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Tyndale University

Transformation:
How God's Ongoing Work through Preaching
Can Impact a Congregation

A Research Portfolio
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
Tyndale University

by

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ABSTRACT

This portfolio describes the way that God's transforming work in the life of a preacher can impact a congregation. It focuses specifically on a preacher's life, context, and congregation and God's work in each of these areas.

Chapter 1 serves as the introduction to this portfolio. Chapter 2 offers My Personal Preaching Identity, which describes my own identity and transformation as a preacher, my sense of call, spiritual gifting, and theological tradition. It contains my theology of preaching, which has been informed by my personal experiences as well as course work, readings, and mentors drawn from church history. Chapter 3, My Preaching Context, describes the congregation I serve, North Park Community Church, as well as the broader community setting and city. This background was used to propose a preaching strategy and a yearly preaching menu that would meaningfully and appropriately address this unique congregation. My Preaching Field Project, found in chapter 4, is a personalized preaching project implemented in my home church to determine the impact that the preaching is having on the spiritual transformation of a certain demographic of our church. The results identified a transformative impact on this demographic but also revealed some important learnings for preachers about the content and delivery of the sermon. Chapter 5, the conclusion, summarizes the content of this portfolio and describes the way in which I have accomplished the four outcomes of the Doctor of Ministry program.

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I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:3-6, NIV).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There is a well known passage in scripture that states, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, NIV). It is often used to encourage and inspire those who may be experiencing some discouragement in their journey of faith. To fully exegete what the Apostle Paul was getting at with these words, however, is to truly understand the richness of their meaning. He was addressing a rather young, upstart church in Philippi that was facing its fair share of adversity and insecurity. In the preceding verses, it is clear that Paul is almost overwhelmed with joy when he thinks of these dear brothers and sisters in faith and his thankfulness for their partnership in sharing the gospel. He is encouraging them from a distance, reminding them of the confidence that he has in them and the faith that they can have in God and the purpose he has for their lives, even when it sometimes feels like they are alone. They can know that the one who began a good work in them will carry it through to completion.

Throughout the last three years that I have been enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Preaching and Communication track, the words of this verse have become so much more personal and meaningful to me. I have been reminded that God has had His hand on my life from the beginning, orchestrating events and

transforming my gifts and talents, to bring me to where I am at this point in my life. Through this introduction, I will highlight some of the key themes that will be explored throughout the body of this portfolio. I will also integrate my personal and vocational learnings as they connect to the overall program outcomes.

Chapter 2, entitled Personal Preaching Identity, details the process that culminated in discerning my personal theology of preaching. It is divided into three major segments. The first, Personal Identity, describes my own sense of call, gifting, and the life experiences that have contributed to who I am as a person, pastor, and preacher. I reflect upon the impact that my family, certain people, and activities have had on me throughout my life. This is when I began to make the connection to Philippians 1:6. God has truly been at work using people and circumstances that have helped shape the person I am today.

We all have people who have made a significant contribution to our personal growth and development. As I had a chance to ponder these influences in my life, I remember a respected high school coach whose encouraging words set me on a course toward teacher's college. There was also a vibrant, culturally relevant pastor who changed my paradigm of the way that I viewed the clergy. A faceless indigenous chief's sorrowful lament at the senseless loss of another young life to suicide catapulted me on a journey to discover my personal source of hope and then the desire to share that hope with others. Being a husband, father, and grandfather has softened my heart and taught me the true depth of love and grace.

In this segment, I also recount my view of the church that was first instilled in me as a child. My involvement in sports facilitated the discovery of certain personal attributes that would later prove useful as a preacher. Teaching solidified my personal passions of teaching and care, which ultimately prepared my heart to receive the news of teen suicide with such compassion. That served as the catalyst God used to eventually transition me into vocational ministry. My past twenty-three years as a pastor have reinforced the fact that teaching and care are truly my sweet spot. The interesting thread that appears throughout this segment and influences a large part of this portfolio is the personal battle I have with insecurity, specifically in my role as a pastor. Throughout this journey of self-discovery, it has only made the words in Philippians 1:6 that much sweeter to me.

The second segment of chapter 2, Preaching Identity, is more of a theoretical and practical understanding of the task of preaching. In this section, I had a chance to focus on some of what the literature is saying about the nature of preaching and ruminate a little on what it means to me with my unique personality, gift mix, and context. Preaching is a God-ordained task that is reinforced all through scripture. There is a certain level of mystery connected to the preaching task that is bewildering. That God could use the words spoken by a preacher to penetrate the hearts and souls of the listeners is awe-inspiring. There is power in preaching scripture but there is also true merit and wisdom in complementing the Word with a personal perspective. Some tension does arise in

this segment as time is spent discussing the degree to which the personality of the pastor influences the message. With the motivation to continue to reach out to an increasingly post-Christian culture with the gospel, is there a spirit of competitiveness that is infiltrating the ranks of preachers today? Does the desire of a preacher to be excellent demonstrate initiative or pride? Can the megachurch atmosphere promote the “rock star” pastor mentality that propagates unhealthy pressure on a preacher? Some time is spent analyzing this paradox as well as the differences between preaching and teaching and their ability to co-exist in the pulpit.

The last part of this segment is devoted to specific preaching practices and methodologies that have influenced me over the years and shaped who I am as a preacher. Included among these influences are the Missional church movement and the call to make the message of the gospel something that is lived out in the lives of Christians, not just on Sunday, but every day of the week. I have also been deeply convicted that my own personal devotional life is pivotal to my preaching life. In this section you will read about a personal daily devotional method that has changed my life and the way that I preach.

Finally, my personal belief is that pastors need to be readers of the Word but they also need to be readers in general. There have been so many books besides the Bible that have influenced me in a profound way. I have come to appreciate N. T. Wright for his scholarly perspective and humility (Wright 2015, 164). His rendition of the gospel and his argument for Christians to vastly broaden

their previous understanding of the gospel, have struck a deep chord with me over the past ten years. It has actually served to make the grand narrative of the Bible even more brilliant and hopeful than I ever realized, and it has profoundly impacted my preaching today. This examination of preaching and how my identity has been shaped by specific preaching ideologies and practices has further reinforced my belief that God has been using these pieces, along with those of my personal identity, to crystallize a theology of preaching for me.

The third segment of chapter 2 brings the pieces together by meshing my personal identity with my preaching identity to construct my personal preaching identity, and this is where my theology of preaching is birthed. This section describes how key areas detailed throughout the first two segments weave together to form a coherent personal statement of belief at this point in my life in ministry. This theology of preaching serves as the foundation for how I approach the task of preaching. I preach not just because the bible commands it (2 Timothy 4:2, NIV), but because the God of the universe has been at work in my life to prepare, equip and then place me in a position to proclaim His grace and truth that is contained in the bible. My theology of preaching has been over fifty-five years in the making. It may change in the years ahead but for now it substantiates my existence and my faith and reinforces my belief that the one who began a good work in me will carry it through to completion.

In chapter 3, the focus shifts toward a contextual and cultural analysis of the current location where I preach. This chapter is divided into three main

segments. The first segment was an opportunity for me to research the history and origins of the city in which I am currently employed as a pastor. I have only lived in this particular city for 5 ½ years, so I am not overly familiar with its genesis and unique idiosyncrasies but through historical records and demographic studies I was able to get a better grasp of the city and maybe, more importantly, the neighbourhood around my church. London is similar to most medium to large-size cities in our region. Some of the more unique qualities of London are highlighted in this segment of the chapter as well as the key employers and nuances that may distinguish London from other cities in Ontario.

The second segment of chapter 3 contains a description of the congregation where I am currently employed as the Teaching Pastor: North Park Community Church. It has details of our services and demographics that have been shaped by over 50 years of history. I have tried to interpret and exegete the context of North Park based on perceived critical rites and rituals of the church. While it has many similarities to a lot of evangelical churches, there are specific aspects of North Park that make it unique.

Although immersed in a city with a reputation for resistance to change, North Park has actually demonstrated great resiliency over the years. It has rolled through pastoral changes, shifts in theological thought and praxis, leadership structures and procedures, and congregants coming and going but has somehow managed to maintain a strong sense of unity and purpose. This faithful consistency has also been demonstrated in its giving. North Park has a distinct

outreach focus and is heavily invested through volunteer time and financial resources in many ministries that reach beyond the walls of the building and into the city and world. All of this is prompted by a core value of the church, which is to “go” into the world and share the love of Jesus with people through word and deed. As I have had a chance to contemplate the context of North Park church, I have come to the stark realization that what is true of my life, is true of the life of this church body. They too have had over 50 years of circumstances and experiences which God has used to make North Park what it is today. The one who began a good work in them will carry it through to completion.

The third segment of this chapter includes a detailed description of a preaching strategy that addresses North Park’s ministry context. This is the crux of my learning through this Doctor of Ministry program. It is where I tie my theology of preaching into the context that I am immersed in, to prepare a menu of preaching that proclaims Jesus, meets people where they are, and challenges them to grow in their faith. In this section, I described areas that I have been challenged to develop in my preaching to address the shifting needs and attention spans of the audience.

Some areas that are unique about the preaching at North Park are, first, our approach to team teaching and our intentional preaching mentorship program that is continually training and developing our seasoned and less experienced preachers through organized roundtable discussions throughout the year. This initiative was launched as a direct result of a course I took during the second year

of the Doctor of Ministry program. Secondly, preaching series are the norm at North Park and we generally plan our preaching schedule months in advance. Series are prayerfully discerned by a preaching planning team and are filtered through a yearly preaching cycle, our strategic vision and values of the church, and the felt needs of the congregation. Thirdly, evaluation is a part of our DNA at North Park, so our preaching and other aspects of our weekend services are assessed on a weekly basis. We have used various tools for this evaluation including some that were distributed in one of the preaching classes at Tyndale.

Chapter 4 describes and outlines my Preaching Field Project. I chose the topic or “problem” of this project very deliberately. The three years in the Doctor of Ministry program have provided me with a growing sense of awareness of who I am and what I bring to the preaching task so I endeavoured to create a project that would genuinely benefit my preaching and my church context.

I have always been interested in the evaluation of preaching but also somewhat skeptical. It is hard to come up with a framework of evaluation that minimizes personal taste and bias and is truly beneficial for the preacher and congregants. As I was pondering the subject matter for my Preaching Field Project, it occurred to me that the elders at North Park had recently discerned a strategic goal of reaching out to a specific demographic in our community with the gospel over the next five years. I began to wonder how to construct a preaching project that would be beneficial to this strategic goal by determining the impact that North Park’s preaching is having on the spiritual transformation of

congregants in this specific demographic. In chapter 4, the methodology and outcomes of this project are described in detail. Questions were devised with great intentionality, building on one another to draw appropriate conclusions. Spiritual transformation is thoroughly defined in this chapter and used as a benchmark to ascertain the preaching impact. Responses from the participants were in the form of journal entries that I hoped would allow for thoughtful and conscientious feedback and maximize the potential for learning and growth for myself, the preaching team at North Park Church, and other preachers in similar contexts.

My prayer as you engage this entire portfolio is that you get a sense of who I am and the journey of my life as a Christian and as a vocational preacher. I trust that you will envision the transformation in my life throughout the three years that I have been immersed in this Doctor of Ministry program and be challenged by the concept that we are all a work in process. God's desire is to continue to grow and shape all of us into what he desires us to be through the circumstances and the people he brings into our lives. I also pray that you will be challenged and inspired by the content and the learnings in this portfolio and, if you are a preacher, it will motivate you to consider why you preach, how you preach, and for whom you preach. Preaching is a gift from God and a supernatural activity but it is something that can be refined and enhanced. It is our obligation as preachers to continue to understand who we are, what we bring to the task, and the context in which we preach.

CHAPTER 2: MY PERSONAL PREACHING IDENTITY

In this chapter of the research integration portfolio, I will outline my personal preaching identity by delving into some of the influences that have shaped who I am as a person, pastor, and preacher over the years. I will begin by unpacking some of those key elements in my life that have moulded me into the person I am at this point. These are the things that have contributed to my personal identity and include some important people and circumstances that have made an impression on my life. Next, I will describe the key influences that have helped to form my preaching identity. Included in this section are pastors and preachers who have had a profound impact on my life as well as faith communities and theological paradigms. Finally, I will bring these two areas together and demonstrate how my personal identity and preaching identity have been woven together to form my overall personal preaching identity. This has helped to reinforce a theology of preaching that serves as the framework as I set about the task of preaching today.

Personal Identity

This section will describe some of the important people and experiences in my life that have shaped the person that I am today.

Hope

Sunday, March 23, 1993, started just like any other Sunday. My wife Carolyn and I and our young daughter attended church in the morning and then on the way home I purchased the *Toronto Star* newspaper like I did most Sundays. After lunch, I settled into my favourite chair and began to read the paper. A story on the front page caught my attention immediately: “Why do Indian teens kill themselves?” (*Toronto Star*, March 23, 1993). It would not be considered an appropriate headline in our world today but this was 1993. I was a school teacher and guidance counsellor at the time, so this article drew me in. I was moved as I read the details of why the First Nations teens in northern reserves were dying by suicide at alarming rates. The comment that specifically touched me was by one of the chiefs of the community who said, “Our teenagers have no power and no hope, they are terrified” (*Toronto Star*, March 23, 1993).

With no hope, these teens could not envision a better future so many were taking their own lives. This news story gripped me in a powerful way. It caused me to reflect upon my own youth and high school days. There were some interesting moments, for sure. I had my share of teenage angst but I never experienced life as hopeless. What made me different from these teens in the article? After some soul searching, I realized that I had hope because my parents had taught me that life was greater than just my wants and needs. Life was greater than my happiness, contentment, and pursuit of the good life. My life was simply a part of a grander story. It was God’s story, which provided deeper meaning and

significance. My faith in Jesus and this greater story instilled in me hope from a young age. As I reflected upon that, I realized that this hope had sustained me through some highs and lows of my life up to that point.

Over the next four years, God led me on a journey. I immersed myself in youth culture. I wanted to know where teenagers were looking to find hope and meaning for their lives. I became a bit of a youth culture “specialist” during this time and was invited to speak to local community groups, parent associations, teachers’ conferences, and churches about this topic.

In early 1997, the church I attended began a search for its first full-time youth pastor. Due to my experience and knowledge of youth culture, I was asked to be on the search committee. Our committee spent the first few months putting together a job description and a list of requirements needed for this position. With each meeting, I would come home and share with Carolyn how things were progressing. What started as information sharing with her soon became pondering and wondering whether this may be a role that I would consider. I tried to shrug off any inclination that God might be calling me into ministry. I had a solid, ten-year career as a school teacher and a guidance counsellor. It was a vocation that I loved. Then I began to experience sleepless nights. Tossing and turning and trying to rationalize all the reasons I could not leave the safety and security of a job with the school board for the uncertainty of working in the local church. Carolyn began to sense my burden. We talked and prayed about it. As always, she was my rock and my encourager. She would remind me that if God wanted me to be a youth

pastor, then he would provide for us. We quietly began to invite some close friends and family members to pray for us and our discernment of God's call on our lives.

After a few months, I addressed the search committee and stated that I was feeling as though God wanted me to actually apply for the position as the youth pastor. This process culminated in July 1997 when I left my career as a teacher and became a youth pastor. That summer I instituted, as our youth group's theme, the Bible verse: "For you have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth" (Psalm 71:5, NIV). I wanted to ensure that those in our youth group knew the source of true hope is our faith in Jesus.

As I reflect back on that story I read in the *Toronto Star* in 1993, I realize that it moved me to the point of literally changing my life. It changed my career direction, my passion, and my focus. Hope was a big reason for my call into vocational ministry and it continues to be the motivation for much of what I do as a pastor.

My Parents

Maybe God's call on my life began much earlier. I was fortunate to have been raised in a loving Christian home. My parents were supportive but not intrusive. My mom's father was a lay preacher in the Brethren church and she was raised in a strict religious environment. She rebelled against that in her teen years and left home at eighteen to pursue a career in nursing. My dad was raised in a lower class, rough and tumble home. His father and older brother were away at

war for a chunk of my dad's childhood and he was left to roam freely by a loving, yet overtaxed mother. After his own period of rebellion, my dad settled into an apprenticeship as a carpenter and met my mom. During this time, my dad also had a profound conversion experience at a gospel crusade and accepted Jesus as his Saviour.

After they married and began to have children, it was important for my mom and dad to establish a solid faith foundation for their family so they found a Baptist church and put down roots. My two sisters and I were raised going to church each Sunday. If I were to highlight three traits that my parents demonstrated and instilled in their three children, they would be faith, love, and encouragement. The faith component I already described. Love was an interesting dynamic in our home as the words "I love you" were not spoken often but I never doubted the fact that my parents loved me and my sisters. My parents were also encouragers, almost to a fault. The good and the potential that they saw in their children almost led them to have blinders on to some of the reality of our limitations.

My dad was a coach. He spent over fifty years coaching women's fastball. He was a champion of the equality and athleticism of women long before it was in vogue. I spent a good part of my boyhood years at my dad's fastball games. I saw the way he engaged with his players. He was not only their coach, but an encourager and cheerleader. That is the same quality he brought to his role as a father. When I left my job as a school teacher to become a pastor, I was not only

leaving the safety and security of a reputable school board, I was also giving up benefits such as ten weeks of paid vacation time. When I became a youth pastor, my annual salary immediately decreased to two thirds of what I made as a teacher. That was huge when you consider that I had four young children at the time. My dad did not blink an eye and reiterated the sentiment that if God was in it, he would take care of me and my family.

I have always felt the love, encouragement and support of my parents. While my dad was working or volunteering in the community through coaching, my mom was the rock at home. They both instilled in me a sense of confidence and assuredness in myself and in God. In 2014, my dad died of a brain aneurism and I think of him every day, but his legacy of faith, love, and encouragement lives in me as I seek to be that same kind of encourager to my family and others around me.

Coach

It was predominantly because of my dad's influence that sports have been a significant part of my life. There is something about the activity, competition, and the role that each individual plays in the overall makeup of a team that connects deeply within me.

An integral part of ensuring a team's success is to have a really good coach. This is someone who is keenly aware of the needs and abilities of the players, extremely knowledgeable of the game plan, and laser-focused on the mission of the team. Throughout my years of involvement in sports, my

experience has been that the coach who achieves the most success is the one who can bring out the best in each player. He or she takes time to get to know the players on a personal level and can motivate and encourage them to play to their full potential. I have had a few coaches in my life who have really impacted me and compelled me to give the best that I had and as a result, I became a better player and person under their coaching. One of these people was my high school hockey coach. He regularly reminded us of our ability as players and the strength we had together as a team, not as individuals. I learned from him the power of a well spoken word of encouragement and what a good coach truly means to a team. That has had a profound impact on my life, especially as a pastor and preacher.

From the time I stood in the pulpit and preached my first sermon, I knew what my role was as a preacher. I was a coach and an encourager. In the act of preaching, my deepest passion and yearning was to proclaim the Word of God in a relevant and engaging manner that revealed the love, grace, and hope of Jesus to this congregation. I think this is why I resonated so much with Robert Reid's description of the "Encouraging Voice" (Reid 2006, 79) in his book, *The Four Voices of Preaching*. Reid suggests that "Encouraging Voice" preachers shape sermons in such a manner that listeners sense a renewed hope, a stronger faith, and a desire to take action. This is where I would equate the "Encouraging Voice" preacher to a coach. It goes back to the profound experiences I had in sports and the coaches and leaders I have experienced as a member of various athletic teams.

A coach encourages his/her team to buy into the game plan and utilize and refine their skills to work toward a common end goal. Similarly, a preacher, through his/her words and delivery, encourages the congregants to experience the Holy Spirit-empowered truth of God that brings awareness to an area of need in their lives and calls for some sort of response or action. The art of coaching involves a suitably trained and experienced person gathering a team of people around them and meticulously explaining – through words, images, or analogy – a set play, concept, or idea. The desired outcome is for the players to not just grasp it intellectually but to also be able to demonstrate it physically. Good coaching moves a player from the conceptual to the practical; that is, they can do what they have been taught. This continues to be my passion for preaching. I am the coach. My prayer is that through the words God gives me, the Spirit will move the congregation to demonstrate and live out the truths of the gospel in their daily lives.

Carolyn

Carolyn and I met in elementary school and our friendship started around our mutual love of sports. In the early days of our friendship, we discovered that Carolyn's grandparents lived on the same crescent as my family. There were many weekends when Carolyn would sleep at her grandparents' home and we would play together until the streetlights came on and we would have to retreat to our respective homes. It was in those days that our friendship really blossomed. We became best friends in our early teenage years.

Unbeknownst to me, Carolyn was beginning to have deeper feelings about our future together during this time. She was also raised in a Christian home and had a profound relationship with Jesus. One day, in our Grade 6 year, we were sitting in the same classroom and she swears that she heard a voice saying to her, “One day you will marry Paul McIlwraith.” She began to write notes to God about how we would one day be married and serve him together. She kept all of these notes and thoughts to herself for years. She prayed to God every day for me as I was experiencing a little bit of my own teenage rebellion. Our relationship changed on the May 24th long weekend of 1980. Carolyn and I were invited to a cottage for the weekend by some mutual friends. That Friday night, as everyone made their way to bed, we stayed up talking around the campfire. The tone of our conversation turned serious when we finally disclosed our true feelings to one another. We were seventeen and we were now officially a couple, after all these years.

Four years later, on June 9, 1984, we were married. Carolyn remains my best friend and greatest supporter to this day. We have had our difficult moments, as any married couple does, but she has faithfully walked with me through my vocational changes and encouraged me every step of the way. We pray together and live out our faith in honest and vulnerable ways with one another. We have travelled the world on mission trips together and maybe, most significant to me, I do not preach a sermon or give a talk without her being my first audience. I have learned to trust her God-given wisdom and intuition because there is no one who

knows my heart and my motivation as she does. She still hears God speak to her about our lives and our ministry, and when she has something to say to me about those things, I have learned to listen well and trust her implicitly. When I began to preach on a regular basis, Carolyn was convicted by the Holy Spirit that I should keep three things in mind when I preach: I should use scripture as my anchor, I should tell stories, and I should incorporate humour. These three things have become important components that I try to weave into my sermons each week.

Children

When Carolyn and I were married, we were still in university. We knew that it was not practical to begin having children at that time. That did not stop us from dreaming about our future family, however. Unfortunately, when the time came for us to actually start our family, we discovered that it did not happen as easily as we were led to believe. After a few years of trying to conceive, we went to a fertility clinic where we were diagnosed with unexplained infertility. This came as quite a shock but fortunately it was in a time when there were some options for us. In vitro fertilization (IVF) was providing many new opportunities for couples in our situation. With much thought and prayer, we decided to pursue a pregnancy through IVF and we also began the process of potentially adopting a child.

In early 1991, we made contact with a Filipino woman through a Christian women's organization. She was pregnant out of wedlock, facing deportation, and needed to give up her baby for adoption. Through a privately arranged adoption,

Carolyn and I were able to walk with this woman through her pregnancy and on the day she gave birth, June 14, 1991, we received the greatest gift another human being has ever given to us: our daughter, Leah. Carolyn and I were now parents. Over the course of the next five years, we added three more children to our family through IVF: our oldest son Scott and our twins Tess and D.J. Although the birth of any child is a miracle of God, we feel especially overwhelmed with gratitude and thanksgiving for the gift of these four treasured children that we call our own. Although parenting has brought its unique challenges and difficulties, our lives have been enriched because of each one of them.

At the time that we adopted Leah, our adoption case worker made the suggestion that because Leah was Filipino, it may be beneficial at some point in her life to take her to the Philippines so that she could have a connection to her ethnic roots. When she was eleven, the opportunity arose to take our entire family on a short-term mission trip to the Philippines. We travelled throughout the country for twenty days. It was in the Philippines that our family's heart for mission, service, and the poor was really birthed. In the subsequent years, we have traveled together and served God in places like Nicaragua, Ecuador, Africa, and Mexico.

In 2004, Carolyn established the charity Feed Love Change (FLC) International in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, which feeds and provides education for widows and orphans who have been impacted by HIV/AIDS. Currently two of our children are actively involved in this ministry with Carolyn. This exposure to

the poor and to different cultures of the world has also shaped my worldview and the way that I approach my role as a pastor and preacher. Most significantly, it has aligned my heart more and more to the heart of God and the mission of Jesus in the Gospels. God has a special affinity for the poor and I think that just may be what is missing in many of our North American suburban churches.

Teaching

Before I became a vocational preacher, I was a school teacher. I had never considered teaching as a viable profession for me when I was applying to universities. As I was leaving my high school on the last day of classes, I dropped by the office of my hockey coach. He was the one who suggested that I go into teaching. As my four-year undergraduate program was nearing a conclusion, with my high school teacher's words still ringing in my ears, I applied to teacher's college. It was during the teaching practicums in teacher's college that I truly felt like I had found my calling in life. After I completed teacher's college, I was fortunate to be hired as a full-time teacher with my hometown school board and I began what I thought at the time would be a long and fulfilling career as a teacher in the public school system.

In the early days of my teaching career, I was drawn to the students who had experienced some difficulty in school. I enjoyed giving them a little more attention and seemed to be able to connect with them in a way that created a positive learning experience. In many of those situations, I was also involved with the parents of these students and some pretty difficult family situations. It was

through these experiences, and a developing passion I had for caring for the holistic needs of students, that I began to take courses to get credentialed as a school guidance counsellor. After my certification, I was hired as a teacher/guidance counsellor at an elementary school that had just opened in Waterloo. It was a position that I held for six years. My new role combined two areas, teaching and care, that I felt were in the personal sweet spot of my gifts and strengths. At the time, I never could have imagined that God would use these gifts by calling me into full time vocational ministry as a preacher.

Early Church Influences

I have been attending church services my whole life. My early recollection of the sermon was that it was something to be endured. I was raised in a Baptist church and the preaching style in my childhood may best be described as “hellfire and brimstone.” In this style of preaching, God is portrayed as a perpetually angry, wrathful, and vengeful God. This created in me a real fear of God.

In my childhood years, my family used to go to a Christian campground in the summer. Along with the plethora of activities including golf, tennis, baseball, and swimming, there were also daily devotions, chapel times, and Sunday night Christian movies. It was at one of these Sunday night movies that I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. I was eleven years old at the time. The movie was entitled “A Thief in the Night.” It was about a young woman who awakens one morning to discover that millions of people have suddenly disappeared and the rapture has occurred. Included among the missing, are her family. She is the only

one who had been left behind. This movie terrified me. I did not want to be the only member of my family left behind if the rapture occurred so I accepted Jesus right then and there. It was a decision prompted mostly by fear.

In my high school years, I started attending another Baptist church with a friend. It was here that for the very first time I sat under a preacher who spoke as if the Bible and the God whom the Bible revealed were applicable to my life. I actually felt as though I could apply what I was learning on Sunday mornings to the rest of my week. This preacher had a sense of humour and used personal anecdotes and illustrations to solidify and reinforce his weekly teaching. I was stunned one Sunday when he referred to a television situational comedy show that was popular at that time. I did not think that preachers would be watching the same television programming as me. It was also at this time that I was taught what author Dallas Willard refers to as the “Gospel of Sin Management” (Willard 1998, 35). In this rendering of the gospel of Jesus Christ, sin is seen as humanity’s main problem and the cure is the death and resurrection of Jesus. By believing and praying a personal prayer to ask Jesus to forgive your sins and invite him into your heart, you have forgiveness for these sins, a new life in him, and heaven one day when you die. At the time, this was my understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Much of the emphasis of the teaching and mission of this church was to convert people to Christianity through this gospel of sin management. This may be a worthy goal but it did create a bit of a judgmental overtone in the church. There was a real dichotomy between those in the church and those in the world.

In my early twenties, now a married man and establishing a life with my wife, we set out to find a church that had a practical, applicable preaching style. After several weeks of searching, we arrived one Sunday morning at a Mennonite Brethren church. In his sermon, the preacher quoted *Sports Illustrated* magazine and at that moment I knew we had found our church home. It wasn't just that this pastor was aware of the culture around him but that he also mixed wonderful biblical teaching with a way to actually live it out in our day-to-day lives. He did not separate church and culture but pointed out a way to blend the two and still be an effective witness for the love and hope of Jesus in the world.

The Mennonite Brethren denomination is known for its emphasis on love, nonresistance, and acts of social justice. Sitting under this preaching during my younger adult years had a profound impact on my life and my theology. I began to see a different image of God than I had understood from my childhood days. The God of judgment and wrath was replaced by a God of love and grace. I was learning about the unconditional love of a God who stopped at nothing to redeem humanity. It was in this church, and under this theology and style of preaching, that my personal faith began to grow. I also experienced the call of God for the first time. This call was to step out of the pews and into a full-time vocational role as the youth pastor. Although I detailed the circumstances around this call earlier in this paper, I neglected to fully unpack the insecurity that has followed me throughout my various roles as a pastor.

God Called, I Answered: No. Yes

I grew up in a faith tradition where the pastors wore robes to preach. Beneath their robes, they wore suits. In fact, every place I encountered my pastor, he was wearing a suit. My childhood pastor stood in front of a large pulpit and used words and expressions I didn't quite understand. His prayers were lengthy yet eloquent, and his preaching was simply a longer version of his prayers. Even when he greeted us in the foyer of the church after a service, there was just something about him that seemed so lofty. He seemed detached from the world. I couldn't picture my pastor immersed in the same pain, sorrow, and temptations that I confronted each day. In my mind, he was immune to these sorts of human shortcomings because he was a pastor. I just assumed that he lived at the church and had God on his side and each week tried to give those of us struggling on the journey of life a breath of hope or a little guilt.

I never would have pictured myself a pastor because I just wasn't good enough. Sure, I could serve in some capacity in the church but the role of a pastor was reserved for those who were trained and qualified. My call into full-time ministry took me by surprise. I was a school teacher and a guidance counsellor. I never dreamed of, or intended to do, anything else. But when I sat on the youth pastor search committee at my church and was involved in the crafting of the role and job description, it just seemed to fit my personality, experience, and gift mix. Everyone around me could see it as plain as day. The last holdout was me. That is why the six words, "God called, I answered: No. Yes", describe my situation so

well. God definitely called. I could sense it and those around me verified it but I fought it. In fact, I said “No” to God at first. I just couldn’t get my head around what I had perceived a pastor to be. I didn’t think I was it. In my discussions with the search committee at the time, I even countered that I would accept the role if they changed the title from Youth Pastor to Director, but that was not an option. Eventually I relented and said “Yes” and accepted the position but I did not refer to myself as a pastor for a long time.

The first sermon I ever preached came just a month into my newfound vocation. It was the Labour Day weekend of 1997. It was the same weekend that British Princess Diana was killed in a car crash. I remember that weekend well. Our senior pastor had declared that all other staff members were to be away so I got the short straw. I was to make my debut as a preacher. As a former school teacher, I had spent a lot of time speaking to groups of people but this was a completely different circumstance. I was to stand in the place in the pulpit where those preachers of my childhood stood, with their robes and suits. I was not worthy of that position. I tried to back out of it. God called. I answered, “No.” But eventually I relented and said, “Yes.” Something happened that weekend. I was affirmed in my preaching. In fact, a person came up to me after the service and stated that I just seemed to have “it.” By “it” I now know that they were referring to that sometimes-intangible quality that radiates from a person who is operating out of their sweet spot and gifting. It is the sense that they were made to do exactly what they are doing.

In my twenty-three years of pastoring, I have had more than a few experiences of “God called. I answered: No. Yes.” Almost always, my initial hesitation was rooted in a deep sense of unworthiness that goes back to my childhood understanding of the role of a pastor and the feeling that I was not good enough. It has only been in the last seven years that I have finally found some peace in knowing it is not all about me. As I have gained a deeper sense of God and who I am in him, I have found fulfillment and contentment in knowing that he made me to be a teacher and he has placed me in the local church to use that gift. I have found rest in my sweet spot and spend a lot less time trying to convince myself that I am worthy to stand in the pulpit and much more time inviting God to use me to be his instrument for proclaiming his Word to the world. I really resonate with this comment in David Benner’s book, *The Gift of Being Yourself*: “Our calling is therefore the way of being that is both best for us and best for the world” (Benner 2004, 88). My prayer more and more is that when God calls me into new opportunities, I don’t default to a “No” right away but rest in his promises and provision for my life, knowing that if he calls, he will also give me everything I need.

Community Care

Shortly after I accepted the call to be the youth pastor at our church, the senior pastor resigned. We were a growing church of about 1,000 attendees on a Sunday morning and now we were left with four full-time pastors to carry on with the day-to-day operations. We had many gaps at this time but perhaps the biggest

hole was in the area of care. We did not have a strategy or the personnel to ensure that adequate care of our community was occurring. Whenever a crisis came up, it was handled by whomever was deemed to have the most margin in their schedule that week. What became obvious during this time was either I was the one who always seemed to have the most margin, or I just made the time, but I was usually able to accommodate the care needs. Perhaps it goes back to my discovery in my teaching days of my love and gifting for teaching and care but I found myself drawn to those situations that required a listening ear. There was nothing that I loved more than sitting with a person going through a difficult time, hearing their story, and then speaking some words of encouragement or hope into their life. I seemed to come alive in those circumstances and was positively reinforced for the help I was able to offer.

I had many opportunities to care for people throughout the two years that our church was in transition without a senior leader. In fact, by the time we did hire a senior pastor, the recommendation was that I move from my role as the youth pastor to the role of community care pastor at the church. This transition met with the approval of everyone but me. I was initially hesitant because I didn't want to leave the youth and the close connection I had established with them. Once again God paved the way and eventually I relented and joyfully stepped into place as the new community care pastor. Unbeknownst to me at the time, it would be this role that would serve as the ideal training ground that would develop me as a public speaker and preacher. In my three years as the community care pastor, I

officiated almost eighty funerals and weddings. It was the preparation and delivery of these unique funeral and wedding meditations that really prepared me for the preparation and delivery of the many sermons I was to deliver in the next phase of my vocational journey.

Lead Pastor

I am not sure that anyone gets into ministry to rise through the ranks. It certainly wasn't on my radar when I accepted the call to be a youth pastor. I never for a moment thought that one day I would become the lead pastor of a church. Unfortunately, it was a negative series of events that led to me being asked if I would accept the position of lead pastor at my church. We had gone through a season of growth and our elder board very much desired to get a dynamic preacher who would continue to draw the crowds. After a season of discernment, a man was hired who met this requirement. He was truly gifted to preach and people continued to attend and the numbers grew quickly but internally things were in disarray. This man was not able to lead a staff team well. Eventually he was challenged by the elders for his lack of nurturing of his staff but their concerns fell on deaf ears. In the end, the elders asked for this man's resignation and the whole matter left a considerable strain on the church.

As the community care pastor at this time, I was brought into many conversations and meetings between the differing factions that arose because of this situation. It was not a good time for those of us who were seeking to proclaim the good news of Jesus to a watching world. Our witness was tarnished somewhat

by the disunity in our pews. Once the dust had settled, the chair of the elders' board requested a meeting with me. He asked if I would consider stepping into the role of lead pastor of the church. It seems that the elders had noticed that, in the midst of the chaos of our situation, people looked to me for support and leadership. This rather unfortunate situation had revealed the true leader of the church and in the eyes of the elders that leader was me. They believed that God was calling me to be the next lead pastor. Of course, I initially responded the way that I had to the other calls God has made on my life. I said, "No." God called and I said "No" again. Personal experience had taught me that I had to at least take this one away and think and pray about it and invite others close to me to pray about it as well. In no way did I feel qualified for this new role. After a time of discernment with Carolyn and others, I accepted the offer from the elders to be the lead pastor. So began a journey that would last over nine years.

Assuming the role of lead pastor did not just mean that I would now be overseeing staff, buildings, and finances, but it also meant that I would be the primary preacher at the church. It was a steep learning curve as I had never taken a homiletics course in my life but once again I was encouraged in this role and my years of experience as a teacher seemed to have prepared me to hold an audience's attention. I was also in the midst of studying for a Master's degree from Tyndale University that was growing my confidence in theological matters. Surprisingly, considering that I do lean toward introverted tendencies, I seemed to

come alive in the preaching. In fact, among all of my responsibilities as the lead pastor, it was the preaching role that seemed to fit me best.

Those 9½ years as a lead pastor taught me so much about leadership and myself. I went through some difficult times with staffing issues, budget constraints, and congregational concerns but they were years of intense personal growth that shaped who I am today and what I bring into the preaching role each week. Ultimately what prompted me to make the decision to leave the role as lead pastor was not dissatisfaction or discouragement. I simply felt that during the next season of my life, I wanted to operate more out of my sweet spot. After some personal time of reflection and discernment, following 15½ years of full-time vocational ministry at the same church, I felt deeply that God was bringing me back to teaching and care. I submitted my resignation as the lead pastor to my elder board and joyfully looked forward to what God had in store for me. As only God can orchestrate, a position opened for me at a new church as the full-time teaching pastor who also oversees the care ministry. That is the role I hold at this time.

Preaching Identity

As I reflect back on all of these life experiences, I have come to the profound realization that God has been leading me to this role I hold now, that of a preacher/teacher in the local church. Sometimes it has been a straight line; more often than not it has been a journey with many ups and downs and detours along

the way. All of my past, present, and future experiences have and will continue to shape my worldview and the theological lens that I bring into my message preparation and delivery each week. To date, my personal preaching identity has been over fifty-five years in the making.

In this section of this chapter, I will describe some specific aspects of preaching that I have gleaned from the courses I have taken and the literature I have read on the topic. I will also include learnings from some of my personal experiences with preaching and some attributes of this task that I value at this point in my ministry life. The content of this section has been significant in helping me to establish a personal theology of preaching. That is what the last section of this chapter will demonstrate.

What Is Preaching?

Each week, millions of North Americans will gather in churches or places of worship and they will, among other activities, listen to a sermon, a compilation of thoughts and musings from a lone orator. What sets a sermon apart from any other speech or talk is that it is a theological act. Preaching is our attempt to “do business with a God who speaks. It is also a theological act in that a sermon is God’s attempt to do business with us through words” (Willimon 2005, 2).

Preaching is different from most other acts of communication in that the speaker dares to speak of God but, perhaps even more startling, the preacher also dares to speak for God. The authority of the office of the preacher is ultimately granted by the authority of the Bible, the inspired Word of God. Preachers speak because

God spoke to his creation through his Word and the God who speaks has a claim on our lives. As his created beings, God preordained that, through word and deed, humanity would proclaim and bear witness to his glory. In preaching, sin-stained mere mortals give testimony to the infinite, all-powerful and sovereign Lord. Such a concept would seem ludicrous if it was not for the fact that it was God who set out the task. In a letter to his young pastor protégé Timothy, the Apostle Paul exhorts him with this God-given task. “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2, NIV). With this in mind, those who preach should see preaching as the ultimate act of humility and mystery.

So what is preaching? In his book *The Witness of Preaching*, Thomas Long put it this way: “To preach is to join our human words with the word that God in Christ in the power of the Spirit is already speaking to the church and to the world, and to speak in Christ’s name is to claim Christ’s own promise, ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me’” (Long 2016, 18). Preaching is not the business of prognosticating about the nature of God and his activity in the world. To preach is not to speculate or even colour commentate the ways and the will of God. To preach is to declare. It is to bear witness to the work of God in our lives and in the world. Preachers speak because God has spoken and has given us his Word. J. I. Packer defined preaching as “the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction from Himself through the words of a spokesperson” (Meyer 2013, 331). This

reaffirms the idea of God speaking his Word through his chosen instruments, men and women, to proclaim his message and call people to himself.

In the Gospel of Mark's rendering of what has become known as the Great Commission, Jesus exhorts his disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15, NIV). In the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he states that Christ has given his followers certain spiritual gifts, among them the gift to teach. Preachers are to preach and teach the Word of God and Paul reinforces the importance of using this gift when he exclaims to the Corinthians, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16, NIV). Finally, in his letter to the Romans, Paul asks his listeners how anyone can hear about the good news of Jesus without someone preaching to them (Romans 10:14, NIV). These passages serve to emphasize how significant it is for those who are gifted and called to preach to fulfill that mandate.

The office of preaching and the position of the preacher are reinforced all throughout scripture. The purpose of preaching is significant for the gospel of Jesus Christ to go out into the world. The preacher is commissioned and empowered by God to speak because God has spoken and the purpose of preaching is to remain faithful to this call to glorify God and reveal this glory to his created beings. The act of preaching is more than just standing up and talking about the bible, however. It is about finding your unique voice based on your gifts and calling and then determining a theology or model of preaching that best represents who you are and what you believe.

The Mystery of Preaching

There is a certain mystery to preaching. Preachers come from among the people, from the midst of congregational life, not outside of them, and they should be well versed in the language and the lives of the congregants. No thoughtful, humble person can stand in front of a community of Jesus followers and not be overwhelmed by the sense of responsibility and privilege it is to proclaim and publicly bear witness to the acts and character of the all-powerful God. Darrell Johnson captures this idea well when he states, “Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend. To stand up to preach is to stand in a mystery” (Johnson 2009, 224). The preacher’s job is to be obedient to the call of God on his life and the rest is up to God. Perhaps that is the mystery. The work of God through His spirit is what gives wind and power to the spoken word and conviction to the listening ears of the congregants. Willimon puts it like this, “Our job as preachers is to stand up and speak the truth as God gives it to us; congregational response is God’s business” (Willimon 2005, 22).

Something happens to the Word as it leaves the preacher’s mouth and then reaches the listener’s ear. I can preach at three separate services each weekend and the sermon sounds different for each congregation. A sermon that leaves me gobsmacked can fall on deaf ears and a message that appears to be mediocre to me can find receptive hearts. Later in the week, I can get a note of encouragement from someone who has been left enraptured by the past weekend’s sermon and I have already moved on. There is more at work in a sermon than any preacher can

even say. Barbara Taylor puts it this way: “Preaching is finally more than art or 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 the preacher and congregation alike, as the ordinary details of their everyday lives are translated into the extraordinary elements of God’s ongoing creation” (Taylor 1993, 91).

Preaching is alchemy. What a wonderful metaphor. Alchemy is the transformation of matter. When the preacher steps into the pulpit, we can count on one undeniable fact: wherever God’s Word is, God is. He is at work loosening our tongues, tuning our ears, thawing our hearts, and transforming our lives. It is a mystery.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit that sets preaching apart from any other form of oration. The preacher is not alone in the pulpit. To believe that the preaching of the Word of God is one of the main pathways that God uses to grow and transform his people is to believe that God will show up in the study and preparation and that God’s Spirit will work in the delivery to convict hearts and change lives. This is why the imagery used by the preacher Ian Pitt-Watson is so appropriate when he states that sermons are more “born” than they are “constructed” (Watson 1986, 10). The crafting of a good sermon takes hours of work and sometimes years of experience. A preacher can construct a good sermon under his own power but what turns a sermon into something great is the work of the Spirit birthing a word into the heart of his spokesperson and then empowering

those words through the presentation. Perhaps author and preacher Mary Hulst captures this sentiment best when she said that the preacher's calling "is to preach Christ and him crucified, and trust that the Holy Spirit will do the rest" (Hulst 2016, 113).

Preaching the Bible

To preach Christ is to preach the Word of God, the Bible. After his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus encountered two of his followers. The Gospel of Luke describes the exchange between Jesus and these men. At a certain point in their conversation, Jesus declared that all scripture points to him; "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27, NIV). Jesus is revealed all throughout scripture and the preacher's main responsibility is to open up the text and demonstrate how it leads to Jesus. This only comes about if the preacher himself is immersed in God's Word and views scripture not just as a rule book but as a living stream by which he receives refreshment and nourishment for his own soul. The task of preaching is not just that the preacher exegetes scripture but that scripture exegetes the preacher. The Bible questions us first and then we question the Bible. Author Todd Billings summarizes this idea more succinctly when he says, "The Bible is the instrument of the triune God to shape believers in the image of Christ, in word and deed, by the power of the Spirit, transforming a sinful and alienated people into children of a loving Father" (Billings 2010, 199).

Just as a preacher goes to the text with their own perspective and filter, they also carry with them the needs and concerns of their congregation. The text exegetes the preacher as they exegete the text but the responsibilities go beyond personal interest and transformation. The preacher brings the weight of their community before Jesus. To step into the pulpit and preach the Word of God to a community of people means that the preacher has to know the people and the culture they are immersed in every day. The more intimately a preacher knows their flock, the more in tune and focused their thinking will be when they come to scripture. The preacher is one who comes from within the community of faith. The deeper their connection and relationship with this community, the more fully they understand their congregants' joys and sorrows, hopes and dreams, and even their brokenness and disappointments. The richer the relationship, the more in touch the preacher is with their faithful obedience to the mission of Christ. This knowledge and understanding allow the preacher to come to the text and shape a sermon that, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will not just be heard by the listeners but also acted upon.

Preaching and Personal Perspective

Preaching is the most public act of ministry but behind the scenes are many interactions between a pastor and his parishioners. There is little doubt that the countless conversations about faith, doubt, fear, and sadness inevitably feed into the weekly sermons. "Preaching and pastoral care go hand in hand" (Hulst 2016, 111). William Willimon supports this idea by saying that as preachers "Our

pastoral care and pastoral visitation among our people is thus related to our preaching. The Christian faith is never some disembodied spiritual affair” (Willimon 2005, 60).

It was American Episcopal preacher Phillips Brooks who declared that preaching is “truth through personality” (Johnson 2009, 173). Preachers are the vessels through which God has determined to send forth his Word but these vessels have their own distinct strengths, personalities, and life experiences that have shaped them. In his book *The Witness of Preaching*, Thomas Long explores this idea a little deeper. He states that ministers tend to have an overarching idea of who they are as they do the work of ministry and this may prompt them to emphasize some aspects of their work and minimize others. Long finds this idea to be especially true with preachers. “When a preacher delivers a sermon, that act is embedded in some larger framework of ministerial self-understanding” (Long 2016, 19). Homiletical scholars have narrowed down the images that describe both the preacher’s nature and the preaching event to four main metaphors. They are: the preacher as the herald, the preacher as pastor, the preacher as storyteller/poet and, the preacher as witness (Long 2016, 19). Most preachers appear to fall into one of these four categories. It is their perspective or nature which they bring to the preaching task that influences the way in which the Word of God goes forth.

As I have pondered these four metaphors, I have determined that I am often the “pastor.” I preach predominately to the needs and concerns of the

listeners. I am also discovering that I am a storyteller. I intentionally seek to intersperse, throughout my expository preaching, personal anecdotes and illustrations. I share stories of my own life and the way that God challenges me. I observe culture and share stories of the world around me to strengthen a point. I am a prolific reader and stockpile stories or anecdotes I come across that could enrich future sermons. I preach with a pastor's heart and a storyteller's creativity and I always seek to point to Jesus.

Preaching and Engaging the Culture

Just as the life of a preacher is lived out in the context of a community of faith, with their litany of needs, concerns, and broken lives, so also a preacher does not live isolated from their culture. Unless he chooses to seek refuge in the desert or the vacant clefts of the hills like some of the spiritual forefathers, a preacher's life is immersed in the prevailing culture of his setting. His life cannot help but be impacted by the setting and the environment in which God has placed him. It was Swiss theologian Karl Barth who is credited with saying that preachers need to preach with "the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other" (Johnson 2009, 201). It may be suggested that in our twenty-first century, North American context, this adage could be expanded to include that a preacher preach with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other but also be logged onto social media feeds such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. In days gone by, pastors discouraged worldly influences such as television, movies, and

concerts for their parishioners but today preachers need to engage the perilous tightrope walk between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world.

Preachers need to view movies, listen to music, read contemporary literature, attend concerts and sporting events, watch political debates and volunteer in the community to help to interface with the world so that they can speak words that connect people to the hope of the Kingdom of God. I have intentionally volunteered as a coach and manager of my children's sports teams through the years. I take a shift at a downtown soup kitchen once a month. I scan three newspapers every day and hold three nonreligious magazine subscriptions. My wife and I invite our neighbours into our home for meals and special events. All of this is for the purpose of getting to know my culture and my community.

It is important that preachers know the concerns and worries of the people of their culture and the challenges that they face. By engaging instead of shunning the culture around them, preachers are suitably informed as they read and study the text for the sermon that week. Mary Hulst puts it succinctly when she writes, "To preach for your context is to take what you know about your congregation and read the text through their eyes" (Hulst 2016, 103). Preaching to engage the culture is important but care must be taken to ensure that the act of preaching does not become more about pleasing the masses, than honouring God.

Preaching and the Pressure To Be "Good"

In this age of the internet and connectivity, people can access a church website or a sermon podcast in mere seconds. In lieu of physically attending a

service, users can enjoy a virtual spiritual experience through any number of churches, large and small, scattered throughout Canada, the United States, or other parts of the globe through a live-streamed church service. If it is just preaching they want, that too can be accessed and downloaded across all denominational lines and methodologies. A seemingly boring preaching topic at the home church can be avoided by staying in the comfort of your own home and logging into a message delivered by the likes of Bruxy Cavey, Andy Stanley, Joyce Meyers, or Steven Furtick.

There is an insidious pressure that faces preachers today in the local church like no other era before them: competition. There is this perceived pressure to be very good. It is the pressure to be entertaining, biblically inspiring, and consoling all rolled into one thirty-minute sermon. Today even the smallest of churches are posting their preacher's sermons online, which increases the reach of the gospel but also brings the risk of comparison and dissatisfaction. One blunder in the pulpit is no longer contained to those in the service on that particular day but it fans out into the vacuous spaces of the worldwide web. This may not be all bad. It does prompt the preacher to do all within his skills and talents to prepare a thoughtful and compelling sermon and to realize the importance of the task at hand and not to grow lazy. It can also motivate a preacher to take time to augment his preaching material with relevant stories and illustrations that are applicable to the congregants' lives. As Karl Barth is credited with saying, "if there is one thing worse than being a nonbiblical preacher it was being a boring one" (Willimon

2005, 32). Preachers must not be boring but they must never forget that the act of preaching is a theological matter before it is a human matter.

This perceived pressure to be good can also lead to an internal battle between what author David Benner describes as our true and false self. When you stand before a gathered audience each week, there is this temptation in the human spirit to get our worth and value through other people. Basil Bennington suggests, “The core of false self is the belief that my value depends on what I have, what I can do and what others think of me” (Benner 2004, 74). One of the trustworthy clues that a person is living in their false self is defensiveness.

I do not accept criticism well. In fact, criticism for me is tied into being liked, accepted, and measuring up to some standard I have for myself. For whatever reason, criticism is a trigger that says to me, “I am not good enough, I am not measuring up, and you must not like me if you are being critical of something I have said or done.” It is a defensive posture. As you can imagine, this one has played havoc with me as a preacher in a larger church. There are potentially 1,400 critics of every sermon I preach. I have been subjected to some harsh and unfair comments that have hurt me. So, one of my coping strategies is to not intentionally or purposefully invite critique of my sermons because I am protecting my false self that struggles with the insecurity of not feeling “good enough” to even be a preacher.

Often times I have felt like a pretender in the pulpit. This is one of the lies my false self tells me often in my role as a preacher. Unfortunately, my aversion

to criticism has also stunted my growth because I have limited any form of critique, which in some cases could have been legitimate for my improvement as a preacher. I am also a “doer” and perhaps that is why Bennington’s statement about the false self being wrapped up in “what I have, what I can do, and what others think of me” struck a chord with me (Benner 2004, 74). One of my mantras in life is “hard work always pays off,” and it is fine to want to work hard but I have been pondering lately my motivation for working hard. Unfortunately, I have to confess that more often than not I want my hard work to be noticed but there is a lot of pride mixed in with that mindset.

I also struggle with areas of vulnerability. I tend to keep everyone but my wife at an arm’s length in my life. I can preach about the Christian’s need to be transparent and the importance of being in community with others but I struggle with it myself. The truth is that I spend a good part of my life hiding, putting up barriers, or running from vulnerability, all so I can maintain control. Control is a big part of my false self. I feel safer and empowered when I hold the reins to my life. Anything that messes with my control is a threat as it takes me to a place of vulnerability which is difficult for me. I feel a lot of pressure as a pastor to be a certain way. I have to live a certain way. I have to be perfect. I fall short of this self-imposed standard many times but the false self kicks in, pride takes over, and I package myself in a way that projects an image or persona that I can control. This is in tension with the authentic self that I really want to display to others. I have found that discussing this with a good Christian counsellor has helped me.

My life continues to be a work in progress. I do struggle with false self issues such as pride, competitiveness, criticism, vulnerability, and control but as I age and gather life experience, I seem to be throwing caution to the wind and allowing my true self to shine forth more often. The only way that we can discover our true identities is by losing ourselves to God.

As I mentioned, I stand before about 1,400 people every week. That has its drawbacks with potential criticism and negativity but it can also be an ego inflator. There are many in our congregations who bestow too much credit and adulation upon the person standing at the front. As I have processed this over the years and engaged God in this tension, I have come to pray a little prayer just before I step to the pulpit each week: “Dear God, I serve an audience of one today. It is you. Use me for your good purposes and to preach your Word for your glory and not my own.” I find that this regular prayer reinforces my true self as I remember that it is God who created me and gifted me and any good that comes from my preaching is because of him.

More and more, I desire to be true to the gifts God has given me and to use them for the purpose he has for me, in the place he has called me to be. I rest more in the idea that God is my defender even against criticism or gossip that I cannot control. He will protect me much more than my controlling tendencies can. Over the past twenty-three years, I have been a pastor in charge of four different ministry areas in two separate churches. I have felt the call of God vocationally four times and on three of those occasions my initial response to God was “No.” I

said “No” to God. Oh, we worked it out but it was only in his last call that I can say that I was fully submissive to God’s timing and placement. This is a true indicator that I am beginning to settle more into a sense of my true identity as I trust completely in where and why God is leading and guiding me. I don’t have to worry about being good enough and instead trust that he will provide, specifically in my role as a preacher.

Preaching Versus Teaching

I have an undergraduate degree from a teacher’s college, which means that I was taught to teach. I was a school teacher for ten years in the public school system. Teaching is a respected and noble profession and I was always proud to declare that I was a teacher. I envisioned preaching a little differently. As was stated earlier, my attitude toward preaching was fostered at a young age. In my mind, preaching was a type of emotional rant and rave that I had to endure through my childhood days. It was almost as if I held on each Sunday to get through it and withstand the avalanche of condemnation that was greasing its delivery. I also saw God as vengeful and angry during this time because the preacher always seemed to be so perturbed talking about him. Perhaps it was because of this early negative view of preaching that I have seemed to distance myself from this descriptor for a large part of my pastoral career. In fact, I insisted on being called a “teaching” pastor rather than a “preacher” when I was hired for my current role. I spend 75 percent of my time preaching but did not like the

baggage that seemed to be attached to the word. Perhaps it was merely my own baggage.

My subtitle for this section, *Preaching versus Teaching*, sets up the wrong paradigm from the onset. Preaching and teaching are not necessarily opposites or even in opposition to each other. They may be on the same spectrum, just at different ends. In the middle would be a balance between preaching and teaching. Many explanations have been given as to the difference between preaching and teaching. Some have the opinion that preaching appeals to the heart of listeners and thus inspires them to take action on what they have heard. Conversely, teaching appeals to the mind and gives practical steps on how to do something. For example, if a preacher was delivering a message on prayer, preaching it would inspire a person to want to pray but teaching it would give the listener practical steps on how to actually begin to develop a life of prayer. Some other differences between preaching and teaching could include: preaching is fiery and boisterous and teaching is calm and methodical; preaching is prophetic and personal and teaching is based on biblical exegesis; preaching is topical and teaching is systematic; preaching is simplistic and teaching is more complex; preaching is revelation and teaching is information.

All of these ideals have their positive and negatives, but the one that I most identify with is the notion that preaching is proclaiming. It is about heralding and announcing the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially to those who have not heard it before, whereas teaching is explaining the gospel so that people can understand

and live in light of it. Preaching is proclaiming and teaching is explaining. That seems to be the main difference in the two different forms of speaking. Ideally it would seem a good preacher would also include elements of teaching in his delivery of a sermon and a good teacher would include elements of preaching in his delivery.

In the book of Acts in the New Testament, after the apostles were beaten by the Jewish authorities for defying the law, they were released. We are told in the text, "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 5:42, NIV). The apostles both taught and proclaimed, or preached, the good news. This seems to be a model to follow in our praxis today, although the distinction between preaching and teaching was not always clear even in the New Testament. Sometimes people spoke interchangeably about preaching and teaching. For example, in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas are described as having "taught and preached the word of the Lord" (Acts 15:35, NIV). There may be a closer connection between these two oratory styles than we care to admit. Upon closer introspection, I have come to the conclusion that there is a definite blend and overlap between the preaching and teaching components in my weekly messages. I am a proclaimer and an encourager. I love to motivate people and appeal to their hearts so that they are convicted to do something with the text that I have preached. Perhaps that is why the Missional movement that is described next, has had such an impact on my preaching.

Missional Movement and the Benediction

About ten years into my ministry, when I was a lead pastor and primary preacher in my church setting, I read a book that helped shaped the next season of my preaching ministry. It was called *The Tangible Kingdom*, written by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay (Halter and Smay 2008). It was my first exposure to the “missional” movement in the evangelical church. The missional movement gained popularity in the Christian church in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and it was predicated on the concept that each follower of Jesus has a very real part to play in ushering in the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven. The task of spreading the gospel was not just relegated to the trained, professional clergy and missionaries. During this time, I came to understand in a greater way that our actions really do matter and that all Christians are missionaries wherever God has placed us in the world.

Halter and Smay contend that the little tweaks we make to a church service don't matter very much. Whether it is louder music or better lighting or offering cappuccinos in the lobby, these frills are not what is going to draw people to church in our North American culture today. What is more important is that “Church should be what ends up happening as a natural response to people wanting to follow us, be with us, and be like us as we are following the way of Christ” (Halter and Smay 2008, 30). It was this emphasis on the way that we live each day as followers of Jesus that really prompted me, at this stage of my preaching ministry, to see the importance of the benediction in the weekly service.

Final words are important. The benediction at the end of the sermon is one of the most important moments in the service. It is a time where I intentionally use words of commission and encouragement. It is a chance for the preacher, the “coach,” to issue some final words. It is the rallying cry, to motivate the team to now go into the places where God has placed them and put into action all that he is doing in their lives. That is what a good coach does, prepares the players well in practice so that they are adequately equipped to play the game. It is at the benediction in a religious service when a blessing is bestowed upon the congregation. In fact, the English word “benediction” has Latin roots: *bene* means “good” and *diction* means “words.” “To give a benediction is to speak good words” (Cherry 2010, 114). My readings about the missional movement have prompted me to take the benediction much more seriously in my preaching. It is no longer a flippant goodbye. It is an opportunity to speak “good words” over the congregation. It is a holy moment when I can bless the church to go out into their week, and to the mission field where God has placed them, to be a blessing to those he puts into their lives. The benediction remains a sacred moment in my weekly preaching task.

As important as the benediction and the sending are to the congregation, it is imperative that they are also encouraged to implement some sort of daily connection with God through spiritual disciplines. This is something that I was lacking for years but have found it to be crucial in my role as a preacher.

S.O.A.P.: Immersed in Scripture

Early on in my tenure as the lead pastor, I experienced a bit of a crisis of time management. I was a little overwhelmed with how to fit all the responsibilities I had in my role into a single day. One of the areas that concerned me the most was the lack of daily quiet time when I could get alone with God. Around this time, I attended a conference and a speaker read off a list of statistics related to pastors. One of the stats was deeply convicting to me. He stated that 70 percent of pastors say that the only time they spend studying the Bible is when they are preparing their sermons. Unfortunately, that was true of my life at the time. Most of my time reading the Bible was for preparing my sermon. I did not have any sustained daily devotional rhythm in my life and, as busy as I appeared to be, I was convicted that I must not scrimp in this area of my life.

A short time later, I attended a mentoring conference and we started each day as a group, with a daily devotional program that the host pastor used and implemented into his broader church congregation. It was called the S.O.A.P. method. It was an acronym for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. The host pastor also distributed a Bible reading plan for a year. The Bible passages were divided in such a way that if you followed this reading program, every day for one year, you would read through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice. The idea of this daily devotional time was that you read through the assigned Bible passage for that day and then on a journal page you write out the scripture (S) passage that impacted you most, any observations (O)

that you took note of in this scripture, a personal application (A) of this passage for your life, and a prayer (P) coming out of the reading.

The structure and routine of this S.O.A.P. method really resonated with me. Each morning of the conference, I faithfully completed the S.O.A.P. method in my daily devotional time and it began to stick. When I returned home, I taught it to my wife and many others in my church community. It has become my daily devotional routine every day since I first started on June 11, 2005. It would not be an overstating it to say that this S.O.A.P. devotional method has had one of the greatest impacts on my preaching to date. It has demonstrated to me the importance of a pastor being saturated in scripture as he approaches the task of preaching. Through this activity, my biblical knowledge has increased and I have come to see the Bible as a grand narrative. It is an unfolding story of God's love and redemption for his people from Genesis through to Revelation. It was also due to the influence and experience of this devotional program that I switched my model of preaching from mainly topical to now mostly expository preaching. My desire is for my congregation to have a deeper understanding of how the Bible all fits together as a bigger story. It is a story in which humanity is deeply immersed and connected to God. I now preach through whole books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, in the weekly services. It was in this spirit of continuing to grow and learn as a preacher that I discovered the writings and teachings of N. T. Wright that have challenged some of my theological thinking.

N. T. Wright and the Gospel

The gospel. This is an expression that is used often by evangelical Christians. What intrigues me most about this word is that if you were to ask people to define the “gospel,” most would stammer over their answer. For those who can piece together some semblance of a working definition, it is usually contained to these main points:

1. Humanity is sinful and therefore separated from God.
2. God sent his own son Jesus to earth to take on humanity’s sin. He was crucified on a cross and therefore our sins were put to death with him.
3. He was resurrected from the dead after three days.
4. For those who trust and believe in Jesus as their personal Saviour, our sins are wiped away, and we have a new and resurrected life with Jesus in heaven someday when we die.

As stated earlier in this paper, Dallas Willard described this as the “Gospel of Sin Management” (Willard 1998, 41). The height of the evangelistic movement that swept across Canada and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s conditioned a whole generation of preachers to a distinct operative theology and rendering of the gospel. Many were deeply influenced by the popularity of noted evangelists such as Billy Graham and tools such as the “Bridge” illustration that condenses the journey to personal salvation and the gospel to four steps. These four steps comprise: all of humanity has sinned, sin has a penalty, Christ paid the

penalty, and all must receive Christ to have assurance of salvation and eternal life. Unfortunately, this operative theology stated very little about how humanity was to live in light of the gospel.

In his book, *The Day the Revolution Began* (Wright 2016), noted Christian author and scholar N.T. Wright states that as early followers of Jesus looked back on the day of his crucifixion, especially in light of what happened in the days that followed shortly after, they came up with the shocking claim that his death had launched a revolution. On that darkened Friday evening as Jesus hung dead on the cross, the world became a different place. Jesus' followers believed that through the crucifixion, God had suddenly and dramatically put into operation his plan to save all of humanity and here is the clincher: God was going to utilize humanity in the plan.

Those who became Christians were also to be messengers or witnesses to usher in the Kingdom of God, wherever they went, through word and deed. Wright states that “The New Testament, with the story of Jesus' crucifixion at its centre, is about God's kingdom coming *on earth as it is in heaven*. That is, after all, what Jesus taught his followers to pray” (Wright 2016, 40).

This is what makes the mission of the Christian life so significant. We are saved for a purpose, not just for heaven. The “Gospel of Sin Management” and the “Bridge” illustration renderings of the gospel are important. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross those who believe in him are new creations but if we leave it there, we are only preaching a partial gospel. We cannot neglect the significance

of the witness of the saints to be agents of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is transformative when people hear good news, give their lives to Christ, receive healing and wholeness for their hearts, and experience freedom from the pain of living in a broken world. Jesus offers this to humanity so that we might know him and then make him known to others. Wright gives a holistic definition of what the good news of Jesus Christ really is in his book, *Simply Good News*. He writes,

“The good news is that *the living God is indeed establishing his kingdom on earth as in heaven, through the finished work of Jesus, and is inviting people of all sorts to share not only in the benefits of this kingdom but also in the work through which it will come to its ultimate completion.* To grasp that good news fully, or rather be grasped by it, will mean being turned inside out by it, so that our self-centered prayers (for help, for rescue, for forgiveness, and for bread) will turn into the God-centered prayer for God’s kingdom to come in God’s way” (Wright 2015, 164; italics in original).

This more comprehensive understanding of the gospel really resonates with me and it is reflected in the way that I preach and train and equip my congregation to live. Each week, I try to ensure that these elements of the good news of Jesus are reflected in my words and proclamation, and it all begins with ensuring that Jesus is at the centre of each sermon.

Personal Preaching Identity

Given the material laid out in this chapter and after careful reflection upon the course material, readings, personal contemplation and life experience, I would propose that my theology of preaching at this stage in my life is:

Preaching is a mysterious and Holy Spirit-empowered activity, humbly carried out by those from within the body of Christ, gifted and called to preach. Preachers should be immersed in scripture, the lives of those in their community of faith, and the culture of their world and are thus able to proclaim the Word of God in a relevant and engaging manner that reveals the love, grace, and hope of Jesus to their listeners. Preaching not only convicts hearts but compels lives to action. It mobilizes followers of Jesus from the intellectual to the incarnational. Preaching moves people from the seats on Sunday to the streets on Monday to practically live out the mission to be people sent by God to proclaim the good news of Jesus into the world.

Let me briefly explain how each one of the following components of my theology of preaching personally applies to me.

Preaching is a mysterious and Holy Spirit-empowered activity, humbly carried out by those from within the body of Christ, gifted and called to preach.

It has only been in the last ten years or so that I have truly accepted my call and gift to preach. The fact is, not everyone can preach. There are still days I struggle with insecurity in the pulpit. To some degree insecurity, or maybe better stated, humility, is the most significant aspect of preaching. We must realize that you cannot come to preach without knowing that you are wholly dependent on God and the Holy Spirit to see you through. There have been numerous times when I have come to sermon preparation on a Monday and drew a blank. By the time the

sermon is completed the next Sunday morning, I stand amazed that God shaped and formed what he wanted to say through me. It is indeed a mystery every week.

Preachers should be immersed in scripture, the lives of those in their community of faith, and the culture of their world and are thus able to proclaim the Word of God in a relevant and engaging manner that reveals the love, grace, and hope of Jesus to their listeners.

I am struck by the idea that preachers come from within the body of Christ. We are one of the congregation. The mentality of the celebrity preacher, especially within the megachurch movement today, implies that somehow the preacher is on a different level than the rest of the parishioners. This sets up a very dangerous dichotomy that is unhealthy for both the preacher and the congregation. It has to be understood that the preacher is on a journey of faith along with his congregation. That is why it is so important for me that I stay immersed in the lives of the people in my church.

Currently at my home church, where I have the title of Teaching Pastor, 75 percent of my time is devoted to study, planning, preparing, and delivering a sermon. Thankfully the other 25 percent of my time is designated for care. I have time to do pastoral care and counselling and engage my community in their deepest longings, concerns, doubts, and joys. This is the lens and perspective I take before God as I prayerfully discern and plan out sermons and sermon series. I must know the heartbeat of my community of faith. As a pastor in the local church, I regularly call my congregation into opportunities of service within the church. As someone who spends the majority of his weekly time in the church, I intentionally look for my opportunities to serve outside those walls and in the

community. I have found that my time spent volunteering with neighbourhood and community associations, coaching minor sports, and serving at community functions and with downtown aid organizations has enriched my understanding of the culture in which I live. It has taken me outside the “box” of the church and opened my eyes to the needs and concerns of those around me, particularly my neighbours. I feel this is essential for Christian preachers today. We do need to preach with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper, social media feed, or magazine in the other but, more than that, we need to actively search for opportunities to engage and listen to those in our community not connected to a church or to faith.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that homiletical scholars have narrowed down the images that describe both a preacher’s nature and the preaching event to four main metaphors. They are: the preacher as the herald, the preacher as pastor, the preacher as storyteller/poet and the preacher as witness (Long 2016, 19). I have determined that I preach with a pastor’s heart and a storyteller’s creativity and I always seek to point to Jesus. I have shed my childhood fear of the wrath of God and instead seek to reveal to others the awe-inspiring love, grace, and hope of Jesus. To preach through the entire narrative of the Bible is to see that Jesus is revealed throughout the Old and New Testaments. Yes, there is wrath and justice but the foundation of God’s redemptive work for humanity is captured in that well known passage, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV). Love remains my anchor and the foundation for my life and my vocation.

Preaching not only convicts hearts but compels lives to action. It mobilizes followers of Jesus from the intellectual to the incarnational. Preaching moves people from the seats on Sunday to the streets on Monday to practically live out the mission to be people sent by God to proclaim the good news of Jesus into the world.

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts hearts. The preacher’s job is to preach and the rest is up to God but I believe it is imperative for a sermon to challenge people to take action and apply the message of God’s Word to their own lives. In the book of James in the New Testament, it says; “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22, NIV). It is when the knowledge of the Word of God actually transfers from the head to the heart, moves from the intellectual to the incarnational, that lives begin to change and it is seen in our actions. I spend time at the conclusion of my sermon each week calling people to action. Very often at the end of the message, I will have people do something as a way of response. I believe that the church worship service is meant to be active, not passive. The Christian life was never to be about a group of people sitting in an audience merely listening to someone for 30 to 40 minutes and then going home and carrying on the same way they always have. The sermon needs to be a time for the Holy Spirit to convict lives.

I pray about creative ways to have the church community respond to the message. I will often encourage the congregation to write something that has challenged them from the sermon on a piece of paper and bring it to the front of

the church during the singing of the final worship song or I will invite people come forward and write on a large piece of paper laid across the front of the church. I will invite people to come forward for prayer if they have been convicted of something in their lives through the sermon. Each week I will look to have some sort of congregational response to the message. This is not a traditional altar call. It is a call to action. Also, as was stated earlier, the benediction is important. After singing songs, praying, and listening to a message from the Bible, the benediction is the blessing to go and take the good news of Jesus into the world wherever that may be. I devote intentional time and prayer to the benediction so that I will use appropriate words that tie into the message and can be an encouragement for God's people as they go into their week.

Preaching is that place where that which is divine and that which is human meet and it is a beautiful mystery. It is a deeply theological act. It is not as if God needs us preachers. There is nothing we add to the Word that will deepen it or make it more relevant. The Word can stand on its own without our help. Yet God not only accepts our feeble attempt to represent his Word but he actually requires and summons it. Preachers put a face and flesh to the Word. We bring our stories and illustrations, our perspectives, and experiences that help the listener to hear. As preachers, we are compelled to bring our best to the task at hand and that includes thoughtfully meditating and pondering why it is that we do what we do. To understand our own personal theology of preaching is to be able to succinctly

state it and use it to set a framework that shapes all that comes from the pulpit each week.

Conclusion

I am pondering my life and my future as a pastor a lot these days. I have been wondering whether there is a shelf life for pastors, particularly teaching pastors in a larger church. As the primary preacher at a church of 1,400 people, do I still have the energy, creativity, and relevancy to continue to command the attention of a congregation that is made up of fewer and fewer people of my generation? This has been a real matter of prayer and discernment for me recently because, as I have stated throughout this paper, I experience times of insecurity in my role. God has been meeting me in my prayers and convicting me in my attitude. My heart's desire is to no longer permit "the things of the flesh," as the Apostle Paul would say, to dictate my call as a preacher. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit" (Galatians 5:17, NIV). I want to ensure that it is the Spirit of God that is guiding and directing me on how and where I use the preaching gift that he has bestowed upon me.

I recently received an email from one of my congregants that demonstrates that God has control over all of these variables. The note was about a sermon I preached at my church. The content of the email reinforced some important components that I have highlighted throughout this chapter of this portfolio. When I read the email through the "lens" of the content of this chapter, three

things immediately jumped off the page to me. First, this woman was complimentary of my preaching and stated that she had been impacted by it. This is a definite affirmation of my gift of preaching/teaching, even to a younger generation, as she stated that she was a student. Secondly, she noticed that I walked around before the service and greeted people. I love to go around the foyer and main auditorium before and after a service and greet the congregation, to shake people's hands and share a few words with as many as possible. I wasn't really aware that people noticed this and that it meant something to them. By bringing this to my attention, this young woman affirmed my passion for caring for the congregation. Thirdly, she mentioned that the words that I preached brought hope to her and her situation. She said, "I needed to hear exactly what you preached. Paul, thank you. God speaks to you. Through you, God speaks to all of us in the crowd who you bless with your message."

Why were these three observations in this email so meaningful to me, especially at this stage of my life? As I have had a chance to reflect over my life experiences and the way that God has grown and led me, it has become very clear that I operate out of my sweet spot when I am teaching and caring. These qualities marked my life when I was a school teacher and a guidance counsellor and now, thirty years later, they continue to be gifts that appear to be a natural part of who God created me to be. In her note, this woman commended me first on my gift of preaching, secondly on my gift of caring and thirdly, on my desire to share the hope of Christ with others. What an amazing confirmation to receive this note

from this woman in my congregation. The passion to share the hope we have through Jesus still permeates what I do as a pastor. I really am a coach and an encourager to the people God has entrusted to me and I truly desire to see them become all that he intends them to be, just as I have seen what he has done for me.

Teaching, care, and hope: these three qualities define who God has created me to be and have helped shape my personal preaching identity and theology of preaching to this point of my life. I pray that I can continue to surrender the limitations I have put on these qualities and instead walk in faith into the next chapter of life and ministry that God has for me.

CHAPTER 3: MY PREACHING CONTEXT

In this chapter, I will describe my current preaching context at North Park Community Church in London, Ontario. I divide this chapter into three sections. The first section consists of a description of the community/neighbourhood where North Park Community Church resides. The history and demography of the community will be explored and explained in more detail. The second section contains a description of North Park's congregation and some of the historical trends and changes that have occurred over the fifty-five years that it has been in existence. Finally, the third section comprises a proposed preaching strategy that will meaningfully address North Park's ministry context and incorporate my personal theological convictions about preaching.

North Park's Community/Neighbourhood

In 1793, John Graves Simcoe was drawn to a parcel of land by the forks of the Thames River as a potential future site for the provincial capital of Upper Canada (Armstrong 1986). Ultimately the fledgling city of Toronto was selected but this scenic vista on the Thames became an attractive and viable option for a settlement and the city of London was birthed. Located in a rich, agricultural belt and strategically positioned halfway between the larger cities of Toronto and

Detroit, London was an attractive area for families to put down roots. There were several factors that stimulated the expansion of London both geographically and demographically over the years but since the Second World War, London has experienced unprecedented growth due to annexation, immigration, and relocation (London Municipal Handbook 1992, 3). Today London has grown to be the largest Southwestern Ontario municipality and Canada's eleventh-largest metropolitan area with a population of 494,069 (Statistics Canada, 2016 Census).

In 2016, London was ranked the fourth-best large city to live in Canada by *MoneySense Magazine* (Maloney, 2016). The ranking is based on variables such as crime rates, health care access, income levels, tax rates, arts, and sports offerings. London is unique in that it maintains a small town feel with a safe, clean, and friendly environment but it also has big city opportunities with excellent business potential, world-class health care and research, unique and diverse neighbourhoods, and renowned educational institutions. The abundance of green space, parks, bike paths, museums, recreational facilities, and proximity to two Great Lakes and beaches, make London an ideal spot to raise a family.

In 1964, North Park Community Church was planted by twelve families in the northeast corner of London in the Stoneybrook neighbourhood. In 1993, the church relocated just two kilometres east but it took them to what was then the outskirts of the city. They were able to acquire about fifteen acres of land that could adequately sustain a building that would accommodate a growing congregation. Today there are approximately 1,400 people who attend the

weekend services at North Park and the city has grown beyond the physical location of the church. North Park is now in what is called the Fanshawe neighbourhood of London. According to the 2016 City of London Profile (City of London, 2016), the Fanshawe neighbourhood has grown in population by almost 200 percent between 2011 and 2016 and it continues to grow as new housing starts are popping up each year. The 20-44 age demographic makes up 39 percent of the neighbourhood, with the 0-19 age demographic following closely behind at 31 percent. Almost one half of the population is married and 70 percent were born in Canada. In terms of education, 58 percent of people in the neighbourhood have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, with 85 percent living in a single-detached dwelling with a median family income of \$114,344. There was no record of religious affiliation in the 2016 profile for this neighbourhood but in the 2011 profile, 63 percent identified as Christian and almost 30 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation (City of London, 2011).

In short, North Park's church building is located on the edge of a neighbourhood that is still growing and is relatively affluent. The population surrounding the church is younger and well educated with a vast majority having been born and raised in Canada. There are four other neighbourhoods within five kilometres of North Park that offer a little more diversity. The Thames River appears to divide the cultural and demographic makeup of this area. The Stoneybrook and Stoney Creek neighbourhoods are located north of the Thames, while the Carling and Huron Heights neighbourhoods fall just south of the river.

According to the 2016 City of London Profile (City of London, 2016), those living north of the Thames River had a higher average household income, more people owned their single-detached homes, and just under 30 percent of the people identified themselves as having no religion in the 2011 neighbourhood profile (City of London, 2011). Those living south of the Thames River had a lower average household income with the majority of the housing being rental units. Of those living south of river, 40 percent identified as having no religion in the 2011 profile. About 66 percent of the households in these four neighbourhoods are family units. Almost 25 percent of these family units south of the river are single-parent households. About 23 percent of the population living in the neighbourhoods south of the Thames River were born outside of Canada. North Park's main campus is located north of the river but in September 2018 the congregation launched a church plant about five kilometres away in the Huron Heights neighbourhood, which is south of the river.

Although North Park is very much a regional church, with some people driving up to an hour to attend weekend services, it has specifically committed itself to making a difference in neighbourhoods within five kilometres of its building. Intentional time and energy have gone into getting to know the neighbourhood in a deeper way. Periodic prayer walks are organized that not only focus on people praying for their neighbourhoods but training is also offered to teach the people to be observant of what is going on around them. It has been

through these prayer walks that needs have been identified and ministry initiatives have been launched.

Less than five kilometres from North Park's main campus is Boullee Street. It has a reputation as an undesirable area in the Carling neighbourhood of London where crime, drugs, and violence are a daily occurrence. Through an intentional prayer and discernment process, North Park resolved to practically step in and be a positive influence in this neighbourhood by hiring a community development worker and renting space in a townhouse in the neighbourhood. Weekly arts, crafts, and sports activities are offered for children and practical skills and support classes are available for adults. Volunteers from North Park help to staff these endeavours. Each year for the past twenty-eight years, North Park has hosted a Christmas dinner for Lord Elgin Public School, the elementary school located close to Boullee Street. The entire student body, teachers, and staff are bused to North Park for a full turkey dinner, games, music, and gifts. This outreach activity is run completely by volunteers and financial donations from the church.

It was through these connections within the neighbourhood that North Park was made aware of a small church in the Huron Heights neighbourhood that was declining and interested in selling its building. Due to the generous support of the faith community, North Park was able to purchase the building with plans to establish a satellite church plant. Although it is located only five kilometres from the main campus, it is a vastly different context. So, the leadership of North Park

entered into an intentional process of listening and discerning the needs in this community. Volunteers went door to door around the streets that surround this church building, inviting feedback about the concerns in that particular community. Located in an area of the city that has been dubbed by some as “Little Cambodia,” many expressed a need for a place to garden and grow some of the vegetables to which they were accustomed. Plans were soon underway to cordon off a portion of the church land for a community garden. Children and youth activities were also mentioned as a major need in this neighbourhood, so before a church service was even launched, a three-week Vacation Bible School and regular youth events were up and running in the summer of 2018. Since September 2018, North Park Huron has been offering a full slate of activities and a Sunday worship service.

The city of London can be known as a relatively difficult place to integrate into as an outsider. It has a rather conservative feel to it and people seem to be resistant to change. One of the great debates that has polarized Londoners over the past five years has been around the issue of transit in the city. For various reasons, as London grew into a rather large metropolis, there was little foresight put into any sort of long-term transportation plan. Therefore, there is no ring road, no expressway system, and no form of rapid transit to serve over 400,000 people. In fact, public transit does not even extend as far as North Park Church’s main campus at this time. The idea of a BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) has been put forth by the most recent city council but it has caused great debate and been a divisive

issue throughout the city. This could be due to a lack of trust in the decision-making of the council as a whole, which has been wracked by scandal for at least the past ten years. In 2014, the sitting mayor was found guilty of misuse of government funds and was forced to resign (*The Star*, June 6, 2014.). In 2016, the next mayor temporarily suspended his duties when it was disclosed that he had an affair with the deputy mayor at the time. This scandal received national attention across Canada (Spalding, CBC News, June 17, 2016). This has cast a dark shadow over city politics in London and people seem to be generally distrusting of decisions coming from city council.

The neighbourhoods around North Park, specifically Stoneybrook and Stoney Creek, are what would be referred to as an “insular community” (Nelson 2008, 154). They are two very tight-knit communities where young families built their homes in the 1970s, raised their children, and have remained into their retirement years. It is a rather homogeneous group and appears somewhat resistant to change. In fact, it is not uncommon for children who were raised in these neighbourhoods to get married, start a family, and buy homes in these same neighbourhoods so their children can attend the same schools they attended. More recently there have been a number of older couples moving away and new younger families moving into these communities but it has coincided with the building of several retirement homes in close proximity to North Park. Perhaps the need for these older people to downsize and their desire to remain close by have created a demand for retirement homes in the area. There are currently four

large retirement, and nursing home facilities within four kilometres of North Park Church.

By all appearances, London seems to be a rather active city. There are well maintained and well used walking and bicycle paths that run throughout the entire city. There are many arenas, pools, community centres, fitness clubs, and parks. In the warmer weather, scores of people can be found at these parks enjoying a favourite sporting activity or a picnic with family or friends.

Two of the largest areas of employment in the city of London are education and health care (Middlesex County Economic Development, 2015). These include the Thames Valley District School Board, Western University, Fanshawe College, and London Health Sciences Centre, which is a hospital network and one of Canada's largest acute-care teaching hospitals combining both Victoria and University Hospitals. Education and health care infiltrate the very fabric of London and neighbourhoods, especially around North Park, are saturated with families who depend on these sectors for their livelihood.

This is a brief description of the community and neighbourhoods that surround North Park Church. The uniqueness of the city creates an interesting dynamic for the church. Within five kilometres of the church building in the Fanshawe neighbourhood are thousands of people with diverse socio-economic and cultural circumstances. This certainly influences the way that North Park seeks to reach out and make an impact in the city and neighbourhood for the sake of the gospel.

Description of North Park Community Church

North Park was started by families who came from the Brethren tradition but they quickly established the church as non-denominational, determining that designation to be the best way to reach out with the gospel message to those in the neighbourhood with no Christian background. North Park Community Church launched its ministry in November 1964 with its first official service. This service was held in a newly completed elementary school gymnasium that would serve as its home for the next 3½ years. As numbers increased, the congregation was compelled to find a permanent home that would fit its needs. North Park erected its first building in 1968 and added a significant addition in 1975. As the church continued to increase in numbers, it was determined that a larger parcel of land was needed to house a building that would accommodate the growing congregation. The church purchased fifteen acres, constructed a new facility, and moved to its current location in 1993. Another sizeable addition was added about ten years later. With its primary focus on family ministry, outreach, and solid biblical teaching, North Park has grown throughout the years from the original twelve families to a high of over 2,000 people in 2008. An average of about 1,400 people currently attend the weekend services on a weekly basis and another 250 are enrolled in the children's ministry programs. The typical North Park attender would be Caucasian, between the ages of 36 and 50, married with children, having some post-secondary education, and working a white-collar job.

On a weekend, North Park offers five distinct worship services. There is a Saturday evening service that is casual in style and offers more contemporary music and an extended time of worship. On Sunday mornings, there are two identical services with contemporary worship music. There is also a traditional service with hymns and more formal liturgy. All of these services have a 30-minute teaching time that strives to be practical, applicable, and biblical. The teaching is live in every service except the traditional service, which gets a video of the teaching from the Saturday night service. There is also a separate Chinese service conducted in Mandarin that is hosted in our chapel on Sunday morning.

As was mentioned earlier, North Park also has campus located in the Huron Heights neighbourhood of London, called North Park Huron. At North Park's 2019 Annual General Meeting, a proposal was put forth to the congregation to purchase a church building from a struggling congregation in the city of Stratford, about 40 minutes away. The idea was to rebrand and launch it as another North Park Church campus. The proposal was overwhelmingly approved and when North Park Stratford was launched in the fall of 2019, it marked the second consecutive year that North Park had planted a church in a new neighbourhood.

In addition to the people who attend the weekend services, there are approximately 130 youth who take part in their own mid-week gathering on Wednesday nights. Several hundred adults also participate in various small groups and discipleship electives throughout the week and serve in various capacities.

There are about seventy people who regularly attend the Sunday worship service at the North Park Huron campus and another eighty people who worship regularly at the North Park Stratford site. The numbers sound large but one of the drawbacks of a larger church is that people can get lost in the crowd whether they choose to or not. Although there is a solid core of faithful and committed members, according to a recent church-wide survey about 45 percent of the congregation has been at North Park for over ten years, and there is also a substantial group that transitions in and out.

Approximately 15 percent of the people in the pews at any given time have been there less than a year. Some come from a negative experience in another church and decide simply to blend in and be ministered to for a season without really getting involved and then they are off. Others “church hop” and are simply looking for the next best thing, fad, or spiritual high. Others come every week but pop in and pop out without really being noticed. Due to its size, North Park is an easy place to stay anonymous if that is a person’s desire. There are certainly places where smaller and more intimate community can be found in bigger churches but people usually have to determine to take the first step themselves to getting involved. Around 78 percent of the congregation state that they attend services every week but over half of them have never connected with a small group or served in any capacity at North Park.

One of the values of North Park Church since its inception has been the importance of cross-cultural mission. It was determined from its early days that a

significant portion of the yearly budget would be used to support long-term missionaries in various places around the globe. When these missionaries were on furlough, the expectation was that they would pay a visit to North Park and report to the congregation and the leadership about the ways that God was at work through their ministry in whatever country they were living in. It was a type of accountability check for the money that was being designated to them. What has become the newer paradigm at North Park is that mission and evangelism are no longer just programs but a way of life and built into every ministry of the church. There are still those full-time missionaries abroad who are supported but they are becoming fewer. More of the mission funds are rerouted into supporting parachurch agencies with connections and positive working relationships with people from the local communities. Mission is also something that North Park is calling its people to as a lifestyle that makes a daily impact locally as well as on the other side of the world. The idea is that followers of Jesus are on mission wherever God takes them, whether that is in their neighbourhood, school, workplace, community, or abroad.

Over the past few years, North Park has become accredited by the Government of Canada as a Sponsoring Agreement Holder (SAH). This means that the church has been authorized to facilitate the resettling of refugees to London. To date, the North Park Church community has been directly responsible for resettling almost 100 Assyrian refugees to their city. To surround each Assyrian family that is sponsored, North Park recruits a host family. A host

family consists of eight to ten members of the congregation who support the Assyrian families in everything from housing, health care, education, and whatever is needed to generally acclimatize them to a new culture. The cost to resettle each of these refugees is about \$8,000, which is absorbed in the North Park budget. In all, about 200 members of the congregation have been involved in this ministry, demonstrating the way that they are on mission to reach out and care for refugees in the name of Jesus.

North Park also runs a vibrant English as a Second Language (ESL) program every Saturday morning for those new to Canada. There are close to 100 participants from as many as sixteen countries of the world. Twenty volunteers from the church do everything from actually teaching English to cooking meals and providing child care. They are on mission for Jesus. The idea of mission and evangelism as a lifestyle rather than a program in the church has taken a lot of time and energy to reimagine, specifically with the older congregants, but North Park is beginning to write a new narrative that will define this ministry footprint in the years ahead.

One of the stumbling blocks of many churches is the inability to adapt to inevitable change that comes their way, whether it be cultural, circumstantial, or theological. North Park has had its fair share of change over the years. Two of the major areas of change in the last ten years have included a shift away from a more traditional musical worship style in the services to a more contemporary expression and a theological shift from a mostly complementarian mode of

leadership in the church to a more egalitarian approach. At North Park, people are encouraged to serve in all areas of the church out of their particular gift mix and are not limited based on their gender. The process involved in both of these shifts was lengthy and involved a lot of discussion, prayer, and engagement.

Considerable emotion and passion were attached to these issues but, in the end, the decisions were made and North Park was able to move forward in a relatively positive manner. One of the strengths of this community is that when presented with a compelling vision, they are able to adapt to change well.

This adaptability is also seen in the ministry activities at North Park. The church has many of the calendrical and critical rites and rituals that Leonora Tubbs Tisdale describes in her book, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Tisdale 1997, 73), but very few are etched in stone as untouchable. Perhaps this flexibility comes from the original vision as a church to be non-denominational. In the booklet, *North Park Community Church: The First Forty Years, 1964-2004*, which has served as a wonderful archival source, author Wilf Fryday states that in one of the church's early planning meetings it was decided that the church would "not slavishly follow patterns, practices or structures that we had followed in the mother churches simply because 'We've always done it that way'" (Fryday 2004, 5). As a result, North Park has been able to meander through many seasons of change and come out stronger.

North Park also has a history of strong financial giving. Not only is it able to sustain its yearly budget but many times there have been situations when there

was a financial need over and above the budget requirements. Again, when the need is accompanied with a compelling vision, the community at North Park responds in a generous way. This has resulted in many successful capital campaigns for building projects and other ministry initiatives that have led to life change and a positive impact on the community. In 2018, North Park set a church operating budget of \$2.21 million. It surpassed this budget by receiving over \$2.53 million in revenue. After distributing about \$2.43 million in expenses, the church was left with a surplus of approximately \$100,000. Over \$700,000, or around 30 per cent of the budget, was allocated to Community and Global Outreach ministries. Special offerings also allowed the church to eliminate any outstanding debt on a Capital Renewal campaign and pay off the buildings at both North Park Huron and North Park Stratford in a timely manner. As the 2019 fiscal year ended, North Park had no debt outstanding and was operating out of a surplus of funds as it moved into 2020.

It is this history of generous giving that has also allowed North Park to reach out to the community. It has a strong partnership with ten organizations in the city of London that are practically helping those in need. North Park provides both financial and volunteer help to these organizations. One of those partnerships is with Teen Challenge, a residential drug-and-alcohol rehabilitation centre. The men from Teen Challenge regularly attend the Saturday night worship service at North Park and the congregation has many families who, on a monthly basis, welcome these men into their homes for a meal and a chance to simply be part of

a family. This is so meaningful to them because they are away from their own families for up to a year. Each Christmas, North Parkers fill over 1,000 street kits with essentials including soap, toothpaste, socks, and blankets. These kits are then distributed to those in need in our city through Mission Services of London. Many families at North Park also volunteer in the Mission Services Thrift Store on a monthly basis. Outreach into the city and meeting practical needs are a distinctive of North Park Church that has been propagated throughout the years by the various preachers that have stood in the pulpit.

North Park has been blessed to have many godly pastors and preachers over the years. They have had a solid reputation throughout their history for good, biblically based, expository preaching. Three of the notable preachers in North Park's history have been Dr. William McRae, Pastor Richard Goetze, and Pastor Terry Sanderson. The changing landscape of church and culture has caused some theological shifts and different preachers have brought their own distinct ideology, methodology, and praxis over the years but given time and familiarity with these preachers, the North Park community remained open to new ideas and ways to approach and exegete the scriptures. Throughout the years, North Park has had key people who have preserved the history of the church and also acted as reservoirs of knowledge, discernment, and Christian integrity. These people are respected and listened to whenever they speak to an issue related to the North Park Church community.

This is a brief description of North Park’s unique identity and personality that has been formed over the past fifty-five years. This faith community is seeing its surrounding community as its parish. The words of Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen in their book, *The New Parish*, really reflect the heartbeat of North Park Church more and more: “The gospel becomes so much more tangible and compelling when the local church is actually a part of the community, connected to the struggles of the people and even the land itself” (Sparks et al 2014, 23). Over the past several years, North Park has intentionally moved to a broader missional-minded gospel that prompts Christ followers to live out their faith in practical ways. This methodology and praxis are becoming part of the DNA of North Park Church today.

A Preaching Strategy to Address Ministry Context

Just after North Park celebrated its 50th anniversary in the fall of 2014, the elders and leadership entered into a strategic planning process to determine God’s direction for the church over the next five years. After much prayer, discernment, and consultation with a professional strategic planner and the broader church community, it was put on their hearts to reach out to 300 non-churched families with the gospel and see them connected to North Park over the next five years. Families were defined as two-parent, single-parent, or blended-family households where the parent(s) is between the ages of 25 and 40. This was to be the target demographic for North Park. The tension with this type of outreach comes when

we see that Christianity is no longer the dominant frame of reference in Canada today. The missional movement appears to be replacing the “you come to us” framework with the “we’ll come to you” approach (Nelson 2008, 36). It is important to note, however, that rather than being the latest fad in personal evangelism, the missional movement is a reminder that right from Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, God called Abram to leave his home and sent him on mission to another land (Genesis 12:1-3, NIV). From the beginning, God has been a “sending” God and the church was always meant to be a sending community whose primary role is to train and equip people to live as missionaries among their neighbours.

The missional movement is about taking the good news of Jesus to our neighbours rather than expecting that they are simply going to show up at the church building. For the non-religious or those skeptical of religion in our world today, the only way they may darken the door of a church is to first experience the love of Jesus through his people in the places where they live. To do that, the onus is on Christians to know their mission field, which includes their neighbourhood, workplace, and school, and intentionally build relationships with the people they encounter there.

There has been a noticeable shift in the emphasis of the preaching at North Park over the past seven years to capture this missional distinctive. Messages have become more practical and applicable with the purpose of teaching and empowering the congregants to take what they learn in the pews on Sunday out

into their world on Monday. The benediction at the end of the sermon is an important moment in the service at North Park. It is the time where the preacher can deliberately use words of commission and sending that motivate the church to go into the places where God has placed them and put into action all that he is doing in their lives. Since it is unlikely that unchurched families will simply show up at the church on Sunday, it is imperative that church leaders continue to train and equip their people to take the love of Jesus to their neighbours with the hope that some of these people may become curious enough to find their way to Jesus and the church eventually.

As was stated in the Person Preaching Identity chapter of this paper, my basic theological conviction about preaching is that it is a:

mysterious and Holy Spirit-empowered activity, humbly carried out by those from within the body of Christ, gifted and called to preach. Preachers should be immersed in the lives of those in their community of faith and the culture of their world and are thus able to proclaim the word of God in a relevant and engaging manner that reveals the love, grace and hope of Jesus to their listeners. Preaching not only convicts hearts but compels lives to action. It mobilizes followers of Jesus from the intellectual to the incarnational. Preaching moves people from the seats on Sunday to the streets on Monday to practically live out the mission to be people sent by God to proclaim the good news of Jesus into the world. (McIlwraith 2017, 15)

Given this theological conviction, I would have to concur with Stuart Briscoe that I approach preaching from the side of “God’s provision rather than our need” (Briscoe 1989, 46). For the most part, the preaching menu that I organize in my setting is expository and moves through particular books of the Bible. I believe that when we understand the nuance, structure, and entire overarching narrative of

the biblical text, it allows people to see that God's Word and the work of Jesus in the world are applicable and relevant to any situation we will encounter. My goal each week through the sermon is to present to my congregation a compelling picture of Jesus and the strength, power, and hope that he can bring to us no matter what we encounter in our lives.

Once the commitment to preach Jesus and the contents of the Bible is made, then careful exegesis and reading are required. I believe that there are three things that I need to read and exegete in preparation for preaching a sermon. First, I need to carefully read the biblical text many times. I also choose to augment my reading of the text with various commentaries and books that give more background information. For me, this process starts on Sunday night after I have had an afternoon to let my mind decompress from preaching that morning. I see the process of sermon preparation as something that is marinated rather than microwaved. As I pray and ruminate on the content of the biblical text and the background story from supporting texts, God begins to bring key themes or ideas to mind. Starting on Monday, that is the lens through which I see my world and my context, and it grows and crystallizes as a message begins to take shape throughout the week.

Added to this percolating kettle of biblical and theological exegesis is the second ingredient I focus on as I prepare my message. I consider and read the audience that I will be addressing with this sermon. Although I lean toward preaching God's provision rather than the congregation's need, it is still important

to have an understanding of the things that are directly impacting them in their day-to-day lives.

A few years ago, a large automotive assembly plant in our community went on a strike that continued for weeks. I knew that many connected to our church were impacted directly or indirectly by this strike. Subsequently I still preached Jesus and his provision for our lives but was able to make it practical to the segment of the congregation dealing with the strike by weaving illustrations and analogies related to worry, patience, and faith into my sermons. It is imperative that a preacher knows his context.

I make it a matter of priority to get to know my congregation on a personal level, which can be difficult given the size, but I leverage time before and after services to meet and greet as many people as I can. I am connected to various forms of social media for the purpose of understanding the deeper longings of the people in my setting. I make time available for many appointments with congregants throughout the week and I intentionally volunteer in my community, all of this in an effort to exegete my setting and culture. The preacher's role is not to make scripture relevant because it already is. But, as we preach the text, we can intersperse personal stories or anecdotes that bring the words of the text into focus for daily living. That is my passion.

Finally, I think it is important to be attentive to the instrument through which God is choosing to deliver his message to the church each week. I start each day with the spiritual practice of meditating on the Bible and journaling. My

daily routine includes following the S.O.A.P. devotional method that was described earlier in this portfolio. This exercise is purely for my own personal connection with God. It is not meant as a study tool for a sermon although the things I learn definitely transfer often into good sermon material. The true benefit of this daily time I spend with God—reading his Word, praying, and journaling my thoughts—has actually given me a greater sense of who I am. Author David Benner says in his book, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, “We do not find our true self by seeking it. Rather, we find it by seeking God” (Benner 2004, 83). I am able to come to God with my own questions, fears, and insecurities and he meets me often and helps me to process and come to a greater understanding of the person he has made me to be and the unique gifts and talents I bring to the preaching ministry. I have also found it truly beneficial to periodically visit a Christian counsellor to help unlock areas of my own life that may be stuck or situations and circumstances that may need to be sorted through to bring further insight to my life. A knowledge of the biblical text I will be preaching, the context to which I will be preaching, and an understanding of who I am as I stand in the pulpit are essential for each message I prepare and deliver. It all gets marinated together on a weekly basis into one final product, the sermon that I pray is God-honouring, beneficial, and challenging to my faith community. Fortunately, I am not the lone preacher in my setting and have colleagues that offer constructive feedback that aids in my continual growth in these areas.

At North Park, we have a very specific goal to engage in team teaching in our weekend services. This means that there is one main teaching pastor who preaches a majority of the time but the congregation also gets a chance to hear from a rotation of other pastors who preach and teach. This gives the messages variety as they come from preachers who are male and female and vary in age, and life and theological perspectives. In the Personal Preaching Identity chapter, it was mentioned that a vast majority of preachers fall into one of four categories. Long calls them the four master metaphors. The four are: “the herald, the pastor, the storyteller/poet, and the witness” (Long 2016, 19). A preacher who falls mainly in the herald category would focus mostly on the content of the sermon, the biblical Word, and staying faithful to God’s message. A preacher who would be described as the pastor moves all the way to the other end of the spectrum and focuses more on the listener and the impact the sermon has on the hearer. The preacher who is a storyteller or poet differs from the others in that the preaching is defined by images of storytelling and expressive, poetic language. The witness testifies to the good news of God’s grace.

As I stated earlier, I see myself as fitting both the pastor and storyteller metaphors of preaching. Most recently, one of my passions as I prepare my weekly message is: story. I love to have the listeners see that the Word of God is a grand narrative of the unfolding plan of redemption for humanity and shape each message in the form of a story. From the introduction that serves as a hook to draw the listeners in, to the body of the message that is rooted in the biblical text

with relevant analogies, to the personal and applicable conclusion, my goal is to create a greater story that people can remember and hopefully live out in their daily lives as they engage with those God has placed around them. Others on our teaching team have different styles and preaching forms that may lean more toward the herald and witness metaphors. It is a strength at North Park that our congregation is regularly exposed to different forms of preaching. The one constant, however, is that each pastor is committed to approaching scripture from an expository perspective and all of the messages have a “sending” application.

North Park’s two satellites sites, North Park Huron and North Park Stratford, both have their own pastoral team and a teaching pastor who constructs his own preaching menu and teaching topics. Periodically we do rotate the teaching pastors, and others with a preaching gift, around to the various sites. There are four main reasons for this rotation system. First, it creates a unity amongst the three churches. Secondly, it allows each of the teaching pastors to get to know and engage the context and culture of the other North Park churches. This enhances their preaching as they are challenged to bring a sermon to more unfamiliar surroundings. Thirdly, this practice lessens the likelihood of any one site becoming too dependent on one primary personality or style in the pulpit. This limits the upheaval if one of the teaching pastors suddenly feels called to another ministry context or leaves the church for other reasons. Finally, it provides opportunities for those identified with a preaching gift to continue to refine it in other settings, which also gives pulpit relief to the teaching pastors in

our smaller sites. For me, this rotation means that I preach in my primary assignment, North Park's main campus, 60 percent of the time or about 31 weekends of the year. About eight weekends of the year will be covered by the two teaching pastors from the other campuses, which leaves 13 weekends a year for other staff members to hone an identified preaching and teaching gift. This will continue to perpetuate our team teaching goal.

Mentorship and succession planning are values at North Park. As I hover around the mid-fifties in age, I am feeling a greater sense of urgency to pass along any wisdom or learnings that I have accrued over the years in the areas of preaching and pastoring in general. Two years ago, I established a preaching mentorship program at North Park. I invited all of our staff team who have a demonstrated gift in preaching and teaching, as well as our youth ministry volunteer teaching team, to participate. I also invited some other members of our congregation who teach in various settings on a volunteer basis and desire to grow their skills.

These mentorship gatherings occur once every three months and include up to sixteen people from our faith community. I provide some material for the discussion with questions that include: the purpose of preaching; the qualities that make a sermon compelling; the steps to construct a good sermon; and tips on how to write a solid opening, closing, and application for a sermon. Our lively conversation lasts about 75 minutes and then we disperse. Many of the participants meet informally between the gatherings to assist one another in

sermons or talks that are on the go. This mentorship serves two purposes. First, it allows us to train and equip younger teachers and preachers, which is important as we continue in our stated strategic goal as a church to reach out to young families in our neighbourhood. A preaching mentorship program also provides us with a succession plan as older preachers are creating a pipeline of younger preachers who cannot only step into the pulpit at our church but also accept calls to other churches where they will have a kingdom impact. We are still relatively early in this preaching mentorship but to this point it has been very well received.

Regular evaluation is an important value at North Park. Our leadership routinely reviews, formally and informally, many aspects of ministry throughout the year. Each spring, a survey is distributed to our congregation in the services and time is given for them to complete it on the spot. It generally asks questions about people's involvement in various church activities and gives us a gauge of the level of commitment exhibited by our faith community.

Evaluation of our preaching occurs every week. Our weekend services planning team meet together on Tuesday of each week. This team consists of myself as the teaching pastor, the lead pastor, and our worship and the arts director. We will also include anyone else who has a role in the service for the coming week. We have two goals in these meetings. The first is to look back on the past weekend's services and evaluate them. We discuss the worship, family life, and sermon components in a general way and look a little more closely at any issues that may have come up. We have used a sermon evaluation form that was

distributed by Dr. Kevin Livingston in the Doctor of Ministry-Preaching and Communication cohort at Tyndale University. This form evaluates the sermon based on these criteria: was it compelling and clear; did it have solid biblical exegesis and theological analysis; was it embodied and imaginative, was it God-centred and Grace-full. The second goal of these weekly meetings is to review the weekend services for the week ahead. This time allows us all to get on the same page. Our worship director can ensure that he knows the overall theme and content of the sermon so that he can assist his worship leaders in the selection and preparation of songs and scripture readings for the services. It also allows us to determine the timing of the service and if there will be any special calls to respond or action items coming out of the sermon. We have found that this regular point of contact helps with the overall communication and impact in all that we do in our weekend services.

In his article, “Planning Ahead: How one pastor was delivered from Monday morning madness” (Ooms 2000), pastor John Ooms confesses that for fourteen years his habit of sermon preparation was basically the same. He would start on Monday morning but inevitably, as the days passed, desperation would set in as the deadlines approached and Sunday morning loomed. His process of planning one week out was stress-inducing for him but also wasn’t fair to others involved in the service, such as the song leader, who needed more time to adequately prepare. This all changed for Ooms when the council of the church he pastored committed to providing him two weeks a year for planning sermons. He

admits that at first, “I felt guilty about taking two weeks away from my pastoral work” (Ooms 2000, 3). Once he was convinced that time spent sermon planning was not two weeks away from ministry, he saw it as an incredibly beneficial exercise. He has learned to use this time to produce a yearly sermon schedule around dates and special events such as the Lord’s Supper, Christmas, and Easter.

This process allows him to compile sermon themes and sermon series with appropriate scripture and titles that he can distribute to everyone involved in the planning and leading of worship to ensure that they have adequate time to prepare. He is careful to suggest that having a long-term preaching schedule must still give some flexibility to change things even at the last moment to respond to a special need that may arise in the congregation or the community. He has also learned to bring in more voices and consultation just before he begins these two weeks of sermon planning. Some of the benefits that Ooms has found in planning ahead for sermons have included more time for research and creativity. He also has the time to gather illustrations and quotes from sources that might be beneficial for a future sermon. He can be more selective of the books he is reading as they tend now to be informed by the sermon series he will be preaching. The advance planning definitely gives his music director more time to prepare so that all elements of the service are thematically unified. Overall, Ooms has found that “planning ahead contributes to enriched congregational worship” (Ooms 2000, 5).

At North Park, we too have found that advance planning for sermons has been extremely beneficial. It is a practice that we have established for the seven

years that I have been on the staff team. Although I do not take two weeks out of my work schedule to plan the sermons, our weekend services planning team meets for an extended time about four times a year. This meeting is usually an afternoon, either on site at the church or off site. Our agenda for these meetings includes prayer and discernment of future preaching topics and series. This time allows us to have open discussions about our context and any factors that are impacting our community. We also evaluate any sermon series that we have completed over the last quarter of the year to ensure that they have met our goals and aligned with our preaching philosophy. This will be explained in more detail a little further on in this chapter.

A large chunk of the time we spend together is brainstorming new preaching series, themes, and anchor scripture passages. We also think of applications and unique calls to action for our congregation. We have found that titles and catch phrases of sermon series are very important as they serve as a hook to pique interest in our community. We utilize our church website, app, and social media extensively so sermon series graphics are very important. We are fortunate to have a communications and media coordinator on staff so we will call her into our meetings when we are at the point of wanting to craft these creative elements. Our worship director also chimes in on songs and other artistic expressions that may support a particular preaching series. Once this meeting has concluded and we have a rough idea of sermon series for the next three to four months, each of us will go to work in our particular areas. As the teaching pastor,

I will flesh out each series into teachable weekly chunks, assign the anchor scripture passage for each sermon, and confirm the speaker for each week. I will also write a 400-word “blurb” that will describe the overarching theme and teaser for each series. We use this blurb on our website and in our monthly communication letter to our faith community.

Our worship director will distribute the ideas to his worship leaders and work with them to select songs, scripture, and other elements that will serve to unify each service. Our lead pastor is responsible for informing the elders of our upcoming sermon series and the underlying purpose and reasoning behind each. The communications and media coordinator goes to work finding appropriate graphics for social media and print distribution. As this process all comes together, we have found many of the same benefits that Ooms did. Planning ahead does contribute to enriched congregational worship and takes the load off of any one individual.

We have determined that preaching series resonate well with our congregation. They provide a chance to really unpack the content of a biblical book or topic without being rushed by time constraints. The general length of these series could be anywhere from five to eight weeks depending on the topic. We have preached shorter two- or three-part series and longer ones that have lasted up to a year. The longer ones tend to be broken up at Christmas or Easter with short sermon series based on those seasonal themes. We find this allows the longer series to sustain the momentum and interest when we return to them.

Preaching Cycle at North Park

At North Park, we have a general plan or preaching philosophy that guides us through a preaching cycle. Our ministry season starts in September. Given our culture, things tend to revolve around the school calendar. September is the launch of a new school year and it also signals the beginning of a new ministry year in our church. We usually begin our season with a preaching series related to the mission and vision of the church. In the past, we have done a series on each one of our core values and our church's mission statement. This reminds people of who we are and the cause for which we have given our lives and it intentionally invites people in. September is a time when many new people show up at church and we want them to get a true idea of who we are through our preaching series.

After Thanksgiving, we tend to focus specifically on a biblical book or shorter, pithy stories from the Bible. In the fall of 2019, we spent eight weeks looking at the teachings of Jesus in the gospels. In the past, we have studied an Old Testament book like Malachi. These series often transition well into a Christmas preaching series. We generally follow the Advent calendar for our Christmas preaching. Whatever our biblical text or slant is each week, we also include Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Our Christmas services are very strategic at North Park. According to our statistics, they attract our largest attendance so that necessitates that we offer four services. One of the services is on December 23 and three are on December 24, Christmas Eve. The weekend before Christmas, our regular services are hosted and run by our Family

Ministries team who ensure that these services are specifically family-oriented for all ages to attend. We encourage our congregation to bring their friends and family who have had limited exposure to church to these unique services. We intentionally ensure that they are inviting, experiential, and succinct in getting across the biblical message of Christmas. We utilize many forms of multimedia, variety in worship music style and form, and the sermon is delivered in a more relaxed, conversational tone. It is also one of the few times throughout the year that we limit our service time to one hour. Our feedback suggests that many people who start attending North Park on a regular basis did so after attending a Christmas Eve service.

The last weekend of the calendar year just after Christmas is usually a stand-alone sermon reflecting on the past year and challenging people in their faith journeys as they head into a new year. This sets us up well as we generally see the first weekend in the new year as the second major launch time in our preaching calendar after September.

All of the winter activities in our church begin in January and we usually start this new season with a sermon series focused on new beginnings. In the past, we have had a series on the Old Testament book of Nehemiah and tied the focus of rebuilding the wall in Jerusalem to challenging our congregation with beginning or rebuilding a deeper connection with Jesus for the coming year. Depending on when Easter falls in the spring, this new-year launch series could run into an Easter series focused on the cross and the significance of Jesus' death

and resurrection. Traditionally at North Park, Easter has not been given as much time and attention as Christmas. More recently we have been highlighting the season of Lent in a more intentional way with relevant sermon series and special prayer and reflection gatherings leading up to Passion Week. We have two Good Friday services that are more sombre and subdued, reflecting on the cross and Jesus' death, which leads to a more joyous Easter Sunday message and the focus on the resurrected Jesus and the importance that plays in the lives of those who choose to follow him. Last year, we experimented with having baptisms in our services on Easter weekend and it was so well received that we will incorporate them again this Easter. If there is time between the new year launch series and Easter, we may do a short series on some area of doctrine that we feel needs to be addressed although concepts like the Trinity, sin, and salvation are woven into most other series throughout the year.

Periodically we will preach "stand-alone" sermons on specific aspects of our confession of faith at North Park. A few years ago, we went through a cycle of interspersing these stand-alone messages every 10-12 weeks. We covered topics such as the significance of the Lord's Supper, baptism, marriage, and the Bible as the Word of God. These "one-off" sermons were appreciated by the congregation and they are topics that are easier for us to cover in one week rather than carrying them over several weeks in a preaching series. In fact, after preaching about the deeper biblical idea of baptism, we had 37 people indicate their desire to be baptised. Some of these people had been Christians for many

years but never really understood the importance of baptism until they heard a sermon about it.

After Easter season, we generally engage our congregation in a preaching series on a smaller book in the Bible, quite often an epistle from the New Testament, and then the month of June could be a series of stand-alone messages related to topics like World Refugee Day or Father's Day. It has become our routine to end our season on the last weekend of June with a "state of the church" address by our lead pastor. He uses this time to share the highlights of what has happened in the life of our church over the year and then to give some vision for the hopes and prayers of the church into the future. We find that this sends our congregation into the summer season thankful to God for his provision through the year and anticipating many good things in the coming year.

Our summer preaching series is always interesting to plan and organize. We have found, in our culture and setting, many people take off for the cottage or vacation throughout the summer. This means that our congregation would have a hard time tracking a preaching series if it builds on each week, as they are away a lot. Our summer preaching series usually extends from the first of July until Labour Day weekend. This gives us ten weekends, so we plan a ten-week preaching series that has a continuous theme but allows people to drop in and out throughout the summer and still be able to get the gist of what is being taught. In the past, we have selected ten well known Psalms, one for each weekend in the

summer, and unpacked them in a little more detail. We have also done this with Proverbs.

In the summer of 2018, prompted by the idea that we wanted to call our church community to engage with their unchurched friends and neighbours in a more intentional, missional way, we devised a sermon series on food and meals. We were able to find some resources about the meals that Jesus ate that are recorded in the Bible, specifically the Gospel of Luke, and how deeply Jesus engaged people from all walks of life around a dinner table. Each weekend throughout the summer, we looked at a different meal Jesus ate with others and applied it to our lives. The application after each message was to exhort our congregation to invite someone to their table in the coming week or accept an invitation to eat at someone else's table. Summer is an ideal time to do this as more people are outside in their neighbourhoods and even something like a barbeque or a picnic can make for easy preparation and cleanup, which allows more time for conversation.

Our congregation responded to this challenge in amazing ways. We heard a story of a person inviting a neighbour they have lived beside for over ten years and with whom they never shared more than a passing greeting. Now they had intentional time to get to know each other in a deeper way around a meal. Another person told us that their subdivision had been bogged down by street construction all summer. So, coming from what they had learned through our sermon series, she and her husband thought it would be fun to have a neighbourhood "end-of-

construction” block party and barbeque. They got a team together and organized it for the residents of the five streets affected by the construction. It was a wonderful afternoon with over 150 attending and connecting with their neighbours. In fact, this sermon series generated so much interest that a new ministry was launched at North Park that fall called “Table Talk,” which sets people up to either host or attend a meal with others in the community that they do not know. To date, over 100 people have participated in this activity, new friendships are being fostered, and lives are being shared.

The civic long weekend in August tends to be our least-attended service of the whole year. A few years ago, we decided to try something new for this weekend. Instead of preaching a sermon, we had a question-and-answer discussion between our lead pastor and myself. It was relatively informal with the two of us sitting around a table and sharing a little more personally who we are and some of our learnings and growth areas in our journeys of faith. This has been well received by our congregation, so we have tried to make it an annual part of our summer teaching series.

What I have described above has become the rhythm of our preaching menu and schedule each year. Annually our goal is to preach through the Bible so that our congregation gets a sense of the greater biblical story. We ensure that we are immersed in both the Old and New Testament texts. We always preach on some aspect of the Gospels. We also take some time in different biblical genres like the wisdom literature or the historical books but we can also unpack an

epistle in its entirety or work through smaller books such as the minor prophets or Esther and Ruth. Each year we can track where we have been and chart an annual cycle so that we ensure that we are covering a good portion of the Bible over a five- to six-year period.

During the 2017-18 ministry year, in our passion to build greater biblical literacy in our congregation, we decided to undertake, as an entire church community, a resource called “The Story.” It was a 31-week walk through the entire Bible from Genesis through to Revelation. In our main service, we used sermon outline templates that were given to us in this resource and compiled and delivered 31 sermons in chronological order through the Bible. Other ministries at North Park from toddlers through to our adult small groups got involved and followed along with the themes that were preached in their gatherings. It was a wonderfully unifying time for our church family and many people grew in their knowledge of the entire scope and themes of the Bible.

As was stated earlier, things like tradition, context and needs of the congregation also influence the preaching cycle. As I am writing this section, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the global population. The effects of the coronavirus are unprecedented. As a church, we are called to respond to such devastating times with our Christian hope and faith. At North Park, we were scheduled to be in a preaching series on the book of Psalms during this time but then our government instituted a ban on gatherings of people and self-isolation became our new norm. We continued with the series in the Psalms online, but our illustrations

and applications were tailored towards this unique context and the pressing needs of the congregation and our world.

Preaching Menu for 2019

Prayer is a value in our church that we are trying to highlight and grow, so we launched our winter season in January 2019 with a six-week preaching series on the Lord's Prayer. The idea was that this prayer was the only recorded discipline that Jesus' followers asked him to teach them, so it must be important. Each week for six weeks, we broke down each line of the prayer and its significance. We offered supplemental discipleship electives on prayer throughout the week for the duration of this series. Our goal was to raise the bar in terms of prayer in our church community and encourage people to make praying the Lord's Prayer a regular part of their spiritual discipline. This series really seemed to resonate with our faith community as I am still hearing comments about the impact the sermons had on people.

Brian Stiller, the Global Ambassador of the World Evangelical Alliance, is a friend of North Park and usually comes to speak once a year, so in February he preached a stand-alone message on the topic of Global Mission. We then transitioned into a six-part series on the book of Revelation. We looked at the letters to the churches in the first part of Revelation and concluded the series with a letter to North Park Church. It was set up with the idea that "if Jesus were to write us a letter about our spiritual condition like he did the seven churches in Revelation, what would he say?"

Our Easter series was actually a reprise of our 2018 Christmas message series. At Christmas, we looked at the significance of the three gifts that the Wise Men placed before Jesus just after he was born. The gold, frankincense, and myrrh represented Jesus as King, as Priest, and as the Sacrifice. At Easter time, we probed a little deeper into what it means that Jesus is King when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. In what ways is he a Priest as he gathered with his disciples around the table for his last supper? Finally, we discovered what it means that Jesus is the Sacrifice as he walks the road to Golgotha with a beam of a cross strapped to his back. Our series concluded on Easter Sunday as we declared what Jesus' resurrection means to humanity, as he is our King, Priest, and Sacrifice. We also had over 30 people go through the waters of baptism on Easter weekend, which just made the whole experience that much more powerful. We leveraged the Easter message, that Jesus is a generous Saviour who held back nothing to save humanity, to transition into a topical preaching series on generosity. The goal was to use the biblical text to challenge our people on how generous they are with their time, words, material resources, and money in their relationship with Jesus and others. Gratitude and generosity are core values at North Park, so we want to ensure that we are preaching these concepts regularly.

In June, we spent four weeks preaching about the significance of our church family. Our entire teaching team was involved in this sermon series. Our Family Ministries pastor preached on the importance of parenting. Our Care pastor took a passage of scripture that talks about honouring our parents and

spoke about it from an adult child's point of view. I preached on the importance of the different generations in a church and how we can learn and grow from each other. Our lead pastor wrapped up this series with his annual "state of the church" address.

For the summer, we launched a series on the minor prophets of the Old Testament that was entitled "Majoring on the Minors." This series gave a taste of the main theme of nine of the minor prophets' writings over nine weekend services. We did this to get a gauge from our congregation as to which ones they would want to hear about in more detail and then in the future we could plan a more intensive series on that one minor prophet book. This series was broken up by a stand-alone message by a guest speaker from Lithuania who shared the way that God is at work in his country.

For our September 2019 ministry season launch, we looked specifically at some of the teachings of Jesus. A lot of Jesus' teachings in the Bible appear to be spontaneous. He was out and about during the course of his regular routine when people would ask him for an explanation of something and Jesus gives some profound insight. An example of this occurs in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is visiting his friends, Mary and Martha. At one point in the text it says that Martha was distracted by all the work she needed to do to prepare a meal for the occasion, so she comes to Jesus and asks, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40b, NIV). This is a

spontaneous interaction that happens in the midst of a daily task and Jesus leverages it to teach Martha about her priorities.

We looked a little closer at these types of teachings of Jesus that almost seemed spontaneous and some of Jesus' teaching that appeared to be a little more structured, like those found between Matthew chapters 5 and 7. We called the series "On the Way."

In November of 2019, we invited an actor, Jason Hildebrand, to share some stories of the gospel through dramatic arts. This change in delivery of the Bible was refreshing to our congregation. In the future, we plan to incorporate more variety into our weekend services in regards to the presentation of the message of Jesus.

Our Christmas preaching series focused on the prophecy of Isaiah and the names of the coming Messiah found in Isaiah chapter 9. Each week, we zeroed in on each name and attribute of Jesus as the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father. We also incorporated the themes of Advent into each week. Our series culminated on Christmas Eve with a short meditation on Jesus as the Prince of Peace. The final weekend of 2019 was a stand-alone message calling our congregation to reflect on their faith journey in the past year and encouraging them to look to God for his provision and guidance to grow their faith into the future.

This was the preaching plan for my congregation throughout 2019. It offered a balance between Old Testament and New Testament teaching and

included different genres and styles from the biblical canon. It had some topical teaching but leaned more heavily toward an expository study of the text. We leveraged certain seasons of the church calendar and the rhythms of the culture and, in the end, our prayer and desire was to educate our people on the metanarrative of the Bible and encourage life transformation and application for their day-to-day lives. Our on-going goal is to find ways to measure whether our preaching is meeting these desired outcomes.

Conclusion

In this chapter of the research integration portfolio, I described my current preaching context at North Park Community Church. First, a description was given of the neighbourhood in which North Park Church resides and other neighbourhoods that are within five kilometres of the church site. Some historical and demographic information was shared as well as certain aspects of the city of London that make it distinct. The diversity and unique aspects of the city provide North Park with an intriguing mission field to continue to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, a description of North Park's congregation was shared including the makeup of the faith community, the three diverse campuses of North Park, and the ministries and outreach activities that define North Park's presence and influence in the neighbourhood. North Park's adaptability to change, history of generosity and passion to reach beyond themselves and the walls of their

buildings, has allowed the church to stay relevant and flourish into their sixth decade of existence.

Thirdly, a proposed preaching strategy that meaningfully addressed North Park's ministry context was described. This strategy incorporated my own personal theological convictions about preaching and the larger historical legacy of preaching at North Park Church. It also described some of the church's larger structures and values that shape the annual preaching cycle. These include aspects of tradition, context, congregational needs and the desire to see enhanced biblical literacy and a missional mindset amongst the congregants.

It this chapter, it was stated that the leadership of North Park made it a prayerful aspiration to reach out to 300 non-churched families with the gospel and see them connected to North Park over a five-year span. Based on the demographics presented, the North Park faith community is quite similar to the neighbourhoods that surround the church. There are many young families that attend North Park on a regular basis and the annual preaching cycle and menu are constructed with this demographic in mind. Therefore, if the content of the sermons is connecting with these families in the church, we could surmise that the preaching would resonate with those families that we are trying to reach in our community. That leads to chapter four and my Preaching Field Project.

CHAPTER 4: PREACHING FIELD PROJECT

Introduction

Evaluation of preaching can be a complicated endeavour to undertake. Care must be taken to ensure that the evaluation tool does not simply measure the personal preferences of the congregation but provides solid feedback that is useful for the preacher's growth and development.

In 2016, the North Park church leadership entered into a discernment process and determined that the church should commit to reaching out, with the gospel, to 300 unchurched families in our community and see them find a home at North Park over the next five years. This strategic initiative meant that every ministry of the church needed to evaluate the ways they were contributing to making this goal a reality. The preaching ministry produced some informal surveys to receive general feedback but there was a desire to undertake a more formal, structured assessment. That served as the catalyst for this research project, which was to evaluate whether the preaching at North Park was having a transformative impact on this specific demographic of our church.

Overall the findings that were compiled from this project substantiated the idea that the preaching at North Park Church is having a transformative impact on this demographic of the church. The data was valuable for the preaching ministry

team to continue to evaluate the content and presentation of the sermons that resonate with this category of people.

Response or Innovation

The central goal of this Preaching Field Project was to determine whether the preaching at North Park Church contributes to the spiritual transformation of the demographic of our faith community that are between the ages of 25 and 40 and parents of dependent children. The information generated from this project will not only serve to enhance my preaching but also the preaching of those on our team and the others that I mentor.

We have a detailed database at North Park that has been able to track people who fit into this strategic demographic. I compiled a pool of potential participants based on the criteria that they are Christians between the ages of 25 and 40, parents of dependent children, and regular attenders at North Park. That is, they have checked their children into the North Park children's ministry for at least 20 of the 52 Sundays in the past year and have participated in at least one children's ministry event in the eight months prior to the start of this project. These criteria were chosen to ensure that potential participants were fairly invested in the life of the church.

From this pool of twenty-three people, fifteen participants were randomly selected to participate in this project. They completed a series of journal questions based on the sermons at North Park each week for eight weeks. The data was

analyzed, coded, and categorized and key learnings were compiled from each of the five questions.

Definition of Key Terms

Spiritual transformation is a key phrase in this project. It is a process that is supernatural and is something only God can accomplish in the lives of Christians through the work of the Holy Spirit. In their book, *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ's Pattern for Spiritual Transformation*, Dallas Willard and Don Simpson describe transformation as a “Holy Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself. To the degree spiritual formation in Christ is successful, the outer life of the individual becomes a natural expression of the character and teachings of Jesus” (Willard and Simpson 2005).

Spiritual transformation from a Christian perspective is the changing of behaviour to become more Christ-like. Christian author Neil Anderson gives a little more definition to what these Christ-like qualities may be when he writes:

The soul of the spiritual person reflects a change generated by spiritual birth. He can now receive his impetus from the Spirit, not just from the flesh. His mind is being renewed and transformed. Peace and joy instead of turmoil characterize his emotions. It is our responsibility to choose not to walk according to the flesh but to walk according to the Spirit. As the spiritual person exercises his choice to live in the Spirit, his life bears the fruit of the Spirit. (Anderson 1993, 17)

Anderson contends that a life that bears the fruit of the Spirit is an indication of transformation and growing to become more Christ-like. In the Bible, the fruit of the Spirit are described as “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV). These are the attributes that should be noticeable in the life of a person who is being spiritually transformed by the Holy Spirit but it is a life-long process. Author Eric Swanson states, “Transformation is more like the North Star, a direction to pursue, than the North Pole, a destination at which we arrive” (Swanson and Williams 2010, 60).

One of the disciplines that is integral in fostering and promoting this spiritual transformation in the lives of Christians is the act of listening to sermons. Christian pastor and preacher Darrell Johnson states:

Whenever a human being, Bible in hand, stands up before a group of other human beings, invites the gathered assembly into a particular text of the Bible and as faithfully as possible tries to say again what the living God is saying in the text, something always happens. Something transformative, empowering, life giving happens. (Johnson 2009, 7)

It would be fair to say that Jesus’ goal in preaching was to produce life-changing and transformative experiences for his disciples. At the conclusion of one of Jesus’ longest preaching and teaching discourses in the New Testament, he says to those gathered around him, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24, NIV). Jesus continues in the passage to state that those who hear his words and do not put them into practice are “like a foolish man who built his house on sand” (Matthew 7:26, NIV). Jesus’ words are clear here. Those who not only hear, but also take action in response to his teaching, have a solid foundation on which to build their lives.

Preacher Mike Fabarez gives added support to this notion that Jesus saw preaching as transformative in his followers' lives. He writes, "To Jesus, successful preaching was not just to disseminate truth. Successful preaching was not bringing the congregation to an understanding of the truth. To Jesus, effective preaching resulted in people grasping truth and putting it into action" (Fabarez 2002, xi). Preaching is a significant means to not only proclaim the truths of scripture, but the Holy Spirit also uses it to effect change in people's behaviour.

To summarize this section, spiritual transformation is a Holy Spirit-empowered process of change in Christians that is demonstrated in their lives through the Christ-like attributes of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In the Bible, these are described as the fruit of the Spirit. In the Gospels, Jesus affirmed the role that the act of preaching plays in facilitating spiritual transformation in the lives of his followers.

It is my goal to gauge the participants' spiritual transformation by the fruit of the Spirit that is evident in their lives. I have chosen this way to define spiritual transformation because it provides an external expression of an internal change in a person's life. In his book, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness*, Christopher Wright states, "what the Spirit of God does, above all, is to make those who put their faith in Jesus to become more and more like the Jesus they love, trust, and follow. In fact, we could say that the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 is a beautiful picture of Jesus" (Wright 2017).

When the Spirit of God is at work through the preaching and in stirring people's lives, aspects of the fruit of the spirit should be evident in the way that they act.

Supervision, Permission, and Access

This project followed the guidelines and restrictions of the Research and Ethics Board of Tyndale University and the administration and faculty of Tyndale University. This project was carried out at North Park Community Church and had the full support of our Lead Pastor, Dr. Matthew Eckert, and the Elder Board.

As mentioned earlier, I used our church database to collect the names of those who fit into the demographic I was choosing to study. This formed my pool of potential participants. All of these people were invited to an information meeting that gave details of the project. After this meeting, the people who wished to be considered for participating in the study signed a letter of consent. In total, there were twenty-three letters of consent that were handed in to my research assistant, who placed all of these names into an Excel program that randomly selected fifteen names of people who became participants in this study. My research assistant handled all of the data collection from this point on to ensure the participants' confidentiality and to counter any power dynamics between myself and the participants. I only had access to the data once it had been compiled in a three-ring binder for me by my assistant. She also endeavoured to screen out any personal information in the journal entries to further ensure confidentiality.

I did not undertake this project in isolation. As a member of the preaching team at North Park, I sought the collective wisdom of this group as I prepared the journal questions for the participants to complete. I am also accountable to this group to provide the learnings from this Field Project for our collective growth and development.

Context

As a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale University, I conducted my Preaching Field Project at North Park Community Church in London, Ontario. I have been the Teaching Pastor at North Park for the past seven years and I also oversee the Care ministry at the church. Previously I spent fifteen years pastoring at a church in Waterloo, Ontario. Preaching has been my main vocational responsibility for over fifteen years.

Historically, North Park has had a solid reputation for good expository preaching. As the primary teaching pastor currently serving at this church, I am always interested in the way that the preaching is connecting with the congregation. This is why I focused my Preaching Field Project on the evaluation of the preaching's impact on a particular demographic at North Park.

We are in the midst of a five-year strategic plan with a main goal of reaching out to 300 non-churched families with the gospel and then seeing them connected to our church. Throughout this strategic planning process, our leadership discussed four key values that we deemed to be important to young

families today, church or non-church. These values are purpose, relationship, family support, and social justice. We have tried to incorporate elements of these values into our preaching on a more regular basis over the past two and a half years. My passion is to understand how and if our preaching is contributing to the spiritual transformation of our faith community.

As the person that led this Field Project and the primary preacher at North Park, I was aware of the power dynamics that would exist and could hinder open and honest feedback. Therefore, I implemented procedures that limited this power dynamic. Those procedures are described in the “Ethics in ministry-based research” section of this chapter. My desire was to create an inclusive, safe environment for people to ponder the content of a series of sermons and then reflect upon the impact they have on their lives by responding to journal questions. Overall this goal was achieved and I received feedback that I am convinced will enhance the preaching at North Park as we continue to refine both the delivery and content of the sermons. This, in turn, will facilitate ongoing spiritual transformation in the lives of our congregants into the future.

Models and Other Resources

Much of the content of the projects and course work that have equipped me to conduct this field project was described in the Preaching Identity section of chapter 2. That section also includes my personal theology of preaching that serves as my conceptual framework for preaching. Along with the resources I

have already cited in this portfolio, I have found Kenton Anderson's book, *Integrative Preaching: A Comprehensive Model for Transformational Proclamation*, an extremely helpful resource. Anderson proposes four movements in a sermon and the ways to integrate elements and compounds into each movement that make a sermon engaging and dynamic (Anderson 2017, 45-84). I have found this approach to preaching really resonates with my own philosophical style and theology of preaching. I believe it also promotes transformation in the lives of our congregants. I have also found that Al Tizon's book, *Missional Preaching: Engage. Embrace. Transform*, and Sparks, Soerens and Friesen's *The New Parish: How Neighbourhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Disciple and Community* are deeply convicting in the power in which the spoken word can change lives and be demonstrated in the way people live in their communities. I endeavored to incorporate these resources into my project as they were pivotal in shaping my theology of preaching as well as forming the conceptual framework through which I sought to understand the qualities that make preaching transformative. The information gathered through these resources helped to determine the criteria for my participants as well as the content of the questions that they were asked. Finally, the data gathered in this project was analyzed based on much of what I have learned through the courses and resources which allowed me to determine the overall learnings of this project.

Project, Methodology, and Methods

In this section, I describe how I accomplished my project. It includes the location where the project took place and a description of the participants. The scope of the project is also detailed as well as the methodology and methods which help to understand the way that I thought about my data and the steps I took to gather and analyze it. The timeline and phases of my project are also outlined in this section as well as the detailed process in which I handled the ethical concerns for this project.

Field

As was stated earlier in this chapter, this Preaching Field Project took place at North Park Community Church in London, Ontario, in the fall of 2019. The specific criteria of the participants are described in the Response or Innovation section of this chapter. Through the process that I used for the selection of potential participants, I was able to settle on fifteen as the final number of participants who took part in this research project.

As the primary teaching pastor at North Park, the participants would know me as the one who preaches the sermon most weeks. I have probably engaged many of them in brief conversations in the church foyer before or after church services but, due to the stringent guidelines that were put in place for this project (described later in the “Ethics in ministry-based research” section of this chapter), I had no idea of the identity of the participants throughout the duration of this project. Their anonymity has been maintained to this point.

The means of data collection for this project was to have the participants answer a series of five questions on at least four sermons delivered over an eight-week period by one of the pastors on the North Park preaching team.

Scope

This Preaching Field Project focused on the impact that the preaching at North Park had on the participants' spiritual transformation. Following each sermon, they were sent, via email, the five questions to be answered in a journaling format. The questions were based on sermon content and presentation. For a full description of the rationale behind using journal entries for this project, see Appendix F. The overall aim of this project was to determine if spiritual transformation is happening in the lives of our congregants. The operational theory for this project is that, when sermons are memorable, it prompts a chain of events leading to spiritual transformation. Therefore, I looked at the elements of the sermon, including content and presentation and delivery that enhance or hinder the memorability of a sermon. The data demonstrates that spiritual transformation is occurring in this specific targeted demographic of our church and the results will be beneficial for the training and development of our preaching team and others.

Methodology

As the primary researcher, I worked in conjunction with the participants to determine the impact of the preaching they listened to on a weekly basis. I devised a series of five "feeling" questions based on the sermon's content and

presentation. Sensing describes these “feeling” questions as those which “seek to understand how this person feels and is emotionally affected by an issue, action or subject. You are asking the participants how they experience the subject being addressed” (Sensing 2011, 88). These questions were sent to participants on the Monday after they had listened to the previous Sunday’s sermon. They incorporated aspects of narrative research as the participants were asked to reflect and comment on the impact of the preaching on their personal day-to-day lives and behaviour. Sensing states that “The purpose of narrative research is to examine how participants impose order on their lived experiences thus making sense of the events, thoughts, and actions in their lives” (Sensing 2011, 157-158).

By the Saturday of each week, the participant was to have completed the journal questions and submitted them via email to the data collection site. This went on for eight weeks. Confidentiality was imperative in this exercise so that the participants felt comfortable to share their feedback openly and honestly. This is described in more detail in the “Ethics in ministry-based research” section below.

This narrative component of the project meant that evaluation was not merely organizing data and presenting the findings. Evaluation also came from observing change and discerning transformation based on the answers to the journal questions. In their book, *Narrative Research in Ministry*, Savage and Presnell define transformation as “a marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better” (Savage and Presnell 2008, 125). The definition

of spiritual transformation that was in the Definition of Key Terms section of this chapter was used as a template as I analyzed the data. It is hard to measure transformation on an absolute scale, so discernment was necessary. Through the journal entries, I asked the participants to give self reports about change in their lives; I wasn't observing it myself. That is why the journal questions were so important. In a sense I, as the researcher, became a type of "story broker" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 132), gently identifying and discerning where genuine change was emerging. In short, the beauty of narratives was not to produce facts and figures to support some scientific theory but rather to elicit social insight, which has ramifications for life in a particular community and setting.

Initially there was one large group gathering opportunity for the pool of participants and myself as the researcher. This occurred before the project began in order to introduce the intent and purpose of the project, explain the methodology, discuss the project ethics, and invite those who may be interested in participating to sign a letter of consent. There was a designated note taker at this meeting who served as my research assistant for this project. From that meeting, twenty-three people signed a letter of consent of which fifteen were randomly selected as the participants.

Methods

The primary data gathering tool used in this project was journal entries based on answers to questions related to sermons that the participants listened to. Bushan and Holsblat state that "Reflective journals are one means of collecting

data in qualitative research (Janesick, 1999), used especially in the behavioral sciences, and considered to be an effective way to obtain information about a person's feelings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007)" (Bushan and Holsblat 2017, 4). This reinforces the value of journal entries to assist researchers in evaluating the process of change or transformation.

A key component of this project was to ensure that the journal questions were devised in such a way so as to elicit good reflective responses from the participants. In qualitative research, the goal is to understand the lives, experiences, and motivations of people. In methods like interviews and focus groups, a researcher can get a one-off insight into a participant's perspective or description of themselves. To be able to measure change over a period of time, a researcher would have to schedule a series of meetings with a participant but they would be limited by what that person can recall and would be willing to share verbally. Using journals as a research tool gives a longer and more sustained insight into lived experiences, plus it helps to negate the researcher-participant power dynamic. Interviews and focus groups can come across as a type of interrogation with the researcher asking the questions and the participant assuming the role of answering depending on their comfort level (Turner 2016). With journal entries, participants have more autonomy to share what they want, how and when they desire.

The same five questions were used each week. They were devised to draw out the pertinent information and encourage insightful contemplation from the

participants. My hope was that by using the same questions each week, it would serve as the catalyst to elicit further insight from the participants and be a source of consistency when so many of the other variables were changing. Using the same questions meant that the focus was on the content of the sermon and not the nuances of different questions every week.

The five questions were:

1. Describe the content of the sermon from this past weekend at North Park that was most memorable to you.
2. What emotions and/or feelings were stirred in you by this sermon?
3. Did the sermon stimulate a connection with God in you? If so, please describe your experience.
4. Did what you heard and felt through this sermon affect the way that you lived this week? If so, please describe some of the ways that it affected how you lived.
5. a. What aspects of the presentation of the sermon distracted from making it more memorable for you? b. What aspects of the presentation of the sermon helped to make it more memorable for you?

Question 1 was devised to determine if the sermon content was memorable. If it was memorable, there is a greater likelihood that it would strike an emotional chord with the participants. That is what question 2 was trying to determine. In their book, *Memory and Emotion*, Daniel Reisberg and Paula Hertel

state that “emotional events are often emotional precisely because they are related to issues we care about and have thought about in other contexts; this would foster the sort of memory connections that we know promote retention and recall” (Reisberg and Hertel 2004, 4). Memory and emotion are definitely connected. Research has also shown that emotion leads to action. Psychologist Dr. Lisa Firestone substantiates this claim when she says that “many of our actions are initiated by emotions” (Firestone 2018). In their article, “Emotion and Action”, Zhu and Thagard write, “Emotions can influence the generation of an action in two ways: the tendency and readiness to act, and the decision to act” (Zhu and Thagard 2002).

Question 3 wanted to know whether the sermon prompted a God connection in the participant. It is the spiritual component of a sermon where the Spirit can draw us close to God and spiritual transformation can occur. Question 4 was inquiring about the degree to which the sermon led to some sort of tangible action for the participants in the week following the sermon.

Questions 5a and 5b focused primarily on the presentation of the sermon. This two-part question was to determine what it was about the preaching that made it memorable. I found this to be an important variable to this project. If a preacher can present the sermon in a memorable way, it is the catalyst to stirring feelings, connecting people to God, and leading to some sort of action or behaviour that demonstrates spiritual transformation.

In terms of analyzing the data, I read over each answer multiple times, looking for various themes, key words, and thoughts that represented similar ideas or concepts. In total, there were 72 separate responses to the journal questions and many of those responses contained four or more sub-points. I coded the data into broad groupings, initially based on key words or ideas, but eventually was able to reduce almost all of the content into four or five main categories per question. This took a lot of time and effort as I was now looking for common themes or categories that encompassed the words and ideas. There was a small sampling of responses that, upon careful analysis, were not suitable to be slotted into any of these categories and were deemed to be insignificant data for the purposes of this project. These included responses that did not have anything to do with the questions asked and appeared to be mostly commentary about something else on the participant's mind at the time. An example of how the initial set of categories was reduced into a smaller set of categories can be found in the "Supporting Documents, Instruments" section of this portfolio.

The problem and purpose of the overall project was to determine whether the preaching at North Park Church is contributing to the spiritual transformation of a specific demographic of the church. This means that the interpretation of data had a twofold purpose. First, it was to discern whether the participant, the receiver of the preaching, is being transformed; that is, did what they hear impact them to the point of changing their behaviour? Secondly, by extension, the data gave meaningful feedback about the presentation of the preaching. The design of the

journal questions allowed the participants to ruminate on the aspects of the sermon content and the preacher's presentation that were memorable and led to transformation and what aspects did not. The data collected is very beneficial to further develop the preaching ministry at North Park. This is why the journal questions were focused not only on the participant's own spiritual journey but also on the presentation of the preaching.

The content of the sermons throughout this project was a key consideration. It was important that the sermons reflected the regular preaching praxis of the North Park preaching team. I did not want to craft a special sermon series that could skew the data. For the eight-week duration of the Field Project, our congregation was in a series entitled, "On the Way." In this series, we looked at the teachings of Jesus that seemed almost spontaneous, as he was doing life "on the way" with his followers, and those that were a little more structured. Stories from the Gospels were used as our Scriptural foundation and relevant illustrations and anecdotes were incorporated into each sermon. Wherever possible, each preacher also tried to merge the values of purpose, relationship, family support, and social justice. These are the values that our leadership have deemed as important to young families so we try to refer to them often in our sermons. Table 1 outlines the Scripture and a brief description of the content of each sermon.

Table 1. Scripture and sermon content

Sermon	Scripture	Description
1. Worry	Matthew 6:25-34	When it comes to worry, Jesus taught that we could lean on him and trust that he is in control.
2. Zacchaeus	Luke 19:1-10	Jesus enters into the “mess” of our lives and invites us to engage in the “messy” lives of others with his love.
3. Healing of the Paralyzed Man	Mark 2:1-12	Are we aware and attentive to the work of Jesus that is right in front of us?
4. Anger	Matthew 5:21-26	Anger can consume us and hinder our relationships with Jesus and others.
5. Lust	Matthew 5:27-30	Sex. What God intended as a covenant good, we have turned into a consumer good.
6. A Story within a Story	Luke 8:40-56	Invite Jesus to grow your faith by stepping out from the crowd and reaching for him
7. The “Jesus Effect”	John 14:12	What does it mean to give up your lives to others in the name of Jesus?
8. Fasting	Matthew 6:16-18	Fasting is setting aside your wants and trusting Jesus will provide what you need.

Phases and Timetables

Table 2 outlines the phases and timetables for this project.

Table 2. Phases and timetables

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
Ethical Review	REB Application for Review	By June 17, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Written report
	Ethical review Approval by REB	August 30, 2019 Revision- September 6, 2019.	REB and Mark Chapman	Written report
Preparatory Field Project work	Develop and identify support documents. Compose recruitment procedure, information letter, and consent forms	By July 15, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Written report for peer review
	Revised these submissions based on peer review	By August 15 , 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Revises written report based on peer review
	Gather the list of potential participants that fit into the required demographic	By August 31, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Consult church data base
	Field Project Proposal revised	By August 15, 2019.	Paul McIlwraith	Revises Project proposal based on peer review
Preaching Field Project	Introductory gathering of pool of Participants. Project explained. Consent forms distributed.	September 9, 2019.	Paul McIlwraith, Gwen Morden Note taker	Personal email invitation to all those who are targeted as potential participants and then a meeting together at the church

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
	1st set of Journal questions distributed	September 23, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	2nd set of Journal questions distributed	October 7, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	3rd set of Journal questions distributed	October 14, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	4th set of Journal questions distributed	October 21, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	5th set of Journal questions distributed	October 28, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	Write a 1-3 page report on progress of Field Project	October 30, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Written Report
	6th set of Journal questions distributed	November 4, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	7th set of Journal questions distributed	November 11, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	8th set of Journal questions distributed	November 18, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Questions emailed out to participants
	Analysis of content of journals	By December 9, 2019	Paul McIlwraith	Study the Journal entries and sort them based on common themes, ideas, concepts, and categories.

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
	Submit draft report for peer review	By December 16, 2019.	Paul McIlwraith	Written report
Preaching Field Project completion	Research Report peer review	By January 6, 2020	Paul McIlwraith	Written report based on Peer review
	Complete Final Preaching Field Project report	By February 7, 2020	Paul McIlwraith	Final written report

Ethics in Ministry-based Research

The role of a pastor as researcher is something to handle with extra diligence and integrity. A pastor holds a sacred trust within his/her congregation. Unfortunately, violations of this trust have been known to happen and the repercussions can be dire or at least take years to re-establish. This is why Tim Sensing states, “As a researcher, you have an ethical obligation to your congregants and participants” (Sensing 2011, 31). Sensing goes on to highlight some core ethical principles that are to guide research practices. They include non-maleficence, which ensures the dignity of all participants is respected; beneficence, which is minimizing the risks for participants and maximizing the benefits; and justice, which ensures that the people who are expected to benefit from the knowledge gained from the research should be the ones asked to participate (Sensing 2011, 32-33).

The Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans states:

Dual roles of researchers and their associated obligations (e.g. acting as both a researcher and a therapist, health care provider, caregiver, teacher, advisor, consultant, supervisor, student or employer) may create conflicts, undue influences, power imbalances or coercion that could affect relationships with others and affect decision making procedures (e.g. consent of participants) (Canada 2014, 99).

Based on this statement, we can safely assume that the role of pastor would fit into the examples of those in “associated obligations.” Therefore, as a researcher who held this dual role, I was fully cognizant of the ethical considerations and cautions that came with it.

The risks in this Preaching Field Project came primarily from the power relationship that existed between the participants and myself. As a preacher, I hold an authoritative position over my congregation. Although I may not have had a direct personal relationship with the participants of my Preaching Field Project, as the primary teaching pastor at the church, they engage with me almost every week as I preach. I also greet many of them in the foyer before and after services. Even if I have had only brief encounters with the people who participate in this project initially, they could be in a position to require pastoral counselling from me or need my services to officiate at a wedding or funeral sometime after this project has been completed.

The other dynamic I was aware of in this Preaching Field Project was that I would be inviting direct feedback from the participants about the transformative impact of preaching at North Park Church where I am the primary preacher. Without some element of confidentiality and anonymity to the data collection, there is the risk of skewed results due to the power imbalance and my dual role as

researcher and pastor as mentioned previously. If their identities were known to me, the participants may be less apt to share some of the more negative aspects of the sermon and the preaching.

For these reasons, I handled this dual role in three ways. First, if any situation of conflict arose between the two roles, I would prioritize my pastoral role. Sensing's comments are helpful. He says, "DMin students are pastorally connected to the participants in their projects. At times, these roles are mixed and confused. Your first priority is always to your ministry and to the service of the people in your parish" (Sensing 2011, 42). In the initial meeting I had with the participants, as I explained the details of the project, I was honest and transparent about the purpose and motive of the Preaching Field Project and was sure to clarify that the data collected was being used primarily to aid in the continual improvement of our preaching ministry. The second way I handled this dual role was to ensure that consent was received initially from the participants and they knew that at any time they felt uncomfortable with the project they could step away. They were also informed that a third party would handle all of the consent forms and data collection. I made certain that they were aware of the benefits and the risks upfront. The benefits included the opportunity for them to process the impact that preaching had on their daily lives, which could lead to potential spiritual growth. They were told that their involvement in this project demonstrated that their voice was needed and heard in the church. The risks may include some vulnerability in sharing ways that the preaching is impacting them

in deeper areas of their life or perhaps having to state that the preaching is not hitting the mark in their lives. Either way, to alleviate any struggle with whether confidentiality would be upheld in this project, I reiterated the benefits of the project and protocol that was in place to ensure confidentiality. The third way I handled this dual role was to ensure that once the project was underway, confidentiality and anonymity were of paramount importance. The only direct contact I had with the pool of participants was in the information meeting. Once that was completed, those who wished to continue and be part of the project handed in a signed letter of consent to my research assistant. From that point on, the participants were only known to me by a number. I had no knowledge of who the final participants in the project actually were. My research assistant was the only one who knew their identities and had access to the completed journal responses each week. She compiled them in a binder for me.

My research assistant signed a Non-disclosure and Data Management Agreement before the project commenced. All data was stored in my locked office and home and on my password-protected computer. These three mechanisms for managing my dual role as pastor and researcher allowed the data from this project to have a maximum benefit for the participants and preaching ministry and protect their role in the research project. This project was approved by the Tyndale REB on September 6, 2019.

Findings, Interpretation, and Outcomes

As has been stated throughout this chapter, my desired outcome for this research project was twofold. First, it was to find out if the preaching at North Park is contributing to the spiritual transformation of the specific demographic of our church. Secondly, the feedback elicited from this project would be beneficial to continue to aid in the development of preachers and preaching at North Park.

Through their journal entries, participants disclosed meaningful thoughts around specific preaching topics and themes that stimulate personal spiritual growth and transformation. These entries also captured certain preaching styles, nuances, and idiosyncrasies that resonated with the participant and may have helped facilitate transformation. The feedback also revealed areas in both preaching content and style that may have missed the mark in terms of facilitating a transformational impact in the participants. Admittedly, personal tastes and preferences played out in some of the comments that were received but there were certain themes, categories, concepts, and ideas that were fleshed out that can be used as dependable and trustworthy data.

The goal for each of the participants was to have them complete journal entries on at least four of the eight sermons in this project. The sermons were preached by four different pastors from the North Park preaching team. As the primary teaching pastor at North Park, I preached five of the sermons. Three other members of our preaching team preached one sermon each in this series. Table 3 displays the number of responses to each sermon and the total number of

responses by each participant in the eight-week period. Unfortunately, three of the fifteen participants failed to respond to at least four sermons. Those are marked with an asterisk in the chart. I do not have any measure for how often each of the participants attended the services during this field project.

Table 3. Responses by each participant and total number of responses per sermon

Participant	Paul #1 Sept 21/22	Paul #2 Sept 28/29	Other #3 Oct 12/13	Other #4 Oct. 19/20	Paul #5 Oct. 26/27	Paul #6 Nov 2/3	Paul #7 Nov 9/10	Other #8 Nov. 16/17	Total
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
2	X			X	X	X	X		5
3	X	X		X		X	X		5
4	X	X	X			X		X	5
5	X	X	X	X		X			5
6	X		X	X	X		X	X	6
7	X			X	X		X	X	5
8	X	X		X					3*
9			X	X	X	X	X	X	6
10	X				X	X	X	X	5
11		X		X	X	X	X		5
12		X							1*
13	X	X	X		X		X		5
14	X				X	X	X	X	5
15	X	X			X				3*
Total	12	9	6	9	10	9	10	7	72

The following are the findings and interpretations of the data received for each of the journal questions in this project.

Question 1. Describe the content of the sermon from this past weekend at North Park that was most memorable to you.

There were seventy-two total responses to question 1 in this project. That means that the fifteen participants over the eight-week duration of the project

wrote seventy-two different journal entries to question 1. Of the responses, not once did someone state that they did not remember a single thing from the sermon. This could have been due to the fact that the participants knew that they were going to be asked what they remembered about the sermon but the results are still encouraging. They indicate that the participants remembered specific details of the sermon including key “catch phrases” or “tag lines” that were used by the preacher.

The data was coded initially into twelve separated groupings but eventually narrowed down to three main categories. One of the reasons for this was because some of the comments actually related more to the presentation of the sermon, than the content. As a result, that data was moved to question 5. This reinforced my theory that the way the sermon is presented impacts the memorability of the content. The second reason was because the remainder of the data was condensed into tighter categories.

Once I compiled and coded all of the data of this question, I realized what people tended to remember most was information about the general theme of the sermon. The majority of the comments were around specific nuances of the main theme of the sermon for that particular day. For the first sermon on the topic of worry, someone wrote that what was memorable to them was, “do not worry, it is not productive. God tells us not to worry.” For the third sermon on the paralytic man and his friends stepping out to care for him, another participant stated, “the paralytic man’s friends had faith on his behalf and went to great lengths to care

for him.” The participants commented on the key sermon themes in all eight sermons they listened to and demonstrated that they were able to recall detailed points of the sermon and remember the content even up to a week after the message was preached. This seems to indicate that the preachers are presenting the material in a way that makes it memorable to the listeners. This topic will be explored further in question 5.

The second main theme that was memorable to the participants was God and/or Jesus. The participants mentioned this theme in seven of the eight sermons. This may seem unremarkable considering it was a sermon the participants were listening to but the journal entries indicate that they specifically noticed the times in the sermons when God/Jesus was active or engaged in situations or in people’s lives. In the second sermon on the topic of Zacchaeus, one participant stated that “Jesus chose the most hated person of this society to have a meal with.” The seventh sermon was about Jesus’ actions and one of the participants observed “how Jesus engaged with people, not only did he spend time with them. He genuinely loved and cared for them.” As a preaching team, our desire is to ensure that God/Jesus is always central in our sermons. The participants stating that God/Jesus was memorable in the sermons reinforced that our preachers are making it a priority and the people are attentive and interested in this theme. The participants remember the theme of the sermons but they also remember the focus on God/Jesus throughout the sermons.

The third main theme that the participants found memorable was scripture. This was specifically mentioned in seven of the eight sermons. Again, this may not come as a surprise given it is a sermon but the journal entries indicate that the biblical text speaks to people to help set context and reinforce the theme of the sermon. For the first sermon on worry, one person stated “going through the biblical text thoroughly helped minimize people splicing different parts and missing the whole message.” In the second sermon on Zacchaeus, a participant wrote that scripture “helped set the context. Historical account of topic and reinforce learning, also learn about scripture.” Our general preaching praxis at North Park is to preach sections of scripture and through books of the Bible. Our desire is for our congregation to become more biblically literate. The fact that the participants mentioned that scripture was something that was memorable for them from these sermons seems to indicate that the preachers are ensuring that scripture is highlighted in their sermons.

Question 2. What emotions and/or feelings were stirred in you by this sermon?

Of the seventy-two times this question was answered by the fifteen participants, only five times did they state that there were no emotions and/or feelings stirred by the sermon. Admittedly the way the question was worded could have led the people to have to come up with some sort of feeling or emotion because it did not overtly say that “no emotion” was an option. But the fact that some people did state that they felt no emotion means they knew that was an acceptable response. The data was initially coded into 24 distinct emotions and/or

feelings that were stirred by the sermons. Upon further analysis, I was able to group many of them together as they represented similar feelings and emotions. For example, many people actually used the word “convicted” in their journal but then others stated things like “I felt a burden,” “I am not doing enough,” and “I need to do better at reading scripture.” These comments all represent conviction and so I grouped them together. Others wrote comments such as “I felt comfort in knowing God would care for me” and “so calming to hear people disengage with people to refresh themselves.” Originally I had these two comments in separate categories but discerned that they could both fit in a category called “Reflective and Reassurance”. This is the process I followed for the other comments as well and was able to comprise five main categories of answers for this question.

Conviction was by far the largest category of emotion/feeling generated by the sermons. Conviction has the connotation of being certain of a belief and challenged to act on it. Some examples of the way that the participants were convicted through the sermons include comments such as “convicted of how easy it is to go through the motions even though what and where our hearts are may be different” and “conviction, anger the explosive kind is something I struggle with especially with my family.”

The theme of being thankful and inspired was the second category of responses for this question. To be thankful is to be grateful or even feel a sense of relief in something and I determined that it fit closely with inspire, which has the idea of being filled with or encouraged by something. Many of the comments gave

this sense of thankfulness and inspiration. One participant wrote, “I was inspired by the way you handled the topic in a way that encouraged people to respond.” Another stated that they felt “Thankfulness for wonderful community where stories intertwined to be challenged by each other.”

The theme of being reflective and reassured in their faith makes up the third category of responses to this question. To be reflective gives the sense of thoughtful pondering and reassurance solidifying a faith or belief in something. Reassurance comes from those reflective moments. Many comments expressed these ideas and so they were grouped together in this category. Some examples of the comments from the participants included, “Reassured and blessed to know many people in my life that are in the people business. Without these people, I won’t know Jesus today. I can play a similar role in the lives of others” and “when I was in Grade 12, I gave my life to Jesus, this sermon took me back to that day. Since that day, Jesus has blessed me so much and this sermon was a great reminder that God loves us no matter where we are.”

The fourth category of responses to this question related to the theme of frustration. These were comments that simply expressed feelings of annoyance or the inability to change something. Some of the comments that were grouped in this category include: “I was frustrated with the sermon because I felt the need to do more, it is not enough to be with messy people, we need to seek God to help transform lives and bring people out of their mess;” and “I wish I was taught that sex is something God honours and desires but I was taught just the opposite. I

think sermons like this are needed in the church.” Frustration was revealed by some of the participants in both the content of the sermon and with themselves or a circumstance in their life where the sermon met them.

Those who responded that no emotions or feelings were stirred during the sermon comprise the fifth category of responses to this question. Those who felt no emotion commented that the content of the sermon was not relevant to them or their life circumstance at that time. One person stated that they watched the sermon online and not “live” and therefore did not feel a connection to it. That would be an interesting study for another time. Some other comments included, “I didn’t feel a lot of emotion stirred in this sermon” and “no emotions stirred in me, this sermon was in my opinion great head knowledge wisdom on how the Bible and the worldviews are polar opposite.” As I analyzed all of the data over the eight sermons, there did not appear to be a pattern of any one participant consistently demonstrating a lack of feeling or emotion with the sermons.

Question 3. Did this sermon stimulate a connection with God in you? If so, please describe your experience.

Of the seventy-two responses to this question, fifty-nine stated that there was definitely a connection with God stimulated by the sermon, and thirteen responded that there was no connection or they were unsure. What became apparent as I analyzed the data is that the idea of “connection with God” could have been made clearer in the question. The wording was somewhat vague and therefore the participants were not completely sure what was being asked. Some

stated that they did not have a connection with God through the sermon and yet when they described their experience in more detail, they did actually have a connection. Despite the ambiguity of the question, there was sufficient data to use for interpretation.

As the participants were contemplating the emotions/feelings stirred by the sermon from question 2, they then transitioned into question 3 asking about the connection with God. The data was initially coded into eleven broad groupings such as action, belief, gratitude, and relationships but once the content was thoroughly analyzed, it was narrowed down to five main categories. Although each category has its own distinct elements, there is this transition of feeling connected to God's love, realizing he is in control, and that he is the one who convicts and encourages us to live out our faith. It is the presence and connection to God in our lives that assimilates those things we know and those things we feel and prompts us to put them into practice.

Those who responded that God loves them and wants to draw close to them, make up the first category of responses to this question. They stated that the sermon gave them a greater sense of the love that God has for them and the desire to be in relationship with humanity. Some comments included, "Reminded me God loves me for who I am. As I grow in this area of trust and faith, God still loves me when I fail" and "I feel God is drawing me closer to me and showing me different ways to grow in relationship with him."

Those who responded that they need to be more connected to God make up the second category of responses to this question. This was the sense that we should rely less on ourselves and more on God and his provision for our lives. God knows what is best for us. One participant stated, “It stimulated making time for God in the morning that I trust will lead to closer connection with him.” Another participant responded, “desire to thirst after God, desire to rely more on heavily on the Lord. An awareness that God can quench our thirst and meet our needs.”

Those who responded that God is in control comprise the third category of responses to this question. Many comments reflected the idea that God is directing aspects of their life and so they don't have to worry, they can trust in him. God is in control of the details. One of the participants expressed their desire to “Rely less on myself and more on the Lord, my needs will be met by him. God is bigger than worry” and another said that “God will give me what I need, not always what I ask for.”

God convicts and encourages was the fourth category of responses to this question. This idea of conviction is the belief in something and a prompting to act on it. It is God's encouragement in believers' lives that helps facilitate this conviction. Some examples of participants' comments on the sermons that fit this category include, “A gentle fatherly rebuke and encouragement to keep pushing forward bringing Christ and his kingdom here on earth” and “a conviction of my

actions and how I show Jesus love to others. Do people know I am a Christian by the way I carry myself?”

Those who stated there was no connection stimulated with God through the sermon made up the fifth category. Some of the participants simply left this question blank for some of the sermons or wrote that they had no connection with God through the sermon that week. Those who did give a specific reason wrote comments such as “I didn’t feel a connection with God because I viewed it from home” and “no connection, just got me thinking about the things Jesus has taught me through his actions.”

Overall the vast majority of the participants’ responses indicate that the sermons did stimulate a connection with God. Only thirteen responses either signified that they had no connection with God through the sermon or the question was left blank. It is hard to know whether those who left it blank really had no connection with God or whether they were just unable to explain it. More information from those who did not respond to this question would have been valuable data for this project.

Question 4 now gets to the heart of the research question as to whether the preaching at North Park leads to spiritual transformation that is evident through the actions of the people.

Question 4. Did what you heard and felt through this sermon affect the way that you lived this week? If so, please describe some of the ways that it affected how you lived.

Of the seventy-two responses to this question, sixty-two affirmed that the sermon did affect the way that they lived that week and ten said that it did not affect the way that they lived. As I read over the data, I was again convicted that this question could have been worded a little more clearly. What I was looking for specifically were tangible examples of how the sermon impacted their actions, such as “I did this because of what I heard in the sermon this week.” I did receive some of those types of comments but there were also a number of incidences where the participants stated that the sermon gave them a general awareness of ways to live differently but they just didn’t follow through with it yet.

The data was initially coded into eight separate groupings, such as: live in the moment, trust God, and application. After analyzing the responses in more detail, it was compiled into the four main categories. For example, a comment originally placed in the “live in the moment” grouping—“just live in the moment more and seize opportunities to spread the gospel”—and one originally placed in the “trust God” grouping—“gave some of the worries to God, felt freedom and lightness in this”—were lumped together in the category of those who took deliberate action. The other categories included those who simply were made more aware of taking action, those who were challenged to take action, and those who declared that the sermon did not prompt them to take any action.

This first category comprised those who did not actually do something but were more aware of their actions that week. As a result of the sermon, they were stirred enough to ponder or think about some of the ways that they act but the

follow-through was somewhat ambiguous. Some comments from the participants included: “It made me think of the songs my kids listen to, books I read, and shows I watch, is the content turning toward loving relationship in marriage or a casual fling?” and “Made me more cognizant of how my actions are perceived and how each little action makes a huge difference.”

This second category were those who weren't just aware of actions but were actually challenged to do something as a result of what they heard and felt in the sermon. They were intent on doing something, it just hadn't translated into a tangible action yet. One of the participants stated that the sermon “Made me look for where I can reach for God instead of something else and really reaching for him and not just pretending.” Another one mentioned that they are more “Mindful of challenges in life and what God is doing, consider how God is trying to get my attention and draw me closer.” Perhaps these first two categories of responses indicate that people are definitely challenged by the content of the sermon but either don't know how to apply it practically to their lives or their lives get filled up with many activities and the content gets lost in rest of the week.

Those who took deliberate action as a result of what they heard and felt through the sermon made up the third category of responses. These were the ones who responded that because of what they heard in the sermon, they actually did something tangible that week. Some of the participants' responses included: “working on a neighbourhood BBQ to get to know neighbours. An example of God working on the way” and “I tried to remember the phrase ‘along the way’

and tried to reconcile any tension or disconnect with my family in the moment rather than exploding or let fizzle with an apology.” Fourteen responses indicated that deliberate action was taken by the participants as a result of listening to the sermon.

The fourth category were those who stated that the sermon didn't stir them to take any action at all. For those who declared that the sermon did not prompt any action, the reasons given were varied. One participant stated the week was too busy and that the sermon just didn't make a connection. Another person honestly stated that they didn't know why the sermon didn't make a connection and three of the participants left this question blank. In at least two cases the participants stated that the sermon did not prompt them to take action and yet their comments actually reveal that they did take action on what they heard. For example, one wrote this response: “Not really, just to keep praying for those dealing with lust” and another stated, “Not this week, don't know why. I will ponder this week to see what got in the way.”

There did not seem to be any sort of pattern for any of the participants consistently stating that they weren't prompted to take action as a result of listening to the sermon. For those who took action or were challenged to take action, more explanation will be given in the Outcomes section of this chapter as this really is the heart of what I was hoping to learn through this Field Project. Questions 1 through 4 were focused more on the content of the sermons and question 5 narrowed in on the presentation of the sermon. As was stated earlier, a

memorable, biblically based sermon is a catalyst for promoting spiritual transformation. The data that related to the presentation of the sermon is valuable to evaluate the effectiveness of preaching for spiritual transformation at North Park. It discloses those aspects of the presentation that hinder, and those that enhance the memorability of the sermon. A memorable sermon stirs emotions, connects with God, and affect the way that a person lives. The goal for preachers is to present a sermon in a way that makes it memorable for the congregation.

Question 5a. What aspects of the presentation of the sermon distracted from making it more memorable for you?

Of the seventy-two opportunities to answer this question, thirty-nine times the participant chose to write nothing at all or responded that nothing distracted from the sermon's memorability. In other words, there were only thirty-three responses on how the presentation distracted from making the sermon memorable. The data was coded initially into seventeen different groupings but was tightened to get to the five main categories mentioned here. For example, some of the comments were related to the sermon having too many points or the content being unclear. Those were separate groupings at first but then were deemed to be of a similar nature, so they were compiled in the category of the sermon being disjointed. Other comments such as the monotone voice of the pastor, lack of eye contact, and lack of visuals like PowerPoint were lumped into the sermon delivery category. It is important to note that the feedback given in question 5 specifically comprise the participants' impressions and not necessarily objective measures.

The area mentioned most frequently as a distraction in the presentation of the sermon had to do with the sermon being disjointed. The participants' observations included things like, there were too many points, the sermon was disorganized, the illustrations didn't fit, the sermon takeaway wasn't clear, too many stories that seemed forced, and there were too many props that didn't seem to land with the sermon. These areas all contributed to the sermon appearing disjointed and unorganized and it definitely distracted from making it memorable.

The second category was around the general delivery of the sermon. Some comments included: the pastor's voice was monotone, there was little eye contact, the pastor seemed to have a general lack of enthusiasm for the topic, there was a lack of involvement with the congregation, and a need for more visuals, such as props or PowerPoint for the biblical passages. How a sermon is delivered plays a significant role in how it is retained. The factors mentioned here definitely distract from its memorability.

The third category was a lack of scripture in the sermon which led to a lack of connection with God. Some of the participants' responses included: "the use of other resources apart from the Bible are helpful to reiterate a point but they are not biblical so it takes away from the message of Jesus" and "you can't replace stories in the Bible with stories of the pastor as they don't hold the same value." Our congregation is used to hearing sermons that are very much biblically based and centred. In one of the messages I preached during this Field Project, I knew that I had incorporated a lot of illustrations and personal stories. In fact,

after I preached the sermon, I was convicted that I had used too many and not enough scripture. Sure enough, the participants picked up on this with their comments. Stories are valuable to reinforce the biblical content in a sermon but they must not take centre stage. I knew it, and the participants' responses confirmed it.

The lack of application in the sermon was the fourth category. Some participants felt that they needed more direction with what to do with what they heard. One participant mentioned, "would have loved for the pastor to give some resources to help with anger management." Another person stated that "rather than give permission to be ourselves, we need to be challenged to look beyond ourselves and comfort." This response seems to indicate that there was confusion around the application of the sermon or the person disagreed with the application.

The lack of focus or distraction on the part of the participants was the fifth category. Two of the participants stated that not viewing the sermon preached live in the auditorium of the church distracted from making it memorable. Another said that it was hard to focus without a visual. Someone else mentioned that they were distracted by the circumstances of their week and were not able to fully focus on the sermon. The answers to question 5b also mentioned many of the same points that have been described in question 5a but with a positive slant to them. Those things that can distract a sermon from being memorable, when

refined and sharpened can actually be used to enhance the memorability of the sermon.

Question 5b. What aspects of the presentation of the sermon helped make it more memorable for you?

Of the seventy-two opportunities to answer this question, it was left blank only six times. That means that sixty-six responses included at least one aspect of the presentation of the sermon that made it memorable. At first, the data was coded into twenty-one separate groupings but eventually narrowed down to five main categories. Initially, characteristics such as personal examples and stories, had their own grouping but I encapsulated those items under the category of the pastor. Tag lines, memorable quotes, and relevant and challenging topics were originally included as stand-alone groupings but I condensed them all under the category of content. This is what was done to make up the other three categories as well. It is important to note that throughout this Field Project, the participants listened to four different preachers. Each has their own distinct style and mannerisms. Although there is not sufficient data to compare what the participants said about each preacher, some individual distinctions are reflected in the responses.

Topping the list of what made the presentation of the sermon memorable was the pastor who did the preaching. As described in my personal theology of preaching, mentioned earlier in this chapter, the preacher does have an important role in making the sermon memorable. Personal illustrations and stories help

make the preacher genuine and relatable and that, according to the responses I received, increases memorability of the sermon. Other comments about the pastor that made the sermon memorable were the pastor's perceived approachability and vulnerability. Perhaps this comment from one of the participants illustrates how a pastor's relatability can increase the memorability of a sermon. The person wrote, "The pastor told a story about his son. I thought of my child who has stomach pain, how hard it is to see a child go through pain. The way that dads would do anything to take away their kid's pain drew the idea that God would do anything for us."

Secondly, the participants mentioned the importance of the content being organized, concise, and relevant to making a sermon memorable. Just as a disjointed sermon can disrupt it from being memorable, a well thought-out sermon can make it memorable. The participants made note of a number of qualities in this category. They appreciated an organized sermon broken down into main points that were easy to remember. They valued a sermon that had a clear direction in where it was going with lots of good summary statements that the people could understand and relate to. The participants noted memorable lines and quotes as well as relevant stories that supported the content and didn't distract from it. They also stated that relevant topics to today's world were appropriate when supported by scripture. One participant wrote that the pastor "keeps coming back to the passage and following verse by verse adding thoughts and context to each line to help us understand the significance and the content."

The third category that made the sermon memorable had to do with the use of scripture. Some participants noticed the attention paid to scripture in the sermons and how impactful it was to remembering the main points of the sermon. There were at least ten comments centering on the idea that it was not just the mention of scripture in the sermon but the “digging” into the text and reading it verse by verse that enhanced the memorability of the sermon. These observations affirm the value that has been placed on scripture in the sermons at North Park.

The fourth category that made the sermon memorable had to do with calling people to action and it being applicable to their life. In two of the sermons, there was a distinct call for people to come to the front of the auditorium and do something that represented their commitment to doing what they learned in the sermon. This was very impactful to the participants in this project. Some of their comments included: “I like how there was a call to come and touch the robe;” and “For people to come forward and touch the robe was a good visual for church to see there are people we need to come around and support.”

The participants found that practical steps given at the end of sermon were very helpful and meaningful in areas related to anger, worry, and lust. In one particular sermon on fasting, the preacher gave some follow-up material for people to actually try fasting during their week and this was well received. One participant wrote, “excellent practical application, solid info to execute application.”

The fifth category had to do with the actual delivery of the sermon. As we noted in the first part of question, negative aspects of the delivery of a sermon can distract from making it memorable but a solid delivery can make it memorable. The participants mentioned a number of characteristics that pertain to the delivery of the sermon that enhance its memorability. They ranged from the timing, rhythm, and voice control of the preacher to the use of humour, great eye contact, and audience participation. At least 12 comments related to the use of visuals such as PowerPoint and props that helped to make the sermon more memorable. One participant stated, “having seven points on the screen is good so I could write it down. I learn best to listen and write it down.” It was somewhat eye-opening that many of the participants declared in their comments that they were visual learners, so anything that can aid in the visual presentation of the sermon will make it more memorable to them.

To summarize, questions 1 to 4 really built on one another and reinforced the theory that if the content of the sermon is memorable, it is more likely to stir emotions and feelings that can cause a connection with God that ultimately affects the way a person lives. For the purposes of my project, this is where spiritual transformation is evident and the fruit of the spirit is being lived out in the participants’ lives. Given the data, I can surmise that spiritual transformation is happening in the lives of people within this focused demographic at North Park. This will be explained in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

Outcomes

The key objective of this project was to determine whether the preaching at North Park was contributing to the spiritual transformation of a specific demographic of the church. For the purposes of this project, I defined spiritual transformation as a Holy Spirit-empowered process of change in Christians that is demonstrated in their lives through the Christ-like attributes of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In the Bible these are described as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV). If one key measurement of spiritual transformation is the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in the participants' lives, then a common understanding of each one of the fruit of the Spirit is necessary. In his book, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness* (Wright 2017), Christopher Wright gives a comprehensive description of each fruit of the Spirit. I have given a brief summary of each one in table 4.

Table 4. Wright’s description of the fruit of the Spirit (Wright, 2017)

Fruit of the Spirit	Description
Love	Love is down-to-earth caring, providing, helping, encouraging, and supporting one another, even when it costs a lot or hurts a lot to do.
Joy	Joy is not just an emotion but flows from the exercise of faith in God’s promises in Christ.
Peace	Peace is all-around well-being, freedom from fear and want, and contentment in relationships with God, others, and creation.
Forbearance	Forbearance is the ability to endure whatever opposition and suffering may come our way and put up with the weakness and foibles of others.
Kindness	Kindness is being thoughtful for others and to want to help, encourage, comfort and do something that benefits or serves them.
Goodness	Good people do not always worry about what is fair but rather like to error on the side of generosity, grace, and kindness.
Faithfulness	Faithful people are trustworthy and dependable. They are someone you can rely on to keep their word.
Gentleness	Gentleness is displayed in the ability to endure hostility and criticism without aggression and instead control your temper and your tongue.
Self-Control	Self-control is power over sinful desires by leaning on the spirit of God.

Using these descriptions of each fruit of the Spirit, I looked at the answers given in question 4: “How did the sermon affect the way you lived?” Specifically, I focused in on those responses where the participant had stated that the sermon had prompted them to take some action that week. There were fourteen of these responses in total. The actions, and the fruit of the Spirit that was demonstrated through these actions, are listed in table 5.

Table 5. Action and the fruit of the Spirit that was demonstrated

Participant #	Action	Fruit of the Spirit
#2	I lived in the moment more this week, seized opportunities to spread the gospel. More focused on the present.	Faithfulness
#11	Working on a neighbourhood BBQ to get to know neighbours. An example of God working “on the way.”	Love, Kindness
#4	I didn’t compare myself, hung out with friends who compare and I just enjoyed myself. I have all I need in Jesus.	Joy
#6	The sermon reminded me of importance of community and supporting each other which translates into my interactions with women in the women Bible Study this week.	Goodness, Kindness
#3	I stepped back and prayed and handled a situation of impatience differently.	Forbearance
#5	When stressed out this week, I was more aware, I took deep breaths, slower to anger.	Self Control
#14	I went to bed 30 minutes earlier to get up earlier to spend time with God.	Faithfulness, Self Control
#5	Thought of sermon this week when praying for things to think not only my will but God’s will. Also thought of what my friends and neighbours’ needs were.	Love, Kindness
#11	I have a history of anger at my dad and vowed to be peaceful, meek and loving towards him always. Thought of sermon a couple of times when I caught myself getting angry, vowed to be peaceful.	Peace, Love, Gentleness
#14	It made me look at my children differently this week, thankful for them.	Joy
#2	Friends dealing with things so I prayed for them and connected with them.	Goodness, Kindness
#14	Didn’t fast this week but used the method of denying temptation then recognizing that I denied it and knew that I could so again with God’s help.	Self Control
#5	Found myself turning to prayer quickly this week when worry crept in.	Faithfulness
#6	Remember the phrase, “Along the Way”, reconciled my tension with my family in the moment rather than exploding in anger.	Self Control, Gentleness

Flow Chart 1. Model to explain what happened in the data



The data also gave meaningful feedback about the presentation of the preaching. This is why the content of question 5 is so pivotal for the development of our preaching ministry at North Park. If we can grasp what it is about the presentation of a sermon that makes it memorable, and conversely what distracts from making it memorable, we can continue to hone our craft so that it can have the maximum impact for spiritual transformation. The presentation of the sermon is the key cog in the model to explain what happened in the data. Please see flow chart 2. I will attempt to synthesize the outcomes in more detail in the following section.

Flow Chart 2. Model to explain what happened in the data



Conclusions and Implications

The overarching goal of the Christian church is to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world. In what has become known as the Great Commission

As you can see from the responses listed in table 5, the various actions that people took in response to the sermon they heard that week covered all of the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit at least once. The analysis was somewhat subjective based on my understanding of what each of the fruits of the Spirit represents but I think the data affirms that spiritual transformation is occurring through the preaching at North Park. Fourteen of the responses indicated a specific action that was taken in response to the sermon that was listened to that week but, sixty-two of the seventy-two response suggested that the sermon did affect the way that they lived.

I think if I left it at that I would be satisfied with the results of this project but the outcomes and learnings went far beyond what I expected. Admittedly, as a novice researcher, I fumbled a bit with the methodology and in particular, crafting the crisp and precise line of questioning that I hoped would produce the best data, but I had a theory. Based on research and personal experience, I had a sense that if the content is biblically based and culturally relevant, then the sermons were memorable, then they would be more apt to stir emotions and feelings that would connect people to God (because sermons are a spiritual activity) and lead to action. Please see flow chart 1. The first four questions in my project tried to draw these connections out of the participants and, although the questions were not perfect, they did reinforce my thinking and the objective of this project and they served as a model to explain what happened in the data.

of the church, Jesus says to his followers, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV).

As stated throughout this portfolio, North Park Church’s commitment to following these words of Jesus has led the church to a strategic goal to reach out to 300 non-churched families with the gospel and see them connected to North Park. It was also suggested that preaching is an important task in the church that God uses to convict hearts and transform lives. To be able to determine the extent to which the preaching at North Park is impacting the lives of this demographic who are already in our church, will give valuable insight as to what resonates with this growing segment of our society, not just in terms of content but also preaching style and delivery. This will allow our preaching team to craft and deliver sermons that we know will align with them and hopefully, give this demographic of our church a comfort level to invite their unchurched friends to join them at North Park.

We have a culture of evaluation and leadership development at North Park. We are always looking for ways to improve our praxis and methodology and equip young leaders. The results from this research project allow us to gain clearer insight into what and how we preach. This information and data can also be used for training purposes within our preaching team as well as in our preaching mentoring sessions with younger preachers. The results of this project

will be quite useful to other churches that have a culture and context that are similar to North Park. We have an important mission to our world and we need to continue to ensure that our preaching is hitting the mark.

For eight consecutive weeks, a group of fifteen congregants between the ages of 25 and 40, who were also parents of dependent children, listened to live sermons in our church auditorium and then answered a series of five questions related to the sermon. The questions were laid out in a journal format and therefore the participants could answer as much or as little as they wished. As described in this chapter, these questions were designed in such a way as to determine if the participants found the sermon content memorable; if that stirred some emotion in them; and if those feelings connected them with God and then led them to take some sort of action on what they had heard. Through my research and personal experience, I have found that there was a connection between these four stages. The key is the memorability of the sermon content and therefore the preacher becomes an integral part of this process. We also cannot negate the role of the Holy Spirit who empowers God's Word in the preaching task, as was described in the Models and Other Resources section of this chapter.

My data revealed that the content of the sermons was definitely memorable to the participants. It did stir emotions and feelings in them. They did feel connected to God and all of this did affect the way that they lived. Their tangible actions the week after listening to the sermon demonstrated many attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. This led me to conclude that the answer to my

project's question, of whether the preaching at North Park church is leading to the spiritual transformation of this particular demographic of the church, is a definite Yes.

As significant as this finding was for our preaching ministry, equally fascinating was the data received for question 5 about the aspects of the presentation of the sermon that either distracted from making it memorable or enhanced its memorability. The good news is that there were many more comments about the positive things that the preachers at North Park were doing to make the sermons memorable than negative things that distracted from making them memorable.

Although I was pleased with the overall implementation and results of this project, there were certainly learnings along the way. As was mentioned earlier, the evaluation of a sermon is a tricky endeavour. How do you get good, comprehensive feedback that is not skewed too much by subjective opinions or personal preferences? This is a real tension. I am not sure I achieved this goal with my methodology as I actually encouraged deep personal reflection through journal entries as my means of data collection, which is basically asking for people's subjective opinions. What I did find, however, was how consistent the responses were across the fifteen participants and how smoothly the data could be compiled into categories. I am also aware of the fact that I was gathering information about preaching by having people answer specific questions that may have influenced their responses. That I would ask what part of the sermon they

found memorable may have prompted them to remember something. Asking them about a connection with God through the sermon caused them to ponder if that connection was made. Would they have mentioned a connection with God through the sermon if I had engaged them in general conversation in the foyer afterward? I am not sure. So the question needs to be asked, “Did the act of journal writing lead to the spiritual transformation or was it the sermon itself?” I think we could probably surmise that the reflection that happened in the journal writing process contributed to the spiritual transformation. Which may be true but I would also suggest that we, as preachers, can leverage this activity in our congregations.

One of the things that surprised me from the data was the number of times that the participants stated that they were visual learners and that they appreciated when the points of the sermon are in PowerPoint on the big screen at the front of the auditorium. It makes it easier for them to jot down the main points. In my observations, as I preach, I have noticed that there are a number of congregants who still take handwritten notes during the sermon. In fact, at North Park each week, we provide a list of questions called “Points to Ponder.” These questions are based on the sermon and people can answer the questions during the sermon or use them to generate discussion with family or friends or in their small group throughout the week. It has proven to be a popular and effective means of facilitating a deeper dive into the content of the sermon besides simply listening to it. All this is to say that journal entries may have aided in making the sermon

more memorable but we, as preachers, should use them in the future as a means of enhancing the sermon's listening experience by offering various levels of engagement such as journaling.

As I mentioned in the Findings section of this chapter, I was not completely satisfied with the quality of my questions. If I was to do it over, I would ensure that they were clearer. This was especially evident in question 3, where the concept of a connection with God may have been somewhat ambiguous, and in question 4, where I was searching for a specific way in which the sermon affected how the participants lived that week. I still received some good responses but I think clearer questions would have generated even better data. Also, receiving the exact same list of questions each week may have skewed the feedback as people may have started to anticipate these questions each week. Due to the practicalities of the project—with different weeks, different sermons, and different preachers—using the same questions added some consistency to the process.

Another learning coming from this project was in regard to the participants themselves. I am completely aware that a sample size of fifteen people in a church of our size is relatively miniscule, and so I would take more participants next time. I had twenty-three people who gave their consent and fit the demographic requirements. I opted to randomly lop off eight from this pool of potential participants to ensure that their anonymity was maintained at the expense of getting some good data from more participants. In the end, three of my

fifteen participants failed to complete the journal questions on at least four of the eight sermons and that was a disappointment. Also, in hindsight I would also have had the participants complete a survey before the project began and one when it was completed to see if I could have another means of measuring spiritual transformation through the eight weeks. Another thing crossed my mind about halfway through the project. My stated goal for the participants was that they would complete the journal questions on at least four of the eight sermons in the project duration. It occurred to me that some of the participants may not come to church on the Sundays when someone was preaching whose style they may not care for as much. Therefore, their data would only be on the preachers for whom they had a certain affinity. I have no way of substantiating this pondering but, if it was the case, it would have been quite beneficial for them to give feedback even on the preachers they may not appreciate as much. That would be good information to use to develop our preaching further.

As I stated earlier, despite these drawbacks to the project, I was encouraged by the data and excited about potential future research that could be done coming out of some of the learnings we gleaned here. One of the interesting comments I received from a few participants had to do with not listening to the sermon “live” in the main auditorium. For whatever reason that particular week, they had to listen to it in the church foyer or online at home. Their feedback indicated that this was definitely not an ideal circumstance and it did hinder the sermon’s memorability, emotional and God connection, which meant that the

sermon had less of an impact on the way that they lived that week. Based on this observation, I would be interested in a study in the future that analyzes the impact of listening to a sermon in a service where a person is surrounded by other people and is involved with the worship music and liturgy of the church versus an online solitary experience where a person usually only listens to the sermon content itself. Do the other factors of a live church experience play a role in the overall transformative power of a sermon compared to sitting at home alone and listening to it on the internet? I think the results of a study like this would be helpful for determining the value of the church and gathering in community in our increasingly disconnected and plugged-in culture.

The goal of the Christian church is to share the good news of Jesus with the world. One of the tasks in this endeavour is the act of preaching. This project set out to determine if the preaching at North Park is having a transformative impact on a certain demographic of our church. The data that was received indicates that preaching is definitely leading to spiritual transformation in this segment of our church family. The comments also gave valuable feedback about the aspects of the preaching presentation and delivery that make it memorable, which aids in transformation. This information will be useful into the future to continue to train our preachers and preaching apprentices, and to enhance the preaching ministry at North Park church and other faith communities.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The overarching theme of this whole portfolio is best summarized in the Apostle Paul's encouraging words to the Christians at Philippi when he states, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, NIV). The contents of chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this document represent personal and theoretical contemplation based on dozens of books and research articles, and hundreds of hours of in-class and personal reflection over three years of committed study and a lifetime of preparation. Never before have I been as confident about something as I am of the fact that God, who began a good work in me, will carry it through to completion. In chapter 2, I describe the many people that God has used to impact my life throughout the years. Each has played a small or very large role in contributing to my personal identity. I didn't realize their cumulative effect until I took time to process and reflect upon the stages of my life and see how only God could have orchestrated some of these relationships and divine appointments.

Experience plays a powerful role in our lives. In fact, one of the most common questions we are asked in a job interview is to describe our experience. Our experiences are our personal contact and engagement with facts, people, and events. Chapter 2 contained not just the people who have influenced who I am but

also many personal experiences throughout my life that have shaped my personal identity. The truth is, not all of these experiences were pleasant or comfortable. Some of them were disappointing and even a little frightful. At times I was disobedient and even rebellious but, upon closer inspection, God was able to use it all, no matter how tedious or innocuous, to form me into the man that I am today.

The second segment of chapter 2 involved determining my preaching identity. This is where the theoretical aspects of the task of preaching were explored in a more detailed manner. As I scoured the assigned texts and supplemental readings, I came to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the nature and importance of preaching. It is a role that is supported and promoted in scripture and, when submitted to God, it is infused with power and a certain degree of mystery. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that sets preaching apart from any other form of oration.

It was in this segment that the importance of preaching and engaging the culture was highlighted. Preachers bring their own identity and personality to the task but they must also be aware of their culture and their context, and the needs of their listeners around them. The preacher-congregant relationship can be a precarious association, however, as it can set up a dichotomy that can be either overly critical of a preacher, causing insecurity, or over-adoring, which can lead to issues of pride. Both can be detrimental if the preacher is not grounded in Christ and does not have good supports around him or her. I was able to reflect on

some of my own personal preaching influences in this segment and describe how they have been incorporated into my praxis of preaching throughout the years.

This is an area that does fluctuate depending on various styles and trends but, just as experiences are pivotal for shaping who we are, so too are practical influences that augment the craft of preaching. God has molded my personal identity but I am also fascinated by the way he had manufactured a preaching identity in me. In fact, I had never even considered that I had a preaching identity until I was tasked with this assignment. Once again, as I laid all of the elements out before me, I realized that God had been stirring and forming this in me for years.

The surprising thing was just how beautifully these two elements, my personal identity and preaching identity, blended to form my personal preaching identity, which is described in the third segment of chapter 2. As I massaged the words and key descriptors in each of these elements, I was able to construct a working theology of preaching that accurately describes my overall preaching philosophy. This served as a useful framework for the work produced in chapters 3 and 4.

The first part of chapter 3 of this portfolio represented a shift away from an emphasis on preaching and focused more on some contextual and cultural analysis of the city and neighbourhood surrounding the church in which I am currently employed as the teaching pastor. Throughout the process of this assessment, I was able to get a clearer picture of the nuances of London as a city but also the distinct features of the neighbourhood surrounding North Park.

Within five kilometres of the church building in the Fanshawe neighbourhood, are thousands of people with such diverse socio-economic and cultural circumstances. These factors do influence that makeup of our congregation but more importantly they constitute the mission field in which our people live, work, go to school, and play each day. This makes a task like the exegesis of a context and culture so vitally important for church leaders.

Taking time to understand the factors that have marked North Park Church throughout the years was also incredibly beneficial for my role as the primary preacher. I was able to process the various theological shifts and methodologies that have left a lasting imprint as well as determine the characteristics that define who North Park is as a congregation today. They are adaptable to change, generous in their giving, and have forged a strong partnership with many organizations in the community. There is also a strong history of solid biblical preaching at North Park, and more recently an increased emphasis on missional living. These factors have given me a greater window into the soul of the church and also made me realize that God has had his hand on North Park throughout the years. It also confirmed the fact that God does not just carry on his work to completion in individuals but also in the collective body of the church.

The later part of chapter 3 was dedicated to constructing a preaching strategy for North Park church, given what I know about the context and incorporating my personal theology of preaching. This really was a process of

fusing the perceived needs and concerns of the congregation with the practical day-to-day mechanics of sermon planning and implementation.

There are a few things that became obvious in this segment based on the content that was covered in chapters 2 and 3. First, the Bible is the main focus of the preaching at North Park. Our preaching menu includes an intentional, annual cycling through sections of the Old and New Testaments as well as a particular focus on the Gospels each year. The Bible is preached book by book and chapter by chapter in a four- to six-week series. This stems from my personal conviction of the importance of being immersed in the Bible, as described in chapter 2, and reading it like a grand narrative, not selectively choosing verses here and there to fit into a sermon. The theme does not dictate the scripture preached at North Park—the scripture illuminates the felt needs and concerns of people today, just as it did when it was written. Therefore, a seven-week series on the book of Hebrews can have a profound impact on Christians in the twenty-first century, just as it did on Jewish Christians in the first century who were experiencing difficulties committing to Jesus.

The second thing that became apparent in this segment was that evaluation is a constant at North Park, especially in the preaching ministry. We evaluate our preaching and our weekend services each Tuesday as a preaching team and I personally watch videos of my preaching the week after I preach to analyze the delivery in particular. This has been instrumental for me to tweak and modify elements of my presentation of the sermon to make it more effective and

impactful. I also watch video of the younger members of our preaching team and meet with them to offer constructive feedback. They are very receptive to this activity because they understand our culture and the importance of growing and developing their preaching gift. This preaching mentoring is an exciting initiative at North Park, launched as a result of my learnings in the Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale.

Although evaluation is important and it is carried out in formal and less formal ways at North Park, I felt the desire to explore this area a little deeper and that is what evolved into my Preaching Field Project, described in chapter 4 of this portfolio. In chapter 2, I stated that although I have several years of preaching experience, I still deal with issues of insecurity around the task. I am also somewhat hesitant to invite someone's feedback if I am not fully certain of their motive. That is why my Preaching Field Project represents such a leap of faith for me and maybe, more significantly, a demonstration of my own personal growth.

The Doctor of Ministry program not only afforded me opportunities to read books and write papers; there were also numerous situations where I had to present sermons and ideas to my professors and colleagues and be open and receptive to their honest thoughts and peer review. It was not always easy to hear but it helped me to grow a bit of a thicker skin and understand that their desire was not to cut me down but to help me to continue to refine my preaching gift. This is why I crafted the Preaching Field Project around the evaluation of the preaching at North Park. I learned a lot from both the implementation and content

of the project. I was heartened to discover that the preaching in general is leading to the spiritual transformation of this demographic of our church. Just as important, I received some positive reinforcement in my preaching, which validates my theology of preaching, as well as thoughtful insight for my ongoing development as a preacher.

The Preaching Field Project ended up being a very healthy exercise that has compelled me to think of other evaluation opportunities in the future. It also reassured me that God is continuing to mold me and shape me into who he wants me to be. I am a lifelong work in progress but the one who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion.

The Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale University has four key learning outcomes. The first outcome is that students will:

Show evidence of spiritual and character growth by pursuing deeper self-knowledge and intimacy with God, including the skill and essential ministry practice of theological reflection.

Evidence of this learning outcome in my life constitutes most of what was written in chapter 2 but it has really been encapsulated in all three of the key chapters in this portfolio. The task of determining my personal identity, preaching identity, and personal preaching identity really was tough slugging as the readings, class assignments, and discussions forced me to take time to contemplate who I am and why I didn't always like what I discovered about myself. But then God showed up in the midst of it and revealed how he was putting the pieces together.

If you would have asked my personal theology of preaching three years ago, I would have stammered to come up with an answer, and yet all the components of it were in place. I had just never compiled it into a succinct statement. Once I did, it was an “aha” moment because my whole life had been building up to it. It is this personal reflection that really translates well into theological reflection. I have seen it so in my life. That is what came out in chapter 3, specifically in putting together a preaching menu for my preaching context. My personal and theological reflection is what has enabled me to construct a well-defined yearly preaching menu that adheres to my personal and theological convictions. As I described earlier, my Preaching Field Project was profoundly meaningful to me personally but I have already seen it translate practically into enhanced skill development in my praxis of preaching.

The second learning outcome is that students will:

Demonstrate greater proficiency in the theory and practice of preaching, including the nature of the preaching task, the work of biblical interpretation, forms and styles of sermons, discerning the needs of the hearers, methods of delivery and the person of the preacher.

Once again, many components of this learning outcome are described throughout the pages of this document. This also was the beauty of the way that the overall portfolio was developed. The project that constitutes chapter 2 of this text was assigned after our first year of the Doctor of Ministry program. Its focus was on who we are and what we bring to the preaching task which allowed us to contemplate various forms and styles of preaching that have impacted us and helped to shape our personal theology of preaching. The second year included

courses on culture and context and the major project that formed chapter 3 of this document. Building on what we learned and wrote about after year one, we were now able to synthesize our thoughts about our preaching context, the needs of our congregation, and the way that we shape our preaching menu to that particular audience. Added to this was the knowledge that we gained through supplemental “Proclamation” courses which instructed us in forms, styles, and modes of preaching in courses such as *Preaching the Parables*; *Preaching Discipleship through Mark’s Gospel*; *Embodying the Gospel*; and *Preaching the Psalms*. Although the papers and assignments completed in these courses do not form an individual chapter in this portfolio, their influence is scattered throughout the pages.

What was learned throughout chapters 2 and 3 is what gave me the confidence to tackle the Field Preaching that was the culmination of the three years of study and the knowledge gained through specific courses such as *Making a Difference*; *Discerning the Setting*; and *Exegeting the Congregation and Community*. I feel I was able to suitably achieve this second learning outcome and am very thankful for the way that this Doctor of Ministry program was implemented to build on each year to foster this learning. It once again provided me with that image of Philippians 1:6 and the ongoing work of God in my life.

The third learning outcome is that students will:

Exhibit skills in contextual and cultural analysis, in both their immediate ministry context as well as the larger culture in which their ministry is situated, to the end that life-needs of listeners are being addressed with the claims of the Gospel.

Much of what I have already described can apply here but one of the classes in the second year of this program stands out for me as it pertains to this learning outcome. In the *Exegeting the Congregation and Community: Research Methods* course, we were given two assignments. One involved a social network analysis and the other was to write a detailed preaching context assessment. I remember that I really struggled through these assignments, perhaps because they involved content and a means of analysis that was somewhat foreign to me. I put out a number of panic calls to my professor during this time looking for clarification. I would say, looking back on it now, this class and these two assignments were the tipping point for me. I was on the verge of packing it in and giving up. I was tempted to walk away but God gave me the strength to press on. Persevering through the difficult moments gave me the confidence in myself that I could tackle the final project and the faith that God would be with me, continuing to do his work in me.

The final learning outcome is that students will:

Produce an integrated research portfolio including their preaching identity, ministry context, and preaching field project.

The fact that you have reached this point in your reading of this document verifies that I did indeed produce an integrated research portfolio. It hasn't been an easy process and has involved a certain degree of blood, sweat, and tears but just writing these words brings a certain amount of satisfaction. This portfolio is the culmination of three years of intensive study and sacrifice building on a lifetime

of experiences and I would not have missed it for anything. There are no regrets. I will refrain from writing the words “The End” as I conclude this portfolio because I know that it is simply the end of this chapter of my life. The one who began a good work in me will continue to refine and shape me into the person he desires me to be. He will also continue writing the portfolio of my life. Hopefully my personal and preaching identity will not remain stagnant but, with new experiences, it will only be refined and enhanced.

God in his wisdom may move me to different settings and situations in the later years of my ministry, which will necessitate me having to utilize exegetical skills in analyzing new congregations and contexts. Strategic planning of a preaching menu may look a little different in the years ahead depending on my context but the skills and methodology have been put into place. Finally, my love-hate relationship with evaluation may linger but I do have a newfound confidence in the value of great feedback, thanks to my Preaching Field Project. I am excited to employ a variety of evaluation methods and techniques in the future as it applies to strengthening my personal preaching gift and preaching ministry in general.

I will conclude with the words of the Apostle Paul that I used in the introduction to this portfolio: “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, NIV). My prayer is that I will continue to be receptive to the work of God in my life, wherever he leads me and whatever he calls me to do. He

has used this Doctor of Ministry program to profoundly impact my life and to grow me mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and vocationally but he is not finished yet. I eagerly await what he has in store for me in the next chapter.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Supporting Documents, Instruments

A sample of participants' comments for question 1 of the Preaching Field Project, related to memorability of the actual theme of the sermon:

Sermon	Participant # and Comments
#1 Worry	#1 worrying is useless and achieves nothing #10 do not worry, it is not productive. God tells us not to worry.
#2 Zacchaeus Messy people	#3 even though Zacchaeus was a despised man, Jesus still came to talk to him #12 we are too much like the crowd around Zacchaeus, we huddled together to keep outsiders away.
#3 Paralytic Man Stepping out to care	#6 The paralytic man's friends had faith on his behalf and went to great lengths to care for him.
#4 Anger	#2 Matthew 5:22 reminded me that I need to have a heart and mind of love first, not anger #5 the part that stood out for me was the concept of careless anger and the danger of it.
#5 Lust	#6 the consumer vs. covenant sex comparison stood out for me #10 God's design for sex serving two purpose, procreation and pleasure
#6 Jairus' Daughter Story within a Story	#1 what stood out was the similarities between Jairus and the bleeding woman #14 had not noticed the similarities between the two stories and the connectedness it implies
#7 Jesus' Actions He not only taught, he acted.	#2 that Jesus' actions are as important as words. #3 the Jesus Effect- how small actions can lead to bigger things.
#8 Fasting	#4 appreciate the reminder of the importance of fasting. It is about setting aside our wants. #7 Fasting isn't presented as optional and for some reason I hadn't included that thought in my spiritual formation related to fasting.

A sample of participants' comments for question 1 of the Preaching Field Project, related to memorability of God/Jesus:

Sermon	Participant # and Comments
#1 Worry	#3 a reminder when we trust God, we shouldn't worry #14 Jesus does not want us to be debilitated by worry
#2 Zacchaeus: Messy people	#1 Jesus came to seek and to save sinners #15 Jesus chose the most hated person of this society to have a meal with
#3 Paralytic Man: Stepping out to care	#4 we often ask Jesus what we think we need, but he gives us what we actually need
#4 Anger	
#5 Lust	#1 sex is a gift that God gives parameters around to stop it from devastating lives #14 sex is a gift from God but it is so delicate this it must be safe guarded by boundaries
#6 Jairus' Daughter: Story within a Story	#9 the older I get, I am more aware of the way that Jesus told stories #10 the healing power of Jesus, we need to trust in his power in our lives
#7 Jesus' Actions: He not only taught, he acted.	#6 how Jesus engaged with people, not only did he spend time with them, he genuinely loved and cared for them
#8 Fasting	#10 three tasks to express our desire to know God—Giving, Praying, Fasting

A sample of participants' comments for question 1 of the Preaching Field Project, related to memorability of scripture:

Sermon	Participant # and Comments
#1 Worry	#7 going through the biblical text thoroughly helped minimize people splicing different parts and missing the whole message #13 scripture was most memorable, Jesus reminds us birds are cared for
#2 Zacchaeus: Messy people	#12 the discussion and points around verse 7, people in the crowd became upset with whom Jesus interacted
#3 Paralytic Man: Stepping out to care	#1 reading a memorable text and learning something fresh
#4 Anger	#2 Matthew 5:22a, if angry with someone, subject to judgment
#5 Lust	#11 the scripture related to sex for sure was memorable
#6 Jairus' Daughter Story within a Story	
#7 Jesus' Actions: He not only taught, he acted.	#9 yes the Bible is filled with many learnings about Jesus but it is his actions (and resurrection) that brought people to believe in him
#8 Fasting	#4 Bible doesn't command us to fast because it assumes we are already doing it

Summary of participants' responses to the five journal questions:

Question 1 <i>Memorable Content</i>	Question 2 <i>Emotions /Feelings Stirred</i>	Question 3 <i>Connection with God</i>	Question 4 <i>Did it affect the way you lived this week?</i>	Question 5a <i>Aspects of presentation of sermon that distracted</i>	Question 5b <i>Aspects of presentation of sermon that helped memorability</i>
1. Theme of sermon	1.Conviction	1.God loves me and wants to draw close	1. More conscious/ aware	1. Sermon disjointed	1.Pastor
2. God/Jesus	2.Thankful/ Inspired	2.Need more connection to God	2.Challenged to take action	2.Delivery	2.Content
3. Scripture	3. Reflective and reassured	3.God is in control	3.Took Action	3.Lack of scripture/ connect with God	3.Scripture
	4. Frustrated	4.God convicts/ encourages	4.No action	4.Lack of application	4.Call to action/ applicability
	5.No feeling	5.No connection		5.Lack of focus/ distraction	5.Delivery

Appendix B: Choosing Project Participants

Choosing of Participants for this Research Project taking place at North Park Community Church by Pastor Paul McIlwraith on the subject of:

Does the preaching at North Park Church contribute to the spiritual transformation of the demographic of our faith community that are between the ages of 25 and 40 and are parents of dependent children?

In December 2016, the leadership of North Park Church entered into a strategic planning process to determine God's direction for the church over the next five years. After much prayer and discernment, it was put on their heart to reach out to 300 non-churched families with the gospel, and see them connected to North Park. Families were defined as two parent, single parent or blended family households where the parent(s) is between the ages of 25 and 40.

Since the worship service is usually the place where most of the church community gathers, I (Paul) want to determine through this research project if the preaching is contributing to the spiritual transformation of this demographic of the church. To assist me in collecting data, I would like to recruit between 15-20 people within this target demographic at North Park and have them complete a series of journal entry questions based on a series of sermons delivered in the fall of 2019 at North Park.

These are the recruitment qualifications for the 15-20 participants:

- between the ages of 25 and 40
- parent of a dependent child (i.e. under 18 years of age)
- a consistent attender of North Park church (i.e. They have signed their children into our Sunday Children's Ministry programs at least 20 of the past 52 weeks and have participated in at least one Children's Ministry extra event in the past 8 months)
- they self-identify as a Christian

Our church database will help me gather a pool of people who fit these qualifications. All of these people will receive an information letter detailing the purpose of the research study, the risks and benefits, the data collection method (open-ended questions that are to be filled out in a journaling style) and an invitation to attend an information meeting. At the meeting the Information Letter and Letter of Consent will be read and questions will be answered. At the conclusion of the meeting, those wishing to participate in the study will be asked to sign the Letter of Consent. Those who sign the Letter of Consent will have their names entered into an Excel Program that randomly selects names. Twenty names

will be randomly selected using this program. These will be the participants in this research project. Only those names that are selected will be contacted.

Those attending the information meeting will be told that as the researcher, I will not be involved in collecting the Letter of Consent or randomly selecting the names of the participants. That will all be done by my research assistant so that the identity of the participants is hidden from me to help nullify the institutional power dynamic that can take place between a pastor and a congregant.

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Email

Dear _____,

As you may be aware, for the past 2 ½ years along with my role as the Teaching Pastor at North Park, I have been in school at Tyndale University completing the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program. My specific area of concentration has been in Preaching and Communication. It has been a wonderful experience and I have learned a lot and now I am down to my final research project.

The thing I love about this program is that it is meant to be geared toward ministry in my specific setting which is North Park. All the assignments and presentations are to be done in such a way as to benefit me and our church community. In my final project, I will be doing some research on how the preaching at North Park contributes to the spiritual transformation of a specific demographic of our church. You are receiving this note because you fall within this demographic.

The demographic includes these qualifications:

- between the ages of 25 and 40
- parent of a dependent child (i.e. under 18 years of age)
- someone who is a consistent attender of North Park church (i.e. They have signed their children into our Sunday Children's Ministry programs at least 20 of the past 52 weeks and have participated in at least one Children's Ministry extra event in the past 8 months)
- they self-identify as a Christian

Attached to this email you will find a letter that further describes this research project and the expectations of the participants. There is also a Letter of Consent attached that if you determine to be involved, I would need you to sign. Please read over both of these attachments in detail and if you have any questions, please let me know. I will also be having an information meeting on _____ to further clarify the scope of this research project and answer any questions.

At North Park, we have tried to create a culture of evaluation. We regularly endeavour to review our ministries and programs to determine if we are doing the best we can with the resources that we have, to meet the needs of those in our faith community and beyond. This research project is an opportunity to have you engage in this important process by helping us to evaluate our preaching ministry so that it can have the maximum spiritual impact for the glory of God. Thank you in advance for considering this invitation.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please let me know if you can attend the information meeting. Thank you and blessings to you.

Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor

Appendix D: Information Letter

Information Letter Regarding Research taking place at North Park Community Church by Pastor Paul McIlwraith on the subject of:

Does the preaching at North Park Church contribute to the spiritual transformation of the demographic of our faith community that is between the ages of 25-40 and are parents of dependent children?

and request for your consent in participating in this study.

In December 2016, the leadership of North Park Church entered into a strategic planning process to determine God's direction for the church over the next five years. After much prayer and discernment, it was put on their heart to reach out to 300 non-churched families with the gospel, and see them connected to North Park. Families were defined as two parent, single parent or blended family households where the parent(s) is between the ages of 25-40. This was to be the target demographic for North Park.

Since the worship service is usually the place where most of the church community gathers, I (Paul) want to determine through this research project if the preaching is contributing to the spiritual transformation of this target demographic. To assist me in collecting data, I would like to recruit between 15-20 people within this target demographic at North Park and have them complete a series of journal entry questions based on a series of sermons delivered in the fall of 2019 at North Park.

These are the recruitment qualifications for the 15-20 participants:

- between the ages of 25-40
- parent of a dependent child (i.e. under 18 years of age)
- a consistent attender of North Park church (i.e. They have signed their children into our Sunday Children's Ministry programs at least 20 of the past 52 weeks and have participated in at least one Children's Ministry extra event in the past 8 months)
- they self-identify as a Christian

Our church database has helped me to gather a pool of people who fit these qualifications. That is why you are receiving this letter. You fit these qualifications. I would like to invite you to an information meeting on Monday, September 9, 2019 at 7:00 pm at North Park Church where I can give further instructions and answer any questions. At this meeting, my research assistant, a trained note taker will be present to ensure that all of the information is recorded for the benefit of this project and your comfort level.

At the conclusion of the information meeting a Letter of Consent will be handed out. You will have one week to pray and ponder if you want to sign the Letter of Consent. Please note, signing the Letter of Consent does not guarantee participation in the research project. Once my research assistant has collected the signed Letters of Consent, she will then enter the names into an Excel program that randomly selects names. It will select up to 20 names. Those people will be the participants in the study and will be contacted. If your name was not randomly selected, you will not be contacted. This process will ensure that I will not have any knowledge of the identity of the participants and will not see their names associated with the data collection method (journals) we will be using.

This research will be conducted by Pastor Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor at North Park Church under the supervision of Dr. Kevin Livingston, Preaching and Communication Track Coordinator and Dr. Mark Chapman, Program Director in the Doctor of Ministry Department at Tyndale University in Toronto, Ontario. This research also has the full support of North Park's Lead Pastor, Dr. Matthew Eckert and the Elder Board.

This research project will conform to all the requirements of Canadian ethical guidelines as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and the *Tyndale Research Ethics Policy Manual*.

This research project will take place during the fall of 2019 at North Park Church. Once the participants have been established, the project will commence. On the Monday of each week for eight weeks, each participant will receive a series of five (5) questions sent by email that are to be answered based on the sermon that was delivered at North Park Church the weekend before.

The questions will be sent out in a "journal" format simply meaning that they will be open ended questions that the participant can write as little or as much as they feel comfortable. The questions will be related to the content of the sermon, the way the participant personally processes the content and the style and delivery of the preacher. Participants will be given five days to complete these questions and then asked to submit them to an online site (Cognito) by the Saturday of each week. I am aware that not everyone will be able to attend church and listen to the sermon every week over these eight weeks so the goal is to get at least four journal entries from each participant throughout this research project.

One of the important values of this project is to maintain the confidentiality of each participant. Once the project begins, you will only be identifiable to me by a number. I will not have access to the online site where you submit your journal question responses. They will be collected by my research assistant who will be bound to confidentiality by signing a *Non-disclosure and Data Management Agreement*. She will simply compile them in a binder for me. All data and information collected will be held in my locked office, secured

portfolio and password protected computer. You are invited to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable throughout the research project.

I will be the only one who will process the data and write a final report. This final report will be shared with North Park's preaching and preaching mentoring teams and the Elder Board. It will also be included in my final project for my Doctor of Ministry graduation requirements. It will also be made available to all participants in the study who would be interested in receiving it.

Please note, I will do all that I can to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to opt out of the study at any time without consequence. Pastoral counselling can also be made available upon request if participants feel a need to discuss some areas further.

This results of this research project promise to be very beneficial to myself and the preaching team at North Park. To gather information about the way that the content, style and delivery resonate with this demographic will aid us in developing and growing as preachers. I believe that each participant in this project will also benefit by engaging the sermons on a deeper level and reflecting upon the impact that they have on your lives. This project will also serve as a prototype for other research we wish to do in the area of preaching in the future. The research results will be made available for anyone interested, sometime in 2020.

If you have any questions, please direct them to me, Pastor Paul McIlwraith at 519-457-1400 or at paul.mcilwraith@northpark.ca. If you have any concerns about this research project, please contact North Park's Lead Pastor, Dr. Matthew Eckert at matthew.eckert@northpark.ca. If you have any questions about the ethical nature of this study, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at Tyndale University at reb@tyndale.ca.

Thank you for considering participating in this research project as we work together to enhance the spiritual growth and development of our community and the effectiveness of our preaching ministry.

Blessings,

Pastor Paul McIlwraith

Appendix E: Email Sent to Participants

The following was sent to participants by email on the Friday before the research project commenced:

Hello: _____

Your name has been randomly selected to participate in the preaching research project conducted by Pastor Paul McIlwraith. Thank you for your involvement in this study. The project will commence this coming Monday (date)_____.

On Monday, you will receive an email from my research assistant, Gwen Morden. (If you don't receive the email, please check your Spam folder). In this note will be the five journal questions that you are to complete based on the sermon from this weekend. You will have five days to complete the five questions. You will be asked to submit them by Saturday of that same week by simply completing the questions and clicking the "submit" icon. Your response will be send to the "Cognito" Form Site.

Only Gwen, will have access to this site. Each week, she will compile your journal responses for me. This will be done to maintain your confidentiality.

The next Monday, you will receive another email from Gwen with the journal questions to answer based on that past weekend's sermon at North Park. This will go on for eight weeks. Obviously, in that eight-week span, you may have to miss a week. That is fine. You just submit the journal entry as blank by the following Saturday. The goal is to have each participant complete journal entries for at least four sermons during this eight-week span.

Remember, I do not want you to be too concerned about spelling and proper grammar when you are writing your responses to these questions. I am more concerned about your thoughts than your grammatical competency. You are also free to answer as much or as little as your desire in the space provided below each question.

I hope this makes sense. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Gwen at gwen.morden@northpark.ca and she will refer them to me. She will maintain your confidentiality. I appreciate your participation in this project and the benefit it will have to the preaching at North Park.

Paul

Appendix F: Journaling

A description of the data collection methodology for the participants:

For the past 14 years, I have used a journal each day as a means of recording my thoughts and feelings about the passages of scripture I read in my daily devotions. I find the journal is a great tool by which to share my concise or even rambling thoughts. It can capture my feelings and stirrings around a particular topic and is almost cathartic in that I can dispense what is on my mind onto a piece of paper, regardless of how organized it may at first appear.

In her book, *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God Through Attentive Writing*, Helen Cepero suggests that journal reflections are a way to bring your life and world around you into greater focus. She says, “Using your journal as a camera lens will allow you to zoom up close on a particular aspect of your own journey or take a step back and see the bigger picture of what might be going on within you and around you.” (Cepero 2008. 8).

For these reasons, the primary data gathering tool I have decided to use in this research project will be journal entries based on questions related to sermons that the participants listen to. Bushan and Holsblat reiterate the significance of journal entries for research when they state that, “*Reflective journals are one means of collecting data in qualitative research (Janesick, 1999), used especially in the behavioral sciences, and considered to be an effective way to obtain information about a person’s feelings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007)* (Bushan and Holsblat 2017, 4).

I believe that by using journals as a research tool, it gives me a longer and more sustained insight into your lived experiences and engagement with the preaching, rather than just a set of quantitative questions. In addition, it helps to negate the researcher-participant power dynamic. Interviews and focus groups can come across as a type of interrogation, with the researcher asking the questions and the participant assuming the role of answering depending on their comfort level (Turner 2016). With journal entries, participants have more autonomy to share what they want, how and when they desire.

Here is how the process of data collection through journal writing will take place for this research project. On the first Monday that the project commences (you will get a reminder email, a few days before the project is to begin), you will receive an email from my research assistant, Gwen Morden. In this note will be a journal that looks like this (*show a picture of what the journal will look like*). It will have a space for the date and then there will be five open-ended questions. Here are the five questions (*show a picture*).

Please note, they will be the same five questions each week, but of course, the content of your journal entries will vary because you will be answering the journal questions based on a different sermon each week. You will have five days to complete the five questions. You will be asked to submit them by Saturday of that same week by simply completing the questions and clicking the “submit” icon.

When you submit your journal entries, only Gwen will have access to the site to compile the entries for me. I will not have access to it because I want to maintain your confidentiality as I handle the data. Gwen has signed the Non-disclosure and Data Management Agreement. We will do all we can to ensure your confidentiality is secured.

The next Monday, you will be sent the journal again via email and you will answer the journal questions based on that past weekend’s sermon at North Park. This will go on for eight weeks. Obviously, in that eight-week span, you may have to miss a week. That is fine. You just submit the journal entry as blank by the following Saturday. The goal is to have each participant complete journal entries for at least four sermons during this eight-week span.

It is important to note, that I do not want you to get caught up on spelling and proper grammar when you are writing your responses to these questions. I am more concerned about your thoughts than your grammatical competency. You are also free to answer as much or as little as your desire in the space provided below each question. Remember, although you will not be identifiable by name, Gwen will be designating a number to your journal so that each week you submit a journal entry, we can keep your journals together by number.

Also, we will do our utmost to ensure confidentiality but we cannot guarantee anonymity as some of what you choose to disclose in your journals may mention specifics about family members or circumstances that may reveal your identity. Use your discretion in that way.

Once the data collection aspect of the research project has concluded after eight weeks, your involvement in this research project is completed. If you are interested in receiving the final report when it is finished, it can be made available to you.

In terms of analyzing the data, I intend to organize it around common themes, ideas, concepts and categories. The problem and purpose of the overall project is to determine whether the preaching at North Park Church is transformative for a specific demographic of the church.

Appendix G: Journal Questions

Each Monday for the eight weeks that this research project is collecting data, the participants will receive these five questions to answer, based on the sermon the weekend before. These questions must be submitted to the designated online site “Cognito” by the Saturday of that week.

Date: _____

Questions

1. Describe the content of the sermon from this past weekend at North Park that was most memorable to you.
2. What emotions and/or feelings were stirred in you by this sermon?
3. Did the sermon stimulate a connection with God in you? If so, please describe your experience.
4. Did what you heard and felt through this sermon affect the way that you lived this week? If so, please describe some of the ways that it affected how you lived.
5. a. What aspects of the presentation of the sermon distracted from making it more memorable for you? b. What aspects of the presentation of the sermon helped to make it more memorable for you?

Appendix H: Research Project Consent Form

Does the preaching at North Park Church contribute to the spiritual transformation of the demographic of our faith community that are between the ages of 25 and 40 and parents of dependent children?

Name (please print): _____

1. I acknowledge that I meet the following qualifications:
 - I am between the ages of 25 and 40
 - I am a parent of a dependent child (i.e. under 18 years of age)
 - I am a consistent attender of North Park church (i.e. I have signed my children into North Park's Sunday Children's Ministry programs at least 20 of the past 52 weeks and have participated in at least one Children's Ministry extra event in the past 8 months)
 - I am a Christian
2. I have read the Letter of Information outlining the purpose, details, benefits and risks of this research project and have had an opportunity to ask any relevant questions.
3. I understand that I will be participating in a project that involves sharing personal information about the way that the sermon content resonates with me.
4. I understand that this research project is being conducted by one of the pastors at my church. There could be a perceived institutional power dynamic between a pastor and a member of his congregation. I acknowledge that I have not been coerced but, my participation in this project is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence.
5. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data and only Gwen Morden, Paul McIlwraith's research assistant will have access to retrieving the journaling entries and compiling them for Paul. She has signed a Non-disclosure and Data Management Agreement.
6. I understand that due to the nature of the data collection (journal entries), complete anonymity may not be possible depending on what I choose to share, but confidentiality will always be respected.

7. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights by being involved in this research project.
8. I understand that the final report of this research project will be included in Paul McIlwraith's final project to meet the graduation requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program. It will also be available to North Park's preaching team, preaching mentoring team and the Elder Board. I will also be entitled to view the final report if I so desire.
9. I am aware that if I have any questions about my participation in this project, they may be directed to Pastor Paul McIlwraith at 519-457-1400 or at paul.mcilwraith@northpark. If I have any concerns about this research project, I can contact North Park's Lead Pastor, Dr. Matthew Eckert at matthew.eckert@northpark.ca. If I have any questions about the ethical nature of this study, I can contact the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at Tyndale University at reb@tyndale.ca.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to let my name stand to be added to the Excel program to randomly select up to 20 names that will be the participants in this research project.

Yes _____ No _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix I: Research Project Consent Form (Preachers)

Does the preaching at North Park Church contribute to the spiritual transformation of the demographic of our faith community that is between the ages of 25-40 and are parents of dependent children?

Name (please print): _____

Job Title at North Park Church: _____

1. I have read the Letter of Information outlining the purpose, details, benefits and risks of this research project and have had an opportunity to ask any relevant questions.
2. I understand that the participants of this research project could be journaling about the content of a sermon that I preach.
3. I understand that the participants of this research project could be journaling about the style and delivery of a sermon I preach.
4. I understand that this research project is being conducted by Paul McIlwraith, North Park's Teaching Pastor. There could be a perceived institutional power dynamic between this pastor and myself. I acknowledge that I have not been coerced but, my participation in this project is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence.
5. I understand that the final report of this research project will be included in Paul McIlwraith's final project to meet the graduation requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program. It will also be viewed by North Park's preaching team, preaching mentoring team and the Elder Board.
6. I understand that when this research project is formally written up, the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of those who preached the sermons that were involved in the study.
7. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights by being involved in this research project.
8. I am aware that if I have any questions about my participation in this project, they may be directed to Pastor Paul McIlwraith at 519-457-1400 or at paul.mcilwraith@northpark. If I have any concerns about this research project, I can contact North Park's Lead Pastor, Dr. Matthew Eckert at matthew.eckert@northpark.ca. If I have any questions about the ethical nature of this study, I can contact the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at Tyndale University at reb@tyndale.ca.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research project.

Yes _____ No _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix J: Script for the Information Meeting

For potential participants in this research project conducted by Pastor Paul McIlwraith:

Welcome everyone and thank you for being here. Your attendance demonstrates your further interest in this research project on preaching that I will be conducting at North Park this fall. Due to the formal nature of the project and ethical requirements associated with such research projects, I have scripted the notes for this meeting to ensure that all that is said is recorded. Forgive me for the formality.

This is what I want to do in our time together. I will read the letter that you were all sent by email last week, describing this project. Then I will read the Letter of Consent so that you are all aware of the logistics of the project and your involvement in it. I will also read a description about journaling, the method of data collection that I am using for this project and show a picture of the means by which this journal will be sent to you by email each week. Once I am done reading these things, I will invite questions of clarity from you. Please note that my research assistant for this project, Gwen Morden is here and will be taking notes.

Gwen is our office manager at North Park and a trained note taker. She has agreed to help me with some of the administrative logistics for this project. Please note, Gwen has signed a Non-disclosure and Data Management Agreement which means she is bound to confidentiality with anything involved in this project. *(Paul will read that letter at this point)*

Gwen will also be the one who will collect your journal entries each week and compile them for me to analyze. I trust Gwen explicitly and thank her for helping me in this way. After I have finished reading the documents, you are free to ask any questions of clarity but as I said, they will be recorded as will my answers so that I have a hard copy to utilize in my project if there is a need. Is everyone okay with this? Again, I apologize for the formality, it is not the norm for me and maybe not how you are used to seeing me, but it does benefit this project for the sake of order and accuracy.

Paul will read through the information letter, the Letter of Consent and the note about journaling. He will also show a picture of the means by which the journals will be sent to the participants each week. (all documents accompany the REB application). Once he is finished, he will invite questions of clarity. He will again remind them that they are speaking voluntarily and all questions and answers will be recorded.

Thank you for coming to this meeting tonight. Just a reminder that if you wish to let your name stand to be randomly selected to participate in this study, you must have your signed Letter of Consent to Gwen in one week's time by _____ (date). I have filled out some stamped envelopes addressed to Gwen that you can take with you and mail your consent to her or you can simply sign it tonight and hand it to Gwen once I have left. My hope is to begin the research project in two weeks' time. An email will be sent only to those people whose names have been randomly selected to participate. It will give more details about when the project will commence.

If you do not receive a follow up email, thank you for your interest in this project but your name was not randomly selected to participate in this research project. Thank you again and have a good evening.

Appendix K: Non-disclosure and Data Management Agreement

Does the preaching at North Park Church contribute to the spiritual transformation of the demographic of our faith community that is between the ages of 25-40 and are parents of dependent children?

Primary Researcher: Pastor Paul McIlwraith

I, _____, the _____ (role in the research project)

I agree to -

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., computer files, journals) with anyone other than the Researcher(s).
2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., computer files, journals) secure while it is in my possession.
3. return all research information in any form or format (e.g., computer files, journals) to the Researcher(s) when I have completed my assigned research tasks.
4. after consulting with the Researcher(s), erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher(s) (e.g., computer files, journals).

(Print Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

Researcher(s)

(Print Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

Appendix L: How the Data was Categorized

Question 1. *Describe the content of the sermon from this past weekend at North Park that was most memorable to you.*

When the data for question 1 was coded the first time it was broken into 12 groupings. The groupings were:

1. The specific topic of the sermon	2. Specific focus on Jesus	3. Scripture	4. Current culture learning
5. Outliers	6. Quotes or Tag Lines	7. Related to the Preacher	8. Illustrations or stories
9. Organization of sermon	10. Application	11. Props and Visuals	12. Personal connection

As this data was studied and reanalyzed, it was condensed to three final categories:

1. Theme of Sermon

Data was taken from 1 to form this new category

2. God/Jesus

Data was taken from 2 to form this new category

3. Scripture

Data was taken from 3 to form this new category

The data from 4-12 in the first groupings was deemed to be more about the presentation of the sermon and it was moved into the data for Question 5.

Question 2. *What emotions and/or feelings were stirred in you by this sermon?*

When the data for question 2 was coded the first time it was broken into 24 different groupings. The groupings were:

1. Anticipation	2. Concern	3. Confidence	4. Confirmation
5. Challenged/Conviction	6. Curiosity	7. Eagerness	8. Emotional
9. Empathy	10. Enjoy	11. Fear	12. Forgive
13. Free	14. Independence	15. Lack of faith	16. Liked

17. Overwhelmed	18. Remorse	19. Revelation	20. Conflict
21. Sad	22. Self Aware	23. Surprise	24. No feeling

As this data was studied and reanalyzed, it was condensed to five final categories:

1. Conviction

Data was taken from 5 to form this new category

2. Thankful/Inspired

Data was taken from 7, 10, 14, 16, 19, 22 to form this new category

3. Reflective and Reassured

Data was taken from 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 18, 21, 23 to form this new category

4. Frustrated

Data was taken from 2, 11, 15, 17, 20 to form this new category

5. No Feeling

Data was taken from 24 to form this new category

There were five responses that stated that they had no feeling related to the sermon.

Question 3. *Did this sermon stimulate a connection with God in you? If so, please describe your experience.*

When the data for question 3 was coded the first time it was broken into 11 different groupings. The groupings were:

1. Action	2. General learning	3. Gratitude	4. Belief/ Faith
5. Thanksgiving	6. God/ Jesus	7. Not sure	8. Relationship with family
9. Relationship with others	10. Presentation	11. No conviction	

As this data was studied and reanalyzed, it was condensed to five final categories:

1. God loves me and wants to draw close

Data was taken from 1, 4, 6, 8 to form this new category

2. Need more connection with God

Data was taken from 1, 4, 6, 7 to form this new category

3. God is in control

Data was taken from 1, 2, 3, 6, 9 to form this new category

4. God convicts/encourages

Data was taken from 1, 3, 6 to form this new category

5. No Connection

Data was taken from 7, 11 to form this new category. There were 13 responses that stated they had no connection or were unsure.

Question 4. *Did what you heard and felt through this sermon affect the way that you lived this week? If so, please describe some of the ways that it affected how you lived.*

When the data for question 4 was coded the first time it was broken into 8 different groupings. The groupings were:

1. Live in the moment	2. Trust Jesus/God	3. More conscious/Open	4. Prayer
5. Application/Shared Learnings	6. Scripture	7. Sermon was impactful not sure why	8. No Action

As this data was studied and reanalyzed, it was condensed to four final categories:

1. More conscious/aware

Data was taken from 3, 5, 6 to form this new category

2. Challenged to take action

Data was taken from 5 to form this new category

3. Took action

Data was taken from 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 to form this new category

4. No action

Data was taken from 7, 8 to form this new category. There were 10 responses that indicated they took no action.

Question 5a. *What aspects of the presentation of the sermon distracted from making it more memorable for you?*

When the data for question 5a was coded the first time it was broken into 17 different groupings. The groupings were:

1. Too many points	2. Other thoughts	3. Away from main auditorium	4. Disjointed
5. Stories/Illustrations	6. Tone and voice	7. Inappropriate illustrations	8. Spectator
9. Content	10. Props	11. Lack of application	12. Resources apart from Bible
13. Lack of Scripture	14. Pastor's lack of enthusiasm	15. Didn't connect to the heart	16. Notes
17. Online resources			

As this data was studied and reanalyzed, it was condensed to five final categories:

1. Sermon Disjointed

Data was taken from 1, 4, 7, 9 to form this new category

2. Delivery

Data was taken from 5, 6, 8, 10, 14, 16 to form this new category

3. Lack of Scripture/Connect with God

Data was taken from 7, 12, 13 to form this new category

4. Lack of Application

Data was taken from 11, 15 to form this new category

5. Lack of Focus/ Attention

Data was taken from 2, 3, 17 to form this new category

Question 5b. *What aspects of the presentation of the sermon helped make it more memorable for you?*

When the data for question 5b was coded the first time it was broken into 21 different groupings. The groupings were:

1. Personal Examples	2. The Bible	3. Stories/ Practical examples	4. Pointed me to Jesus
5. Genuine	6. Encouraging	7. Delivery	8. Points
9. Organized	10. Humour	11. Visuals	12. No notes
13. Relevant Topic	14. Memorable Quotes	15. Relatable to World	16. Biblical Story relatable
17. Audience Participation	18. Applicable	19. A call to action	20. Props
21. Challenging topic			

As this data was studied and reanalyzed, it was condensed to five final categories:

1. Pastor

Data was taken from 1, 5 to form this new category

2. Content

Data was taken from 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 21 to form this new category

3. Scripture

Data was taken from 2, 4, 16 to form this new category

4. A call to action/ applicability

Data was taken from 18, 19 to form this new category

5. Delivery

Data was taken from 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 17, 20 to form this new category

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