jesus has a wonderful  
plan for our life if we  
will only follow Him

B.

**Our possessions  
and abilities are not  
how Jesus  
measures value**

C.

God is working for  
good in the bad  
situations

D.

I can't remember

E.

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #5: What practical application could be taken last week's sermon?**

A.

I should rejoice in the  
bad because God is  
working for good

B.

**I should stop  
attempting to earn  
Jesus' love by having  
much or doing good  
things**

C.

I should claim deeper  
peace in my life  
because God has a plan

D.

I can't remember

E.

I wasn't  
here

### Appendix C4: Object Lesson Survey

Instructions: *Please help Garin with his doctoral project by filling out the following brief survey. Circle only ONE answer under each question, please...*

*\*Special note - If you were not here or don't remember, no problem! Please don't ask your neighbor, just mark whatever answer is accurate for you. Thanks for your help!*

#### General Info:

##### **What is your gender?**

A.  
Female

B.  
Male

##### **What is your age range?**

A.  
0 - 12

B.  
13 - 19

C.  
20 - 35

D.  
36 - 55

E.  
56 & above

#### **Question #1: What was the theme of last week's sermon?**

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

God's sacrifice for us in  
Jesus was great

Evil can overtake us if  
we aren't careful

**Sin is internal and  
external**

I can't remember

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #2: What was the title of last week's sermon?**

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

**A Proverb Worth  
Remembering**

Jesus Paid It All

The Best Trick The  
Devil Every Pulled...

I can't remember

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #3: What was the primary Scripture passage of last week's sermon?**

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

Satan tempts Jesus in  
Luke 4

**A woman is  
forgiven in John 8**

Jesus teaches his  
disciples in John 10

I can't remember

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #4: What could be the summary statement of last week's sermon?**

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

Jesus laid down His  
life so we can spend  
eternity with God

Temptations will come,  
so we all must be  
prepared

**We are *all* sinners  
in need of a fresh  
start from Jesus**

I can't remember

I wasn't  
here

#### **Question #5: What practical application could be taken last week's sermon?**

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

**I should not be so  
quick to judge  
others for their sins**

I should thank God  
daily because he died  
for me

I should read my Bible  
in order to better fight  
temptation in my life

I can't remember

I wasn't  
here



## Appendix D1: Picture Memory Cue Sermon

---

### If It Had Been a Snake...

October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014

#### INTRODUCTION

##### I. PRAYER

Oh GOD revealed in Jesus

We have come into this place and to this time to encounter You.

To meet You face to face.

To hear the stories of Your love for the world...

To remember how Your power was revealed in those that have come before us...

And to consider anew how that same power might be made manifest in our own lives.

O LORD, we have heard of Your renown, and we stand in awe, O LORD, of Your work.

*In our own time* revive it.

*In our own time* make Your deeds known to Your servants...

And let Your glorious power be revealed again among Your people, now, and forevermore.

AMEN.

##### II. INTRODUCTION – SOUTHERN SAYINGS

A. (Slide 1) If you live in the South – particularly if live – in a rural part of South...

B. ...we take some things for granted → among them, I think – is that folks understand the language we use

C. We here at Sandy Plains – like to bring the knowledge to the people // so I thought I'd share a few Southern – idioms or phrases with you

D. May already know // But just want to make sure → up to speed on things

E. If you're from a different region of the country – then this might be informative // and it's even free of charge

1. First need to know (Slide 2) – *Sweetie* or *Sweetheart*

a. Even if *not* from South – may know that word

b. But you'll find out if haven't already – may get called that term // not by your spouse / parent / loved one...

c. But by someone you don't even know...

d. Usually by a woman... // ...perhaps in a restaurant // it can throw you off – if not ready

e. Depending on my mood that day – I still occasionally hear it and think // "I am *someone's* sweetheart – but not yours"

- f. Essentially – it’s meant to be a friendly term, though // I find it’s easiest just to → roll with it

Some others Southern phrases – don’t need explaining so much as defining...

2. (X) “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” → Know the results first – before you assume
3. (X) “Bit off more than he could chew” → tried to accomplish more than he was really capable
4. (X) “Get the short end of the stick” → treated poorly or unfairly

Last one – I bet if I started, some of you could finish it for me...

5. “If it had been a snake...” (X) (It would have bitten me) → Say this when something you are looking for – was actually right under your nose the whole time

### III. WHERE WE ARE & SCRIPTURE

- A. We – going to look @ Bible passage today – from 4<sup>th</sup> chapter – book of John
- B. It’s a passage – some of us may be familiar with... // ...and to be sure – it has a kind of, “If it’d been a snake...” – quality to it
- C. So let’s be sure to pay attention
- D. We’ll read some specific verses – in a few minutes // but it helps to understand if we can – set the stage... (Slide 3)

### **NOT PERCEIVING**

#### I. INTRODUCTION – JEW VS. SAMARITANS

- A. Where we jump into the Bible // we land on → a strange scene indeed...
- B. Jesus and his disciples – have traveled from Judea in the South // back home to Galilee in the North
- C. Have chosen to go through region called → Samaria to get there
- D. Strange in part b/c, typically → Jews didn’t like – go that way // b/c if you’re familiar w/ the background of this story at all – you know...
- E. Jewish people and Samaritan people → did not like each other
- F. This wasn’t a friendly → “Everyone knows deep down Duke is better – but they and Carolina still banter” – kind of rivalry // (2 wks in a row – I know)
- G. No. It was a full on...
  1. Hatfields // McCoys
  2. Montagues // Capulets
- H. ...“We don’t like each other” – kind of deal // it was mainly fueled by religious differences
- I. Unfortunately – what we know – history // religious skirmishes → typically ugliest ones of all

## II. MEETING THE WOMAN

- A. Yet in today's text – despite these misgivings – they decide to go through Samaria – anyway // that's when the strangeness really takes hold...
- B. The disciples had gone into town – for some food
- C. We find Jesus – sitting by a well, and as a Samaritan woman approaches...
- D. Unbelievably → Jesus asks her – for something to drink
- E. That's so strange in fact – that the woman – points it out // we pick up the biblical text in John 4, verse 9 (Slide 4)

*The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)*

- John 4:9 (NRSV)

- F. NO – Jews did NOT share things in common with Samaritans
- G. But the unusual nature of the scene – went even deeper than that
- H. See – this drama does not unfold in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- I. Jewish rabbis were – in this place & time – the top rung of the ladder...
- J. ...but in this particular context – not only was there a strike against this person b/c she → Samaritan
- K. But she was a "SHE" // a female // commentaries and histories about this era make clear...
  - 1. Jewish men did not initiate conversation with → unknown women – of any nationality
  - 2. Jewish teachers did not engage – with a woman at all → in any kind of public exchange
- L. In fact – one well known ancient Jewish commentary says (Slide 5) → *He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself...*
- M. I'm fairly certain → I overheard Todd say that – to a potential boyfriend of Abbie's recently // that's serious stuff, right?
- N. Jews did not invite – contact with Samaritans
- O. Jewish men – did not invite contact with unknown women
- P. So – Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman → was quite uncivilized
- Q. But despite all that. By grace of God → the woman had a need // and Jesus saw it // the Scripture continues (Slide 6)

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." <sup>11</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

<sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" <sup>13</sup>Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will

*give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”*  
<sup>15</sup>*The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”*

- John 4:10-15 (NRSV)

- R. This woman was thirsty – can you hear it in their conversation? // She’s thirsty // she’s weary // she’s tired of – drinking this water and never being truly filled
- S. Now to be fair – for her part, at first – the Samaritan woman assumes – they are talking about being *physically* thirsty
- T. But Jesus knows her need – goes beyond that
- U. As their conversation progresses → it’s evident she is curious about spiritual things // she doesn’t understand – all there is to understand
- V. She’s looking for something // for someone → to come and fix everything that has been broken...
- W. John 4:25 (Slide 7)

<sup>25</sup>*The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”*

- John 4:25 (NRSV)

### III. GOD IS RIGHT THERE

- A. This is one of those moments – isn’t it? // Where the reader has – what Rhonda tells her English students about → 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscience
- B. Where we can stand over the story – look down on top of it → see things – even the characters in the narrative – don’t see yet
- C. We can see the irony – dripping from her statement – like water from that finicky kitchen faucet
- D. She’s been looking // her town has been looking // her region... // her country... // her world... // and everyone in it... // for all of human history had been – looking...
- E. Waiting // watching // scanning the horizon // trying to find a Messiah who would come – and make sense of it all
- F. A person that would come – give people hope // give people a reason to think that life wasn’t just about → schlepping some water jar back and forth – every day of your life until you die. // that’s the end
- G. She’d been waiting // everything – she’d been waiting for – was sitting right in front of her...
- H. ...and she didn’t – even notice

### IV. WHAT ABOUT US?

- A. What about us? // what about you – what are you looking for?
- B. See I’m convinced – so many people in the world – maybe some of us → live our entire lives – schlepping that water jar around...
- C. ...and don’t notice what’s going on – right in front of our faces
- D. IOW – we’re so doggone busy... // and so concerned with our own...
  - 1. Problems

- 2. Physical ailments
- 3. Dire situations – that need addressing each day
- 4. With filling our own water jars – whatever that looks like for us
- E. ...we're so consumed with all those things... // ...that we don't see the work of God – right in front of us
- F. And it may be true – we've been looking // we've been waiting // we've been watching for God to show up in some grand, miraculous way – as no doubt the Son of God would do – right?
- G. But somehow // for some reason... we missed him

## REVELATION

### I. GOD REVEALED IN JESUS

- A. But the Good News. Is that the story of the woman @ the well // and maybe your story too, if you'll allow it – doesn't stop in the middle...
- B. It doesn't end – a story of → someone who is just – aching for help, but can't find it
- C. John 4:25-26 (Slide 8)

*<sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."*

- John 4:25-26 (NRSV)

- D. So what do you think? // what do you think happened internally @ that moment – in the woman's heart?
- E. I'm thinking like → light bulb // bells // Hallelujah Chorus // like that scene in Christmas Vacation – where Ellen finally gets the lights to come on – Clark's decorated house
- F. It's a revelation! // in that moment – Jesus says to her...
  - 1. "I am the fulfillment of everything you have – ever wanted"
  - 2. "I am the One you have thirsted for – your entire life // even if you didn't realize it was me in front of you"
  - 3. I. AM. // that's what Jesus says in v.26 // I. AM.
- G. It's absolutely meant to evoke memory → of when God told Moses at the burning bush – God's covenant name = I. AM.
- H. Jesus is claiming deity right here // right in front of – Samaritan woman

### II. IMAGING THE SCENE

- A. You know – sometimes I like to imagine // visualize scenes like this in the Bible // sometimes my versions are... unique
- B. Maybe a result – too many – movies watched on my part // Too much entertainment // too many paint chips eaten as a kid – hard to say, really
- C. But I imagine this scene like a play...
  - 1. She has this revelation
  - 2. In – same moment – disciples come back // begin talking – Jesus

3. All the stage goes dark // except a lone spotlight – which finds her in a corner
- D. And if this were a musical – she’d begin to sing, wouldn’t she? // She’d begin to sing...
  1. About what this means – for all that she has longed for before
  2. Maybe most importantly – about what she’s going to do about it now // now that she has seen – what she hadn’t seen before
- E. There’s a moment that hangs in the balance // time slows down // the decision comes → what will she do
- F. And then in my mind’s eye...
  1. The lights come up
  2. The music rises
  3. And we see her run away // leaving her water jar behind // as fast as she can go – to tell her friends – all she has seen and heard
- G. Her testimony leads finally – to the grand finale – where all the townspeople sing together // for they – come and see for themselves – this Savior called Jesus
- H. But the singing – is only if it were a musical, right?
- I. Well the reality of the story → just as good // in the end... (Slide 9)

*42They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”*

- John 4:42 (NRSV)

## CONCLUSION

### I. WHERE ARE YOU & PICTURE

- A. Friends – as we try to put a bow on all this – I wonder if you consider this question: where are you in this – whole story
- B. Maybe – like we said earlier → you are so concerned with your own problems // your own ailments // filling your own – water jar → you are weary of it all...
- C. You are looking for something or someone – to come along...
  1. To make sense out of it all
  2. To give purpose and meaning and hope – in the midst of day to day – life → that just has to happen
- D. Or maybe you’ve been looking for God to show up...
- E. You’ve been waiting on – that grand, miraculous way – God seems to show up for other people // you’re waiting on – your turn
- F. Surely, that’s how the Son of God – works, right?
- G. When you’ve been looking for some kind of Messiah for so long → where might you find Him?
- H. I want to leave you with an image // that might help us make sense of this – as we bring this all together (Slide 10)

- I. Be still for a moment // Take a look if you will // Beautiful, isn't it?
- J. You know – I see sunsets like that // and a part of me believes → that's just God showing off
- K. But before we change slides – I want to ask you → do you recognize where an incredible display of God's beauty – like that – was captured?
- L. Less than 200 yards from where I now stand // right up there – at the top of the hill
- M. Frankly – God has put sunsets like it on display for about the past 2 weeks – I've taken lots of pictures

## II. PICTURE

- A. You know – maybe it's true – we get caught up in our own lives
- B. Maybe it's true – that sometimes we even look for God // and that grand, miraculous revelation – for whatever reasons seems to find others // but unfortunately – avoids us
- C. Maybe it's true → if – work of God in our lives – had been a snake... // it would have bitten us
- D. But maybe it's also true – in spite of all that → Jesus still comes and reveals himself to us // in ways that we'll eventually understand
- E. Maybe the revelations – aren't grand and miraculous – as we have always assumed it to be...
- F. ...but it's in the everyday, beauty of God that's right in front of our face
- G. Maybe it *becomes* grand and miraculous – when we finally recognize – Jesus can be revealed in...
  - a. A cup of cold water
  - b. A sunset to benedict the day
  - c. A laugh // a tear // a question // a step of faith – even when we aren't 100% sure ourselves
- H. Maybe it comes – when we're finally able to set down @ the feet of Jesus – the constant worries of our life
- I. But yet understand → everyday things – don't just have to be a → weight we carry
- J. But can instead be made extraordinary – by the revelation of God in even the mundane – tasks of life
- K. So my challenge to you this week – is to pay attention // look for the beauty and the work of God on display...
- L. And not in some fancy – complex – theological framework
- M. But in simple // ordinary // right-in-front-of-your-face → places – where you find yourself each day
- N. In my experience // and the experience of those in the Bible → that's where God can usually be found
- O. May we see & may we hear for ourselves. He truly is the Savior of the world. (Slide 11)

## Appendix D2: Control Memory Cue Sermon

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### Finding a Lost Identity

October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014

#### INTRODUCTION

##### I. PRAYER

Oh GOD revealed in Jesus

We have come into this place and to this time to encounter You.

To meet You face to face.

To hear the stories of Your love for the world...

To remember how Your power was revealed in those that have come before us...

And to consider anew how that same power might be made manifest in our own lives.

O LORD, we have heard of Your renown, and we stand in awe, O LORD, of Your work.

*In our own time* revive it.

*In our own time* make Your deeds known to Your servants...

And let Your glorious power be revealed again among Your people, now, and forevermore.

AMEN.

##### II. INTRODUCTION

A. It's a phrase – I repeat to my children → weekly, at least

B. “Life is hard” // to be fair – usually repeating this after some tragedy such as → they've found one shoe – but can't yet find the other

C. Or – had toy taken away – b/c – beating each other over head w/ it

D. But hear it anyway → “Life is hard”

E. Now we watch the news – for some in – world → Life → is legit... Tragedy.

F. For us – things – occupy us – may not constitute – spot on the 11:00 news // but life can be hard – in sense – just *stuff* – have to deal w/ each day

G. Which is why – we just find relief in the simple things...

H. ... like when we go through something stressful – there's a calm right after – storm

I. I was thinking about a few instances – I wonder if any of them resonate with you // like...

1. The day you get to work – you realize → the inspectors have gone (Isn't that a great feeling?)

2. What about – make that final lap on mower – know → you won't have to mow yard again – for another 4 or 5 months (Isn't it nice?)



3. Unless you're me – mowed it 2 or 3 weeks ago – excited it was the last time // but yesterday – came to sad realization → “No, apparently – that wasn't last time”
4. Or what about – if you're a student – watch that clock count down minutes – on last day of school // (beautiful)
5. Or – last work hours before a beach vacation
6. Or finally – have you ever lost your ID somewhere // Your identification – maybe your whole wallet is missing...
7. Doesn't always happen – but maybe → kindly soul finds – your lost ID & returns it to you... safe and sound
8. Peace literally – washes over us, doesn't it – when recover → lost

- J. In our text today – life is hard // legit hard... // for one individual in particular...
- K. ...but he catches a break // he finds some relief → when someone very special comes along – who can return his lost identity to him
- L. Story – found – 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke // begin by reading vv.26-29 from NIV (ON SCREEN)

*<sup>26</sup>They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. <sup>27</sup>When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. <sup>28</sup>When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!” <sup>29</sup>For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.*

- Luke 8:26-29 (NIV)

## **THE SCENE**

### **I. THE MAN**

- A. When it comes to Jesus – no rest for the weary, is there? // of course – he's a traveling man → that's kind of – the lifestyle
- B. Turn around – he's in some new town...
  1. Preaching // teaching
  2. Healing
  3. Fraternizing with sinners & outcasts
- C. With – demands of his job → he's always – on call
- D. In today's text – he's just stepped off the boat // doesn't even have his luggage yet → when he's approached by – this most recent person in need // a demon possessed man
- E. V.27 – tells us a couple things about this guy – that are informative...

- F. First of all – he does not wear clothes // bold wardrobe choice // I don't think – need to go – lot of explanation there // you know how – works
- G. What IS true – he's like the emperor in the famous story → doesn't seem to notice – he's not wearing anything – but everyone else is
- H. Could be he does know – he just doesn't care // either way – v.27 makes a statement @ how social convention – lost on this guy b/c he's so far gone
- I. But it's not just – what he's wearing // or not wearing, as it were // that we discover here...
- J. b/c – v.27 not only – describes *how* – man lives – but also *where* he lives
- K. Not in a house – but where? // That's right – in the tombs
- L. Now maybe cemeteries – aren't that strange to us...
  - 1. There's one – right outside those doors
  - 2. This particular time of year – can head over to Ron & Martha's house → for all the graveyard fun – you can handle
  - 3. Saying they “decorate for Halloween” – doesn't really do justice – what happens over there on Crawley Gin Rd.
- M. But when this man in story – is said to live in the tombs → to any Jewish listener → red flags immediately go up
- N. B/c you see → Jewish culture – tombs – considered unclean
- O. In fact – they used to whitewash them // just to make them easier to see – so you didn't accidentally come into contact with one
- P. See, civilized person didn't...
  - 1. Touch them
  - 2. Worship – w/ them right outside
  - 3. Didn't set up – fake ones in their yard – invite would-be trick-or-treaters
  - 4. Certainly didn't – *live* amongst them
- Q. But the evil – of these demons – come into this man's life → completely taken over // robbed him of his identity...
- R. They'd – stolen from him → his dignity // his peace....
- S. They'd left behind → shell of a person – who was owned by something other than – his own will and his own purposes

## II. TOWNSPEOPLE

- A. So let me ask you – question → let's say – you lived in town near this guy // put yourself in the position of one of the townspeople...
  - 1. Wayne – could be → carpenter
  - 2. Todd – could be → baker
  - 3. I – could be → guy – needs to sample what Todd bakes for quality control // every town needs bureaucrats, right?
- B. Well when it comes to – how to deal with this guy → if we were – the towns-people // what approach would – we take
- C. IOW – What do people tend to do – when there's black sheep – in midst
- D. Honestly – I think we'd all admit → most groups have a pretty firm – black sheep policy // now it's not written down // it's only tacit

- E. ...a policy → usually involves – some combination of...
  - 1. Ignoring → problem-person
  - 2. Tip-toeing around → problem-person
  - 3. And/or – at some level – managing → problem-person // WHY?
  - 4. So they won't be so → dog-gone embarrassing – for everyone else
- F. We can see in v.29 – town had tried this – “managing” technique // they'd tried to subdue him, hadn't they
- G. Chained his hands and feet up // even put a guard with him
- H. Of course, it didn't seem to matter, did it? // he – too much to handle...
- I. ...for the text says – the evil drove him away // forcing him to live in → “solitary places”

### III. OUR SITUATION

- A. (ON SCREEN) I wonder – if we could pause for a moment → think about – where this text – intersects our own lives
- B. What we encounter... // WHO some of us *are* → we are people who are battling – demons in life // legit hard – demons // Every. Single. Day.
- C. We may have – more scientifically descriptive names in – 21<sup>st</sup> century → addiction // depression // obsession...
- D. But long ago – those diagnoses → were considered spiritual ailments
- E. If that's you – in this room today // we haven't quite got to the end yet... // but I think this story – can give us hope for – battles we fight
- F. But even beyond what – be considered – clinically diagnosable → is there evil that exists in our lives – somewhere? (Selah)
- G. Maybe saying we have ‘demons’ – too strong a word // we might even consider “evil” – too strong a word, too // But maybe it's not
- H. What if we thought about it like this...
- I. ...God – the ultimate good power – in the universe // for those of us – who are Christians → bet we could mostly agree on that
- J. So if God is good // absence of God – evil, is it not?
- K. So then – another – question to ask → where is God absent in – lives?
- L. Now I don't assume God is absent – in general – we are here @ church // we care about spiritual things to some degree...
- M. But are there places in...
  - 1. Our thoughts
  - 2. Our actions
  - 3. Our motivations
  - 4. Our sharing of resources
- N. ...are there sections of our lives – where if we are being honest → God isn't really that present?
- O. Maybe – not so much *we* are black sheep // but moreso → there may be parts of us – we don't want – even God to know about...

- P. ...so as a result – there’s this – black sheep – side of life – we have
- Q. Does that exist – anywhere – inside us? (Selah)

#### IV. CONTROLLING OUR BLACK SHEEP-NESS

- A. If it does – v.29 speaks to → what – I’d bet – we’ve tried to do about it // IOW – how we’ve tried to solve that evil problem (ON SCREEN)
- B. We’ve already mentioned it → b/c they tried it, right?
- C. In today’s text – they tried to manage that evil – to control it, didn’t they?
- D. They had this guy – chained up → his hands // his legs...
- E. ...even had a guard standing by – to keep him under control
  
- F. But here’s what we all know... // ...even if we’re only talking about → a quarantined, black sheep part of our life...
- G. Evil → can’t be controlled so easily // b/c if it could, we’ve been battling it so long – we would have figured it out
- H. V.27 – in our story today, uses phrase → “for a long time...” – this man had suffered // makes sense b/c evil is strong & doesn’t – let go easily
- I. But that doesn’t stop us – from trying to manage – all those shameful parts of our lives, does it?...
- J. ...it’s stuff we even try to hide from God – but surely we can figure it out
  
- K. Other thing – we see here in v.29 → where this separation from God forces us → to the solitary places
- L. That makes sense, too // do you know that feeling?
- M. We might be in a crowd of people // but...
  - 1. If something has a hold of us
  - 2. If we’ve lost our identity
  - 3. If part of us – is owned by something outside – our own will and purposes...
- N. ...we may be around other people // but we feel alone
- O. ...like we’re trapped in some solitary place // by a power – beyond our control // what do we do?

### CONCLUSION

#### I. THE TEXT

- A. My suggestion → let’s take a breath of hope → see how text – finishes this story (ON SCREEN)

*<sup>30</sup>Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. <sup>31</sup>And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. <sup>32</sup>A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup>When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.*

*<sup>34</sup>When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, <sup>35</sup>and the people went out to see what*

*had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. <sup>36</sup>Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. <sup>37</sup>Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. <sup>38</sup>The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup>"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*

- Luke 8:30-39 (NIV)

B. Friends – I want you to hear me say something loudly and clearly // it's something that → we see was true...

1. For the Gerasene demoniac
2. For me
3. For you
4. For people we encounter each day – live in painful, solitary places...

C. The power of God = greater than = power of evil in the world

D. Not just true – in the good ole' days → when Jesus used to walk around – healing the sick // telling memorable stories

E. 1 John 4:4 reiterates (ON SCREEN) →

*<sup>4</sup>You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

F. The one who is in you → greater // than the one who is in the world

G. Right here // right now // in this place // in your life (Selah)

## II. CONCLUSION

A. As we conclude our time together → I wonder if you would consider...

B. Is there – solitary place in your life → that's a black sheep area for you?...

C. IOW...a place where evil exists b/c – truth be told – we haven't really given God access – to that part of ourselves

D. If we're honest with ourselves and with God right now...

E. We get *comfortable* – living with the demons we face // b/c we have set up our lives in such a way – that we try to manage them

F. We do that → b/c it is easier to manage...

1. The dysfunction
2. The evil

G. – than deal with the frightening reality – that we're not in control // even of our own life

H. But friends – the power of God can set us free

I. When...

1. Life is hard
2. Lost our identity

J. When it has been stolen from us – by the evil we encounter in – world

- K. We don't have to be afraid // b/c Jesus wasn't
- L. Jesus – doesn't fear the evil...
- M. Jesus – doesn't fear embracing us – despite the fact we are outcasts, living in solitary places – among – unclean things of the world
- N. The power in Him is greater → than the power that's in the world
- O. ...and if you have accepted God's spirit into your life...
- P. ...that same power lives in you
- Q. So today, church → Be not afraid. Be set free.

## Appendix D3: Story Memory Cue Sermon

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### The Words We Long to Hear

November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014

#### INTRODUCTION

##### I. PRAYER

Oh GOD revealed in Jesus

We have come into this place and to this time to encounter You.

To meet You face to face.

To hear the stories of Your love for the world...

To remember how Your power was revealed in those that have come before us...

And to consider anew how that same power might be made manifest in our own lives.

O LORD, we have heard of Your renown, and we stand in awe, O LORD, of Your work.

In *our own time* revive it.

In *our own time* make Your deeds known to Your servants...

And let Your glorious power be revealed again among Your people, now, and forevermore.

AMEN.

##### II. FIRST STUFF

A. Prayer → *God, revealed in Jesus...*

##### III. SPORTS FAN THIS TIME OF YEAR

A. I've been pastor here now – around 5 1/2 years...

B. In that time – you've figured out – some things I really like to use as springboards // ...to get into – and help us – understand, biblical text

C. For instance – my boys → Isaac & Eli // I'm not biased – they're... just... awesome // okay, maybe a little biased, but...

D. They aren't – only examples // I like movies, too – maybe little too much!

E. Books → I enjoy a variety... // I really like the classics → C.S. Lewis // William Shakespeare // Dr. Seuss → the heavy hitters!

F. But this time of year – I just can't help it – as much as anything else – extra-curricular... // I have *sports* on the brain

G. It's b/c – alongside a few weeks in late March / early April...

H. *This* week in late October – greatest week of the year – for a sports fan...

1. College football – finally – playoff → 1<sup>st</sup> bracket rankings came out

2. Great NFL games every weekend → like Broncos vs. Patriots today
3. Hockey's been going few weeks – if you like that kind of thing
4. NBA season opened Wednesday night // LeBron returned to Cleveland

- I. Great games on every channel – all week! But all that – isn't even the most exciting sports news of this past week...
- J. See – there are 2 words – 2 words that all fans of professional basketball, hockey, or baseball – long to hear...
- K. ...because they mean – drama at the highest level
- L. As earlier this week – I quizzed my poor wife → whom I subject to this kind of thing all the time // pray for her...
- M. What 2 words are considered – most exciting 2 words in sports??
- N. What → words every sports fan – longs to hear: (ON SCREEN) GAME. 7.
- O. When series comes down to – & in this case, baseball's World Series...
- P. ...came down to – one game for all the marbles // it did not – disappoint
- Q. I was even pulling for – Royals – team that lost // and it was *still* exciting
- R. Game. Seven. // for pro sports fans → those words – we all want to hear

#### IV. BEYOND SPORTS

- A. But this week got me thinking... beyond that – beyond sports → *what are* those words, people long to hear – down deep in their souls?
- B. I love sports – playing, watching, talking them → but admittedly, there are much deeper, more important things in the world
- C. I know it's true for me // Imagine it's true for you – that...
- D. Most significant things that happened in life this week – did not involve San Francisco Giants baseball club
- E. So it begs the question – if the words, “Game 7” can bring the fans together & conjure excitement and hope...
- F. ...then what words – have power to bring excitement and hope – to folks like you and me... // ...in the midst of day-to-day living
- G. I'm convinced – those words exist // I'm convinced – find them → Bible
- H. Our Scripture today – may be familiar to you... // especially if – grew up in Sunday school, sung the song about him
- I. But if not – that's okay too – b/c we'll read his story // it concerns a man named Zacchaeus // found in → Luke 19:1-9 (ON SCREEN)

*[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup>A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup>He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because [Jesus] was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup>So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup>All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a*



sinner.”<sup>8</sup> *Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”*<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.

- Luke 19:1-9 (NRSV)

## **ZACCHAEUS**

### **I. TAX COLLECTOR**

- A. Today’s text begins a bit like → Don Quixote // Peter Pan // A Prayer for Owen Meany...
- B. ...discover something descriptive about a character – 1<sup>st</sup> couple sentences → that will be important the rest of the way
- C. Jesus – main *character* of the story – passing through Jericho // quickly encounter a man – as Luke describes – name is Zacchaeus
- D. Right out of the box – we learn Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector // which means – he isn’t just – wealthy, as the text states...
- E. I think the ancient Greek phrase – would be more accurate to say...
- F. He is *ridiculously* wealthy // now = a technical theological term – you don’t need to worry about // ...but suffice to say – significant resources
- G. He gained them – by virtue of his job collecting taxes // commentaries explain how this used to work...
- H. The Romans = in charge // but they oversaw – so much → needed help
- I. So in some places – like Judea – they would sub-contract – with local wealthy entrepreneurs
- J. These entrepreneurs would pay – up front! – ALL the taxes – for the region to the government // Rome was sure to get theirs, weren’t they?
- K. But then, Rome would endow these local – industrious financiers – with the power – to go and collect back – from the general population... // ...what the entrepreneurs had paid up front – to the Empire
- L. IOW – if these tax collectors were to make ANY money whatsoever → they would have to overcharge people
- M. They would have to charge → more than what Rome – dictated
- N. It was – a system built on corruption // and sustained by greed
- O. So imagine if you will – what kind of reception Zacchaeus – a tax collector like this → would get when he walks into a crowd
- P. What kind of welcome would you and I give him?
- Q. What would happen, for example, if you were having a party at your house // few friends were over...
  - 1. Game’s on over in one corner
  - 2. Hotly contested – Scrabble in kitchen // Donnis = dominating
- R. ...when an IRS agent knocked on your door – who you knew was *personally responsible* for your paying WAY too much in taxes...
- S. ...just so he could buy a 3<sup>rd</sup> Ferrari → how would he be welcomed?
- T. To his face? Probably – treated pretty well – if not, life could be miserable

- U. But behind his back? Loathed. Despised by most. // That = Zacchaeus  
 V. He was rich... // ...but not beloved

## II. SOUNDS LIKE US

- A. Now that was – life he had chosen → wealth over kindness  
 B. Certainly not all bad → there are a lot of things – don't have to worry about when you have money  
 C. Let's face it – most of us, if offered a 3<sup>rd</sup> Ferrari – would probably take it  
 D. As you know – I already have 2 red ones – I probably wouldn't want another of those // but otherwise... I'm in  
 E. Zacchaeus – liked – wealth // but had this nagging feeling // for all he...  
     1. Owned  
     2. Brought to the table  
 F. ...there was something more  
 G. For all his great wealth, he had YET to hear words – ever spoken to him – that conjured real excitement and real hope  
 H. (ON SCREEN) You know – it was 2,000 years ago... // but I'm convinced – world we live in today → not that dissimilar – from, world of Zacchaeus  
 I. There are certain commodities – that are deemed important in life... // ...and all of us spend some amount of time – chasing them // for example...  
     1. Like Zacchaeus – being wealthy // who among us – hasn't fantasized – all the good we could do with \$10 mill. – in the bank  
     2. Being good looking // research says – awfully convenient // if science is to be believed → makes everything from finding a mate // to getting a job = easier  
     3. Or what about – being influential  
     4. Or intelligent  
     5. Or being known – in city // county // state → as best at something  
 J. Now to be fair – these desires themselves are innocent enough // shouldn't people want to be known = good @ what – do? // Well – sure!  
 K. But what happens? // If we aren't vigilant → the desire scooches over – takes its place in the driver's seat – which is not its *assigned* seat  
 L. Then the *value* metric changes // and we find ourselves – where we don't want to be // IOW – the measure – of...  
     1. What kind of person we are  
     2. How valuable we are  
     3. If – we – really matter... // all that gets tied to → how successful we are @ attaining...  
         a. Wealth  
         b. Attractiveness  
         c. Influence  
         d. Intelligence

## e. Skill

- M. We chase those things – as primary pursuits // when they – only ever meant to be byproducts – of a life well lived...
- N. But sadly – that’s not even the worst part of the story...
- O. For the great irony of the whole mess is → IF we ever actually caught – desires we’ve been pursuing = wouldn’t actually bring us what we want
- P. IOW, friends – We may spend a lot of our time // energy // effort → wishing we were... or trying to become...
  - 1. Wealthier
  - 2. More attractive
  - 3. Best – “whatever” – in Cleveland Co.
- Q. But at the end of the day – the value those things assign us → HOLLOW // they are like chasing the wind
- R. B/c we can never have enough // we can never be good enough // they have made promises – they cannot deliver

**JESUS****I. THE ENCOUNTER**

- A. If you don’t believe me – ask Zacchaeus
- B. He had longed to hear – for quite some time = words that would give him real excitement and purpose in life // words that were full of...
  - 1. Honest to goodness
  - 2. It-applies-even-to-lousy-ole-me → HOPE!
- C. He wanted something. // for the first time – in as long as he could → Zacchaeus wanted = to be valuable in someone’s eyes – for reasons that had nothing to do with his money
- D. This Jesus guy – from what he’d heard – Zacchaeus thought *HE* might be different // so much so – that Zacchaeus completely – broke social protocol to find out
- E. (ON SCREEN) As v.4 describes – rich men = do not run // and they most certainly = do not climb trees
- F. But Zacchaeus’ efforts – extreme as they were → were not in vain

*When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”*

- Luke 19:5 (NRSV)

- G. Now just for your peace of mind – when Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus’ house – that doesn’t go down like it would today
- H. If Frank says it’s okay – random person come to stay @ his house – w/o consulting Debbie first – I don’t care who it is...
- I. That doesn’t end well – for Frank // same way @ my house // same way @ most places

- J. But in ancient times – it was not only customary // it was an HONOR for Jesus to do that
- K. Why? // B/c it showed – cared about Zacchaeus // and even though Zacchaeus → was despised by everyone else around...
- L. Jesus doesn't use – same measures – of valuing persons – everyone else uses // say that one more time...
- M. Jesus doesn't use – same measures – of valuing persons – everyone else uses
- N. Zacchaeus'...
  - 1. Wealth = not important
  - 2. Influence = not important
  - 3. Popularity // or lack thereof = not important
- O. With Zacchaeus – Jesus saw past – all of the – secondary fluff // straight to – the heart of the matter
- P. Zacchaeus – was just like all of us → simply a child of God // longing to hear – those words that bring...
  - 1. Honest to goodness
  - 2. It-applies-even-to-lousy-ole-me → HOPE!
- Q. Zacchaeus longed to hear → Salvation. Has. Come. Here. Too.
- R. Salvation had come to Zacchaeus //
- S. And friends, the good news of the Gospel is → Salvation has come to you // Salvation has come to me, too
- T. Salvation has come – and it doesn't have anything to do with...
  - 1. Wealth
  - 2. Influence
  - 3. Popularity
- U. It's come b/c of – great mercy of God // in that each of us – is considered a heir of Abraham
- V. Each of us – is considered – child of God → we are born into the lineage of faith in Jesus Christ // all we have to do → claim that for ourselves

## II. TRANSFORMATIVE

- A. Church – I want you, know... hearing – information = transformative
- B. Knowing that you are a child of God – not b/c of → wealth // looks // intelligence...
- C. ...but rather by grace through faith = transformative! // Meant to change your life! // It did for Zacchaeus
- D. Look – he changed the way he lived! Made him a new man!
- E. If he really did all those things he says – in v.8... // ...he made himself poor – by repenting of past wrongs and making restitution
- F. Notice, too – this is so important → he didn't change his life...
  - 1. In order to *gain* – the acceptance of Jesus
  - 2. But in *RESPONSE TO* – the acceptance of Jesus
- G. Zacchaeus finally heard – those words he'd longed to hear – v.9...

*Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.*

## **CONCLUSION**

### **I. SERMON IN SEMINARY**

- A. (ON SCREEN) Want to close – sharing a brief story // maybe a slight confession
- B. I struggle w/ truth of today's sermon // always have
- C. As long as I can remember → wanted to be the best // at what?
- D. Well, Ev – ery – thing... // I mean – everything within reason // everything that I really tried
- E. My problem really is → I let that desire – scooch over – in my driver's seat sometimes...
- F. ...such that – I allow my success or failure – at whatever I'm trying → determine my value // my worthiness, as it were...
  
- G. So 13 or so years ago – I was in a class in seminary // Preaching class
- H. Now there were other people in the class // but there was only one – preacher in the class // you know what I mean?
- I. So I would go to class = assuming the size of the ego would allow – my head to fit through that narrow doorway // (Some days it wouldn't)
- J. I would take notes // respond in class – but in high school and in college → I'd done already so much public speaking & preaching...
- K. I was basically another – professor in the room
- L. Also important to consider → I thought = was true // it – definitely not
- M. But was accurate → astronauts could see my ego from space // scientific fact – confirmed by NASA
- N. Now along the way, in class – no doubt my insightful comments had – wowed my professor // but what was *really* going to impress him → was the sermon we had to submit for a grade
- O. The time came // and I'll tell you – 'space ego' here → nailed it...
  - 1. A witty introduction
  - 2. Scriptures
  - 3. Finished – great illustration I experienced as a summer worker at a church // it involved a little boy and stick // it killed!
  
- P. Or so I thought... until I got – my written copy of sermon back
- Q. Grade wasn't that bad // but the professor's comments – there were only 3 of them – deflated my giant ego with haste // I have them w/ me...
  - 1. "Some good ideas, but a lot of gaps in the connections"
  - 2. "Neither was I clear all the time exactly what you were driving at"
  - 3. "Perhaps with a little more time, the ideas could be brought together into a *good* sermon"
  
- R. I read between the lines → "...of which this one – is NOT"

## II. ACCEPTANCE

- A. Friends – I want you to know... this = what I was going to do – w/ my life
- B. Hearing my best effort at it → “left gaps” // “wasn’t clear” // “could be good – one day”... // ...can make a person like me question
- C. Question...
  - 1. My value
  - 2. My worth
  - 3. Has God really called me to this”
- D. Truth is → I’m older now // maybe I’m a little more experienced @ preaching // but I still struggle...
- E. ...b/c I can’t pretend it’s about → Me – being the best
- F. One – b/c I’m not // Two – b/c it doesn’t matter → that kind of thing is hollow // it’s like chasing the wind
- G. Being good at something // wealthy // influential → cannot deliver
- H. So instead today... May each of us listen to those transformative words of Jesus // words – if we’re deep-down honest... all really long to hear...
- I. Today – salvation has come to you // not because of anything you DO or HAVE... // but b/c you too are an heir of Abraham
- J. You too are a → child of GOD

## Appendix D4: Object Lesson Memory Cue Sermon

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### A Proverb Worth Remembering

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014

#### INTRODUCTION

##### I. PRAYER

Oh GOD revealed in Jesus

We have come into this place and to this time to encounter You.

To meet You face to face.

To hear the stories of Your love for the world...

To remember how Your power was revealed in those that have come before us...

And to consider anew how that same power might be made manifest in our own lives.

O LORD, we have heard of Your renown, and we stand in awe, O LORD, of Your work.

*In our own time* revive it.

*In our own time* make Your deeds known to Your servants...

And let Your glorious power be revealed again among Your people, now, and forevermore.

AMEN.

##### II. PROVERBS

- A. It's been awhile // too long, perhaps → time for another quiz
- B. Think you've had one like this @ some point // can't remember exactly when // and everyone needs an occasional refresher – anyway
- C. Now when we say – word → *Proverbs* in church // typically, understandably – talking about the book of the Bible = Proverbs
- D. Today we're going to have a Proverbs quiz // but not a = “Do you know Proverbs 16:3” – kind of thing
- E. The questions are more – general // than specifically – biblical
- F. For example (ON SCREEN) – if I started a proverb, saying → *A bird in – hand is worth...* // You would finish it by replying → *...Two in – bush* (X)
- G. Excellent! // So that's how it works – I'll start by beginning a proverb... you finish it, okay?
- H. Here we go...
  1. (X) Absence makes the heart – (X) grow fonder
  2. (X) When the cat's away – (X) the mice will play
  3. (X) A rolling stone – (X) gathers no moss
  4. (X) Necessity is – (X) the mother of invention
  5. (X) A stitch in time – (X) saves nine
  6. (X) Don't count your chickens – (X) before they are hatched

## I. And finally...

(X) People who live in glass houses – (X) shouldn't throw rocks!

- J. Great work everyone! // I knew – you had it in you! // Give yourself = A
- K. What would be interesting – if we had time... // ...to me, anyway – b/c I'm kind of a nerd → is to go find out the origins – some of these phrases
- L. Who uttered – original quote = A stitch in time, saves 9? // somebody had to figure it out first
- M. I don't know the answer // but I do know that last one – People in glass houses shouldn't throw rocks – has a biblical ring to it
- N. It may not first – said back then... // ...but maybe – could have been

III. TODAY'S TEXT

- A. Our text today – from John 8 // if you grew up in church, might know this story // if you aren't a Christian or a Bible person...
- B. ...You still might – heard it referenced // but – worth exploring – detail
- C. It's a story about Jesus // it's a great one // John 8:2-11 (ON SCREEN)

*<sup>2</sup>Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup>And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup>She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."*

- John 8:2-11 (NRSV)

**THE STORY OF JOHN 8**I. SETTING

- A. One thing – mention – before we dive into the story proper // if you're reading this story in your Bible → you'll probably see brackets around this particular passage
- B. If – have a study Bible – look @ the notes – will say something like → "the most ancient – authorities lack – this passage"
- C. Doesn't mean it didn't historically happen // just means – it was likely – inserted into the book of John → after manuscript was originally written



- D. John may have written it // may not have // it has language in common – w/ the other 3 Gospels, actually
- E. But however it made it into – canon – I’m glad it did // powerful story!
- F. Much to the chagrin – night owls everywhere – Jesus = early riser // at least he was – on this day
- G. He didn’t care – about catching → 11pm – SportsCenter or Jimmy Fallon @ 11:35 // Means he could get up early – in the morning
- H. (ON SCREEN) In v.2 – find, Jesus teaching = 8am – Scriptures 101 – class in temple // Unlike my Freshman – Sociology class in college...
- I. ...Everyone is here and on time for Jesus // the text says – he got there early, and the people came
- J. But they had good reason to be, right? // Jesus was a master teacher – of the highest order // the greatest teacher – in all human history
- K. That day – crowds had gathered round – to hear this great teacher – open up the Scripture for them // to hear Jesus interpret the law...
- L. ...so that each of them could – to borrow a phrase from John 10 – live their lives more abundantly

## II. PHARISEES

- A. But rather quickly – class is interrupted // by a loud commotion coming through the door
- B. A group of scribes and Pharisees – teachers of God’s law → burst onto – scene // dragging behind them, a woman
- C. As v.4 describes → this was a woman caught in the very act – of adultery // v.5 – hastily explains why → big problem for her
- D. The punishment for such an action – according to law of Moses = is death // they don’t hesitate to remind Jesus of this...
- E. Then comes – question, doesn’t it? // With malice & evil in their eyes...
  - 1. The woman – shaking with fear
  - 2. And the crowd looking on
- F. They nefariously – put Jesus on – spot → Now what do you say? (Selah)
- G. We know how this works – right? // switch gears w/ me for a moment
- H. (ON SCREEN) Hypothetically speaking – You’re...
  - 1. In your house – sitting in your living room // around this time of  
year – heels of Halloween // leftover candy – still to be found
  - 2. Your children / grandchildren / nieces or nephews... → playing in the other room
  - 3. Suddenly – hear sound, playing – stop // all know, never good
  - 4. Instead = hear rustling // perhaps a faint chewing – sound
  - 5. Said child/children – wander into room where you sit
  - 6. Sometimes – even w/ chocolate on their face...
  - 7. Ask magical question → “Can I have – piece – candy”

- I. Now here's what's true @ that situation...
    - 1. You know – exactly what has just taken place
    - 2. They know – exactly what has just taken place
  - J. Interesting thing is → nothing has been said – to confirm it
  - K. That situation – sound familiar? // Obviously – that's all hypothetical → would never happen @ my house // maybe it would at yours...
  - L. But it's kind of what happened – here // Of course – it would never be admitted – in a crowd like this, but...
  - M. The scribes and Pharisees → were doing something – they absolutely should not be doing // they knew it
  - N. Jesus knew – scribes and Pharisees → were doing something – they absolutely should not be doing
  - O. All this – despite the fact, nothing had been said to confirm it // but both Jesus and the leaders knew – what was happening
  - P. This → was a set-up // they wanted to trap Jesus (ON SCREEN)
  - Q. To test him – as v.6 says – so they have some charge to bring against him
  - R. We can tell – that's what's really happening
  - S. Obvious for a couple reasons → even if it didn't say so explicitly – in v.6
  - T. One – scribes & Pharisees – didn't really need to know → Jesus' opinion // b/c they were capable of making that determination for themselves
  - U. They didn't need – ask Jesus! // deciphering – Scriptures was their job!
  - V. But unlike the crowd – who wanted Jesus to interpret the meaning of the law – in order – as we said earlier – that they might have life
  - W. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to interpret – in order that they might use his words as a weapon to bring death
  - X. Ironical, isn't it? // the religious people didn't understand – Bible at all
  - Y. Another reason – this was obviously a set-up // and undoubtedly – crowd noticed this, too...
  - Z. Where was the *man* caught in adultery? // a Proverb we didn't get into earlier → It takes 2 to tango // and this guy – no where to be found
  - AA. Not even mentioned in the story!
  - BB. But just like for the women... // the penalty for adulterous men – also death // where was the outrage – should have been directed @ this guy?
  - CC. Doesn't matter – when it's just a game, does it?
- III. GETTING A PICTURE
- A. Are you getting the picture in your mind – of how – scene plays itself out?
  - B. Can you see – how *dark* these – scribes and Pharisees – are inside?
  - C. They are so blinded by their utter – hatred of Jesus → what are the lengths – they are willing to go to // ... to bring a charge against him?
    - 1. Ignore law – they swear to uphold // I mean, man isn't around
    - 2. Completely & utterly shame this woman...

3. ...and though she is female – and technically considered little more than property in that unenlightened age...
  4. Still care nothing – for dignity at all // save their own
  5. Beyond that – what if Jesus – had indeed instructed to stone her?
  6. They are willing for this woman to DIE... // to make a point // ...just to get Jesus into interpretative, legal hot water
- D. It's just her life, that's all // it's a sacrifice – they're willing to make
- E. (ON SCREEN) Can you see it? // It's all a show! //v.3 – Making her – stand before all of them
- F. In v.4 – pronouncing loudly in front of everyone – what she had done... // despite the fact...
1. Everyone probably – already knew
  2. Wasn't their business anyway
- G. Scribes & Pharisees wanted → shame her publicly // shame Jesus publicly
- H. Her life means nothing // this is just theater to them...
- I. They knew it // Jesus knew it // even though – nothing had ever been said to confirm it
- J. Maybe it's b/c the scene – has a theatrical feel to it... → we can almost sense it for ourselves // put yourself in the moment...
1. Anger & hatred → dripping from the religious leaders – like an icicle in the sun
  2. Fear → radiating from the woman – wondering if these moments would be her last
  3. Anticipation of the crowd → as they look back and forth between – Master and malice

## **JESUS & SIN**

### **I. JESUS RESPONDS**

- A. (ON SCREEN) And then we find Jesus – v.6 – in the midst of all that tension – bending over and writing in the dust
- B. What's he writing? // We don't even know // Honestly – doesn't matter
- C. But we can say – that signified → Jesus had no desire to engage them
- D. Yet they keep pressing – and so Jesus stands → speaks those words that make this passage famous...
- E. "Let anyone among you – who is without sin – be the first – to throw a stone at her."
- F. IOW – mind the glass house – you live in
- G. Bible says...
  1. One by one – beginning with – elders – dropped their stones
  2. Soon – it was only Jesus – standing in front of the woman
  3. "They haven't condemned you. I don't condemn you. Go, leave your life of sin."

## II. SIN

- A. Friends – as we try to think about – how all this fits together // I think if we'll allow it – this scene can be so instructive for us
- B. ...in so many ways, really // but particularly – in regards to how we understand sin in our lives
- C. The genius of this passage – that I'm blown away by – every time I read it → Jesus' reaction to the religious leaders' accusation
- D. Off the top of his head – he is wiser than we would be – with a *lifetime* to formulate a response
- E. But I think it is b/c → Jesus understands sin // he understands that first and foremost → sin is not about – a particular law being broken
- F. Sin is about → a disease of the heart
- G. It was always an internal problem – before it was an external problem
- H. So Jesus understands → Pharisees are just as guilty – as the woman
  
- I. We in this world... // we in this country... → very good at diagnosing – what we understand as external diseases...
- J. The external sins – that those around us – commit // And we...
  - 1. Sit around and talk – about those sins
  - 2. We comment on Facebook – about those sins
  - 3. Watch the news – about those sins
- K. All about how the country is – literally – going to hell in a hand-basket
- L. And that's what we believe – b/c of all the sin that's → out there
  
- M. For all we understand about God – I'll tell you – sometimes church people are the very worst // all of us – myself included
- N. We're very worst at admitting → we might have heart disease
- O. That some of the brokenness in the world – might actually be our fault // even still, after the grace of God has saved us
- P. Sometimes – we are the last of the ones to drop the rocks... // despite the fact – we're the ones living in glass houses
  
- Q. Maybe – one of the things we can recognize today → when Jesus spoke of sin // he didn't think about it and speak about it → way – Pharisees did
- R. Did you break the rule, or not? // It's what Judaism had become...
- S. Frankly – it's what much of Christianity has become, too – are you keeping the rules?
- T. Jesus said to the Pharisees that day // and if we'll hear it – Jesus says to you and me
- U. ...keeping the rules are not the end // not the goal // means TO – goal
- V. The goal – having → pure heart
- W. That's why – in Matt. 5 → Jesus takes – 10 Commandments & expands them – way beyond what was stated – but to encompass what is internal
- X. Scripture says... (ON SCREEN)

*<sup>27</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’  
<sup>28</sup>But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has  
 already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

- Matthew 5:27-28 (NRSV)

- Y. Do you see that? Holiness is not a matter – just of actions // it is a matter of having → heart that is true
- Z. Friends – we are...
  - 1. All liable // all guilty
  - 2. All carrying rocks
  - 3. All need to drop them

## **CONCLUSION**

### **I. INVITED TO GRACE**

- A. (ON SCREEN) As we wrap this up – can I share a word of encouragement w/ you // I think we could use, it, huh?
- B. It’s actually something Gail O’Day points out about – this passage... // we need to hear it // b/c it’s my experience...
- C. ...Jesus words – spoken long ago – can be powerful for us too // if we will have ears to hear
- D. That word is → every main character in this story // both...
  - 1. The woman
  - 2. Scribes and Pharisees
- E. ...were offered an invitation to grace
- F. Everyone in the story – granted an opportunity to break with their old ways // where the power of...
  - 1. Law
  - 2. Condemnation
  - 3. Death
- G. ...Are the determinative forces at work in the world
- H. Everyone is invited and to enter a new world // marked by...
  - 1. Acquittal
  - 2. Freedom
  - 3. Grace
- I. A world where the → pain / sin / death – of the past // do NOT have to dictate – the story of the future
- J. Everyone is invited.

### **II. DROP YOUR ROCK**

- A. Speaking of which – We’re going to end today’s service – in a special way
- B. Here’s what we going to do...
  - 1. We have with us today – several rocks – varying sizes // like ones used in today’s story
  - 2. Just a moment – I’m going to close sermon // like we always do – I’ll sit down – give you a minute of reflection

3. Going to extend that today – for a few moments // give you an opportunity – to lay down – condemnation you’ve been carrying
4. Going to pass out the rocks on the end – of the aisles
5. Take it in your hand // feel the weight of it
6. Maybe this feels like – what you want to hurl at the world // or hurl at someone in your life → for the sin and the hurt they bring
7. Then consider for a moment – we have no business casting – 1<sup>st</sup> stone
8. Hand the stone to your neighbor // as you feel the release of the weight of the rock...
9. Feel the release of the weight – of the burden you carry
10. When rocks make to end → set them down beside

C. You know – you don’t have to participate – in our little ritual if you don’t want to // if don’t want to hold for a moment – just pass it along

D. But you should know – everyone is invited...

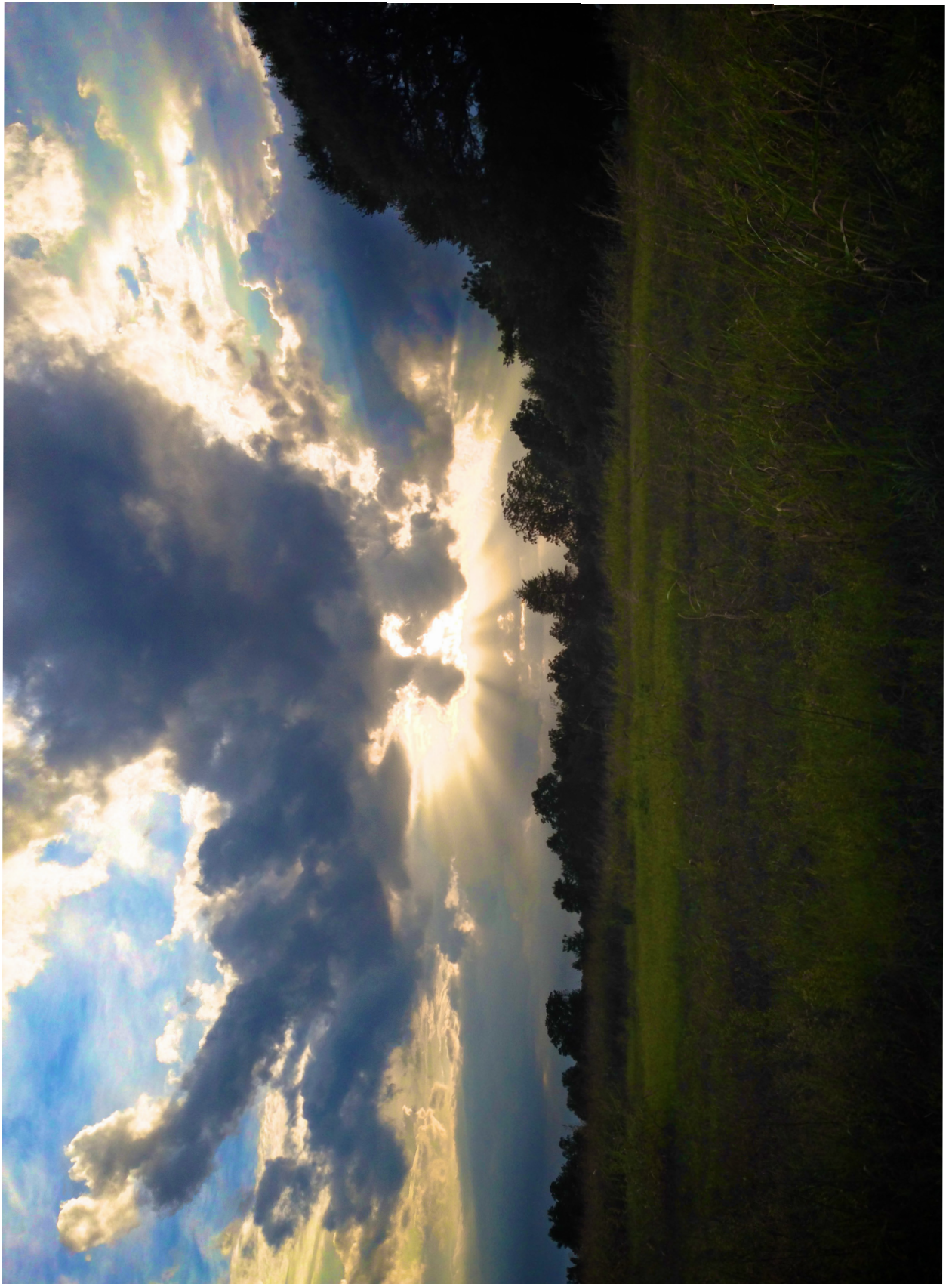
E. Everyone is invited – (get rock) to take the rock you’ve been carrying around... // and to drop it (Drop)

F. Everyone is invited to...

1. Recognize – we too live in a glass house (Drop)
2. Understand – sin we need to worry about isn’t → out there // it’s in our own hearts (Drop)
3. Break with their old ways (Drop)
4. Enter a world where the → pain / sin / death – of the past // do NOT have to dictate – the story of the future (Drop)

G. Won’t you consider today – laying down your rock? As Kay comes to play...

## Appendix D5: Picture Sermon – Sunset



## Appendix D6: Picture Sermon's PowerPoint Slides



### Southern Words & Phrases You Need to Know...

- Sweetie // Sweetheart
- Don't count your chickens before they hatch
- Bit off more than he could chew
- Get the short end of the stick
- If it had been a snake... it would have bitten me



The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

- John 4:9 (NRSV)

*He that talks much with womankind  
brings evil upon himself...*

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." <sup>11</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? <sup>12</sup>Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" <sup>13</sup>Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." <sup>15</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

- John 4:10-15 (NRSV)



<sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

- John 4:25 (NRSV)

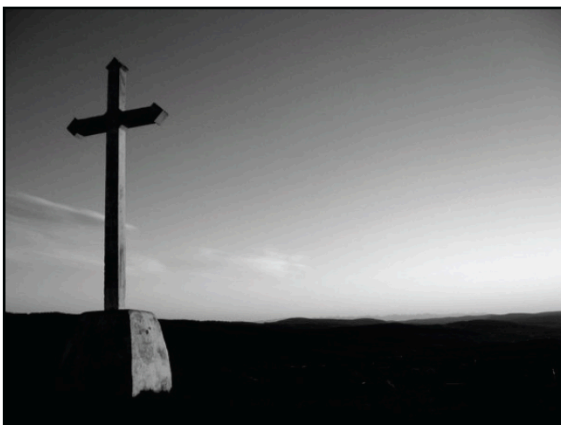
<sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

- John 4:25-26 (NRSV)

<sup>42</sup>They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

- John 4:42 (NRSV)

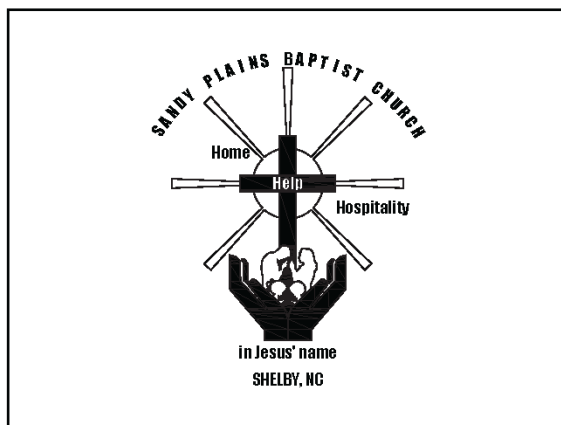


## Appendix D7: Control Sermon's PowerPoint Slides



<sup>26</sup>They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. <sup>27</sup>When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. <sup>28</sup>When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" <sup>29</sup>For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

- Luke 8:26-29 (NIV)



<sup>29</sup>For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

- Luke 8:29 (NIV)

<sup>30</sup>Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. <sup>31</sup>And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. <sup>32</sup>A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. <sup>33</sup>When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. <sup>34</sup>When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, <sup>35</sup>and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and

in his right mind; and they were afraid. <sup>36</sup>Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. <sup>37</sup>Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. <sup>38</sup>The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, <sup>39</sup>"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

- Luke 8:30-39 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup>You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

- 1 John 4:4 (NIV)



## Appendix D8: Story Sermon's PowerPoint Slides



# Game. Seven.

[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup>A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup>He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because [Jesus] was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup>So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup>All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." <sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham."

- Luke 19:1-9 (NRSV)



[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup>A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup>He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup>So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because [Jesus] was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup>When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup>So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup>All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup>Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." <sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham."

- Luke 19:1-9 (NRSV)



**Appendix D9: Object Lesson Sermon's PowerPoint Slides**

A bird in the  
hand is worth...  
two in the bush.

Absence makes  
the heart...  
grow fonder.

When the cat's  
away...  
the mice will play.

A rolling stone...  
gathers no moss.

Necessity is the...  
mother of  
invention.

A stitch in time...  
saves nine.

Don't count your  
chickens...  
before they've  
hatched.

People who live in  
glass houses...  
shouldn't throw  
rocks.

<sup>2</sup>Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup>And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup>She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

- John 8:2-11 (NRSV)

<sup>2</sup>Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.



<sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

- John 8:6

<sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.

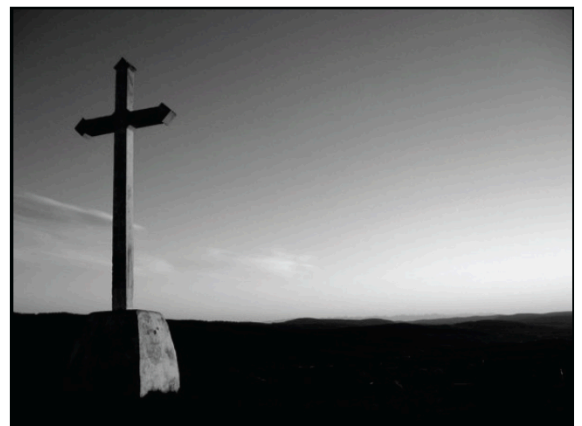
- John 8:3-4

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” <sup>8</sup>And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” <sup>11</sup>She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

- John 8:6b-11

<sup>27</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’  
<sup>28</sup>But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- Matthew 5:27-28 (NRSV)



## Appendix E1: Survey Number & Total Mean Scores

### Case Processing Summary

|                          | Cases    |         |          |         |       |         |
|--------------------------|----------|---------|----------|---------|-------|---------|
|                          | Included |         | Excluded |         | Total |         |
|                          | N        | Percent | N        | Percent | N     | Percent |
| SurveyTotalR *<br>Survey | 118      | 72.8%   | 44       | 27.2%   | 162   | 100.0%  |

### Report

SurveyTotalR

| Survey  | N   | Mean   | Std.<br>Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------|-----|--------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| Picture | 32  | 3.1250 | 1.84478           | .00     | 5.00    |
| Control | 33  | 3.4242 | 1.65888           | .00     | 5.00    |
| Story   | 28  | 2.7857 | 1.57191           | .00     | 5.00    |
| Object  | 25  | 2.5200 | 1.89561           | .00     | 5.00    |
| Lesson  |     |        |                   |         |         |
| Total   | 118 | 3.0000 | 1.75412           | .00     | 5.00    |



### Appendix E2: Mean Scores on Individual Questions - Picture Survey

| AgeRange     |                | What was the theme? | What was the title? | What was the primary Scripture passage? | What could be the summary statement? | What practical application could be taken? |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 0-12         | Mean           | 1.0000              | 1.0000              | 1.0000                                  | .5000                                | 1.0000                                     |
|              | N              | 2                   | 2                   | 2                                       | 2                                    | 2  |
|              | Std. Deviation | 0.00000             | 0.00000             | 0.00000                                 | .70711                               | 0.00000                                    |
|              | Sum            | 2.00                | 2.00                | 2.00                                    | 1.00                                 | 2.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 11.1%               | 7.7%                | 9.1%                                    | 8.3%                                 | 9.1%                                       |
|              | % of Total N   | 6.3%                | 6.3%                | 6.3%                                    | 6.3%                                 | 6.3%                                       |
| 13-19        | Mean           | .5000               | 1.0000              | .5000                                   | 0.0000                               | 1.0000                                     |
|              | N              | 4                   | 4                   | 4                                       | 4                                    | 4  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .57735              | 0.00000             | .57735                                  | 0.00000                              | 0.00000                                    |
|              | Sum            | 2.00                | 4.00                | 2.00                                    | 0.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 11.1%               | 15.4%               | 9.1%                                    | 0.0%                                 | 18.2%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 12.5%               | 12.5%               | 12.5%                                   | 12.5%                                | 12.5%                                      |
| 20-35        | Mean           | .5000               | 1.0000              | 1.0000                                  | .5000                                | .5000                                      |
|              | N              | 2                   | 2                   | 2                                       | 2                                    | 2  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .70711              | 0.00000             | 0.00000                                 | .70711                               | .70711                                     |
|              | Sum            | 1.00                | 2.00                | 2.00                                    | 1.00                                 | 1.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 5.6%                | 7.7%                | 9.1%                                    | 8.3%                                 | 4.5%                                       |
|              | % of Total N   | 6.3%                | 6.3%                | 6.3%                                    | 6.3%                                 | 6.3%                                       |
| 36-55        | Mean           | .8750               | 1.0000              | 1.0000                                  | .8750                                | 1.0000                                     |
|              | N              | 8                   | 8                   | 8                                       | 8                                    | 8  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .35355              | 0.00000             | 0.00000                                 | .35355                               | 0.00000                                    |
|              | Sum            | 7.00                | 8.00                | 8.00                                    | 7.00                                 | 8.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 38.9%               | 30.8%               | 36.4%                                   | 58.3%                                | 36.4%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 25.0%               | 25.0%               | 25.0%                                   | 25.0%                                | 25.0%                                      |
| 56 and above | Mean           | .3750               | .6250               | .5000                                   | .1875                                | .4375                                      |
|              | N              | 16                  | 16                  | 16                                      | 16                                   | 16   |
|              | Std. Deviation | .50000              | .50000              | .51640                                  | .40311                               | .51235                                     |
|              | Sum            | 6.00                | 10.00               | 8.00                                    | 3.00                                 | 7.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 33.3%               | 38.5%               | 36.4%                                   | 25.0%                                | 31.8%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 50.0%               | 50.0%               | 50.0%                                   | 50.0%                                | 50.0%                                      |
| Total        | Mean           | .5625               | .8125               | .6875                                   | .3750                                | .6875                                      |
|              | N              | 32                  | 32                  | 32                                      | 32                                   | 32   |
|              | Std. Deviation | .50402              | .39656              | .47093                                  | .49187                               | .47093                                     |
|              | Sum            | 18.00               | 26.00               | 22.00                                   | 12.00                                | 22.00                                      |
|              | % of Total Sum | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |
|              | % of Total N   | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |

### Appendix E3: Mean Scores on Individual Questions - Control Survey

| AgeRange     |                | What was the theme? | What was the title? | What was the primary Scripture passage? | What could be the summary statement? | What practical application could be taken? |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 0-12         | Mean           | 0.0000              | 1.0000              | 1.0000                                  | .5000                                | .5000                                      |
|              | N              | 2                   | 2                   | 2                                       | 2                                    | 2  |
|              | Std. Deviation | 0.00000             | 0.00000             | 0.00000                                 | .70711                               | .70711                                     |
|              | Sum            | 0.00                | 2.00                | 2.00                                    | 1.00                                 | 1.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 0.0%                | 9.5%                | 7.1%                                    | 4.2%                                 | 4.8%                                       |
|              | % of Total N   | 6.1%                | 6.1%                | 6.1%                                    | 6.1%                                 | 6.1%                                       |
| 13-19        | Mean           | .5000               | .7500               | 1.0000                                  | 1.0000                               | 1.0000                                     |
|              | N              | 4                   | 4                   | 4                                       | 4                                    | 4  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .57735              | .50000              | 0.00000                                 | 0.00000                              | 0.00000                                    |
|              | Sum            | 2.00                | 3.00                | 4.00                                    | 4.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 10.5%               | 14.3%               | 14.3%                                   | 16.7%                                | 19.0%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 12.1%               | 12.1%               | 12.1%                                   | 12.1%                                | 12.1%                                      |
| 20-35        | Mean           | .6250               | .7500               | .7500                                   | .7500                                | .7500                                      |
|              | N              | 8                   | 8                   | 8                                       | 8                                    | 8  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .51755              | .46291              | .46291                                  | .46291                               | .46291                                     |
|              | Sum            | 5.00                | 6.00                | 6.00                                    | 6.00                                 | 6.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 26.3%               | 28.6%               | 21.4%                                   | 25.0%                                | 28.6%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 24.2%               | 24.2%               | 24.2%                                   | 24.2%                                | 24.2%                                      |
| 36-55        | Mean           | .8571               | .5714               | 1.0000                                  | .8571                                | .8571                                      |
|              | N              | 7                   | 7                   | 7                                       | 7                                    | 7  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .37796              | .53452              | 0.00000                                 | .37796                               | .37796                                     |
|              | Sum            | 6.00                | 4.00                | 7.00                                    | 6.00                                 | 6.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 31.6%               | 19.0%               | 25.0%                                   | 25.0%                                | 28.6%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 21.2%               | 21.2%               | 21.2%                                   | 21.2%                                | 21.2%                                      |
| 56 and above | Mean           | .5000               | .5000               | .7500                                   | .5833                                | .3333                                      |
|              | N              | 12                  | 12                  | 12                                      | 12                                   | 12   |
|              | Std. Deviation | .52223              | .52223              | .45227                                  | .51493                               | .49237                                     |
|              | Sum            | 6.00                | 6.00                | 9.00                                    | 7.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 31.6%               | 28.6%               | 32.1%                                   | 29.2%                                | 19.0%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 36.4%               | 36.4%               | 36.4%                                   | 36.4%                                | 36.4%                                      |
| Total        | Mean           | .5758               | .6364               | .8485                                   | .7273                                | .6364                                      |
|              | N              | 33                  | 33                  | 33                                      | 33                                   | 33   |
|              | Std. Deviation | .50189              | .48850              | .36411                                  | .45227                               | .48850                                     |
|              | Sum            | 19.00               | 21.00               | 28.00                                   | 24.00                                | 21.00                                      |
|              | % of Total Sum | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |
|              | % of Total N   | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |

### Appendix E4: Mean Scores on Individual Questions - Story Survey

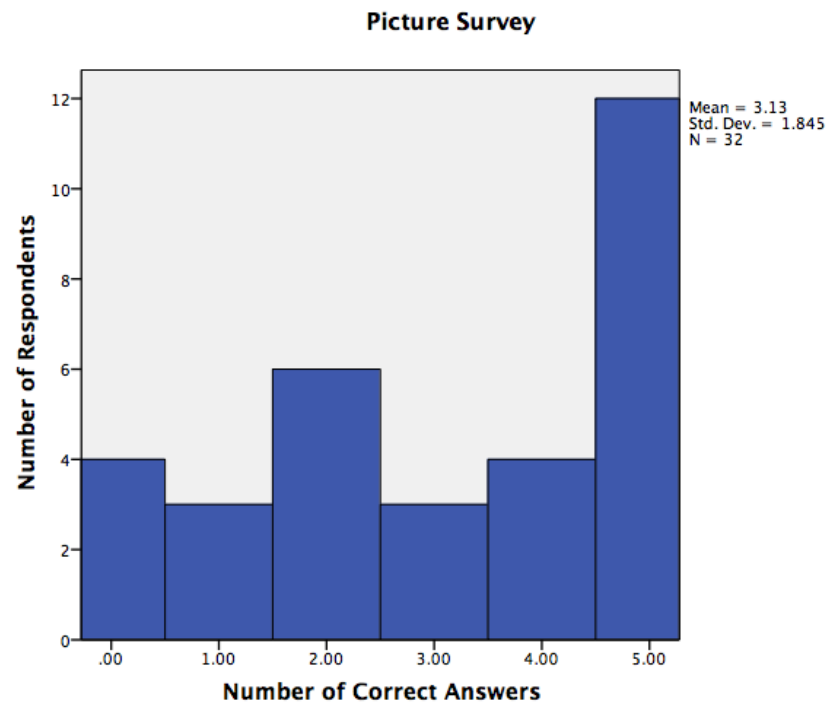
| AgeRange     |                | What was the theme? | What was the title? | What was the primary Scripture passage? | What could be the summary statement? | What practical application could be taken? |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 0-12         | Mean           | .5000               | 0.0000              | .5000                                   | 0.0000                               | 0.0000                                     |
|              | N              | 2                   | 2                   | 2                                       | 2                                    | 2  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .70711              | 0.00000             | .70711                                  | 0.00000                              | 0.00000                                    |
|              | Sum            | 1.00                | 0.00                | 1.00                                    | 0.00                                 | 0.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 8.3%                | 0.0%                | 4.5%                                    | 0.0%                                 | 0.0%                                       |
|              | % of Total N   | 6.9%                | 7.1%                | 7.1%                                    | 7.1%                                 | 7.1%                                       |
| 13-19        | Mean           | .3333               | .3333               | 1.0000                                  | .3333                                | .6667                                      |
|              | N              | 3                   | 3                   | 3                                       | 3                                    | 3  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .57735              | .57735              | 0.00000                                 | .57735                               | .57735                                     |
|              | Sum            | 1.00                | 1.00                | 3.00                                    | 1.00                                 | 2.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 8.3%                | 9.1%                | 13.6%                                   | 5.6%                                 | 13.3%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 10.3%               | 10.7%               | 10.7%                                   | 10.7%                                | 10.7%                                      |
| 20-35        | Mean           | .4000               | .4000               | .8000                                   | .6000                                | .6000                                      |
|              | N              | 5                   | 5                   | 5                                       | 5                                    | 5  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .54772              | .54772              | .44721                                  | .54772                               | .54772                                     |
|              | Sum            | 2.00                | 2.00                | 4.00                                    | 3.00                                 | 3.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 16.7%               | 18.2%               | 18.2%                                   | 16.7%                                | 20.0%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 17.2%               | 17.9%               | 17.9%                                   | 17.9%                                | 17.9%                                      |
| 36-55        | Mean           | .7143               | .5714               | .8571                                   | .8571                                | .8571                                      |
|              | N              | 7                   | 7                   | 7                                       | 7                                    | 7  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .48795              | .53452              | .37796                                  | .37796                               | .37796                                     |
|              | Sum            | 5.00                | 4.00                | 6.00                                    | 6.00                                 | 6.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 41.7%               | 36.4%               | 27.3%                                   | 33.3%                                | 40.0%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 24.1%               | 25.0%               | 25.0%                                   | 25.0%                                | 25.0%                                      |
| 56 and above | Mean           | .2500               | .3636               | .7273                                   | .7273                                | .3636                                      |
|              | N              | 12                  | 11                  | 11                                      | 11                                   | 11   |
|              | Std. Deviation | .45227              | .50452              | .46710                                  | .46710                               | .50452                                     |
|              | Sum            | 3.00                | 4.00                | 8.00                                    | 8.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 25.0%               | 36.4%               | 36.4%                                   | 44.4%                                | 26.7%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 41.4%               | 39.3%               | 39.3%                                   | 39.3%                                | 39.3%                                      |
| Total        | Mean           | .4138               | .3929               | .7857                                   | .6429                                | .5357                                      |
|              | N              | 29                  | 28                  | 28                                      | 28                                   | 28   |
|              | Std. Deviation | .50123              | .49735              | .41786                                  | .48795                               | .50787                                     |
|              | Sum            | 12.00               | 11.00               | 22.00                                   | 18.00                                | 15.00                                      |
|              | % of Total Sum | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |
|              | % of Total N   | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |

**Appendix E5: Mean Scores on Individual Questions - Object Lesson Survey**

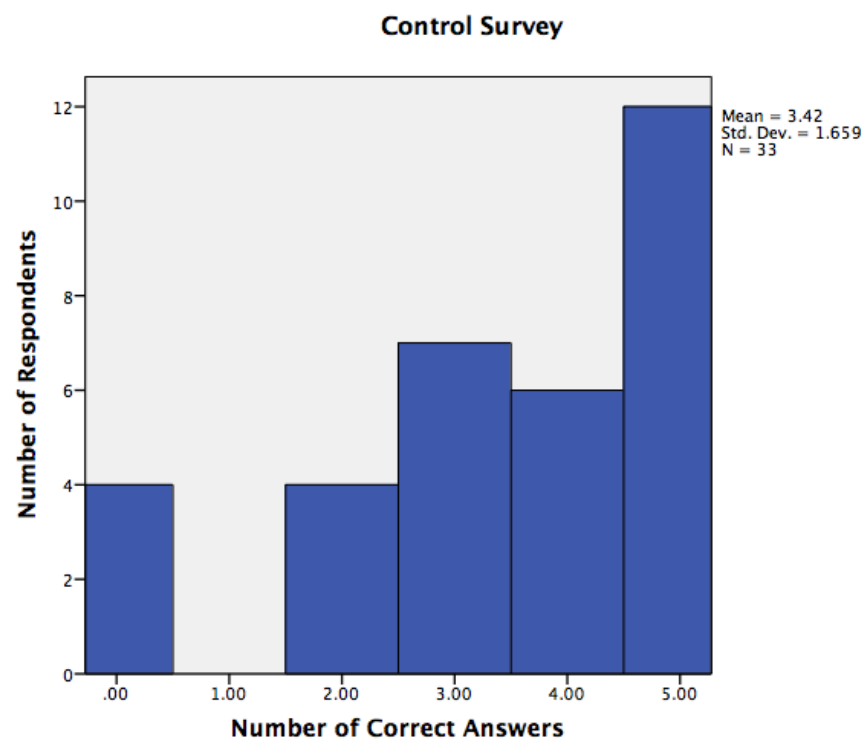
| AgeRange     |                | What was the theme? | What was the title? | What was the primary Scripture passage? | What could be the summary statement? | What practical application could be taken? |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 0-12         | Mean           | 0.0000              | 0.0000              | 1.0000                                  | 0.0000                               | 0.0000                                     |
|              | N              | 2                   | 2                   | 2                                       | 2                                    | 2  |
|              | Std. Deviation | 0.00000             | 0.00000             | 0.00000                                 | 0.00000                              | 0.00000                                    |
|              | Sum            | 0.00                | 0.00                | 2.00                                    | 0.00                                 | 0.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 0.0%                | 0.0%                | 12.5%                                   | 0.0%                                 | 0.0%                                       |
|              | % of Total N   | 8.0%                | 8.0%                | 8.0%                                    | 8.0%                                 | 8.0%                                       |
| 13-19        | Mean           | .2000               | .2000               | .4000                                   | .8000                                | .6000                                      |
|              | N              | 5                   | 5                   | 5                                       | 5                                    | 5  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .44721              | .44721              | .54772                                  | .44721                               | .54772                                     |
|              | Sum            | 1.00                | 1.00                | 2.00                                    | 4.00                                 | 3.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 16.7%               | 8.3%                | 12.5%                                   | 26.7%                                | 21.4%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 20.0%               | 20.0%               | 20.0%                                   | 20.0%                                | 20.0%                                      |
| 20-35        | Mean           | .2500               | .7500               | .7500                                   | .7500                                | .7500                                      |
|              | N              | 4                   | 4                   | 4                                       | 4                                    | 4  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .50000              | .50000              | .50000                                  | .50000                               | .50000                                     |
|              | Sum            | 1.00                | 3.00                | 3.00                                    | 3.00                                 | 3.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 16.7%               | 25.0%               | 18.8%                                   | 20.0%                                | 21.4%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 16.0%               | 16.0%               | 16.0%                                   | 16.0%                                | 16.0%                                      |
| 36-55        | Mean           | .4000               | .8000               | .8000                                   | .8000                                | .8000                                      |
|              | N              | 5                   | 5                   | 5                                       | 5                                    | 5  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .54772              | .44721              | .44721                                  | .44721                               | .44721                                     |
|              | Sum            | 2.00                | 4.00                | 4.00                                    | 4.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 33.3%               | 33.3%               | 25.0%                                   | 26.7%                                | 28.6%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 20.0%               | 20.0%               | 20.0%                                   | 20.0%                                | 20.0%                                      |
| 56 and above | Mean           | .2222               | .4444               | .5556                                   | .4444                                | .4444                                      |
|              | N              | 9                   | 9                   | 9                                       | 9                                    | 9  |
|              | Std. Deviation | .44096              | .52705              | .52705                                  | .52705                               | .52705                                     |
|              | Sum            | 2.00                | 4.00                | 5.00                                    | 4.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|              | % of Total Sum | 33.3%               | 33.3%               | 31.3%                                   | 26.7%                                | 28.6%                                      |
|              | % of Total N   | 36.0%               | 36.0%               | 36.0%                                   | 36.0%                                | 36.0%                                      |
| Total        | Mean           | .2400               | .4800               | .6400                                   | .6000                                | .5600                                      |
|              | N              | 25                  | 25                  | 25                                      | 25                                   | 25   |
|              | Std. Deviation | .43589              | .50990              | .48990                                  | .50000                               | .50662                                     |
|              | Sum            | 6.00                | 12.00               | 16.00                                   | 15.00                                | 14.00                                      |
|              | % of Total Sum | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |
|              | % of Total N   | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |

### Appendix E6: All Surveys Totaled with Number of Correct Answers

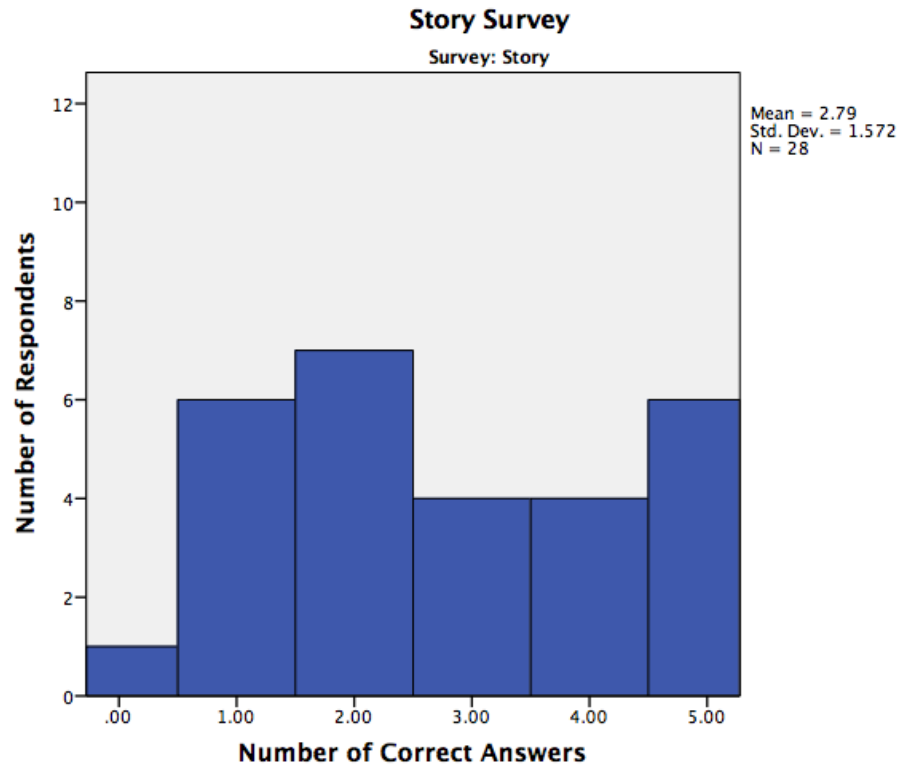
| Survey        |         |                   | Number | Percent | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|---------------|---------|-------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Picture       | Valid   | 0 Answers Correct | 4      | 9.5     | 12.5    | 12.5         |
|               |         | 1 Answer Correct  | 3      | 7.1     | 9.4     | 21.9         |
|               |         | 2 Answers Correct | 6      | 14.3    | 18.8    | 40.6         |
|               |         | 3 Answers Correct | 3      | 7.1     | 9.4     | 50.0         |
|               |         | 4 Answers Correct | 4      | 9.5     | 12.5    | 62.5         |
|               |         | 5 Answers Correct | 12     | 28.6    | 37.5    | 100.0        |
|               |         | Total             | 32     | 76.2    | 100.0   |              |
|               | Missing | System            | 10     | 23.8    |         |              |
|               | Total   |                   | 42     | 100.0   |         |              |
| Control       | Valid   | 0 Answers Correct | 4      | 8.7     | 12.1    | 12.1         |
|               |         | 1 Answer Correct  | 0      | 0.0     | 0.0     | 0.0          |
|               |         | 2 Answers Correct | 4      | 8.7     | 12.1    | 24.2         |
|               |         | 3 Answers Correct | 7      | 15.2    | 21.2    | 45.5         |
|               |         | 4 Answers Correct | 6      | 13.0    | 18.2    | 63.6         |
|               |         | 5 Answers Correct | 12     | 26.1    | 36.4    | 100.0        |
|               |         | Total             | 33     | 71.7    | 100.0   |              |
|               | Missing | System            | 13     | 28.3    |         |              |
|               | Total   |                   | 46     | 100.0   |         |              |
| Story         | Valid   | 0 Answers Correct | 1      | 2.6     | 3.6     | 3.6          |
|               |         | 1 Answer Correct  | 6      | 15.8    | 21.4    | 25.0         |
|               |         | 2 Answers Correct | 7      | 18.4    | 25.0    | 50.0         |
|               |         | 3 Answers Correct | 4      | 10.5    | 14.3    | 64.3         |
|               |         | 4 Answers Correct | 4      | 10.5    | 14.3    | 78.6         |
|               |         | 5 Answers Correct | 6      | 15.8    | 21.4    | 100.0        |
|               |         | Total             | 28     | 73.7    | 100.0   |              |
|               | Missing | System            | 10     | 26.3    |         |              |
|               | Total   |                   | 38     | 100.0   |         |              |
| Object Lesson | Valid   | 0 Answers Correct | 5      | 13.9    | 20.0    | 20.0         |
|               |         | 1 Answer Correct  | 5      | 13.9    | 20.0    | 40.0         |
|               |         | 2 Answers Correct | 2      | 5.6     | 8.0     | 48.0         |
|               |         | 3 Answers Correct | 3      | 8.3     | 12.0    | 60.0         |
|               |         | 4 Answers Correct | 5      | 13.9    | 20.0    | 80.0         |
|               |         | 5 Answers Correct | 5      | 13.9    | 20.0    | 100.0        |
|               |         | Total             | 25     | 69.4    | 100.0   |              |
|               | Missing | System            | 11     | 30.6    |         |              |
|               | Total   |                   | 36     | 100.0   |         |              |

**Appendix E7: Picture Survey Number of Respondents and Correct Answers**

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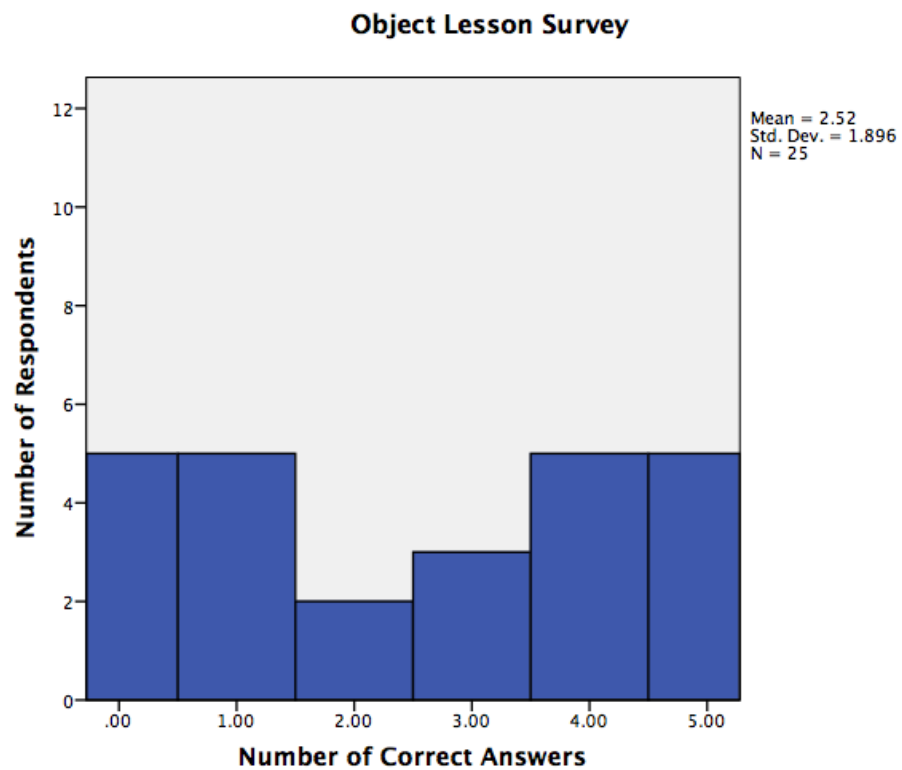
**Appendix E8: Control Survey Number of Respondents and Correct Answers**

## Appendix E9: Story Survey Number of Respondents and Correct Answers



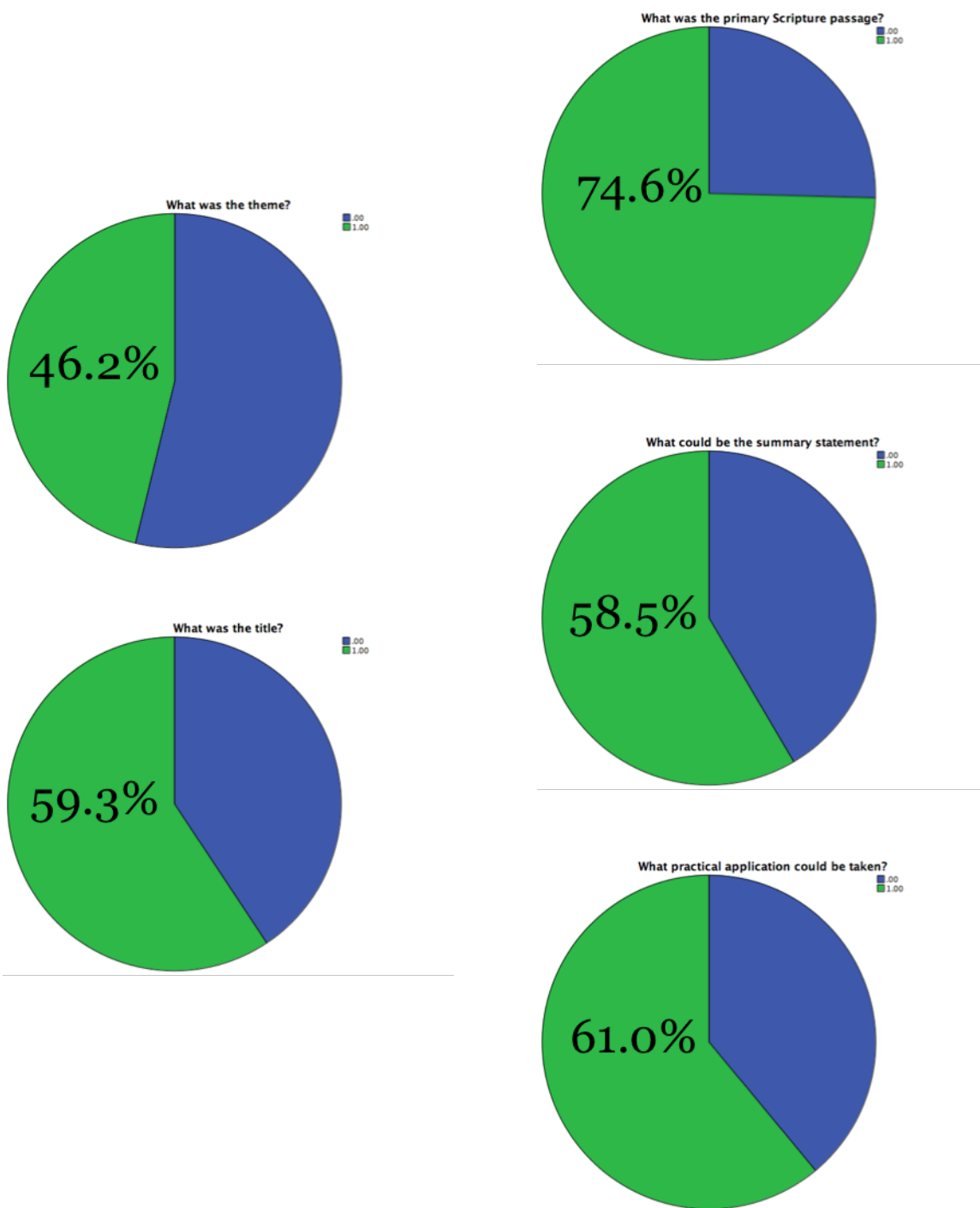
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## Appendix E10: Object Lesson Survey Number of Respondents and Correct Answers



## Appendix E11: Specific Question Percentages for all Surveys Combined

*Pie Chart Key:*  
*Green (1.00) = Correct answers*  
*Blue (.00) = Incorrect answers*





**Appendix E12: Beta Set - Question Mean Breakdown**

| <b>Beta Set Data</b> |                | <b>Theme</b> | <b>Title</b> | <b>Scripture</b> | <b>Summary</b> | <b>Application</b> |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 0-19                 | Mean           | .3750        | .5417        | .7500            | .4583          | .6667              |
|                      | N              | 24           | 24           | 24               | 24             | 24                 |
|                      | Std. Deviation | .49454       | .50898       | .44233           | .50898         | .48154             |
|                      | Sum            | 9.00         | 13.00        | 18.00            | 11.00          | 16.00              |
|                      | % of Total Sum | 16.4%        | 18.6%        | 20.5%            | 15.9%          | 22.2%              |
|                      | % of Total N   | 20.2%        | 20.3%        | 20.3%            | 20.3%          | 20.3%              |
| 20-55                | Mean           | .6304        | .7174        | .8696            | .7826          | .8043              |
|                      | N              | 46           | 46           | 46               | 46             | 46                 |
|                      | Std. Deviation | .48802       | .45524       | .34050           | .41703         | .40109             |
|                      | Sum            | 29.00        | 33.00        | 40.00            | 36.00          | 37.00              |
|                      | % of Total Sum | 52.7%        | 47.1%        | 45.5%            | 52.2%          | 51.4%              |
|                      | % of Total N   | 38.7%        | 39.0%        | 39.0%            | 39.0%          | 39.0%              |
| 56 and up            | Mean           | .3469        | .5000        | .6250            | .4583          | .3958              |
|                      | N              | 49           | 48           | 48               | 48             | 48                 |
|                      | Std. Deviation | .48093       | .50529       | .48925           | .50353         | .49420             |
|                      | Sum            | 17.00        | 24.00        | 30.00            | 22.00          | 19.00              |
|                      | % of Total Sum | 30.9%        | 34.3%        | 34.1%            | 31.9%          | 26.4%              |
|                      | % of Total N   | 41.2%        | 40.7%        | 40.7%            | 40.7%          | 40.7%              |
| Total                | Mean           | .4622        | .5932        | .7458            | .5847          | .6102              |
|                      | N              | 119          | 118          | 118              | 118            | 118                |
|                      | Std. Deviation | .50068       | .49333       | .43729           | .49487         | .48979             |
|                      | Sum            | 55.00        | 70.00        | 88.00            | 69.00          | 72.00              |
|                      | % of Total Sum | 100.0%       | 100.0%       | 100.0%           | 100.0%         | 100.0%             |
|                      | % of Total N   | 100.0%       | 100.0%       | 100.0%           | 100.0%         | 100.0%             |

**Appendix E13: Beta Set - Gender and Age - Question Mean Breakdown**

| <b>Gender &amp; Age</b> |           |             | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std. Deviation</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Female                  | 0-19      | Theme       | 8        | .5000       | .53452                |
|                         |           | Title       | 8        | .8750       | .35355                |
|                         |           | Scripture   | 8        | .6250       | .51755                |
|                         |           | Summary     | 8        | .6250       | .51755                |
|                         |           | Application | 8        | .8750       | .35355                |
|                         |           | Valid N     | 8        |             |                       |
|                         | 20-55     | Theme       | 29       | .6207       | .49380                |
|                         |           | Title       | 29       | .6897       | .47082                |
|                         |           | Scripture   | 29       | .8621       | .35093                |
|                         |           | Summary     | 29       | .8276       | .38443                |
|                         |           | Application | 29       | .8276       | .38443                |
|                         |           | Valid N     | 29       |             |                       |
|                         | 56 and up | Theme       | 27       | .3704       | .49210                |
|                         |           | Title       | 27       | .5926       | .50071                |
|                         |           | Scripture   | 27       | .6296       | .49210                |
|                         |           | Summary     | 27       | .4444       | .50637                |
|                         |           | Application | 27       | .4074       | .50071                |
|                         |           | Valid N     | 27       |             |                       |
| Male                    | 0-19      | Theme       | 16       | .3125       | .47871                |
|                         |           | Title       | 16       | .3750       | .50000                |
|                         |           | Scripture   | 16       | .8125       | .40311                |
|                         |           | Summary     | 16       | .3750       | .50000                |
|                         |           | Application | 16       | .5625       | .51235                |
|                         |           | Valid N     | 16       |             |                       |
|                         | 20-55     | Theme       | 17       | .6471       | .49259                |
|                         |           | Title       | 17       | .7647       | .43724                |
|                         |           | Scripture   | 17       | .8824       | .33211                |
|                         |           | Summary     | 17       | .7059       | .46967                |
|                         |           | Application | 17       | .7647       | .43724                |
|                         |           | Valid N     | 17       |             |                       |
|                         | 56 and up | Theme       | 22       | .3182       | .47673                |
|                         |           | Title       | 21       | .3810       | .49761                |
|                         |           | Scripture   | 21       | .6190       | .49761                |
|                         |           | Summary     | 21       | .4762       | .51177                |
|                         |           | Application | 21       | .3810       | .49761                |
|                         |           | Valid N     | 21       |             |                       |

**Appendix E14: Gender - Question Mean Breakdown**

| <b>Gender</b> |             | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std. Deviation</b> |
|---------------|-------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Female</b> | Theme       | 64       | .5000       | .50395                |
|               | Title       | 64       | .6719       | .47324                |
|               | Scripture   | 64       | .7344       | .44516                |
|               | Summary     | 64       | .6406       | .48361                |
|               | Application | 64       | .6563       | .47871                |
|               | Valid N     | 64       |             |                       |
| <b>Male</b>   | Theme       | 55       | .4182       | .49781                |
|               | Title       | 54       | .5000       | .50469                |
|               | Scripture   | 54       | .7593       | .43155                |
|               | Summary     | 54       | .5185       | .50435                |
|               | Application | 54       | .5556       | .50157                |
|               | Valid N     | 54       |             |                       |

**Appendix E15: Beta Set - Picture Survey - Questions Breakdown**

| <b>Beta Set - Picture</b> |                | <b>What was the theme?</b> | <b>What was the title?</b> | <b>What was the primary Scripture passage?</b> | <b>What could be the summary statement?</b> | <b>What practical application could be taken?</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|---|
| 0-19                      | Mean           | .6667                      | 1.0000                     | .6667  | .1667                                       | 1.0000  |
|                           | N              | 6                          | 6                          | 6  | 6   | 6   |
|                           | Std. Deviation | .51640                     | 0.00000                    | .51640   | .40825                                      | 0.00000   |
|                           | Sum            | 4.00                       | 6.00                       | 4.00   | 1.00  | 6.00  |
|                           | % of Total Sum | 22.2%                      | 23.1%                      | 18.2%  | 8.3%  | 27.3%   |
|                           | % of Total N   | 18.8%                      | 18.8%                      | 18.8%  | 18.8%                                       | 18.8%   |
| 20-55                     | Mean           | .8000                      | 1.0000                     | 1.0000   | .8000                                       | .9000   |
|                           | N              | 10                         | 10                         | 10   | 10  | 10  |
|                           | Std. Deviation | .42164                     | 0.00000                    | 0.00000  | .42164                                      | .31623  |
|                           | Sum            | 8.00                       | 10.00                      | 10.00  | 8.00  | 9.00  |
|                           | % of Total Sum | 44.4%                      | 38.5%                      | 45.5%  | 66.7%                                       | 40.9%   |
|                           | % of Total N   | 31.3%                      | 31.3%                      | 31.3%  | 31.3%                                       | 31.3%   |
| 56 and up                 | Mean           | .3750                      | .6250                      | .5000  | .1875                                       | .4375   |
|                           | N              | 16                         | 16                         | 16   | 16  | 16  |
|                           | Std. Deviation | .50000                     | .50000                     | .51640   | .40311                                      | .51235  |
|                           | Sum            | 6.00                       | 10.00                      | 8.00   | 3.00  | 7.00  |
|                           | % of Total Sum | 33.3%                      | 38.5%                      | 36.4%  | 25.0%                                       | 31.8%   |
|                           | % of Total N   | 50.0%                      | 50.0%                      | 50.0%  | 50.0%                                       | 50.0%   |
| Total                     | Mean           | .5625                      | .8125                      | .6875  | .3750                                       | .6875   |
|                           | N              | 32                         | 32                         | 32   | 32  | 32  |
|                           | Std. Deviation | .50402                     | .39656                     | .47093   | .49187                                      | .47093  |
|                           | Sum            | 18.00                      | 26.00                      | 22.00  | 12.00                                       | 22.00   |
|                           | % of Total Sum | 100.0%                     | 100.0%                     | 100.0%   | 100.0%                                      | 100.0%  |
|                           | % of Total N   | 100.0%                     | 100.0%                     | 100.0%   | 100.0%                                      | 100.0%  |

### Appendix E16: Beta Set - Control Survey - Questions Breakdown

| Beta Set - Control |                | What was the theme? | What was the title? | What was the primary Scripture passage? | What could be the summary statement? | What practical application could be taken? |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 0-19               | Mean           | .3333               | .8333               | 1.0000                                  | .8333                                | .8333                                      |
|                    | N              | 6                   | 6                   | 6                                       | 6                                    | 6  |
|                    | Std. Deviation | .51640              | .40825              | 0.00000                                 | .40825                               | .40825                                     |
|                    | Sum            | 2.00                | 5.00                | 6.00                                    | 5.00                                 | 5.00                                       |
|                    | % of Total Sum | 10.5%               | 23.8%               | 21.4%                                   | 20.8%                                | 23.8%                                      |
|                    | % of Total N   | 18.2%               | 18.2%               | 18.2%                                   | 18.2%                                | 18.2%                                      |
| 20-55              | Mean           | .7333               | .6667               | .8667                                   | .8000                                | .8000                                      |
|                    | N              | 15                  | 15                  | 15                                      | 15                                   | 15   |
|                    | Std. Deviation | .45774              | .48795              | .35187                                  | .41404                               | .41404                                     |
|                    | Sum            | 11.00               | 10.00               | 13.00                                   | 12.00                                | 12.00                                      |
|                    | % of Total Sum | 57.9%               | 47.6%               | 46.4%                                   | 50.0%                                | 57.1%                                      |
|                    | % of Total N   | 45.5%               | 45.5%               | 45.5%                                   | 45.5%                                | 45.5%                                      |
| 56 and up          | Mean           | .5000               | .5000               | .7500                                   | .5833                                | .3333                                      |
|                    | N              | 12                  | 12                  | 12                                      | 12                                   | 12   |
|                    | Std. Deviation | .52223              | .52223              | .45227                                  | .51493                               | .49237                                     |
|                    | Sum            | 6.00                | 6.00                | 9.00                                    | 7.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|                    | % of Total Sum | 31.6%               | 28.6%               | 32.1%                                   | 29.2%                                | 19.0%                                      |
|                    | % of Total N   | 36.4%               | 36.4%               | 36.4%                                   | 36.4%                                | 36.4%                                      |
| Total              | Mean           | .5758               | .6364               | .8485                                   | .7273                                | .6364                                      |
|                    | N              | 33                  | 33                  | 33                                      | 33                                   | 33   |
|                    | Std. Deviation | .50189              | .48850              | .36411                                  | .45227                               | .48850                                     |
|                    | Sum            | 19.00               | 21.00               | 28.00                                   | 24.00                                | 21.00                                      |
|                    | % of Total Sum | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |
|                    | % of Total N   | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |

### Appendix E17: Beta Set - Story Survey - Questions Breakdown

| Beta Set - Story |                | What was the theme? | What was the title? | What was the primary Scripture passage? | What could be the summary statement? | What practical application could be taken? |
|------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 0-19             | Mean           | .4000               | .2000               | .8000                                   | .2000                                | .4000                                      |
|                  | N              | 5                   | 5                   | 5                                       | 5                                    | 5  |
|                  | Std. Deviation | .54772              | .44721              | .44721                                  | .44721                               | .54772                                     |
|                  | Sum            | 2.00                | 1.00                | 4.00                                    | 1.00                                 | 2.00                                       |
|                  | % of Total Sum | 16.7%               | 9.1%                | 18.2%                                   | 5.6%                                 | 13.3%                                      |
|                  | % of Total N   | 17.2%               | 17.9%               | 17.9%                                   | 17.9%                                | 17.9%                                      |
| 20-55            | Mean           | .5833               | .5000               | .8333                                   | .7500                                | .7500                                      |
|                  | N              | 12                  | 12                  | 12                                      | 12                                   | 12   |
|                  | Std. Deviation | .51493              | .52223              | .38925                                  | .45227                               | .45227                                     |
|                  | Sum            | 7.00                | 6.00                | 10.00                                   | 9.00                                 | 9.00                                       |
|                  | % of Total Sum | 58.3%               | 54.5%               | 45.5%                                   | 50.0%                                | 60.0%                                      |
|                  | % of Total N   | 41.4%               | 42.9%               | 42.9%                                   | 42.9%                                | 42.9%                                      |
| 56 and up        | Mean           | .2500               | .3636               | .7273                                   | .7273                                | .3636                                      |
|                  | N              | 12                  | 11                  | 11                                      | 11                                   | 11   |
|                  | Std. Deviation | .45227              | .50452              | .46710                                  | .46710                               | .50452                                     |
|                  | Sum            | 3.00                | 4.00                | 8.00                                    | 8.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|                  | % of Total Sum | 25.0%               | 36.4%               | 36.4%                                   | 44.4%                                | 26.7%                                      |
|                  | % of Total N   | 41.4%               | 39.3%               | 39.3%                                   | 39.3%                                | 39.3%                                      |
| Total            | Mean           | .4138               | .3929               | .7857                                   | .6429                                | .5357                                      |
|                  | N              | 29                  | 28                  | 28                                      | 28                                   | 28   |
|                  | Std. Deviation | .50123              | .49735              | .41786                                  | .48795                               | .50787                                     |
|                  | Sum            | 12.00               | 11.00               | 22.00                                   | 18.00                                | 15.00                                      |
|                  | % of Total Sum | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |
|                  | % of Total N   | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |

**Appendix E18: Beta Set - Object Lesson Survey -  
Questions Breakdown**

| Beta Set - Object Lesson |                | What was the theme? | What was the title? | What was the primary Scripture passage? | What could be the summary statement? | What practical application could be taken? |
|--------------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 0-19                     | Mean           | .1429               | .1429               | .5714                                   | .5714                                | .4286                                      |
|                          | N              | 7                   | 7                   | 7                                       | 7                                    | 7  |
|                          | Std. Deviation | .37796              | .37796              | .53452                                  | .53452                               | .53452                                     |
|                          | Sum            | 1.00                | 1.00                | 4.00                                    | 4.00                                 | 3.00                                       |
|                          | % of Total Sum | 16.7%               | 8.3%                | 25.0%                                   | 26.7%                                | 21.4%                                      |
|                          | % of Total N   | 28.0%               | 28.0%               | 28.0%                                   | 28.0%                                | 28.0%                                      |
| 20-55                    | Mean           | .3333               | .7778               | .7778                                   | .7778                                | .7778                                      |
|                          | N              | 9                   | 9                   | 9                                       | 9                                    | 9  |
|                          | Std. Deviation | .50000              | .44096              | .44096                                  | .44096                               | .44096                                     |
|                          | Sum            | 3.00                | 7.00                | 7.00                                    | 7.00                                 | 7.00                                       |
|                          | % of Total Sum | 50.0%               | 58.3%               | 43.8%                                   | 46.7%                                | 50.0%                                      |
|                          | % of Total N   | 36.0%               | 36.0%               | 36.0%                                   | 36.0%                                | 36.0%                                      |
| 56 and up                | Mean           | .2222               | .4444               | .5556                                   | .4444                                | .4444                                      |
|                          | N              | 9                   | 9                   | 9                                       | 9                                    | 9  |
|                          | Std. Deviation | .44096              | .52705              | .52705                                  | .52705                               | .52705                                     |
|                          | Sum            | 2.00                | 4.00                | 5.00                                    | 4.00                                 | 4.00                                       |
|                          | % of Total Sum | 33.3%               | 33.3%               | 31.3%                                   | 26.7%                                | 28.6%                                      |
|                          | % of Total N   | 36.0%               | 36.0%               | 36.0%                                   | 36.0%                                | 36.0%                                      |
| Total                    | Mean           | .2400               | .4800               | .6400                                   | .6000                                | .5600                                      |
|                          | N              | 25                  | 25                  | 25                                      | 25                                   | 25   |
|                          | Std. Deviation | .43589              | .50990              | .48990                                  | .50000                               | .50662                                     |
|                          | Sum            | 6.00                | 12.00               | 16.00                                   | 15.00                                | 14.00                                      |
|                          | % of Total Sum | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |
|                          | % of Total N   | 100.0%              | 100.0%              | 100.0%                                  | 100.0%                               | 100.0%                                     |

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