

Closed-Loop Preaching: Enhancing Preaching Using Lay Feedback

Research Project conducted for partial fulfillment of D. Prof. Programme in Leadership
Communication: Developing and Using Lay Feedback in Preaching

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Preface

George's wounds

George is a wonderful pastor. Nearly everyone in his congregation loves George, mainly because they can palpably feel his affection for them. In describing George's visitation capacity, one of the parishioners described him this way, "George is the kind of priest who gets to the hospital before you do!"

Now please don't think of George as one-dimensional. He dearly loves the pastoral care aspects of ministry, but he also enjoys preaching. The Bible means a great deal to George personally, and he studies it deeply. George describes the Bible as "God's Holy Word." He is very passionate about the scriptures and the preaching of scriptural truth.

However, George is limited in this part of his ministry, even as he prospers in the visitation aspects. George senses that something is wrong, but can't seem to put his finger on it. He really works hard on his messages, and laboriously practices them in front of his long-suffering wife on Saturday nights. She likes them, and on the rare occasion that she offers comment, George accepts her input and makes changes.

Within the parish, there is a great deal of gossip about George's preaching. Little of it is positive. Even George's staunchest supporters give way before the inevitable criticism of his preaching, retreating onto the safe high ground of George's laudable affection.

Tragically, the priest is becoming a rather comic figure to many in the parish. They want

him by their side when the rare emergency occurs, but they have stopped listening, having given themselves over to somewhat cynical internal humor instead.

George is rather blind to all this. The wool is pulled firmly over his eyes in two protective layers – the external kindness of his flock and his own natural defense mechanisms that do not wish to see the problem. Yet, such is George’s sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and to people that he can indeed tell something is not quite right with the preaching situation at his church.

So, George calls me, a fellow pastor whom he knows cares for him and whose preaching he respects. I likewise appreciate George’s fine qualities, being in fact a bit jealous of his pastoral care brilliance. Over lunch, we discuss his situation. This dear man shares his suffering over the unsolicited and sometimes unkind preaching advice with which he is continually encumbered. He shares frustration and even some anger over not only the volume of this advice, but its maddeningly conflicting nature. He is wise enough to recognize that the presence of a few vocal supporters does not mean he is really hitting his goal in preaching the Word of God. After an hour of listening, we come to the conclusion that it would help for me to privately meet with some members of his congregation.

I ask if George has any suggestions regarding who would make good candidates for me to interview? We agree that these persons should be discerning, wise, and Christians who have a fair grasp of what is involved in teaching the Bible. If they also exhibit the

spiritual gift of teaching or exhortation, that will be a welcome bonus. After some discussion, George equips me with four names, and the investigation is on.

I manage to get all four together for a breakfast gathering. Three women and one man, they impress me with their candor and their compassion for their preacher. They see George trying too hard. They notice a scattered aspect to his thinking, in which he attempts to be so biblically accurate that his loving heart for people is obscured. They are bothered by the lack of objectives and the common question after a sermon, “What was the big point?” However, George apparently does use humor and illustrations well.

It becomes obvious that George’s sensitivity has served him well. These people are most insightful and genuinely have the best interests of the preaching ministry of their church at heart. I thank them in George’s name, delighted that each of these fine folks is loyal to their pastor.

Later, George and I go over the findings. He has joined in the spirit of discovery and growth admirably. In fact, he is so happy to be getting healthy and positive help that prideful ego seems not to have joined us at the table. As a sinful, prideful pastor myself I know what a major miracle this is! As I praise George for this and thank him for the honor of being a part, I ask the big question, “Will you please prayerfully consider forming these four folks into a pulpit team?”

As George has learned, I operate with a pulpit team, dear brothers and sisters who

evaluate and guide every message I give. They channel input for me so that I receive necessary corrections and helpful suggestions in the most positive manner possible. I sense that George has the makings of a fine pulpit team and recommend he mold this ad hoc group into something that can have an ongoing impact.

Getting Within the Story

Most of us who teach or preach the Bible are very conscientious. We desperately want to do a good job, fulfilling our ministry and working heartily as to the Lord. We particularly feel privileged to be a part of those moments when the eyes of people are opened to what God has to say. Words can scarcely describe that electric thrill we feel when we see in a listener's eyes that she or he has captured a concept. We listen with pleasure as he describes to us after the lesson that he felt "like a light bulb went on" in his head. We are energized to run the preaching race with endurance and zeal.

Yet, we struggle with many blockades and hurdles to effective biblical preaching. Well under one-half of the preachers who labor around the world have any formal Bible training. Even those who attended seminary regularly describe the struggles of applying the never-changing scripture to an ever-changing environment. And most especially, our own pride hampers us by making us inflexible. We labor diligently, but like contemporary CEOs in the business world, we often take input as threat.

In order to overcome the hurdles and race forward in the preaching ministry to which we have been called, we need assistance. This study has been conducted to determine

whether the standing pulpit team offers the help every pastor needs to run this race with integrity and flexibility. Examining the conclusions of this work, the reader will find that although it can be difficult to serve in submission with a pulpit team, doing so will improve one's service dramatically. Also, we will see that opening oneself to feedback and assistance is the right thing to do. It will make all the difference.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my marvelous wife [Janna](#) and our children [Jessica](#), [Michael](#), and [Benjamin](#), whose support made this study possible. Likewise, I was buoyed by the zeal of the Elders and members of Frisco Bible Church throughout this process. [Thanks to Daniel Southern, Richard Bush, Josh Eells, David Ward, Tommy Sears, Bob Wudeck, and Mike Catchings](#). My own FBC pulpit team merits praise for making these ideas live for 10 years and for encouraging their propagation. [David Wade, Angi Gibson, Cathi Layfield, Cindy Sharp, David Dietz, and Mark Mattay](#) – well done and thank you. As the one who first nudged me toward this path, Dr. Cliff Sheets deserves special credit; as does Dr. David Lane of the Professional Development Foundation.

Dr. John Reid and Dr. Jerry Wofford have been wonderfully encouraging – much that is good in this study originated with them. The Venerable Reverend Dr. Gordon Kuhrt opened his Westminster Abbey office and shared his brilliant grasp of the parish priest. Dr. Pauline Armsby was most forgiving and helpful as I struggled to write academically. Dr. Tom Siems used his gifts of insight and encouragement to shape not only the research

but also the researcher, and I am grateful.

Petra Spoken of the Cambridge Libraries was wonderfully helpful, particularly in providing private quiet workspace. Likewise, Warden Peter Francis and the team of talented librarians at St. Deiniol's Library in Wales granted immeasurable help, especially among their singular collections. Not to be forgotten, the staff at the Collin County Community College in Frisco spared no effort in their assistance.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the amazing faith of the participants in this study. Rev. J, Rev. T, and Rev M are not only fantastic pastors, but have edified all of us in their bold willingness to embark on this journey as pioneers. May God richly bless them.

Though no man is an island, all this work is my own. While each and all of these have dramatically blessed me, any errors are my sole responsibility.

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[Red Brick Lodge](#)

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Abstract

This study has been conducted under the direction of Middlesex University and through the good favor of the Frisco (Texas) Christian Alliance. The concern of this research has been whether the existence of a standing lay pulpit team increases measurably the preacher's openness to feedback. [This process of developing sensitivity to useful feedback is known as "closing the feedback loop."](#) Multiple case studies, triangulated with many other [data collection instruments](#), have been the primary means of examining the [hypothesis that a standing lay evaluation team closes the feedback loop](#). Further, existing studies and literature have been used to not only support this hypothesis but to convincingly establish that openness to feedback leads inevitably to improved teaching. [The results clearly demonstrate the efficacy of a lay pulpit team in opening a preacher to feedback and thus increasing effectiveness.](#) Thus, the theory herein tested, supported by this research and further validated by other work, may provide a simple means to achieve an end long sought in the preaching profession.

Chapter 1 Feedback and Communication

Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success. (NAS)

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (NAS)

Preaching

Like thousands of other pastors and priests¹ around the globe, I find a great deal of my ministry emphasis is on preaching. Preaching is our calling and our passion, and the task at which most pastors most desire sharpening. (Miller 2002: 12) This desire to excel in preaching is no doubt linked to the importance of the preaching task. In essence, preaching is about persuasive leadership through communication, specifically communication of the Bible. (Lee 1959: 15) This communication of the Bible is of paramount importance for not merely the health of the individual and his church, but for the furnishing of the minds of the world's citizens. Allan Bloom says:

Without the great revelations, epics and philosophies as part of our national vision, there is nothing to see out there, and eventually little left inside. The Bible is not the only means to furnish a mind, but without a book of similar gravity, read with the gravity of the potential believer, the mind will remain unfurnished. (Bloom 1987: 60)

Thus, preaching is communication of great ecclesiastical and social significance leading

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¹ There are significant regional and denominational differences among the terms “ministers,” “preachers,” and “pastors,” and “priests.” However, for this study, the terms are used interchangeably since we are concerned with the preaching task and the acquisition of feedback – events that cross all boundaries. Such linguistic interchange also reduces any exclusive or sexist implications inherent in writing in a language absent a neuter pronoun.

people to thinking that helps them see the world “out there” and to be more fully developed internally. These lofty goals are accomplished through the exposing of the Bible, that deepest of literature. (Adler & VanDoren 1972: 246). Thus, preaching sets the pace for leadership communication – at its best influencing other leadership communication enterprises such as politics and education.

For the purposes of this study we shall concentrate on the leadership communication aspects of preaching, leaving the biblical studies to other discussions. This is in no way intended to minimize the importance of historical, literary, grammatical, textual and even psychological influences upon effective preaching. Each plays a part in the preaching task. Yet, our focus will remain on preaching as leadership graphically exposed through communication.

Feedback

Narrowing our scope even further, this study will focus on only one aspect of that communication. Our area of interest involves listener feedback. One of the most assiduously researched areas of leadership communication involves the positive impact of feedback on teaching – both in sharpening communication and in developing better teachers. In a recent article for preachers, Rev. Dr. Donald Shoff quotes and then comments on E.M. Bounds, “‘The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.’ Ideally, the two go hand in hand.” (Shoff 2002: 8)

How can the [preacher \(the people\)](#) and the [preaching \(the methods\)](#) each improve

together? A powerful means is found in studying the impact of feedback on communication and communicator. Feedback studies are of great import to our understanding of the communication process in general and apply to preaching in particular. A brief review of the more significant findings will illustrate the importance of feedback.

Literature Review

The foundational research that impacts and prefigures all subsequent studies is that of Leavitt & Mueller (1951). These pioneers studied the effects of feedback on communication – particularly within the context of authoritative teaching. Given the strong parallels between preaching and authoritative teaching, their results are of great interest to this proposed work. By way of summary, they discovered that:

1. The inexperienced teacher can advance and operate on the same level as the experienced one when feedback is free-flowing. “The difference (in quality of instruction between inexperienced and experienced teachers) holds for *zero feedback* only, since with *free feedback* there are no perceptible differences.” (italics courtesy of Leavitt & Mueller.)

That is to say that when an inexperienced teacher receives unfettered feedback through a clearly determined channel, his effectiveness is equal to that of a more experienced teacher. Leavitt & Mueller went on to speculate that many ineffective teachers became such through lack of feedback, a view popularized in literature

and film, a classic example being *The Dead Poets' Society*.

2. Every instructor, regardless of experience, performed better when receiving student feedback. “Every instructor got better results with feedback than without.” The ubiquitous blessing of feedback was striking. Despite all other factorial differences in the participants, feedback improved each and all.

3. Teachers getting input from those they instruct have more confidence. “*Zero feedback* is accompanied by low confidence and hostility; *free feedback* is accompanied by high confidence and amity” In other words, teachers accepting feedback in a closed loop, that is, in a method designed to grant them input on the effectiveness of their teaching (“free feedback” to Leavitt and Mueller) were more at ease with their teaching situation. Thus, Leavitt & Mueller were moved to call for closed feedback loops in teaching; i.e., for a system of acquired feedback in an open environment. Interestingly, the last fifty years have seen almost universal acceptance of such closed loops and a proliferation of teacher evaluation tools of all kinds – including self, audience (or student), and supervisory models.²

The concepts contained in this groundbreaking work have direct application to preachers and preaching. Leavitt and Mueller themselves say, “...if the material to be communicated is relatively new and relatively precise, previously learned language may not be enough. Accurate transmission may require some additional contemporaneous

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² I have included an example of an excellent self-evaluation used in many US public school systems. Found in Appendix A, this instrument particularly stresses the importance of feedback and one’s openness to it. As such, it is an excellent example of Leavitt and Mueller’s legacy.

feedback.” (Leavitt & Mueller, 1951: According to Mortimer Adler, no book requires the depth of understanding and communication precision as the Bible (Adler & Van Doren 1972: 294-295). Certainly, that would make feedback a key component for preachers who desire to teach the Bible.³

Furthermore, the assured “high confidence and amity” are a missing ingredient for many preachers, and leads to poor preaching. Calvin Miller notes, “Great communication is based on liking our audience rather than fearing them... We can never speak to people while we fear them.” (Miller 2002: 20) Could the parallel be more clear? Free feedback in a closed dialogue loop between preacher and congregation is nearly nonexistent; meanwhile, a famous professor of preaching laments the poor state of preaching, keying particularly on the lack of confidence and amity. Miller continues, “Pulpits are places where our ordinary preaching phobias are magnified. We face the sermon place terrified of grace. Why? Because we cannot imagine how we will be received.” (Miller, 2002: 26) Back in 1951, Leavitt and Mueller seemed to have found a solution, a sure way of knowing one’s reception. Yet the application to preaching has not yet occurred.

Next we should consider the contributions of educational (applied) psychology, the realm where much relevant study of leadership communication has taken place. [Psychology’s interest has been centered on the listener and the situational factors that lead to stronger speaker-audience engagement. This has bearing on our attempts to measure the change brought by closing the speaker-audience loop.](#) Many studies relate to our hypothesis

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³ Similar results were expounded in many studies by Arthur Cohen in the 1960s. See especially Cohen & Bennis 1961.

under consideration, but we'll select two that represent "families" of research.

First, Neville Moray's Listening and Attention, based upon his studies through the University of London, attempts to delineate why people in an audience listen attentively at some times while "tuning out" at others. This selective attention, the "ability of the listener...to process only part of the information he receives and to ignore the rest," is dependent upon the "arousal" capacities of the speaker and vigilance. Vigilance describes the fact that listeners cannot for long listen *to* something, but rather need to be informed what they are listening *for*. (Moray 1969: 83-92)

These concepts did not begin with Moray, but he summarized and stated them so well that his Penguin edition became a standard statement of the realities faced by communicators. Since an audience will, consciously and unconsciously, selectively attend to the speaker, a wise speaker will learn how to best connect with his audience. In the years since Moray, arousal and vigilance have become recognized to be of equal important in the delivery of a message with the data to be shared. The implications for preaching are obvious.

Second, Frederick Glen's oversight of many studies through both the National Health Service and the Department of Behaviour in Organizations (at the University of Lancaster) affords him the experience to be classified as an expert in Organizational Feedback. In his book, The Social Psychology of Organizations,⁴ (1975) Glen adds to the

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⁴ This work was considered revolutionary and important enough to be immediately reprinted as part of Peter Herriot's *Essential of Psychology* series. As such, Glen's conclusions were taught to countless

previous learning this important thought – evaluation should be regular and over time. Having railed against those who merely pop in for an evaluation and leave the one being evaluated (whether an individual or an organization) in disarray, he says:

The remark attributed to Osler, to the effect that it is more important to understand what kind of patient has a disease than what kind of disease a patient has, could well be applied to organizational research. The parallel is valid in several respects; it can be difficult to judge whether a particular event in a patient or organization constitutes a departure from ‘normal’ if one does not know what ‘normal’ is in that situation; some patients/organizations appear to have a much higher capacity to tolerate conflict than others, such differences could lead to the same event being perceived very differently in different situations – a quite usual occurrence in one case, a significant symptom in another. (Glen 1975: 117)

Thus, the need for feedback pleas for a system of action research, that is, ongoing ‘organizational research’ according to Glen. What Glen exposes is the grand weakness of focus groups or other ad hoc teams formed for preaching evaluation on anything less than a regular basis. Such groups cannot determine a ‘norm,’ and are thus in great danger of confusing the usual with the significant. Cohen discovered similar conclusions. (Cohen, Bennis, & Wolkin 1961: 430-431) As we shall see, this lack of continuity is one of the ongoing weaknesses of currently proposed pulpit evaluations.

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numbers of students in the 1970s-1990s and have had a commensurate impact on thinking about perception and feedback.

Business philosophy should also be included at this juncture, [as increasing work on leadership and feedback is occurring in the realm of commerce](#). As one choice among hundreds, let's examine the communication wisdom offered by Sir Geoffrey Vickers, "For the information derived from feedback is of two kinds. It tells us the trend, up to the moment of last comparison, between actual and norm. It also may or may not tell us something about the effect of our would-be remedial actions in the past." (Vickers 1968: 73-74) Vickers goes on to clarify that feedback certainly tells us how we have done and that it sometimes alerts us to ways we are improving over past mistakes. That is certainly true when the feedback is from the same source and regularly received.

More recently, Decker (1992) shows businessmen how to draw the seminal and pertinent out of messy communication and situations, describing the emotional trust bond necessary for good communication and encouraging executives to find ways to measure that connection. (Decker 1992: 100) Senge likewise addresses secular situations, but clearly is thrilled at the prospect of churches becoming learning organizations. (Senge 1990: 206) Winnett describes the significant impact of a "closed feedback loop" in medicine and business. (Winnett 2001: 1-2) Atherton puts in forcefully in describing communication feedback as the key to organizational health. (Atherton 2000: 1-5) Surely we can apply these concepts to the church?

Indeed, lessons from one aspect of communication studies can apply across the board. For example, Mark Abbott declares, "Preaching must teach! Teaching is integral to Biblical preaching. To eliminate or minimize the teaching role of the preaching pastor is

to ask him or her to do something less than Biblical preaching.” (Abbott 1999:6) Further, studies in communication history indicate the parallelism among all types of leadership communication. For example, Joseph Meisel divides his dissertation on public speaking during the Victorian era into three equal and interconnected categories: Education, Religion, and Law. He reminds us that:

Certainly, speeches in the House of Commons, from the pulpit, in the courtroom, and from the platform differed from each other with respect to form, tradition, style, audience, and intended outcomes. Even so, the practices of public speaking in politics, religion, and law experienced similar developments in a number of important respects... (Meisel 2001: 275-276)

Such studies continue to this hour and each displays that feedback is a vital blessing to the communicator. Further, they display how the establishment of a regular system for procuring feedback enhances the constructive aspects of the input.

Yet, in the world of preaching – a worldwide communication venue of massive proportions – there remains very little research on the benefits of a standing team for the granting of focused feedback. This study has been designed to discover whether the creation of a pulpit team in local churches will increase the parish priest’s receptivity to constructive feedback. [“Pulpit team,” as used in this work, represents a standing team of lay volunteers crafted to close the feedback loop between preacher and congregation.](#)

To that end, I have worked toward the following research aims:

1. To ascertain the effectiveness of the pulpit team as a systemic tool in accomplishing its primary mission.
2. To codify the groundwork, institution, and function of a local church pulpit team such that other churches can easily craft their own teams.
3. To provoke other research on this and other aspects of the pulpit team operation.

In order to accomplish those research aims, participants were solicited, trained, and engaged in such a way that the aims could be achieved in an environment of study.

Therefore, the objectives of this program of study included:

1. To craft indigenous pulpit teams in willing field churches.
2. To assess the effectiveness of the pulpit team as a general tool.
3. That the training given to and participation given by the participants would be a positive in their lives and the life of this researcher.

Chapter 2 The Professional Situation

Proverbs 15:22 Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed. (NAS)

The fields of communication, business, and pedagogy have benefited the ministry of the church pulpit greatly through their studies on continuing education and improvement.

Some have even examined the valuable and historic connection between preaching and communication. (e.g., Hillis 1997: 1-3) However, unlike these other disciplines, preaching as a field has seen precious little research regarding the role of feedback in developing preachers and preaching. While good books and articles describing preaching style and methods abound, minimal work has been done to build upon the broader feedback work accomplished especially in the communication and education domains.

Especially wanting is a working model for stimulating greater openness to learning in the preacher. [The early research experimented with a closed feedback loop and found positive results.](#) (Malcomson 1967: 34-39) However, none of the early experiments discovered a sustainable system, and Baumann's casually suggested concept of standing team found no purchase. (Baumann 1972: 266-270) Litfin, while proposing no strategy, built upon Leavitt and Muellers' work by reinforcing the underlying thesis: "Such tactics inevitably take a toll on the preacher's ego, but research in communication suggests that the result will be increasingly pertinent sermons as the pastor becomes increasingly sensitive to the needs of his listeners." (Litfin 1973: 6) [Of course, greater effectiveness is worth the temporary ego price, yet Litfin's oft-quoted observation led to little feedback acquisition.](#)

As one can see, a generation ago the universal church shared a fairly widespread surmise that a closed feedback loop would positively impact preaching. Though logically based on pedagogical and communication realities this common surmise failed to propagate practical application. Why? My premise is that the lack of a proven model doomed those original proposals to remain merely theoretical. This study [codifies a pulpit team model crafted to provided the missing input, tests that model's effectiveness in some local churches, analyzes the results, and prepares for further study by this researcher and others.](#)

Literature Review

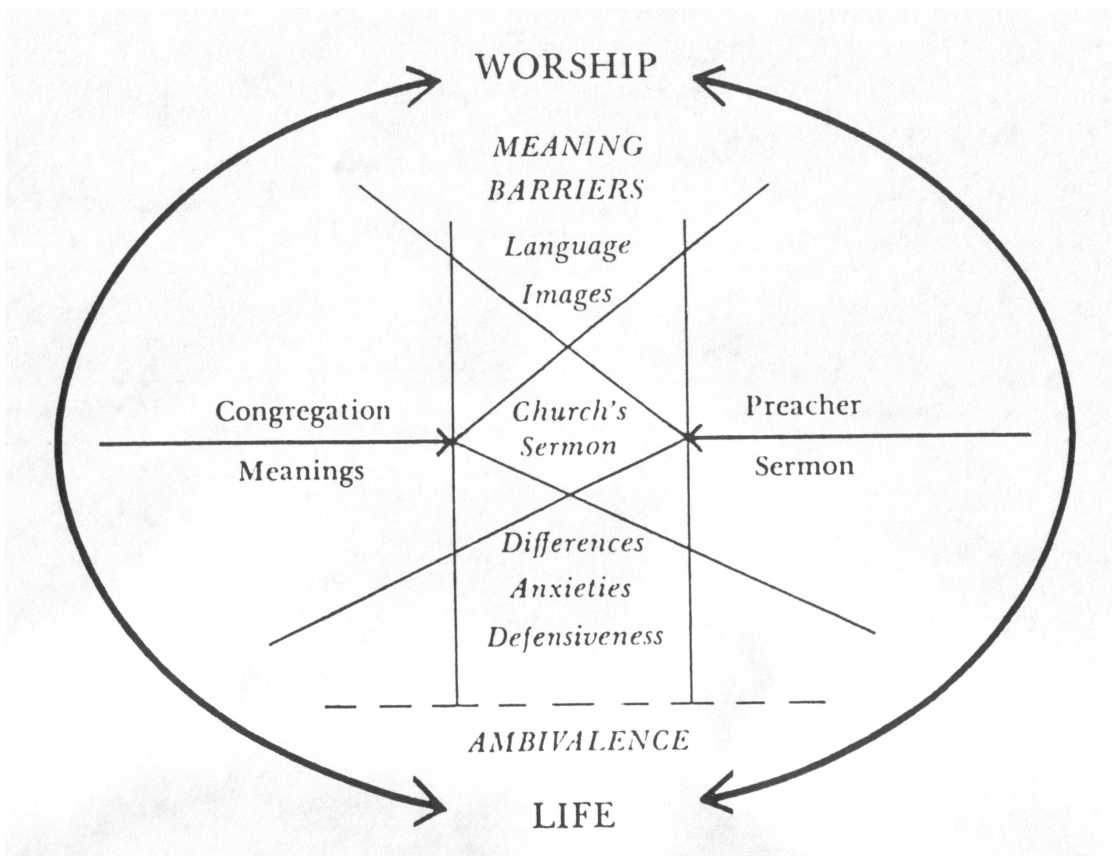
That is not to imply that past work done in preaching provides no help. The study of preaching has given rise to many calls for effective feedback to enhance leadership communication. Robinson (2001) calls for evaluation (see below), as do many others. Long declares that preachers must move beyond their own preferred patterns of speaking. (Long 1989:130) Hall goes so far as to address preaching as communication in need of a closed loop and designs a questionnaire to get the feedback he craves. (Hall 1991:1-2) Malcomson published what some others have duplicated in the more sterile seminary environment – [multiple case studies](#) that prove the benefit of feedback to the preacher. (Malcomson 1967: 34-39) Miller describes the blessings of feedback on narrative preaching.⁵ Yet, none of these preaching masters lays out for the local church pastor a workable model designed to grant that feedback. Not that their calls have been unhelpful, quite the contrary. They appear to be merely incomplete. Before examining our study,

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⁵ See Miller's running evaluation of a preacher throughout [The Sermon Maker](#).

let's take a deeper look at the foundational literature by briefly investigating nine significant contributions.

Ruel Howe's fascinating book, Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue stands as the earliest and clearest clarion for preachers to think of the sermon in terms of dialogue with the laity. His model, reproduced below as Figure 1, shows a strong understanding of leadership communication issues, including the difficulties of connecting pedagogically.

Figure 1 Sermon Dialogue as the Key to Christian Worship



Howe's great concern is that lives be changed through Christian worship, specifically through the sermon as the keynote of worship. Thus, the sermon becomes central to his

model. The loop is closed when the preacher's sermon is commensurate with the congregation's understanding, or "meaning" in Howe's term. The barriers to that congruence involve preaching language and images not grasped by the laity or "common" language and images either not utilized or not understood by clergy. Further, these differences lead to anxiety and defensiveness on the part of the preacher – driving the loop further open.

As one can observe, Howe sees the sermon as the primary means of communication within the church, and he further envisions that communication as occurring in dialogue with laity. In fact, he sees the entire church as existing in dialogue with the world at large – a fairly rare concept at the time he wrote, but one largely embraced today. (Barna 1995: 93-95) Therefore, Howe describes the preacher's primary need in terms of this question, "How shall the preacher prepare himself for dialogical preaching?" His answer entails:

He should study the theological resources of Scripture, history, and doctrine; and study also, with equal seriousness, what he knows of related meanings from his own authority of both traditional and contemporary experience; and how to recognize the authenticity of the dialogue, both historical and contemporary, between God and man and the dependence of each upon the other. His purpose is to bring these dialogues together in order that the historical dialogue may be challenged and judged in light of the contemporary; and the contemporary dialogue be challenged and given perspective by the historical. (Howe 1967: 71-72)

From the outset of his study, Howe sees this dialogue as taking place with the assistance of the laity, responsible for understanding the preacher's task. (Howe 1967: 6) Therefore, Dr. Howe was in essence calling for a closed feedback loop in order to help the preacher communicate more effectively in dialogue with congregation and community.

So why did this summons, from our perspective nearly forty years later, achieve so little traction? After all, Howe was at the time director of the prestigious Institute for Advanced Pastoral Studies. To some degree, the charge of little traction is misleading. Howe's work did indeed have an impact, as we will hear parts of his message repeated and expanded in each of the other authors' that we examine. However, it is not inaccurate to say that the lasting impact was minimal as experienced in the typical church. My conclusion is that the lack of a workable model fated Howe's work to the world of academic theory alone. No churches created structures, systems or teams to implement these concepts – not because the concepts were poor or the author unknown – but because no way was fashioned by which to easily and effectively execute them.

A. Duane Litfin recognized the implications of other disciplines' research for preaching and built upon Leavitt and Muellers' work, carrying their ideas from the classroom to the pulpit:

Unfortunately, too many preachers have failed to see the importance of their role as listeners. They seem to feel that, since preaching is essentially the transmission

of a message from God, they have no need of feedback from their auditors. But nothing could be further from the truth. It is perhaps not overstating the case to say that because preaching *is* the transmission of a message from God, feedback is more important here than in any other genre of human communication (Litfin 1973: 3).

In his book, 24 Ways to Improve Your Teaching, Kenneth Gangel (1988) begins with a call for methodical communication:

John Wesley was sarcastically dubbed a “Methodist” when he began to promote an organized approach to the communication of the Gospel. His commitment to method implies that there is a disorganized way to communicate...as well as an organized way. Wesley’s success, demonstrated by his place in history, is a strong argument for the latter. The word *method* is simply descriptive of processes and techniques used by a teacher to communicate information. (Gangel 1988:7)

Gangel goes on to notice the communicative loop that exists between preacher and congregation, when he notes, “*Two-way communication between teacher and student is another approach to teaching methodology. In the opinion of many professional educators, this category exceeds (others enumerated) in effectiveness.*” (Gangel 1988: 9) Yet, Dr. Gangel does not apply Wesleyan Methodism to the advancement of two-way communication. The concept of the benefits of feedback is becoming established, but the gap between theory and practice remains unfilled.

Haddon Robinson, commenting on Howe's work, clarified that the problem most often heard in a sermon is the lack of a central idea. (Robinson 2001: 34-37) He expounds:

Terminology may vary – central idea, proposition, theme, thesis statement, main thought – but the concept is the same: an effective speech “centers on one specific thing, a central idea.”⁶ This thought is so axiomatic to speech communication that some authors...take it for granted. (Robinson 2001: 36)

From that basis, Robinson builds his excellent model of “Big Idea” preaching, in the process developing the most oft-required text in seminary courses on preaching. Most significant for our purposes, though, are Dr. Robinson's final thoughts. In his final chapter, he comments on feedback as a grand tool to assist preachers with staying focused on the big idea of the biblical passage. He even goes so far as to suggest that preachers seek lay feedback, though only on an ad hoc basis:

Effective speakers look for feedback...Invite a select group of listeners to meet with someone in the church to take thirty minutes to give their reactions to the sermon. They ask simple questions such as: “What do you think the preacher was driving at today?” “Do you think you understood the text from which the minister spoke?” “Were the illustrations helpful?” “Do you have any idea what you may do in the days ahead as a result of this sermon?” “What is your reaction to the

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⁶ Robinson's footnote reads: William Norwood Brigance, *Speech: Its Techniques and Disciplines in a Free Society*, p. 35.

minister's delivery?" "If there were one or two things you could tell the pastor that you think could improve his or her preaching, what would it be?" Let the group meet, turn on a tape recorder, and let them speak freely. Then listen to what they have to say. Usually you will be positively affirmed. People who know you're interested in their reaction will be kind and gentle. At the same time, you can get insight as to what you might do to improve your effectiveness. All of us need all the help we can get – from God and from the folks who assemble to hear us. (Robinson 2001: 219-220)

Bill Hybels takes Robinson's idea (the concept was in the earlier 1980 edition of Robinson as well) and goes one better. He shares his commitment to meet annually with a lay team crafted for the purpose of sermon series discussion. He selects people who represent not only his church's target audience, but also those who correspond to a large segment of the church regarding career, family, etc. Then, he asks each to canvass their friends and associates regarding "on what issues people would like to get clear teaching from the Word of God." (Hybels 1989: 160-162) He summarizes their reaction and his own excitement:

People think, *Hey this might change what I have to listen to!* And they get motivated. They talk to their friends and people they work with. Some of them invite groups of people to their homes for input...It's amazing to me the wealth of wisdom that comes out of a plurality of godly people who look at life differently than I do. (Hybels 1989: 161-162)

Given Hybels' position as the most powerful preacher in America, teaching more than 20,000 a weekend and influencing scores of other preachers through his Willow Creek Association, his comment has led to a mild proliferation of this practice. Yet, Hybels does not meet regularly with that team, nor are they given particular permission nor training to evaluate his preaching. While helpful for preparation of sermons yet to come, Hybels' idea still leaves the feedback loop open.

Jill M. Hudson, while not evaluating preaching, per se, has become an expert on the process of clergy evaluation in general. She gives a brilliant exhortation to the preacher in saying, "The pastor who truly wants the feedback must say clearly and *repeatedly* that he or she needs this information in order to stay fresh and effective in ministry."

(Hudson 1992, 12) The significant aspects here are two-fold: 1) The need for lay input in order to remain 'fresh and effective.' 2) The idea of repetition. This will become obviously important as we consider the [approach taken in this study](#) and observe the impact of repetition on the team's function.

Perhaps most significantly, Hudson postulates a concept that had been rather foreign to that date. Countering the concept that only broadly-acquired quantitative data can assure accuracy in evaluation, she proposes a team based on direct relationship with the pastor that will evaluate only one area of ministry. "Consulting individuals with whom the pastor has a direct relationship in one area of ministry to evaluate *only* that area may also be helpful." (Hudson, 1992: 13-14) This seed has helped germinate this pulpit team

project.

C. Jeff Woods, accessing his excellent skill of quantitative analysis (Woods is not only a preacher but also a professor of statistics at Indiana Wesleyan University.), also calls for pastoral evaluations. His ringing exclamation is insightful and challenging:

All pastors are capable of improving their ministry competencies. Most pastors say that they desire regular improvement. Secretly tucked away in the concept of improvement, however, is the C word. That's right – CHANGE! And that's the problem.

Traditions, routines, doing things the same old way – these can be addictive. C.S. Lewis once said that human possess a love for the familiar. Loving the familiar way of doing things is understandable. Expecting different results from the same old way of doing things is untenable...

To improve one's results, one must change. Do not be misled by false claims. Good evaluation procedures lead to suggested means for improvement, and improvement means change...Bettering one's ministries is an arduous task. It is, however, a rewarding task. (Woods, 1995: 68)

Woods goes on to wisely call for formative evaluation in granting feedback to pastors. He says, "Summative evaluation involves discovering how well someone is doing, while

formative evaluation tries to help the person improve.” (Woods 1995: 69) This distinction is an important contribution, and the method being studied here, the pulpit team, is intentionally crafted from a formative perspective.

However, Woods falls short of applying these principles specifically to the preaching task. It is understandable, given his focus on overall job performance, yet nonetheless lamentable. While calling for dialogue and for lay partnership in the evaluation process, he only suggests an annual evaluation of the total scope of a parish priest’s efforts. (Woods 1995: 69-76)

Major David P. Hillis, a US army chaplain, traces the rhetorical nature of preaching as communication. Though he comes short of calling for feedback (being more classical and focused greatly on Cicero’s five points of rhetoric), he does expect preachers to practice “rhetorical awareness” and offers a valuable contribution to the study of preaching as leadership communication. Hillis writes:

Augustine was the first to integrate the classical aim of rhetoric and the purposes of preaching in his work entitled *De Doctrina Christiana*. In so doing, he created the church’s first handbook on preaching which established the study of Christian rhetoric for over a thousand years. It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that thinkers began to re-evaluate the origins and functions of language. This emphasis foreshadowed the work of 20th century rhetoricians, such as I. A. Richards and Kenneth Burke.

Burke understood language as the primary medium for communicating reality.

Thus, words portray images; language creates reality. In other words, finding the right words to invoke certain images and responses is making use of effective communication and rhetorical skills. Being attuned to idioms and symbols within a rhetorical community and the essence of language has become a contemporary passion.

Rhetorical awareness reminds preachers that they need to consider the areas of audience analysis, linguistics, cultural biases in communication, as well as more traditional purviews of speech studies. (Hillis 1997: 12)

Finally, Graham Johnston (2001), in Preaching to a Postmodern Word gives credit to Hybels (1989) for his occasional focus groups, and goes on to emphasize the visualization of invisible audiences as suggested by Robinson. He even shares the personal practice of Don Sunkijian, a preacher and teacher of preachers from Texas, wherein Dr. Sunkijian fills out a grid with people types across the top and life situations down the side and then examines his sermon in terms of how well it will reach these intersections.⁷ Yet, the concept of a standing team focused [on closing the feedback loop, who could use such a guide as part of dedicated accountability](#), is not considered. (Johnston 2001: 169-171) However, Johnston does give the strongest call yet for the acquisition of feedback:

In short: Learn to listen if you wish to be heard. Adopt some structure of receiving

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⁷ An example is found in Appendix E as one of the feedback forms.

feedback other than the perfunctory “good word, pastor” at the door. Feedback, as a form of listening, will enable you to ascertain strengths and weaknesses of your unique style and presentation, especially if you increasingly ask, “How can I foster some genuine dialogue within this message?”

With the appropriate input, you’ll continually refine and rethink your content, delivery, and tone through the eyes and ears of your listeners; community will be built through good communication, and community will grow through listening. (Johnston 2001: 171)

For all his emphasis on listening and receptivity, Johnston’s methods remain susceptible to the weakness so well described by Glen. The movement is building, but a workable tool still remains unrealized. Pastor Larry Osborne depicts the current situation nicely, “Most pastors I know are deeply committed to personal growth. Not many are willing to settle for mediocrity...Yet, curiously, many of us avoid perhaps the most vital ingredient for growth – someone to candidly tell us how we are doing.” (Osborne 2001: 135)

The closed loop project

By now we can clearly see the need, the gap that remains between what the world of preachers know and what they are easily enabled to practice. This research tests a proposed model that might fill the gap and close the feedback loop, granting the preacher the feedback he is urged by so many to receive. Constructive feedback is a missing element in the vast majority of pulpits, a void that needs to be filled; however, developing

a workable model for the introduction of feedback to preachers has proven a strenuous task because of four main factors:

1. The concept of closed loop communication has rarely been practically applied to leadership communication, much less preaching. Preachers tend to be open-looped, that is, not actively seeking feedback.
2. Even those who recognize the need for feedback have offered no workable model for the practitioner. (e.g., Wilhite 1996:15)
3. Preachers tend to be poor listeners, especially to the laity. Their biblical belief in absolute truth, their focused theological education that exceeds the vast majority of their listeners' education, and the reality of unfair or unwise criticism from the congregation combine to produce a reticence regarding lay feedback. (Miller 2002: 15-16)
4. In some ecclesiastical circles, the concept of an informed laity assisting and influencing the priest is considered threatening if not heretical. Consider the not unusual case of Cardinal John Henry Newman. His publishing of discourses in the *Rambler* periodical claiming the laity have a traditional and biblical role in developing the Church's teaching was met with such violent reaction from Rome, that Newman never spoke of it again. (Femiano 1967: 3, 133)

Any tool being evaluated must overcome these obstacles if it is to be successful.⁸ The concept of preaching is based on praxis of taking the never-changing message of the Bible to an ever-changing people, so an epistemology must be dedicated to truth yet humble enough to receive input. It would be necessary that the methodology [deal with all aspects of biblical communication and](#) show direct consequence from an absolute perspective yet remain flexible in application to a varied audience.⁹

Professional significance

With nearly 2 billion Christians worldwide attending churches and interacting with preaching, the impact of this study could be significant. [Such impact is](#) to be expected, as Kathleen A. Cahalan of the Lilly Endowments Initiatives in Religion summarizes, “Evaluation is a tool for learning that contributes to improving, adapting, and building strong programs, organizations, and institutions...Leaders need to be intentional about evaluation.” (Cahalan, 2001: 5)

Thus we can likely assume that this tool, if proven valid and reliable (certainly a big ‘if’) will leave a lasting impression. This *tupos*¹⁰ has been first visible in the Evangelical community in the United States. However, the participation of leaders from the Church of England, the Church of Uganda, and the largest seminary in the USA should ensure that such a beneficial practice spreads rapidly throughout Christian practice.¹¹

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⁸ Of course the fourth is greatly out of the hands of the local priest. Yet, he can be encouraged in the current openness of most denominations regarding lay leadership. (Femiano 1967: 135-137)

⁹ [To that end, a variety of feedback forms should be used, a sampling of which is contained in Appendix E.](#)

¹⁰ A marvelous koine Greek word meaning explosive, dynamic impact, *tupos* is the foundational idea behind *The Total Christian Leader*.

¹¹ My doctoral committee is honored to include Rev. Dr. John Reed, Chairman of the Doctor of Ministries Department at Dallas Theological Seminary and the Ven. Rev. Dr. Gordon Kuhrt, Ministries Director for

Herman Melville captures the significance of making a major change in pulpit effectiveness, when he writes in Moby Dick:

...for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest is in the rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on it's passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is the prow. (Melville 1851: 43-44)

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the Archbishop's Council, Church of England. Further, my friend Bishop Dr. Michael Kyomya of the Church of Uganda has been an ardent supporter of this research.

Chapter 3 How We Know What We Know in Preaching

Proverbs 15:14 The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly. (NAS)

You must know the One from whom the message comes, you must know the message, and you must know the ones to whom the message will go. – Graham Johnston (2001: 64)

Epistemology in general

We must take a moment before proceeding and discuss the epistemology of preaching. If we cannot understand the realities of how the preacher knows and the presuppositions of his knowing, then we are very unlikely to be able to consider, much less evaluate, what we want him to know. (Gangel 1988: 199-200)

Robert Audi's recent work, Epistemology, grants us a healthy working definition. He defines epistemology as equal (and sometimes interconnected) parts knowledge and justification. (Audi 1998: VIII) He goes on to relate each part of historic discussions of epistemology to knowledge and justification. Perception, memory, consciousness, reason, and testimony are each "sources of knowledge and justification." (Audi 1998: 14, 54, 73, 94, 129) Simply put, we consciously know and justify that knowledge to ourselves through things we perceive or hear others perceive, things we remember, and things we reason out.

The key implication for our discussion is that those who want to know need to know what others perceive. Therefore, a key part of a teaching epistemology is knowing what others think about the teaching. That doesn't minimize the other aspects such as reasoning, but

is critical nonetheless. Such an understanding of epistemology has led to the proliferation of evaluation in teacher's colleges and the giving of feedback to the teacher.¹² Rare is the school that does not require its student teachers to be evaluated, and most modern school districts conduct regular formal evaluations to supplement the ongoing informal ones inherent in teaching. (McCormick 1993: 165) This focus on feedback is intended to assure that the teacher becomes increasingly aware, able to construct a personal epistemology about his teaching.

Epistemology in preaching

The preacher shares many common blessings and struggles with the teacher. Yet, this tool so well-utilized in education¹³ remains largely absent in ecclesiastical practice. The typical professional preacher lacks any regular conduit for such constructive and beneficial feedback. The prime causes for this deficiency include fear of suffering through criticism and the lack of a workable model by which feedback can be appropriately and constructively attained. In other words, preachers don't want to know what others know about their preaching because they are frightened of the pain involved and because they have no way to learn effectively.

If this project is going to make a difference for preachers, it must start with a strong epistemological statement that gives the preacher a chance of overcoming these causes of resistance. Therefore, we will approach our epistemology from a number of angles.

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¹² For example, see the aforementioned [New England Feedback Form](#), found in [Appendix A](#).

¹³ Note: The same could be said for the study of communications, which also parallels preaching and uses feedback extensively. See James R. Motl, "Homiletics and Integrating the Seminary Curriculum," *Worship* 64 (January 1990): 24-30 where he states "Communications is the theological specialty to which other areas of theological study lead."

1. Epistemological biblical exegesis is the basis for Christian preaching. Packer asserts the classic Christian position that any Christian epistemology is grounded in the fact that God has spoken. (Packer 1989: 14) Allan Plantinga declares that a person can be a “sophisticated and knowledgeable contemporary believer aware of all the criticisms and contrary currents of opinion” by knowing what God has said in the Bible. This is possible because theistic and even decidedly Christian belief is warranted and there is nothing in life to which the Bible does not speak. (Chignell 2002: 2) Thus, this project begins with an epistemological framework wherein belief in the spoken Word of God is warranted. This takes us naturally to the concept that such warranted belief is meant to be shared and specifically preached. (Epistle to the Romans, c. 10) Such a starting point also insures that the message being preached takes center stage, not the means by which it is communicated. (Johnston 2001: 61-63)
2. Epistemological exegesis of self is foundational. If the preacher doesn't know himself and his knowledge gaps, then he will be most unlikely to purposefully seek to fill those gaps. A few years ago, I attempted to design a tool that would motivate Christians to work towards bridging this knowledge gap. The results were good, but it fell short of becoming what was most desperately needed – a means for pastors in particular to gain a healthier preaching epistemology, what Hillis called “rhetorical awareness.” However, let me briefly describe that tool, as it became a part of the assessments used in [this project](#).

Called The Total Christian Leader, it is based upon the work of Dr. Eileen Russo, who developed a wonderful secular tool along similar lines. (Russo 1995: 2) Dr. Russo and I discussed at length the purpose of such inventories. Basically, we are both intrigued with the need for a leader to be open to knowledge from many sources on many levels. Our premise was that the more extensive the knowledge development system, the greater the potential for effective leadership. My work added a dimension of spiritual growth (“Knowledge of God”), but otherwise resembled Dr. Russo’s. We had considered combining the tools and jointly publishing, but I have heretofore not felt the timing was right to move ahead, and have become more interested in the focused study of the pulpit team. A copy of The Total Christian Leader is attached, including a copy of the self-scoring answer sheet, as Appendix B.

3. Epistemological exegesis of the audience is also important. (Hybels, 1989: 164) Unfortunately, preaching can disconnect via poor epistemological understanding of the audience. (Giles 2001: 6) As post-modern listeners increasingly fill the church pews, the preacher must find a way to understand their thought if he is to take this never-changing message to an ever-changing people. [If in the dark regarding what they perceive, the preacher will not connect.](#) (Johnston 2001: 70-75) Thus arises another practical benefit of the pulpit team and a clear signal for the necessity of lay feedback. For example, the following article appeared in Christianity Today, November 13, 2000. It was written by Carlos Aguilar and

titled, “Urbanites: More Justice, Less Epistemology.”

I speak as a member of an emerging class of urbanites, namely Latinos and African-Americans, who have received or who are receiving a college education. The table talk that occurs among these rising urbanites tends to center on the issues of social justice.

The pressing question in the minds of most of these students is “Who has been and continues to be exploited by the American system?” Here the American system is synonymous with the white man's molding of an economic system, the creation of an exploited class coupled with a religious system that at once justifies the exploiter and pacifies the exploited.

Granted, this is overly simplistic if not historically naïve, but this is what is propagated from the lectern and what is believed by the vast majority of this emerging urban class. The primary rhetorical targets of this group, then, are capitalism and Christianity. Here the problem is not radical skepticism about knowledge, rather radical suspicion about power relations. Again, the issue for this emerging class isn't that I can't get at truth qua truth; it's the issue of whether I can or should trust you to lead me to whatever it is that Christians claim.

Mainstream American evangelicalism seems blindingly monochromatic and culturally monolithic. And with the emphasis on

personal piety as modeled by our leaders, the simple fact is that we urbanites don't want to become what you are—that is, focused on the individual, the immediate, and the idiosyncratic, e.g., “Come to the altar right now and pray like this.”

While the epistemology of radical suspicion poses an immediate problem for the gospel in America, the quest for justice and for a well-thought and well-lived Christianity is more urgent.

Note that the desire is not for lessening of the biblical message (truth *qua* truth), but the heightening of interactive awareness of the congregations needs. Our model is designed to close the loop, allowing the preacher to hear those cries and preach so as to be heard.

4. Epistemological exegesis of the worship experience must be included. “Preaching is an experience.” So said Charles Haddon Spurgeon, whose preaching jolted London into a pronounced Christian revival. Preaching is part of worship and the experience of it is part and parcel of the worship experience. In our evaluation of preaching, we must approach preaching as an act of divine worship that can and should be evaluated and strengthened through input. “Recent Christian work in epistemology ... has been reclaiming spiritual experience as cognitively important, not merely personally moving.” (Stackhouse 2000: 79)

One of those helping to reclaim experience as epistemologically necessary for

proper evaluation is Basil Jackson. He writes:

Unfortunately, many people in evangelical Christianity still feel that a critical self-observation and examination is, in some way, anathema, taboo, and dangerous. They seem to feel that any attempt to look at a Christian's life or beliefs from a psychological perspective is somewhat akin to sacrilege and may actually be subversive to his whole faith. For the spiritually healthy and mature, nothing could be further from the truth. A faith which cannot stand up against honest scrutiny is but, at best, mythical and, at worst, psychopathological. The empirical examination of healthy religious experience can prove to be positive and worthwhile. If some aspects of such experiences can be shown to be related to antecedent influences or to other psychological parameters, this in no way minimizes the value of those healthy spiritual experiences nor proves their falsity. (Jackson 1975: 100)

The reminder that the *what* being preached is more important than the *how* it is preached (See point 1 above and Johnston 2001: 61.) doesn't change the reality that the *how* matters very much. The style of delivery and tone of a message are especially key in their influence on the experience. The preacher who incorporates this epistemology of experience prepares himself for more effective service. (Miller 2002: 31-32, 82) [In relation to this study, the intervention of a standing lay](#)

pulpit team has been evaluated as solution to the preacher's epistemological need to remember the how.

Overcoming the blockades to a healthy preaching epistemology

Examining this four-part epistemology carefully, one is struck by certain other minor hazards to its effective implementation. Such problems as poor education, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and a fuller comprehension of worship are excellent subjects for other studies; yet they remain minor and outside the scope of this work. For us it still remains to face the two giants previously mentioned – criticism and method.

We have already noted Howe's (1967) observation that pastoral anxieties and defensiveness regarding lay critique are barriers to productive preaching. The answer, as we have seen, is not to eliminate the criticism, but to channel it and overcome the fear of it. Regarding fear of suffering through criticism, Thomas H. Troeger, in his address to the Association of Professional Christian Educators at the 2003 Denver conference made an interesting connection between preaching and suffering. Said Troeger, "But few, if any of us, are eager to ascend the mountain of suffering. Like the disciples, we would run away or like the women, we would look on 'from a distance.' Some of our reluctance is traceable to a natural propensity to avoid suffering, but this instinct may be heightened in us who are educators" (Troeger, 2003: 43).¹⁴ He went on to state that our Enlightenment

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¹⁴ A bit of anecdotal evidence may prove helpful. As recently as twenty years ago, students at a [preaching training college in England](#) were subjected to the following system of feedback. At 9:00 am each Wednesday, a random student was called by the principal and given a scripture passage. He was thence allowed five minutes for preparation and was expected to give a 20-minute sermon before the masters and entire student body. After this terrifying ordeal, he was "evaluated" by anyone who wished to make a comment. Students described it as "being fed to the wolves." One can only imagine the warped view of learning community that was developed in their minds. Happily, the practice is now discontinued.

training leads us to use reason as a shield against real suffering. Certainly this is true for the vast majority of preachers who use their learning as a means to distance themselves from congregational feedback.

Hudson provides a welcome solution, “Comprehensive evaluation of a pastor is most helpful when the minister asks for it. Major reviews that focus intensely on particular aspects of a pastor’s performance can be extremely helpful when the pastor desires such feedback. Planning the process in such a way that the pastor being reviewed can contribute to the design also leads to ownership on the part of all.” (Hudson 1992: 66) Thus, I chose to target pastors themselves as the main participants in this study. If these pastors emerge desirous of more feedback, committed to a healthier epistemology of preaching, then others may be encouraged to follow Hudson’s advice and request input from their own congregations. Hopefully, such leadership will help preachers learn from the mountain of suffering by making the journey less daunting.

Regarding the missing component of a workable method, there has been little progress in the past 35 years. As is evident from our literature review, the scant references to epistemological growth are rare and usually tucked in the back section of the book. Despite the many books written on preaching each year, there has been no serious proposal designed to open the preacher to constructive feedback. Each year a few voices cry out for the pastor to garner input, but none has offered a model for safely gathering that feedback. The most recent proposition supported by research came from Rev.

William Malcomson in 1967! (Malcomson 1967: 34-39)¹⁵ Non-research-supported calls for feedback have even included J. Daniel Baumann's casually proffered concept of standing team (Baumann 1972: 266-270). Yet as we have seen, these instructions have accomplished little. My premise is that the lack of a proven model doomed those original proposals in practical application. Thus, it remains hard for us as preachers to have much confidence in what we know about preaching audience or experience as they interact with the scriptures.

Like many leaders today, Dennis Campbell, Director of Congregational Development of the School of Theology at the University of the South, has been very influenced by Peter Senge's vision of the "learning organization." (Senge 1990: 1) Considering the impact of the learning organization on general church leadership, Campbell writes:

The challenging task of oversight requires a variety of gifts and talents that not everyone possesses. Even those who have the potential for oversight need tools and practice to realize and develop their ministry. Strong oversight by a team of clergy and laity is a minimal prerequisite for developing congregations as learning communities. At the same time, learning communities are the ideal context for people with the potential to develop fully as strong ministers of oversight.

(Campbell 2000: 12-13)

Campbell is getting closer to a model; and though he is speaking in terms of church

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¹⁵ Sadly, Malcomson proposed no transferable tool. However, he did deal effectively with the ethical dangers and point the way to a general method for receiving more effective criticism.

ministry management, the concept of a laity/clergy team likely applies to preaching oversight as well. While preaching is specific leadership communication and not general management, it seems likely that the challenging task of preaching contains similar needs. Such needs could be met through a simple method – the pulpit team – something Senge would applaud as a result of systems thinking. (Senge 1990: 234-236)

Chapter 4 The Pulpit Team

Proverbs 15:31 He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. (NAS)

*Se and here and holde þe style,
Zefe þou wolte lyue and haue þe wylle. – Fasciculus Morum, Rawlinson MS, Oxford
(See and hear and hold thee still,
If thou wouldst live and have thy will.)*

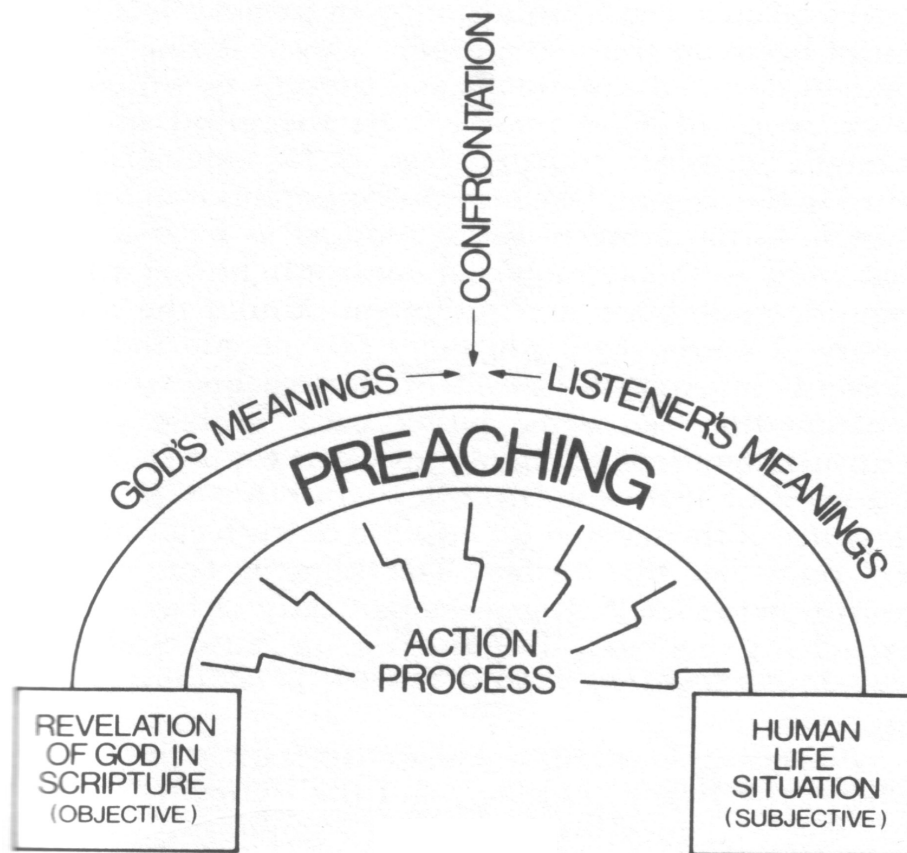
What is a pulpit team?

In general, it is an ongoing action research tool for the individual preacher. In academia, action research is the term used for the study of practical work in concrete situations. (Elliott 1991: 12). As such, it suits the practical work of weekly preaching. Further, action research is always used for studies over time. Judith Bell states that action research “is directed towards greater understanding and improvement of practice *over a period of time.*” (Bell 1999: 10) Carol Costley and Pauline Armsby [give two great reasons which fit nicely](#) with the preaching task. First, the authors write, “The individuals involved should own the problem and have a personal as well as an emotional stake in the project.” (Costley and Armsby 2001: 70). That certainly fits the local church, where members are zealously and religiously committed to the betterment of their organization. Second, the authors quote Mumford on the benefits of action research for senior managers:

For most purposes, learning for managers is a social process which needs the involvement of other people. They require feedback, the generation of alternatives and the confirmation of effectiveness for learning to be established. (Mumford, Alan, quoted in Costley and Armsby 2001: 71).

Preachers and preaching priests are in equivalent positions to senior managers in a corporation and the quote could readily be applied to them as well. In fact, every time I read that quote I am struck by how easily “preachers” could be substituted for “managers,” so well does the description fit the pastoral modus operandi. Therefore, action research seems an excellent method for finding out what preachers want and need to know. After all, preaching has long been recognized as an action process. Holmes offers the following diagram to describe the action orientation of the preaching task (Holmes 1978: 65):

Figure 2 Preaching as an Action Process



In Holmes' view, the act of preaching requires an action process that continuously operates to take the revelation of God to application in human lives, or in our terms, the never-changing message to an ever-changing people. The players in this process are God and the preacher writing the sermons. Yet Holmes notes that the process bottlenecks in the difficult apex of differences between what is said and what is heard. The best means for eliminating this blockade is external confrontation, specifically input from ones not actively in the action process. This would mean that regular confrontation (feedback) is necessary from one familiar with the meanings of both congregation and preacher. I call the group responsible to keep the action process moving through this "confrontation" a pulpit team.

Specifically, a pulpit team is a committee designed to assess and assist the preacher in the reception of beneficial feedback on his preaching. This is the kind of team expounded by Senge – nimble enough to promote systems learning and creativity, allowing the preacher-leader to see the forest and the trees. (Senge 1990: 127-129). Creativity is greatly assisted by a well-functioning team, one that experiences what Senge calls "alignment." With such an aligned team, the preacher is enabled to creatively embrace the action process of taking the never-changing message (*Revelation* in Figure 2) to an ever-changing people (*Situation* in Figure 2). Keith Wilhite, director of Denver Seminary's D.Min. program says, "Studies in creativity clearly indicate that the best creativity is a collective effort" (Wilhite 1996: 15).

Therefore, the team is not merely an evaluation squad. They are essentially designed to

edify the preacher and his ministry through collective creativity and growth. Certainly, as we will see, evaluation is central to that mission, particularly as the open reception of feedback so clearly improves teaching. Yet, evaluation must never be thought of as coming from the unengaged. This team is participative and reflective. (Senge 1990: 277) These are shareholders, whose interest and share in the organization leads to the enthusiasm described by Hybels in chapter 2. (Hybels 1989: 161-162) In Woods' terms, this group is "joined with the pastor in formative evaluation." [This insightful language, "formative evaluation," is more than clever phraseology. It represents the heart of a team who sees the preacher's formation as their concern.](#) (Woods 1995: 69)

The crafting of a pulpit team

If the team is to be truly formative, then the members must obviously be chosen from stakeholders in the congregation. That does not mean they must necessarily be officers, long-term members, or big donors. Emotional and spiritual engagements are the significant aspects here, and thus the team could contain none of the above and be successful. Of course, it goes almost without saying that anyone considered antagonistic to the preacher's positive formation should not be allowed on the pulpit team. Having said that, how does one choose the members for the pulpit team?

In the closed-loop preaching project, each participating [pastor brought together a pulpit team, taking into account group size, male/female representation, and spiritual gifting.](#) Certainly, many other factors could have been considered and hopefully will be gauged in future studies. [However, these were the three factors our participating churches keyed on.](#)

Regarding size, we agreed that any number over eight total would limit the capacity to achieve synergy within the group. Social science research on reference groups (teams that grant input or have formative responsibilities) posits repeatedly that such groups should number fewer than nine. Macionis (1995: 178) displays how increasing complexity of group dynamics in teams of nine or more may lead an “ingroup” (group building esteem and loyalty) into an “outgroup” (one based on competition.)¹⁶

Male/female participation was also very important to each team. In order to garner input from both the men and women of the congregation, each participating pastor formed his team of equal numbers of men and women. Such formation not only allowed for more complete feedback, it was also in line with proper network methodology. (Hanneman 1999: 92-96)¹⁷ Rev. J built a pulpit team comprised of one female and one male church member. Rev. T’s team was composed of two females and two males.

Finally, each pastor needed to find team members whose spiritual gifts matched the requirements of the ministry task. As Cardinal Newman, Martin Luther, and others have pointed out, the Bible is quite clear that each member of the body of Christ is given by God spiritual gifts intended for the edification of the church. (see Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, 14:12; Ephesians 4:11-13) As for the gifting analysis, it was anticipated that we would use the Discovery System to discern which congregants would

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¹⁶ Similar conclusions were reached by: Walsh & Golins (1976) regarding groups dealing with stress or adventure and Allen, et al (2003) in terms of computer user groups.

¹⁷ See also Wasserman & Faust (1994) and Smith (1984). Smith particularly addresses the need for broad network base within the church context.

fit well on the team.

The Discovery System is a tool for ministry development written by Pastors Roger Pryor, Mark Mattay, and myself. (A copy of the spiritual gift evaluation portion is included as Appendix C.) Though merely one of the good tools on the market, Discovery has the great advantage of software that allows the church to track the members in ministry and to easily locate willing servants when a lay ministry position opens. Like the other systems, Discovery sees the layperson as a full minister of the gospel, serving Jesus and not merely a pastor. Further, each of these tools treats the individual ministry member as uniquely and complexly comprised, attempting to ascertain the individual's best fit in ministry without "pigeonholing" or limiting him. The unique premise of Discovery is the declaration that interest is the best means for determining one's spiritual gift. Simply put, the most fruitful and fulfilling ministry placements occur when one is serving according to desires of one's heart.

Having said all that, we found that we were unable to use the Discovery, nor any other system in selecting the team members. Each of the participating pastors was to have received a copy of the entire Discovery package, software, booklets and forms. Yet, the Discovery shipment arrived a full two months later than promised, something that was a great embarrassment to me personally! However, J & T were unaffected. They grasped the concept and looked for people who had shown great interest in the preaching and teaching tasks of the church, and built their respective teams out of such persons. As we will note in evaluating the observation studies, the pastors chose well and ended up with

members gifted for and excited about their task.¹⁸

The training of the team

Let's take a moment for review. A pulpit team is an ongoing action research team designed to assess and assist the preacher in the reception of beneficial feedback on his preaching. It is formulated from stakeholders in the congregation who agree to engage for the sake of the preacher, the church, and the use of their own gifting. They are selected according to spiritual gifts and the need to represent as broad a cross-section of the audience as possible, while keeping the group to a size where none are under-used.

Once that group is identified, they need to be trained. Training is very important, something businesses are discovering as they implement better feedback systems, and something churches will experience if they don't train their teams properly. Susan M. Heathfield, author of *360 Feedback*, describes the problem of untrained reviewers: "Employees who will participate in a 360 process need training about the process, how to provide constructive feedback, how to interpret results, and more. Failure to provide the appropriate amount of training and information can sink a process quickly." (Heathfield 2002: 6)

Each member of our participating churches' teams was trained through a condensation of this material presented to them free of charge. It was given them in a notebook format

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¹⁸ For those building on this research, despite our shipment faux pax, I still recommend [The Discovery System](#), available through ATS. To assist other researchers, I have included [Discovery](#) in Appendix C. Other options include [Networking](#), produced by the Willow Creek Association and available through Zondervan, and [Claiming God's Promises: A Guide to Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts](#), written by Thomas Hawkins and available through Abingdon Press. (Woods 1995: 66)

entitled, “All The Difference.” A copy is included as Appendix D. They were expected to work through the questions at the end of each brief “chapter” as a way of preparing themselves for the task of ministering on a pulpit team. [The material trained the team by means of establishing the need for the team, discussing the structure of the team, and its goal to achieve formative change in the preaching task. Such a developmental structure follows the accepted training practices of group dynamicists. \(Immelman 2000: 1-5\)¹⁹](#)

To our great delight, each member reported doing so. Rev. T, one of the participating pastors, even copied some of his personal answers in as part of his incidental diary. We will deal with his responses when we examine the diary data.

The resources of the team

As a major function of the team is giving feedback, it is important that they have guidance on how best to do that. Without such, the risk of slipping from formative evaluation into mere criticism increases. (Woods 1995: 68-70) Further, the grave weakness of mere annual or ad hoc evaluations – the lack of learning a norm – is alleviated by regular evaluation according to the same style. (Glen 1975: 117) Also, uniformity of response style, while not a necessity for qualitative research, is always helpful in understanding such activities as our observation studies. Therefore, we provided each team with sermon evaluation forms, copies of which comprise Appendix E.

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¹⁹ Immelman draws heavily from D.R. Forsyth, [Group Dynamics](#) (1990) Brooks/Cole, Pacific Grove, California. Forsyth sees such goal-oriented training as key to team development.

With that in mind, these wonderful research partners and I conducted [multiple case studies](#) on the usefulness of a pulpit team in a local church. Our methods, results, and conclusions follow.

Chapter 5 Research Methodology

A person who has received a lamp but hides it from those who need it, whether they live in the house or wander in darkness, would surely commit an offense against him who has given him the lamp. (Wenzel 1989: 53) translation of Latin De Superbia Operis

Acts 5:35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men." (NAS)

It is important at this juncture to remind ourselves of our aims in the study. This study was not designed to determine whether feedback makes the preacher more effective. A preponderance of literature and study has already proven that point quite effectively. This study has been crafted to fill a needed void by testing a tool, the pulpit team, to ascertain whether such a team can indeed close the loop; i.e., to facilitate healthy and necessary feedback.

Suitability of work to researcher

As a preacher with 10 years' experience, and as one who formed a pulpit team that has given increasingly great service for 8 years, I feel particularly prepared to teach this model and perform action research on it. As one who holds an M.A.B.S. from Dallas Theological Seminary and a B.S. Ed. From Baylor University, I feel fairly comfortable with the literature and concepts involved in a study of teaching/preaching. As co-founder and former President of the Frisco, Texas Christian Alliance, I have been blessed with the relationships necessary to produce a workable field study.

Methodologies detailed and defended

For many reasons, action research has proven the best family of methodologies in which

to begin. In short, action research is the practice of evaluation and modification in an ongoing environment of learning “on the job.” As one can readily see, the pulpit team is itself an example of ongoing action research. Reflect again on the statements we examined earlier by Costley and Armsby. First, “The individuals involved should own the problem and have a personal as well as an emotional stake in the project.” The members of the newly-formed pulpit team not only fit that description emotionally, but also spiritually see themselves as stakeholders. Second, the authors quote Mumford on the benefits of action research for senior managers:

For most purposes, learning for managers is a social process which needs the involvement of other people. They require feedback, the generation of alternatives and the confirmation of effectiveness for learning to be established. (Costley and Armsby 2001: 70-72).

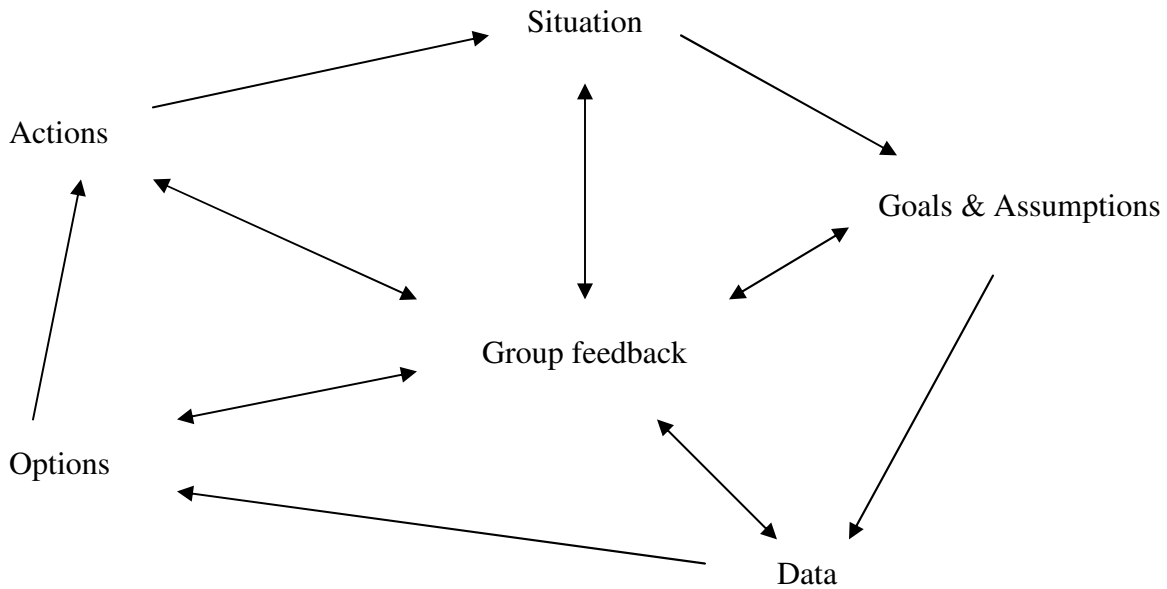
As already discussed, preachers fulfill that statement well. Therefore, action research seems the best method for describing what occurs through a pulpit team. The goals of our meetings, the data we analyze, the options and actions we consider – each and all are discussed in group. That discussion takes the form of feedback given to the team leader and public spokesman, the preacher. Thus, the pulpit team’s ongoing effectiveness is a continuous dynamic cycle of action research – designed to address and solve the problem of limited feedback for the preacher. As Cahalan says, “Evaluation is the responsibility of institutional leaders” (Cahalan 2001: 2). It is interesting that this quote comes from one whose career has included overseeing endowed studies of churches and pastors. She

recognizes that preaching pastors are called to be leaders of ongoing action research in dynamic organizations.

Bennet and Oliver's diagram model of action research is beautifully adapted to the pulpit team experience, and is reproduced in Figure 3 on the following page. (Bennet and Oliver 2001: 63) In an interactive structure, the team evaluates situations before it according to data it receives and in light of the goals and assumptions agreed to by the team. Using group feedback throughout the entire process, the team then evaluated options and proposes specific actions.

For example, a pulpit team receives input from its evaluations that the preacher is not connecting well with a certain segment of the audience. Thus, their situation of poor connection must be considered in light of their goals and assumption – including, in the norm, a goal of inspiring each individual in the audience to life change. Therefore, the team considers the situation in light of his or her own data, the weekly evaluation performed by each member. Through discussion, the team then works through options available to it and take specific action designed to correct the situation. Notice again that everything comes back to the group feedback core. Figure 3 depicts how the teams are structured around the central task of giving feedback.

Figure 3 Group Feedback as Key to Action Research



Thus, the pulpit team becomes a tool for that action research to continue. Pastoral leaders, by submitting to a pulpit team and utilizing its unique contribution to their ministry are in effect engaging in action research of a collaborative nature.²⁰ Thus, understanding action research was part of the training, quietly built into each team through the questions and answers at the end of each training chapter. Yet, though the approach itself is action research, I came to the conclusion that best means for evaluating the effectiveness of the pulpit team was through [multiple case studies](#). Further, we followed the accepted style of [quasi-experimentation](#) – an approach that fit the parameters of working with pastors and church volunteers. This allowed for easy comparison of each case according to the

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²⁰ A word is here necessary to explain why Collaborative Inquiry was not used as a rubric for the teams. The real struggle with developing collaborative inquiry in my project is not the nature of CI, but the worldview of those who promote it in the US. Collaborative inquiry will hopefully be established in each pulpit team as a matter of course in the preparation of each team for long-term ministry. Yet, it is a tool whose proponents are its worst enemy, at least for use within biblical Christianity. Peter Reason, one of the strongest proponents of CI in the United States, describes Christianity as “crude,” and Christianity’s progressive view of history as “anti-democratic.” John Heron, a popular CI researcher, leads each participant to view himself as his own god. These points of view are completely at odds with biblical truth, and make their product at best insensitive to and at worst unusable for my research partners.

Nonrandomized Control Group Pretest-Posttest Design. In this design, two non-randomly selected groups are used. Each is given a pre-test – in our cases a questionnaire regarding each church’s preacher, specifically about his openness towards feedback. (Leedy and Ormrod 2001: 237)

However, only one group is then introduced to the idea of the pulpit team. In experimentation terminology, only one church is administered treatment. Each group is later given a posttest, and the results are compared.

Leedy and Ormrod write, “If, after one group had received the experimental treatment we find group differences with respect to the dependent variable, we might reasonably conclude that the post-treatment differences are probably the result of that treatment.” (Leedy & Ormrod 2001: 238) In this study, the experimental treatment is of course the introduction of pulpit team and the dependent variable is openness toward feedback. The situation can be diagrammed as follows:

Table 1 Nonrandomized Control Group Pretest-Posttest Design

Group	Time \longrightarrow		
Church 1	Pretest	Pulpit Team	Posttest
Church 2	Pretest	---	Posttest

Research Participants

In order to perform a true quasi-experiment, it would have been necessary to have at least

six participating churches. Though willing volunteers were located, cultural disparities were determined to be so large as to render ancillary research necessary before these primary discoveries could be understood. It is my sincere hope that others will transfer this research to multiple cultural settings and qualify this work further. Unfortunately, the time parameters of my research window did not allow for work on such a scale.

Therefore, this research utilized the quasi-experimentation approach to focus attention on a singular factor, the pulpit team, as applied in two of three case studies. To eliminate as many ancillary factors as possible, this research has addressed the problem in local churches within one community – Frisco, Texas. Three churches were selected in this one community in order to minimize cultural discrepancies, allow for a control and to ensure a matched pair for the treatment. (Leedy and Ormron 2001: 239) The pastors of these churches already meet monthly in a Christian Alliance and were selected from those who accepted my invitation to join this study. One was set aside as control, the other two actively trained and brought into the study. The control was selected at random, in order to reduce any bias. The control was assured complete intervention through the creation of a pulpit team after the study was complete.

Changing their monikers for reasons of ethical protection, we shall title the control member Rev. M, the treatment pastors will be known as Rev. T and Rev. J.²¹ It was very important that we be enabled to examine this singular variable of the introduction of the pulpit team, and not have the research skewed by other factors. Of course, there is considerable debate whether complete objectivity and singularity of dependent variables

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²¹ The titles “Pastor” or “Preacher” may also be substituted for “Reverend.”

is attainable within human research, but given the complete novelty of this research, great care was necessary to craft the situation for validity. (Leedy and Ormrod 2001: 106-107)

Perhaps the best solution is to adopt the mindset of opticians, who define the objective lens as the one closest to the object, the one which focuses light on the object. Whereas subjective study shines light on one's understanding of a subject, objective study shines light on the object of study itself. Therefore, the openness of each preacher to feedback remained the main focus of our lens.

To limit the extraneous factors, the willing volunteers were winnowed according to some factors pertinent to establishing uniformity among the participants. Eight basic categories were considered, and the two pastors most similar to the control in those categories were chosen. Note: these categories do not necessarily reflect on a participant's openness to feedback. On the contrary, this data is included merely to prove that these men share great lifestyle and ministry similarity, eliminating to some degree the presence of other "lenses" that might distract from our study objective. Their similarities are striking, and add to the hope that the dependent variable is singular. Please examine Table 2 to perceive the eight categories and their similarities:

Table 2 Eight categories of comparison among participant pastors

Name	Age	Years in ministry	Planted a church?	Served as prior Youth Pastor?	Married, Number of children?	Education Level, Degree earned, in school of your denomination?	Normal sermon length?	Most comfortable with what label?
Rev. M (control)	41	15	Yes	Yes	Yes, 2	Bible College, M.A., Yes	30 mins.	Evangelical
Rev. T	39	17	Yes	Yes	Yes, 2	Bible College, B.A., Yes	30 mins.	Evangelical
Rev. J	37	15	Yes	Yes	Yes, 2	Bible College, B.A., Yes	25 mins.	Evangelical

As we can see, these men have considerable similarities that assist us greatly in eliminating other “lenses” from the study. Of course, such uniformity leaves reliability a more open question. However much validity is strengthened by this singularity, I sincerely hope others studies will address the pulpit team’s reliability by broadening the scope to include divergent populations, independent churches, feminist studies, etc.

A word here is necessary regarding the professional research struggle of informed consent. Leedy and Ormrod detail the basic principle: “Research participants should be told the nature of the study to be conducted and be given the choice of either participating or not participating.” However, the detail of information given can be problematic. They continue, “If people are given too much information – for instance, if they are told the specific research hypothesis being tested – they may behave differently than they would under more normal circumstances” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 107). It would be nearly impossible in these multiple case studies for the participants not to have perceived that the preacher’s receptivity to feedback was the issue at hand, as the study was of course be constructed in such a way as to measure just that. Therefore, how could the researcher

account for the discrepancies in behavior prompted by such perception?

I chose to manage the struggle of informed consent by being completely frank throughout the process. The participating pastors and their team knew that their task was to help their preacher do a better job preaching. They also knew that the giving of feedback was their main tool for achieving that goal. I did not specifically reveal that we were focusing on receptivity to feedback as the key to improved preaching (see literature review above.) If they discerned that receptivity was out main focus, I assumed that it would not weaken the results since such knowledge more closely resembles the professional situation to which this tool will be applied. See Chapter 7 Analysis for more details.

Furthermore, I was my confident assumption that the pulpit team would prove reliable in most settings regardless of the knowledge base of the participants. I base this mainly on the uniformity of the preaching task across time, space, and culture. Given the epistemology of preaching and the primacy of the Bible, the uniformity in the preaching task is not remarkable. In fact, one can read a recent message on pride from *Preaching* magazine, one from Spurgeon's collected sermons, from the translation of *Fasciculus Morum*,²² and from St. Augustine's Confessions and be astounded at the similarity of purpose and structure in each. (cf. Wenzel 1989: 34-37)

I also surmised that the pulpit team model would work in other situations because I have myself been the beneficiary of it. My own pulpit team's effectiveness led to this study;

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²² F.M. is a handbook for preachers from the very early 14th century written by an anonymous Franciscan English friar. It includes guidelines and some sample sermons.

yet I differ from these three pastors in three of the categories.

Research Instruments

1. Questionnaires – These included our initial surveys of the pastors and teams and the exit surveys of each. The personal evaluation of the pastors is very important, as is the evaluation of the team. Specifically, we gathered data under six headings: The Preacher, His Preaching, His Resources, His Responses, His Desires, and His Discernment. (The final of these involved taking The Total Christian Leader.) The surveys are included in Appendix F. [These six arenas were selected as they related to the preaching task \(Preacher, Preaching, and Resources\) and to his openness towards feedback \(Responses, Desires, and Discernment.\) By limiting the evaluation to these six factors, rather than covering the massive whole of pastoral ministry, we were able to focus on preaching and feedback, the critical issue for this study.](#)

Before the initial survey was administered, Dr. Jerry Wofford and Dr. Tom Siems agreed to use their expertise to help evaluate the questionnaires. Dr. Siems suggested a few word alterations, which were implemented. Both evaluators felt that the changing order of answers would be confusing and would lower the accuracy of results. Therefore, in the edition given to the participants, the scaled answers were arranged in the same order on every question. Dr. Wofford was also very concerned about the dual purpose of some questions, rightly fearing that the lack of focus would dilute any analytical possibilities. He wrote, “The content

looks good and interesting...To be reliable an item should assess only one construct. You are sometimes forcing a choice between comfort with audience, importance to success, etc. So, you need to have an increasing or decreasing scale on only one of these constructs...check each question for multiple constructs.”

Having made these adjustments, I administered to each preacher the initial survey. Likewise, the churches receiving the “treatment” of a pulpit team also had initial surveys completed by each team member. (The control church will also complete pulpit team members’ pretest questionnaires once the team is formed, after the experiment. This will be as a service to the pulpit team and pastor of that church and not part of the study.)

Almost exactly one year later, each team was re-administered the Closed Loop Preaching survey. The exact same instrument was used as in the initial survey, save that the cover was changed to read “exit survey.” The teams had not seen the questions in a full year, as all copies were with me since they had completed the initial survey. Likewise, the participant pastors were given the same questionnaire as before, save the title page was also altered.

Thus, the baseline was established by the first survey and matched against the exit survey one year later. The results and comparison with the control pastor’s results are covered in the next chapter.

2. Interviews – I conducted an exit interview with each of the treatment pastors and their teams. The interviews took place over coffee and dessert, and allowed me to ask specific questions designed to gain direct commentary from those who had spent the past year in this study and to assist future researchers by exposing aspects worthy of further investigation. These interviews granted another gauge of the effects of the pulpit team on the pastors, some informative data re: anomalies in the research cycle, and some excellent quotes.

3. Diaries – Each of the treatment pastors was asked to keep an incidental diary through the course of the multiple case studies. This was a focused instrument recording his thoughts on feedback and the impact of the pulpit team on his preaching. This action helped the participant truly begin to close the loop in his preaching and helped me triangulate better on the effectiveness of the pulpit team model (Ready 2001: 1). Unexpectedly, some of the participating teams offered incidental information as well. Though not requested by the researcher, these people desired to share their thoughts and asked their pastors to forward their written comments.

4. Observation Studies – The teams met monthly for the course of one year, in order to overcome the stilted weaknesses of annual “evaluations” (see chapter 2) and to build community that leads to honesty. (Sunukjian 1982: 261-262) Team meeting observations were interesting and very helpful, as they exposed significant trends and events in the development of the preachers and their teams. (Bell 1999: 156)

Thankfully, the teams agreed to videotaping, granting me access to the full scope of the meeting without the distraction of the “inventor” of the system being present. The first taping of each team’s meeting was conducted in the first three months of their work, the final taping 9 months later. The results will be discussed below. In order to protect confidentiality, the tapes were of course destroyed after viewing by the researcher.

Research Validation

Hopefully, the literature support, the design of the research instruments, the interviews, and the results of the multiple case studies lead to credibly triangulated conclusions.

However, to further ensure validity there are a few strategies beyond the above-listed triangulation that have also been employed (Leedy & Ormrod 2001: 106).

4. Extensive time in the field. By spending nearly a year with each of these preachers and their teams, I enjoyed manifold opportunities to observe merit or discontinuity in my hypothesis. My thoughts will be shared in the analysis.
5. Feedback from others. I have used my contacts in the field of preaching to receive peer input regarding the outcome of the study and my interpretations of it.
6. Respondent validation. By going to participants with my conclusions, I gained valuable insight from those directly effecting and affected by the multiple case studies. They had freedom to either disconfirm or confirm my conclusions based

on their agreement or disagreement with my analysis of the results.

Chapter 6 Results – Data

The desire for human praise is like a thief who secretly joins those who travel on a straight way, that he may pull his dagger in secret and murder them. – St. Gregory (Wenzel 1989: 531 translation of Gregory’s Moral Commentary)

One at a time, we will examine the findings of our research instruments and list the pertinent findings.

Interviews

The interview can be an invaluable source for information in qualitative research, and the flexible interview style used in this study allowed for open sharing of information that might otherwise have been missed. (Leedy & Ormrod 2001) Because the interviews include the participants own words and conclusions, we will open our information chapter with the interviews.

The interview with Rev. J and his team

In October 2004, I gathered with Rev. J and his team, consisting of one male member and one female member. Over coffee, tea, and chocolate, I asked ten questions and recorded their answers. For ethical reasons, the names are changed to reflect Rev. J, female member and male member.

Interviewer: Are you glad that you were part of this team? Why?

Female: Yes. This made our hour on Sunday a lot richer. I could feel Rev. J benefiting. I am also – I now pay closer attention to feedback from others.

Male: Agreed. I've gotten as much out of this as Rev. J has. I, like Female, had my radar up for more feedback. (I) know it's risky to solicit criticism, but in this controlled environment I recommend that every church do this.

Rev. J: Think it's been awesome! Only thing I would say is that meeting more regularly would be even more beneficial.²³ For me, Male's perspective, as a businessman only a Christian seven years, has taught me a lot. This different perspective has helped greatly, especially as he knows what it's like not to be a church person. Likewise, Female's input as a stay-at-home Mom with a long church experience has broadened my outlook. I now think ahead and think about our audience more proactively.

Interviewer: What, if any, aspects of this team's work have been beneficial?

Male: At first, Rev. J's approach was very academic. As we went along, Rev. J was making a lot of changes. We could see on Sundays that Rev. J was listening – things where I said to myself, "Hey, Female mentioned that in our team."

Female: Variety. He's putting himself out there more, taking more risks. Also, I now can approach him with changes between services and he's more open.

Rev. J: True! Before, I wasn't open in the same way. I trust these people's hearts and that

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²³ Note: Some health and pregnancy issues forced their team meeting to be a bit erratic between May and September, 2004.

they have the pulse of our church. For example, I recently had an illustration that meant nothing to the people. Female flagged it and I made a change.²⁴

Female: One more thing – there is an honest accountability there now.

Interviewer: Do you think other churches should form such teams?

Female: Absolutely. There was absence of this in the church I grew up in. My childhood pastor was a dear man, but I can't imagine him being open to this or people feeling free to share with him. And lots of problems came from that lack of honesty.

Male: Pretty bold move for a pastor (or anyone, really) to do this. But, it's so great that every church should do it. I know the tough part is finding a group you can trust.

Female: As a teacher, I found this kind of input great, because I was evaluated all the time.

Rev. J: No question. I don't know if brave or bold is the right term. It just seems logical. This is the most important communication in the world, so why shouldn't we want to make it the best possible message we could? Before this, you preach and then forget that message. This forces me to look back on what could have been better and what we can do better next time.

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²⁴ "Flagged" is American slang for "pointed out."

Interviewer: What, if any, changes have you noted in Rev. J's preaching?

Female: He's having us read a book, Five Dysfunctions of a Team. I feel like he's getting to the complete honesty that book describes, and he wants us to learn that kind of frank openness as well.

Male: I consider Rev. J a close friend, but his knowledge of others was weak and has grown dramatically. He seems more attuned to me and to our peoples' needs.

Rev. J: One word comes to mind – confidence.

Interviewer: Is Rev. J more open to feedback now? If so, how has the team helped cause such a change?

Rev. J: I think so. I think the knowledge that they love me and want the best for the church. Knowing that, and that we can sit and talk in a relaxed small group, has allowed me to see input as really constructive. Also, they've been so kind and affirming, it has helped greatly. I can really trust them.

Male: Definitely, he is more open to feedback. He now even tries to drag information out of us by asking specific questions. I think in its simplest form the act of coming and soliciting this makes a huge change. Because he trusts me with this, I took it seriously.

Female: I have seen an immediate change, especially regarding the implementation of ideas now. At first, we kept saying the same things over and over. Now, there have been changes and we are able to move on to other things. Accountability is there now for him. To be able to go back and praise and criticize has given him something valuable to be used.

Interviewer: What has been hard for you (the team) in this process?

Female: I struggle with wondering why my opinion should count. Lots are smarter, know the world better – why use my thoughts? What if I give wrong advice?

Male: The first two or three weeks, the hardest thing was disengaging from wearing the critic's hat only. (Female interjected a strong "Yes!" at this point.) It took a while to really enjoy the message and still get good input for Rev. J. I also echo Female; how can I give good input as businessman?

Interviewer: What has been hard for Rev. J?

Rev. J: Hardest is not being able to implement suggestions or creative ideas they have fast enough. Also, it took a while to realize that with each piece of great feedback I had two legitimate choices a) change or b) disagree for a reason.

Female: I wonder if meeting weekly would help fulfill these changes faster? That has

been my secret desire – to meet weekly instead of monthly.

Interviewer: What has changed in Rev. J during this past year?

Female: He uses more of the arts. I think he's taking more risks, using more stories.

When we started the church we had so many technical problems that he backed off of some tools. Now, we might still have those struggles, but he's more relaxed. He's thinking more about services as a whole, I think.

Male: Rev. J used to be very academic. Nothing wrong with that, but it didn't fit our congregation well. Now, he's moving around the stage and not apologizing so much. He's more confident and personal.

Rev. J: I think more about what I'm doing, knowing I'm being evaluated.

Interviewer: What changes, if any, have you noted in the congregation's response to Rev. J's preaching?

Female: I think so. One thing I asked him, "Will you share feedback you get from others so we can measure ourselves against that?" He has. Based on that input, they seem to share more clearly and buy in to what he's saying.

Male: I've been watching the church as he preaches. Church has changed – before there

was lots of sitting back, few taking notes. Now, they're sitting like this (forward) and taking notes. Taking it more seriously.

Rev. J: I would have to say that I got more positive feedback from the congregation the last six months than I have ever. This is the best year of my preaching career. Their comments have reinforced what the team says, which builds confidence in the team and self.

Interviewer: What changes would make this team's work more effective?

Male: Probably being strict on meeting every 30 days. Possibly not meeting in a restaurant as we did once.

Female: Since doing this, I'm reading more books, and more clued in to good speaking. I want to be better educated so I have really good input. The sharper we become, the better we are to make him sharp.

Rev. J: Female's answer is great; and I completely concur with Male's answer. Maybe the addition of another person or those two soliciting thoughts from others. I'm not sure how that would work, but it's an idea to broaden the base of feedback more.

Interviewer: What do you think the academic or professional communities should know about this that hasn't been said?

Female: Nothing I can think of.

Rev. J: I do think the success of this is dependent upon the people in the study team and the leader being evaluated. If the preacher is naturally defensive, this may not work as well. The same is true if the team members have a special agenda.

Male: Nothing to add.

Female: I have one final comment. Thank you for doing this. Our preacher was good before and we loved him. But he gets better and better, he's becoming great.

The interview with Rev. T and his team

In October 2004, I gathered with Rev. T and his team, consisting of one male member and one female member. Over coffee, tea, and chocolate, I asked ten questions and recorded their answers. For ethical reasons, the names are changed to reflect Rev. T, female member and male member.

Interviewer: Are you glad you were part of this team? Why?

Female: Felt very beneficial. I saw change in areas that I thought needed improvement. It was good for me, too; brought me deeper into the Word.²⁵

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²⁵ In this context, "Word" refers to the Bible. Christians also use "Word" as synonym for Jesus (see St. John I), as reference to Greek concept of Logos or meaning, and as the common usage of spoke word.

Male: I have a heart for the Word of God going out, for Rev. T blessing others with his words, and for Rev. T doing his best. This taught me to listen to the whole message, to tune my ear.

Rev. T: I enjoyed it. My expectations changed after the first meeting. I thought it would be more of getting info – that was true, but I got spiritual prompting as well. Also, maturity grew in me. My study habits deepened. I began to carry a mandate instead of just words. Female, for example, talked about my illustrations being one-dimensional. That helped me diversify and be more inclusive.

Male: I realized how much work it takes to put all this in simple terms so all can get it.

Rev. T: These people really cared about our church and really cared about me.

Interviewer: What, if any, aspects of the team's work have been beneficial?

Male: Making sure scriptures are used more and fit the whole message, not merely inserted. That's the change I saw, and the research became much better.

Female: Accuracy. Particularly if it's a well-known passage, he began to make sure all was in context and well-used. Diversity also helped. Our personalities brought different perspectives and really helped us grow, bless Rev. T, and the church.

Rev. T: It brought a sense of balance. Now, I use more scriptures so people can keep growing at home. I didn't do that before. Humor was previously used to mask insecurity – now I've been called on that. Who would have said anything before? I now have roadblocks on negative things.

Interviewer: Do you think other churches should form such teams?

Rev. T: Yes and No. Not just to do it. If the pastor is not ready, it could kill him. I grew to trust them – they had no ulterior motive. Never was their input destructive.

Female: I think it's very beneficial. I thought it was real encouraging.

Male: Yes, but I think along with Rev. T that it takes a very mature person to invite criticism. It can really elevate the message God wants to get to the people, but when the pastor chooses the people, their motive must be examined to be found as a constructive way to further the kingdom.

Interviewer: What, if any, changes have you noted in Rev. T's preaching?

Female: Diversity was my first thought, more variety in examples and more originality. More scriptures, better organized. I see more genuine heart – he's really being himself. It's less mechanical. He also had a bad "rabbit trail" tendency that has changed.

Male: I would have to say less stress, less reading to fill gaps – that’s why he previously went to sports or humor too often, to fill. Now, it’s all linked together and is organized better.

Interviewer: Is Rev. T more open to feedback now? If so, how has the team helped cause such a change?

Male: I think it’s about the same. He was open in the beginning, which allowed us to give and give more. He was welcoming it and that heart relaxed us to then do a better job giving increasingly honest, good feedback.

Female: He was open. But (stressed) he was uneasy, somewhat. He became more and more open – especially after realizing we were for him.

Rev. T: I was before, but that’s easy to say when I didn’t have any! I have involvement now, real help with delivery and knowing that I’m connecting.

Interviewer: What has been hard for you in this process?

Female: I found I was having to analyze all, so it was hard to sit back and learn. In some respects, that took away from my growth.

Male: Time investment. I listened to the cd 2-3 times each week. It might have been easier to see a VHS or something like that.

Interviewer: What has been hard for Rev. T?

Rev. T: I didn't experience much difficulty. I did experience discomfort. I think my desire to get better for my people helped. I think longer tenured pastors may have more trouble, as they might be more settled and less open to learn.

Interviewer: What has changed in Rev. T overall?

Female: He seems more comfortable. He's more self-confident.

Rev. T: I am more attentive to people and how well I'm connecting. This has been like driving through a full-service gas station – you feel rich and got good service. I get less flustered, also.

Male: Relaxed. He's more relaxed.

What changes, if any, have you noted in the congregation's response to Rev. T's preaching?

Female: They are more attentive, more attuned.

Male: One message promoted the next, and folks were ready.

Rev. T: They've become more expectant. The way the team has helped me deliver and prepare for the next message, the people are prepared.

Interviewer: What changes would make this team's work more effective?

Female: Possibly add a few more people to get a little more diversity.

Male: We could meet once right after the service to get our immediate heart response and then meet later to go over after-thoughts.

Rev. T: New evaluation forms would help, too, as we find out which of the old ones we don't like.

Interviewer: What do you think the academic or professional communities should know about this that hasn't been said?

Rev. T: I don't think the team can grasp the pastor's passion to deliver God's Word. In turn, having that passion, yet being sure there are flaws in your delivery is a burden. This helps, but the pain of being a flawed vessel still isn't eliminated. It's good (stressed) to get this input, but it still hurts.

Female: But this kind of group can validate so that off-the-cuff criticism doesn't hurt.

Rev. T: Yes, it protects me. That's true.

Male: Knowing what will come about re: feedback may make some pastors become led by people-pleasing, not by God-pleasing. It may take time, so they need not to push. Let God make the change in you, using people's feedback.

Initial assessments

A combination of the Closed Loop Preaching Survey and the Total Christian Leader Inventories were administered to each participant. These allow us to establish a baseline for observation of any change as a result of the intervention.

Control Initial Assessment

The initial assessment was given to Rev. M, the control on the 22nd of August, 2003.

Some of his answers merit our attention. In the first section, dealing with the preacher's personal joy in the preaching task, all his answers were positive save question 5. Question 5 leaps out because it alone in the section doesn't receive the control's highest possible score; in fact, he responds with the lowest possible answer. Our control answered, "I read and learn about preaching ___never___."

The second quintet of questions covered the preaching task lived out. Question 6 is very

revealing, exposing the natural limiting of audience with which most preachers struggle. (Johnston 2001: 169-171) Our control preacher declared, “When I prepare a sermon, I do so with ___ “Those who are hurting” ___ foremost in my mind.” Question 7 reads, “As I preach, I am ____ physical movements and gestures.” Pastor M. replied, “Somewhat aware of my.” This is the second-lowest on the scale of this question, the two superior answers being, “Highly aware of my” and “Alert to the point of regularly practicing different.”

The entire pericope of questions 11-15 concerns the resource of lay feedback, and our control was very revealing in his responses. In question 11, he “cannot imagine” a regular team who grants feedback on his messages. It is therefore no surprise to see that on question 12, “I ___ feel alone (humanly) in my preaching ministry,” he answered below the optimum score of “Never.” His response was in fact “Occasionally.” Question 13 queried the number of “occasions for me to receive truly constructive criticism.” Our control responded with “Few.” Question 15 read “Most lay criticism is ____”, and contained only one positive answer (“Constructive”) and three negatives. Our control chose “Wounding to me.” As we have already seen from chapter two, that is a very standard answer among clergy.

Yet, our control apparently sees great potential in lay feedback despite his wounding. Question 14 asks, “How helpful can lay persons’ input be to my preaching development? Rate on a 1-10 scale; 1 representing no help & 10 meaning great help.” Rev. M. chose “8-10.”

The section of questions 16-20 deals with the priest's response to feedback in general and criticism in particular. Here, we see some possible confusion, or more likely the reality of a gap between theory and practice. The pastor comments in question 16 that he “__actively__ seeks input regarding the crafting of series and individual sermons.” Similarly, our control says that “Criticism__helps__.” (Question 17) And less strongly, he comments on question 20 that he __“sometimes”__ has “found constructive feedback on my sermon to be helpful.” The answer is intriguingly ambivalent, as the question was skewed towards the positive by the insertion of the word “constructive;” still, he avoided the most positive answer, “usually.”

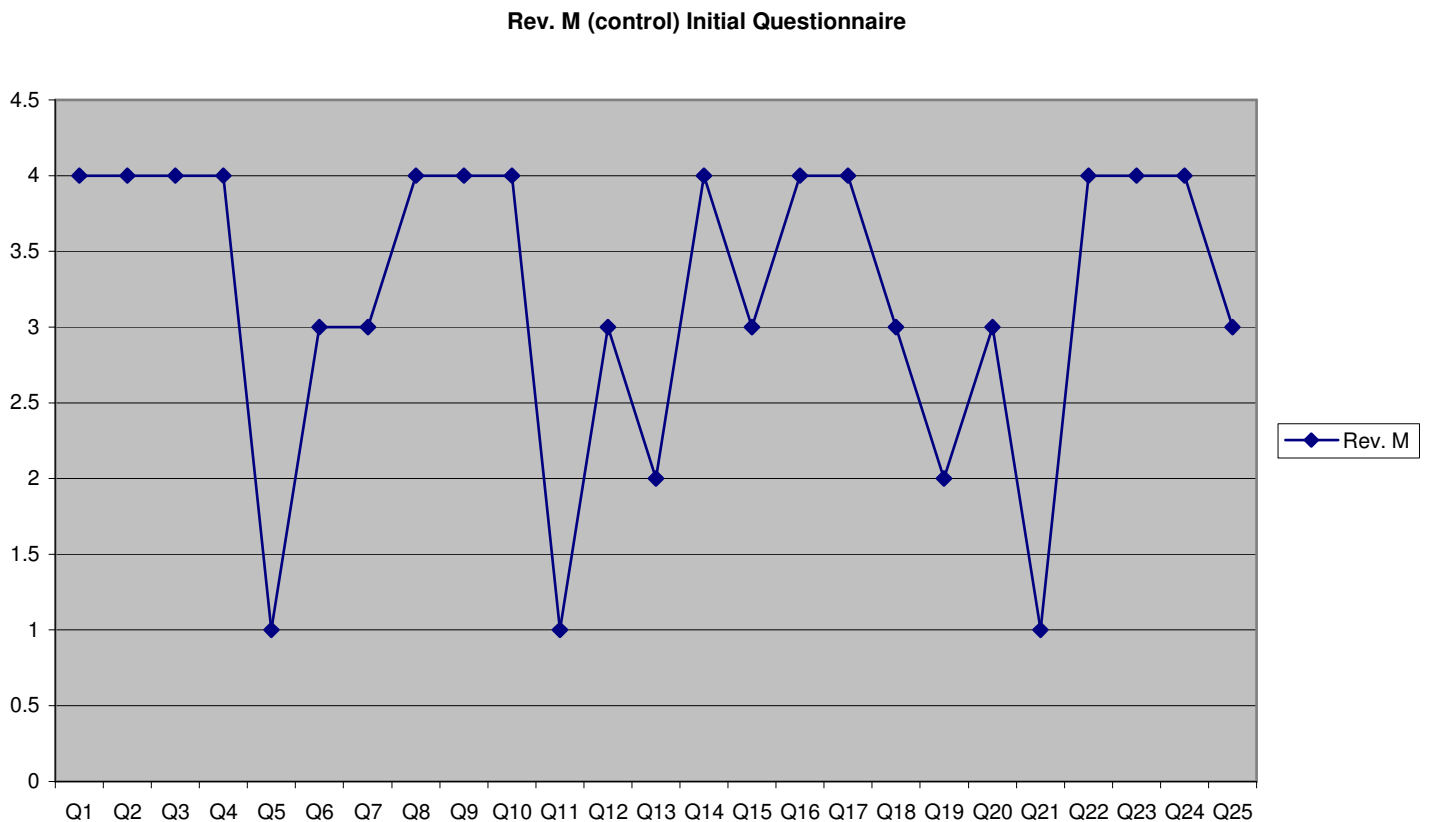
The gap becomes more clear in question 18, which asks, “Constructive feedback on a sermon__.” He again rejected the most positive answer, “is a great gift,” choosing instead the lower score, “is usually delivered with mixed motives.” Even more telling was question 19. It reads, “When I am approached with feedback on a sermon, I honestly__.” Our control chose “Prepare to defend myself.”

The fifth section covers the preacher's internal drive and desires. All of Rev. M's responses were positive, save numbers 21 and 25. The first reads, “I __ wish my preaching could be more effective.” He chose the most negative choice, “Often.” This reveals a deep desire to be more effective as a preacher. Similarly, there is honest doubt revealed in question 25. To the query, “My greatest insecurity in preaching is (generally) __” he responds with “The thought that I am not connecting with the congregation.”

Note: none of the potential answers was positive on this question, all were negative. But the selection of that one is most consistent with the gap we saw in the literature – the gap between the preacher and his audience.

In summary, Chart 1 gives a graphic overview of Rev. M's responses on this initial inventory. This data becomes a baseline with which to compare his exit responses.

Chart 1 Rev M Initial Survey Responses



Finally, Rev. M completed the Total Christian Leader inventory. In Table 3 his scores are compared with the levels we have found to be high and low: (Russo 1995: 8; also, personal correspondence with Dr. Russo)

Table 3 Rev. M Initial Scores on the Total Christian Leader Knowledge Inventory

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. M (control) score	34	42	33	40	43
High score (top 20 % of scores): > #	> 35	> 40	> 39	> 44	> 40
Low score (bottom 20 % of scores): < #	< 23	< 26	< 25	< 29	< 24

We can detect that Rev. M scores comparatively highest in knowing his church and God. He is closest to being low-scoring in knowledge of others.

Participant pastors' initial assessments

The initial assessment was administered to each pastor on the 24th of June, 2003.

We will begin with the results from Rev. T, and as with the control, we will expand on a few of his answers according to category. Regarding the preacher and his delight in preaching, Rev. T also was mostly positive. To the first three questions, he selected the highest score to express his zeal for preaching and study. On question 4, however, he slipped to the second-most positive answer. To the question, “Of all my duties, preaching ____” he replied “falls somewhere in the middle in terms of personal enjoyment,” as opposed to “ranks as most enjoyable.” With question 5, he also chose the second-most positive answer, saying he reads and learns about preaching “selectively,” rather than “regularly.”

On the second series, designed to query the performance of preaching, Rev. T also chose greatly positive answers. Only on numbers 8 and 9 were his answers less than the highest

positive reply possible. On number 8, he said, “I __somewhat__ utilize basic preaching principles.” This is, again, one step below the top choice, “do.” Number 9 read “I _____ objectives for each message I give.” He chose, “Do not think in terms of,” an answer just below the prime “set.”

The third part questioned the preacher’s resources. Here, Rev. T faced some confusion. He is one of those who has recently has begun forming an ad hoc team for annual feedback. Yet, he realized that question 11 asked about the presence of a “regular” team. Unsure what to say, he indicated that he “works with a regular team who grants feedback on messages.” Later, after seeing the detailed structure in the training manual for his pulpit team, he requested the answer be changed to “I __would appreciate__...” That changed answer would be indicative of his other responses in this section. On question 12, he “feels alone (humanly) in my preaching ministry” “occasionally.” Question 13 reveals that “there are __few__ occasions for me to receive truly constructive criticism.”

Questions 14 and 15 seem to be derivatives of one another. On 15, Rev. T states that “most lay criticism is __wounding to me__.” Such wounding has understandably led to a lowering of expectations, as evidence in his scoring of only 6-7 on question 14, “How helpful can a lay person’s input be to my preaching development?”

The fourth group covers the preacher’s reaction to feedback in general and criticism in particular. Here again, the damage of unsafe criticism is evident. For question 18, Rev. T chose the lowest response, “is rarely delivered in a helpful manner” to the question,

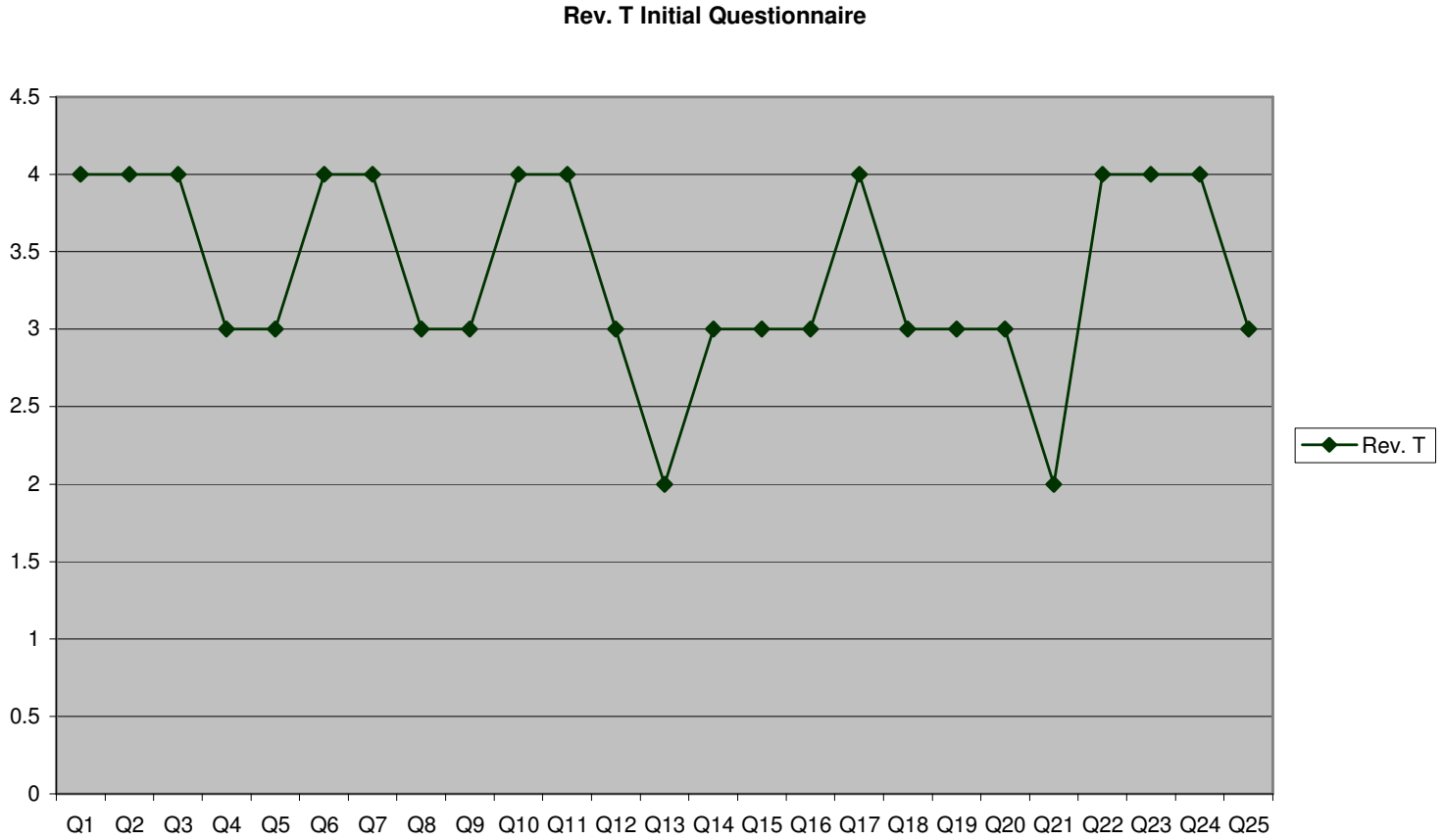
“Constructive feedback on a sermon ____.” This most negative response is quite telling, given the aforementioned positive slant of that question. Question 19 shows us a preacher (like so most of us) who says, “When I am approached with feedback on a sermon, I honestly__try to control my face so it won’t appear I’m recoiling.__”

However, Pastor T is gamely desirous of input, displaying once again the gap between theory and practice. On 17, he chose the most positive answer, “Criticism __helps__.” On question 16, he didn’t select the most positive score, but did chose the next highest, saying “I __sometimes__ seek input regarding the crafting of series and individual sermons.” Finally, he relates another second-rank answer on number 20, “I have __sometimes__ found constructive feedback on my preaching to be helpful.”

Regarding internal desires (sector 5), Rev. T has only two noteworthy places where he dips below the top positive answers. On 21, he “sometimes” wishes his preaching could be more effective. And in 25, he tells us that “My greatest insecurity in preaching is (generally) __the thought that I am not connecting with the congregation__.” As we observed with our control, none of the potential answers was highly scored on this question; all were negative.

In summary, [Chart 2](#) gives a graphic overview of Rev. T’s responses on this initial inventory. This data becomes a baseline with which to compare his exit responses.

Chart 2 Rev. T Initial Survey Responses



Finally, Rev. T completed the Total Christian Leader inventory. In Table 4 his scores are compared with the levels we have found to be high and low:

Table 4 Rev. T Initial Scores on the Total Christian Leader Knowledge Inventory

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. T score	34	39	34	41	45
High score (top 20 % of scores): > #	> 35	> 40	> 39	> 44	> 40
Low score (bottom 20 % of scores): < #	< 23	< 26	< 25	< 29	< 24

Notice that Rev. T scores comparatively highest in knowing his church and God. He is closest to being low-scoring in knowledge of others.

Reverend J also completed the pre-test. Like the others, he was very positive in the first section, which discussed the preacher's joy in preaching. All of his scores were highest, save question 5 where he selected the second-highest response. He said, "I read and learn about preaching __selectively__."

Concerning the performance of preaching (second question set), Rev. J also chose greatly positive answers. His answers less than the highest positive reply possible only on numbers 6 and 10. On number 6, he said, "When I prepare a sermon, I do so with __the normative members of our church__ foremost in my mind." As for number 10, he admitted that "Planning plays __not enough of a__ role in my preaching and preparation."

The third cluster covers the preacher's resources. Rev. J, like Rev. T, found the question unclear. He also has someone set aside to help with sermons, in his case to assist with sermon series planning (his aforementioned weak point.) His helper is seen as on a standing position, not ad hoc; yet, she heretofore had not granted any feedback. Unsure what to say, he also indicated that he "works with a regular team who grants feedback on messages." Later, seeing the detailed structure in the training manual for his pulpit team, he too requested the answer be changed to "I __would appreciate__..."

Like the others, he "feels alone (humanly) in my preaching ministry" "occasionally." (Q. 12) On question 13 he answers one step higher than the others, stating, "there are __some__ occasions for me to receive truly constructive criticism." Yet, he does not

chose the highest answer, “many.” He agrees that a layperson’s input can be very helpful, giving the “8-10” response on question 14. Further, he states, “Most lay criticism is __constructive__.” (Q. 15)

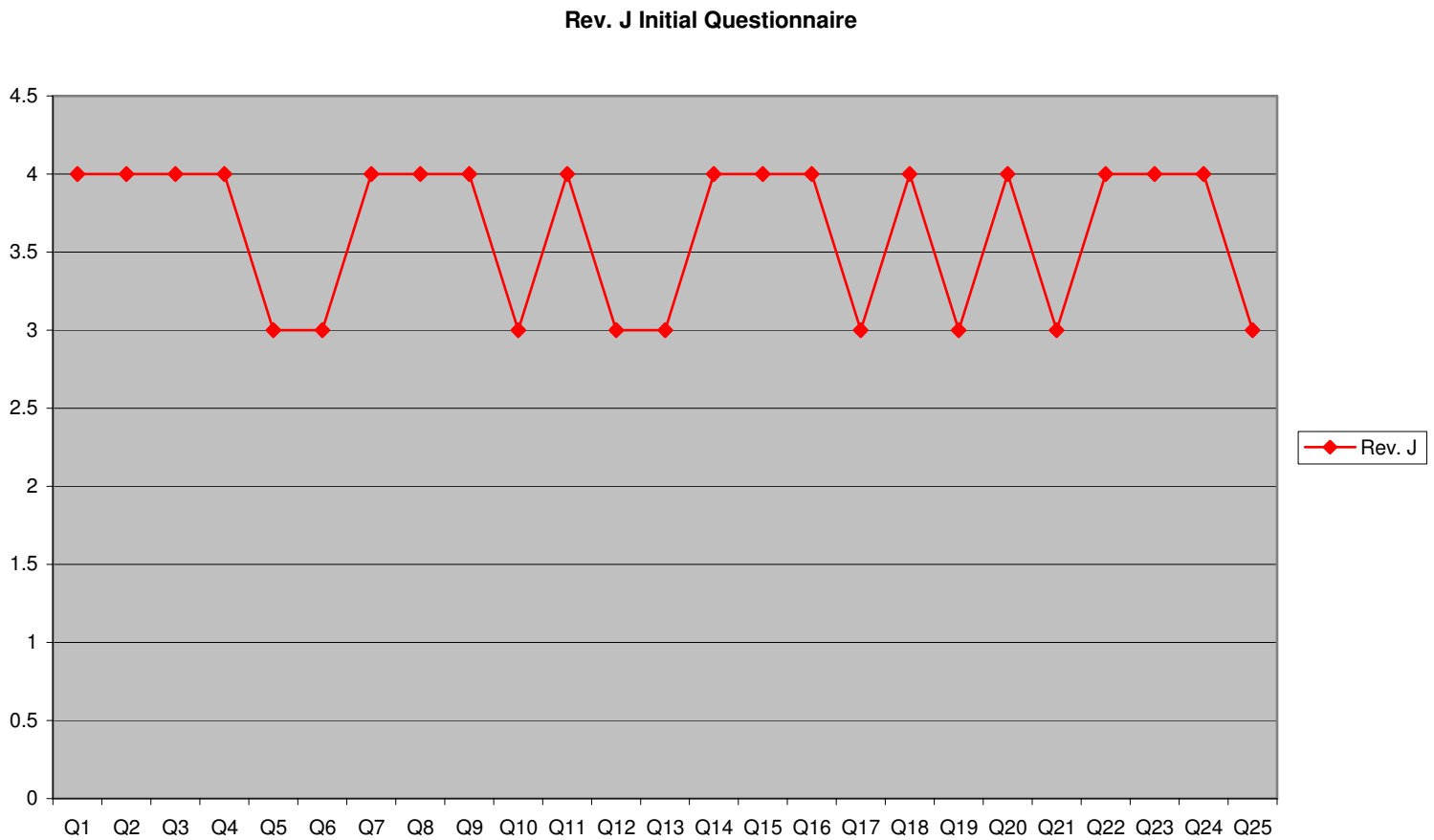
The fourth group involves the preacher’s reaction to feedback in general and criticism in particular. According to question 1, Pastor J thinks “constructive feedback on a sermon __is a great gift__.” Likewise, he declares that he “__actively__ seek(s) input regarding the crafting of series and individual sermons.” This highest-ranking response to question 16 is not surprising, given his helper mentioned earlier. He also singular in writing question 20 as “I have __usually__ found constructive feedback on my preaching to be helpful.” Frankly, I expected this response across the board, but only Rev. J supplied it.

However, like the others he displays a reticence towards the actualities of receiving feedback. Question 19 received the same answer given by Rev. T, “When I am approached with feedback on a sermon, I honestly__try to control my face so it won’t appear I’m recoiling.__” And question 17, “Criticism ____” was completed with the second-ranking answer in terms of positivity, “is unavoidable.”

Rev. J’s internal desires, displayed in section five, exposes only two spots where he dips below the most positive answers. Like Rev. T, he “sometimes” wishes his preaching could be more effective. (Q. 21) And like the others, he tells us on question 25, “My greatest insecurity in preaching is (generally) __the thought that I am not connecting with the congregation__.”

In summary, Chart 3 gives a graphic overview of Rev. J's responses on this initial inventory. This data becomes a baseline with which to compare his exit responses.

Chart 3 Rev. J Initial Survey Responses



Finally, Rev. J completed the Total Christian Leader inventory. In Table 5 his scores are compared with the levels we have found to be high and low:

Table 5 Rev. J Initial Scores on the Total Christian Leader Knowledge Inventory

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. J score	35	44	35	43	47
High score (top 20 % of scores): > #	> 35	> 40	> 39	> 44	> 40
Low score (bottom 20 % of scores): < #	< 23	< 26	< 25	< 29	< 24

Notice that Rev. J scores comparatively highest in knowing his church and God. He is closest to being low-scoring in knowledge of others.

Before continuing to the teams' questionnaires, one observation should be highlighted for further analysis. The complete unanimity among the Total Christian Leader scores is intriguing. Each of the pastors scored highest in knowing their church and in knowing God. The raw numbers are not nearly as important as the categorical agreement. Further, each pastor scored lowest in knowing others. Again, the number isn't as instructive as the category.

Why should these priests score lowest in their knowledge of others? As can be readily seen in the Total Christian Leader inventory (a copy of which is attached as Appendix B), this survey gauges one's practice of seeking knowledge. Thus, pastors across our study most aggressively sought knowledge of their church and God and most passively sought information about others.

Such response on a self-evaluation is telling and speaks to the blind spot most preachers have towards their audience. Such a situation establishes fertile ground for the testing of our hypothesis – that the acquisition of feedback from a lay team will close that

knowledge gap. The supposition suggested by these results is that after a year of intervention whereby the participating pastors' receive regular input from others, their scores on knowing others should increase. Meanwhile, the control should remain fairly constant.

Participating teams' initial assessments

As the study of the team itself is not within our purview for this particular exercise, they were not administered an inventory on their own capacity for openness, but queried only on their pastor's.²⁶ This is very important and becomes another baseline by which we might measure any progress in the participating preachers.

Each team member completed the "Closed Loop Team Survey" and then collected his training materials. Rev. J's team completed their forms on the 25th of June, 2003. Rev. T's group filled out their surveys on June 26th, though only two team members were available to grant us this necessary baseline.

To achieve a baseline, the numbers for each answer have been averaged and plotted on a chart. A few of the distinguishing characteristics will be discussed in the next chapter's analysis. Likewise, comparison of these with the similar exit survey chart will also be covered in the analysis. Please see Chart 4 on the next page for a summary of Rev. J's team results, and Chart 5 on the page following for a baseline of Rev. T's team responses.

I. _____

²⁶ Regarding the teams, our main concern for this research is their impact on the pastors, especially in opening them to feedback so they become better preachers. That is not to say the teams don't merit study, and I hope others will conduct thorough research on them.

Chart 4 Comparison of Questionnaire Responses, Rev. J Team

Rev. J's Pulpit Team - Comparison of Initial Questionnaires

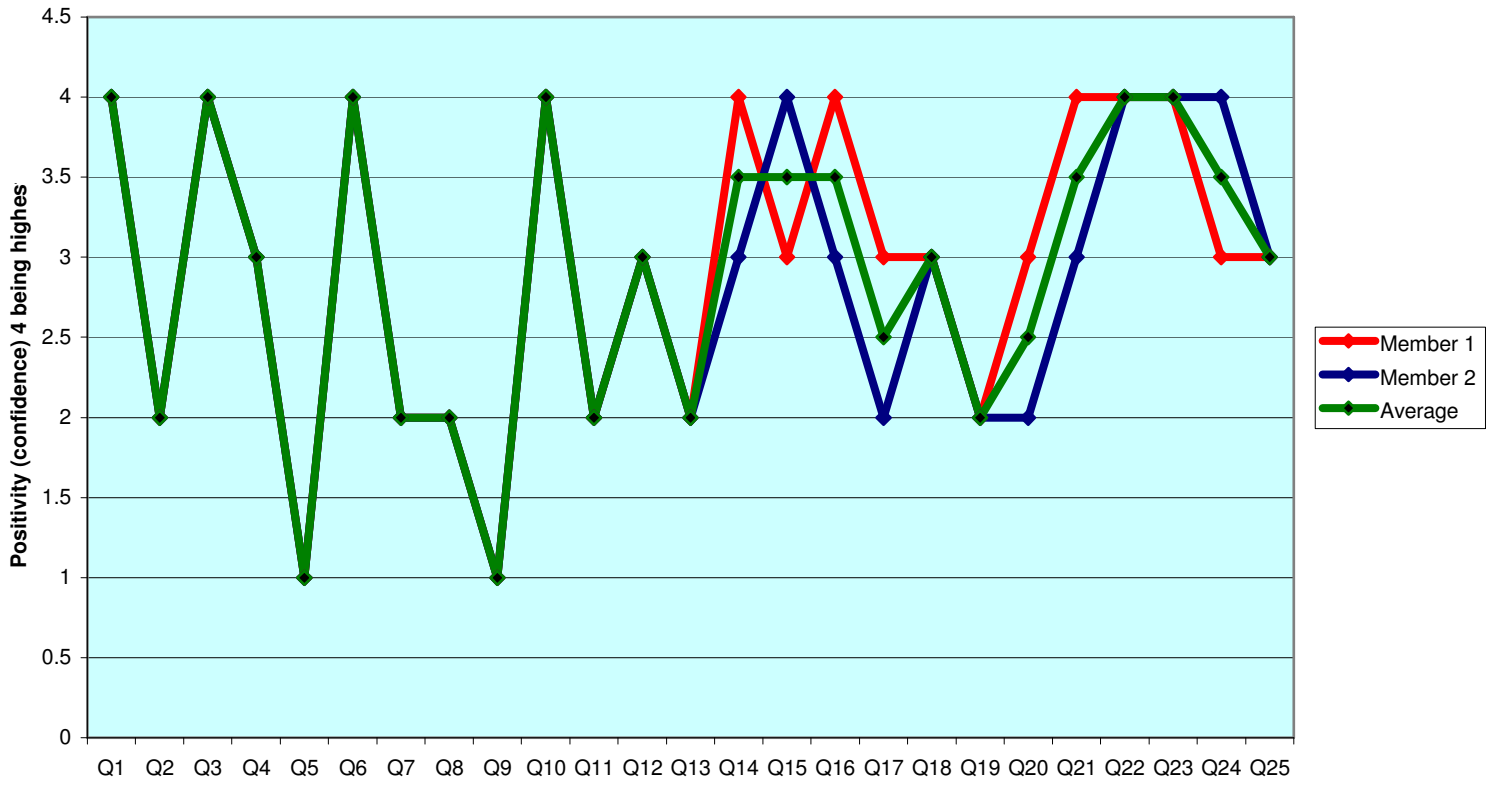
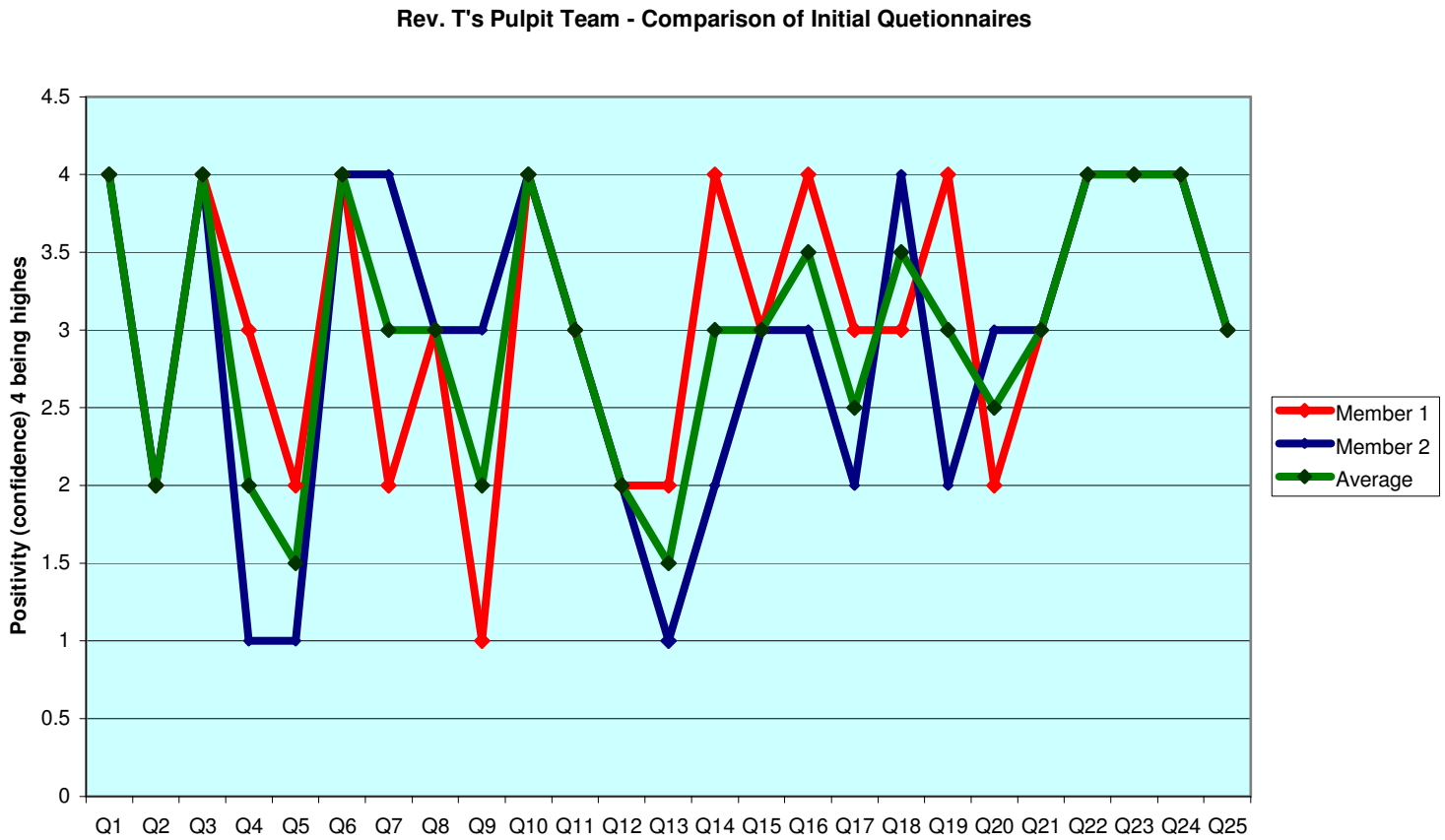


Chart 5 Comparison of Questionnaire Responses, Rev. T Team




Observation studies

According to Bell, observation studies can be conducted in person without endangering the efficacy of the data. Nonetheless, I watched the videotape of the team meeting, having arranged with each participating team and pastor to film their meetings. This was preferable to having me there, due to the difficulties inherent in being seen as the “expert” in the situation. This was particularly important for the first Observation Study, as the teams had only begun to gel and might have found it too convenient to respond to me instead of the pastor. (Leedy & Ormron 2001: 195-196)

For scoring, I made tick marks on a score sheet as each person spoke, keeping track of seven areas of communication, as revealed in Table 6.

Table 6 Types of Communication Observed in the Pulpit Team Meeting

Type of communication	15 sec. talking	correct	edify	clarify	direct	interrupt	self-defend
symbol		-	+	?	d	i	D

- 15 seconds talking – Any time a speaker spoke for longer than 15 seconds without either soliciting input or asking a question, he or she received a tick mark, rendered as an hourglass in our report. This allows for dominating patterns to be readily distinguished, as speakers grab the floor and maintain control. Such behavior is a detriment to closing the feedback loop. It rather closes off others and keeps the feedback loop open. (McCutcheon, Schaffer, Wycoff 2001: 155)
- Correction, on the other hand, is considered a positive activity in a meeting designed to grant constructive criticism. Whenever a corrective or critical comment was made, I recorded that with a – sign. (McCutcheon, Schaffer, Wycoff 2001: 181)
- Edification is also a welcome part of any developmental meeting (or any meeting, for that matter.) As a person made an encouraging or edifying comment, I look note with a + mark. (McCutcheon, Schaffer, Wycoff 2001: 67-69)
- Clarification is an important part of genuine feedback. Without clarifying what is being really said and heard, communication easily becomes stilted or stymied. As we saw in the literature review, such is the state of many pulpits. Therefore, clarification – inquiring about meaning and explaining interpretations of what was

heard – is a vital activity of the pulpit team. (McCutcheon, Schaffer, Wycoff 2001: 103-104)

- Directing is another positive activity. The speaker who directs performs an important function by keeping the discussion on task. Directing comments gently focus the group back on the matter at hand or introduce a new arena for discussion, setting the stage for further feedback. To direct without interrupting, self-defending, or dominating (speaking for more than 30 seconds uninterrupted) is difficult for pastors accustomed to being in charge. Those who learn to do so will have made great strides towards genuine openness toward feedback. (McCutcheon, Schaffer, Wycoff 2001: 160, 183-184)
- Interrupting is among the most negative behaviors, especially given the nature of the team meeting. To interrupt during an offering of constructive criticism makes the evaluator feel suddenly discredited and devalued. (McCutcheon, Schaffer, Wycoff 2001: 181)
- Self-defending has no place in an arena where a closed feedback loop is desired. Whether it is the priest defending himself against criticism or the lay member being forced to defend herself against some pastoral counter-charge, defensive behavior robs the group of unity and harmony. (McCutcheon, Schaffer, Wycoff 2001: 182)

It is important to remember that in the observation studies my focus was neither the development of the individuals, nor the growth of the team itself. Certainly, those are of great importance to the churches and I am available in the future to each church that I

might help facilitate such growth. However, for this study, the reactions of the preacher were the only concern. His responses to input from a lay team were the significant issue. His behavior patterns allow us to ascertain his openness to feedback and to growing in his knowledge of others and how they hear him.

Further, performing two observation studies allows a means of measuring change between the two team meetings observed. With that in mind, one would anticipate over time to see a decrease in the negative behavior and an increase in the positive, given the affirmative community engendered by the team environment. (Malcomson 1967: 39)

Again, though the overall growth of the team will be significant to other researchers, this study will zero in on the change in the priest's behavior.

Observation Study I

The Rev. T team met in November of 2003, with one female member, one male member, and the pastor (Rev. T) present. Their tally is detailed in table 7. My desire is not to recreate the entire meeting, but to focus on the behavior listed in Table 7. Each row across on the chart represents a thought segment, a portion of conversation with a distinct beginning and a conclusion or transition to a new concept. During that discussion segment, the pertinent actions of each member are noted.

Table 7 Behaviors in Rev. T Pulpit Team Meeting (Observation #1)

Female Team Member	Male Team Member	Rev. T
⌚+		⌚⌚ d -
⌚⌚+ -		⌚?
⌚⌚⌚ -		⌚⌚?
⌚i	⌚	⌚⌚⌚D
⌚	⌚ i	⌚⌚⌚D
	⌚⌚	⌚?
⌚ -	⌚+	⌚-
⌚⌚⌚ -	⌚	⌚d
⌚i+	⌚⌚ -	⌚⌚
⌚+	⌚+	⌚D
	⌚	

Only a few comments are necessary. The meeting flowed well, though it got rather spicy, as one can tell from Table 7.

- The female team member twice spoke for over 45 seconds, each time sharing corrective information. This dominance was resented by Rev. T and may have led to the reticence of the male team member in the beginning of the discussion. Likewise, Rev. T's dominance, twice speaking for extended periods while self-defending, added to the discord and suppression of the male lay member.
- There were five corrective points shared with Rev. T, and two others he offered as personal observations of weakness in the message being discussed.
- Six edifying comments were made regarding the sermon. Like the corrective comments, these were adroitly shared and helpful to the team's purpose.
- Clarification was a strength for Rev. T. Three times he asked that further

information be shared so that he could understand the input.

- Directing was done only by Rev. T, and that only twice. This displays his dominance over the process – and expected pattern at this early stage.
- There were three major interruptions, which led to reactionary defensiveness on Rev. T's part.
- Possibly of greatest significance, I observed three times of major defensiveness on Rev. T's part.

Interestingly, at one point Rev. T was frustrated with the inherent difference in a lay team – their unfamiliarity with theological concepts and his desire to bring them up to speed so they could understand an issue raised in his message. The female team member, however, countered that by wisely noting, “That’s why we’re here. None of your audience knows those concepts, not in those terms, and you’ve asked us to tell you when it isn’t clear.” To Rev. T’s credit, he repeated then and two other times, “That’s what I’m looking for. I don’t want to be unclear.” One final note: they were more cognizant of my presence through the camera than I had hoped. Six times during the meeting, a member referred a comment directly to me, though only twice after the first five minutes of discussion.

The Rev. J team also convened in November of 2003, with one female member, one male member, and the pastor (Rev. J) present. Their tally is detailed in Table 8. As with the Rev. T team’s table, each row across on the chart again represents a thought segment, the next line not being used until that thought was completed. [During that discussion segment, the pertinent actions of each member are noted.](#)

Table 8 Behaviors in Rev. J Pulpit Team Meeting (Observation #1)

Female Team Member	Male Team Member	Rev. J
	⌚⌚⌚+++⌚ -	⌚d
		⌚+
⌚⌚⌚+ ⌚ -	⌚+ -	⌚⌚i-
⌚+	⌚⌚⌚++++	⌚
		⌚i
⌚ -	⌚+	⌚⌚D+
		⌚ -
⌚+?	⌚ -	⌚-
⌚⌚+ ⌚-	⌚⌚⌚+	⌚⌚i+
	⌚	⌚
⌚?		⌚
		⌚
⌚?		⌚⌚⌚d
⌚?	⌚+	⌚⌚i -
⌚+	⌚+	⌚d
⌚+?	⌚+	⌚⌚⌚⌚⌚i
⌚+	⌚	⌚d
⌚⌚⌚⌚⌚⌚⌚⌚⌚⌚		

A few clarifying notes are necessary. This meeting also flowed well, and the team seemed encouraged to be together.

- Each member of the team dominated the floor at certain times during the discussion. Each person spoke for over 60 seconds on at least one occasion, and the meeting was marked by periods of individual dominance.
- There were ten corrective points shared, four of them by Rev. J.

- Nineteen edifying comments were made regarding the sermons being evaluated, and two edifying comments were made by Rev. J – regarding the positive role the team could play.
- Clarification occurred five times, but only from one member.
- Rev. J was very talented at directing. Four times, he adroitly guided the discussion to keep the group on task.
- There were four major interruptions, each by Rev. J.
- I observed one episode of major defensiveness on Rev. J’s part. He did, however, end the self-defensive speech with an encouraging comment about the team and his need for feedback.

Obviously, the female member felt the predicted camaraderie as she talked a long time at the end about a personal prayer request. The men also seemed to be loose and comfortable with each other. Rev. J used many directing phrases to emphasize his desire for constructive criticism. For example, his first directing comment was, “Thank you. Don’t be afraid to be negative, because that helps, too.” His final direction was, “Thanks for this. Before I save the document, I now think, ‘What needs to change, because I’m going to be in a meeting where that will come up.’ I want to be a better communicator.”

The team was possibly overly positive and may have been less than candid. According to Rev. J’s diary (see below), it wasn’t until two months later that he felt they really gave him honest evaluation. Further, there were four interruptions and one defensive period – all by Rev. J. Finally, this group appeared less conscious of my “presence,” mentioning

the camera only three times, all in the first half hour.

Observation study II

The Rev. T team met in November of 2004, with one female member, one male member, and the pastor (Rev. T) present. This meeting was observed by the researched, and the tally is detailed in Table 9. Again, we won't recreate the entire meeting, but to focus on the feedback-affecting behaviors. As before, each row across on the chart represents a thought segment, a portion of conversation with a distinct beginning and a conclusion or transition to a new concept. During that discussion segment, the pertinent actions of each member are noted.

Table 9 Behaviors in Rev. T Pulpit Team Meeting (Observation #2)

Female Team Member	Male Team Member	Rev. T
⌚⌚ -	⌚++	⌚⌚?
	⌚d ⌚+ -	
	⌚⌚⌚ -	⌚d
⌚+	⌚+	⌚⌚?
⌚+	⌚⌚ -	⌚?
	⌚d	⌚⌚
⌚d		⌚+
⌚ -	⌚ -	⌚+
	⌚?⌚ -	⌚D
⌚+	⌚+	⌚⌚ -

This meeting displayed the significant progress made during the year, especially

regarding Rev. T's openness to feedback from his team.²⁷

- No one spoke for more than thirty seconds at a time. Further, there were times when members were willing to be quiet and just listen to their partners. The give and take, the openness to listening, and the comfort with silence showed synergy and spoke to Rev. T's development of his team.
- There were eight corrective points shared, the last being Rev. T's apology for his self-defensive response.
- Eight edifying comments were made regarding the sermon.
- Rev. T remained committed to clarification. Three times he asked for further information. Also impressive, another team member followed this lead and also asked for clarification.
- This time, four directing comments were shared, and every member participated. This represented clear progress, particularly showing Rev. T's openness to team discussion.
- There were no interruptions.
- There was only one episode of self-defensiveness by Rev. T, and this was followed almost immediately by an apology.

The Rev. J team gathered in October of 2003, with one female member, one male member, and the pastor (Rev. J) present. This meeting was observed, and their tally is detailed in Table 10. Again, each row across on the chart again represents a thought segment, and the pertinent actions of each member are noted.

I. _____

²⁷ The team also obviously made great progress in meeting dynamic, and I trust other research can develop the growth of the pulpit team.

Table 10 Behaviors in Rev. J Pulpit Team Meeting (Observation #2)

Female Team Member	Male Team Member	Rev. J
?		⌚⌚
		⌚⌚⌚d
	⌚⌚+⌚+	
d⌚+⌚-?	⌚⌚⌚++++	⌚?+
⌚⌚-	⌚-	
⌚+⌚		⌚
⌚d⌚-		⌚?
⌚-	⌚⌚+ d	
⌚⌚+		⌚⌚- +

This meeting was active, smooth, and seamless. Progress was clearly visible regarding Rev. J’s capacity to accept and request input from his team.

- Compared with the first observation study, the team made great strides towards sharing power. No one spoke for a minute or otherwise tried to wrest control. They were also much more content to be quiet and listen, as evidenced by the white space in Table 11.
- There were five corrective points shared, one of them by Rev. J.
- Eleven edifying comments were made regarding the sermons being evaluated, including one by Rev. J. His final comment included an encouraging praise for the team’s work.
- Clarification was better spread, occurring four times, twice by Rev. J.
- Rev. J needed to perform less directing, as the other members made three directing comments. As with Rev. T’s second observation study, this shows

- willingness on the part of the leader to accept input from the group.
- No one interrupted at any time, a remarkable improvement.
 - Neither was there a single episode of self-defense.

Extracts from the diaries

To my chagrin, the pastors struggled with our agreed practice of keeping diaries. They did record incidental thoughts and share them with the researcher via phone, conversation, or note. However, such communications were limited. The excerpts below represent nearly the complete crop.²⁸

Rev. T shared this feeling in November, 2003: “This is hard! It’s really good to hear things I need to know...things I wouldn’t have known. But it still hurts.”²⁹

In November 2003 a member of Rev. T’s team wrote the following (which he passed on), “We need to work on overall organization, as overall flow is still an issue.”

Rev. J records this thought in January, 2004, “Tonight they finally gave me both barrels. It was awful, but it really felt good. I hadn’t felt they were coming completely clean with me until now.”

In February 2004, Rev. T phoned me to say, “Thanks for doing this. It’s the best change I’ve ever made.”

I. _____
²⁸ Only personal references such as, “I am really glad to work with Wayne” are excluded.

²⁹ This explains why Thomas Troeger (2003) refers to garnering feedback as “the healthy climb up the mountain of suffering.”

In May 2004, Rev. M writes, “I scored lowest on knowing others. I would have more influence if I knew the people better. I (could) make better use of people & giftings.”

In June 2004, a member of Rev. J’s team passed on this thought, “This has rubbed off on me! I find that I am now asking those closest to me for feedback on my ideas.”

For the final participant comments, please see the *Interviews* section below.

Closing Assessments

Control Closing Assessment

The closing assessment was given to Rev. M, the control, on the 3rd of June, 2004. 10 of the 25 questions received different responses from those he gave on the initial assessment. This represents a 40% variation. We’ll analyze these variations and discuss the 60% that remained unchanged in the next chapter; however, some detail is necessary at this juncture.

In the first section, dealing with the preacher’s personal joy in the preaching task, all his answers were positive save question 5. Question 5, “I read and learn about preaching ___” had previously had received the lowest score of “__never__” from Rev. M. On this closing assessment, he upgraded that response to the second-highest answer, “__selectively__.”

As you may recall, the second quintet of questions covered the task of preaching. On the initial assessment, questions 6 and 7 were low spots for Pastor M. In his self-analysis, he saw improvement in each area. Question 6 asked “When I prepare a sermon, I do so with ____ foremost in my mind.” Pastor M’s previous choice, “__those who are hurting__” is considered problematic. (Robinson 2001:155) On this survey, Pastor M moved to the second-most positive choice, “__the normative members of our church__.” Question 7 also witnessed improvement, as our control pastor is now “__highly aware of my__” as opposed to “__somewhat aware of my__” movements and gestures.

Our control displayed the most variation in the section (questions 11-15) concerning the resource of lay feedback. Whereas our control had previously been more hostile towards lay feedback, he now displays some openness. Question 13 queried the number of “occasions for me to receive truly constructive criticism.” Our control had previously responded with “__Few__.” On this final measurement he improves to “__Some__.” Question 15 read “Most lay criticism is ____”, and contained only one positive answer (“Constructive”) and three negatives. At the outset, Rev. M. chose “__Wounding to me__” but now he selects the slightly less negative “__unhelpful__”

Yet, our control has actually moved backwards in his valuation of lay feedback. Question 14 asks, “How helpful can lay persons’ input be to my preaching development? Rate on a 1-10 scale; 1 representing no help & 10 meaning great help.” Rev. M., who previously selected “8-10,” now chooses “6-7” instead.

These mixed responses continue in the next section (16-20) covering the priest's response to feedback in general and criticism in particular. Questions 16, 17, and 20 were scored the same as on his previous inventory. His answer on 20 remained the rather hesitant “__sometimes__” – again, a very telling response in light of the way the question was skewed toward the positive by the insertion of the word “constructive.”

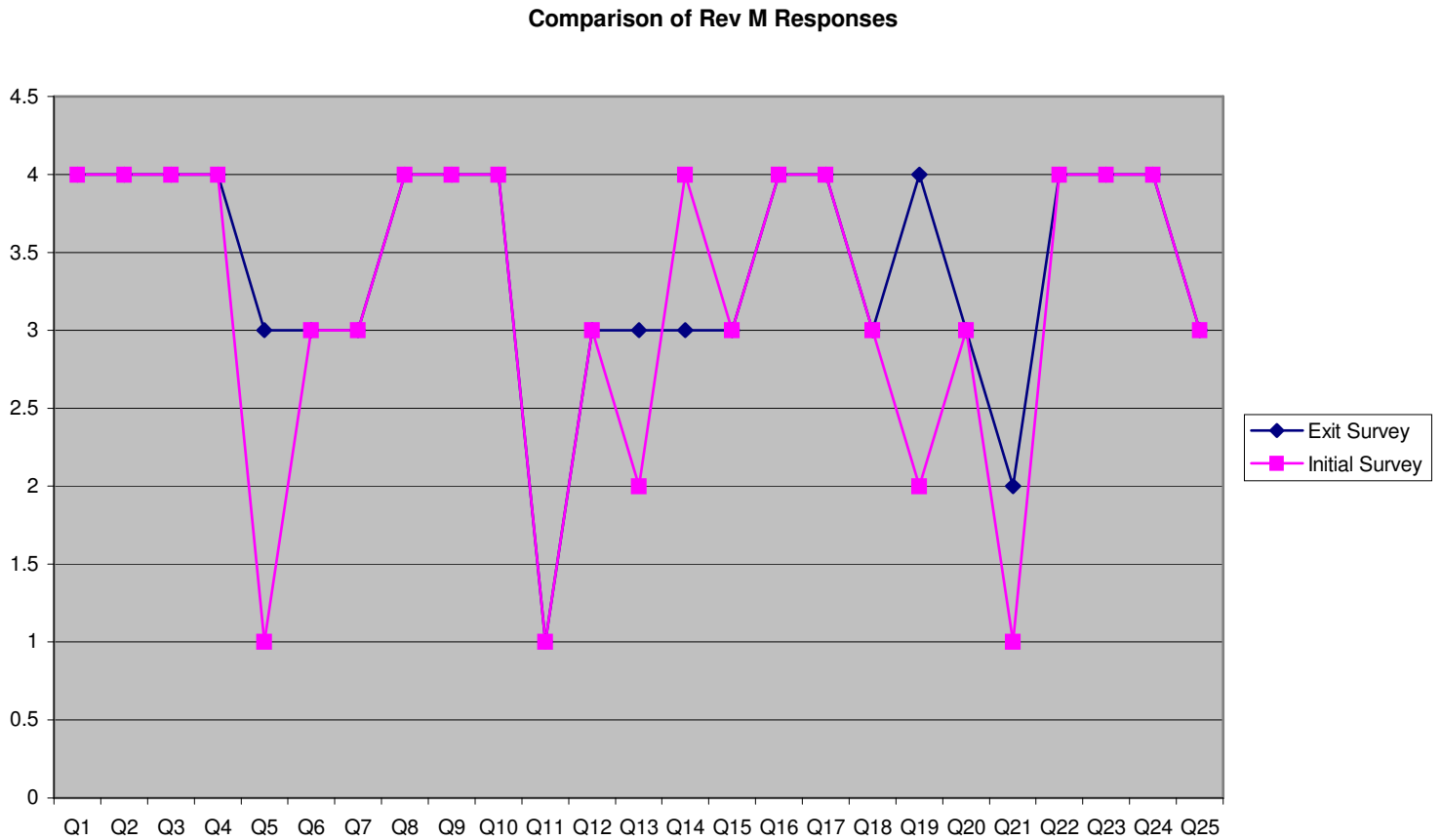
However, on questions 18 and 19, Rev. M. showed improvement. Question 18, “Constructive feedback of a sermon _____,” had formerly received from him the lowest possible response of “__is usually delivered with mixed motives__”. On this later inventory, Rev. M. upgraded slightly to the third-best answer, “__is rarely delivered in a helpful manner__.” Question 19 also displayed positive movement. Previously, our pastor had stated, “When I am approached with feedback on a sermon, I honestly __prepare to defend myself__.” Now, he chooses the most positive reaction, “__look forward to the input__.”

On our initial assessment, Rev. M. had 3/5 positive answers in the final section – covering the preacher's internal drive and desires. The gap between the preacher and his audience, predicted in literature and seen in question 25 remains for this pastor. None of his other responses varied, save a mild improvement on question 21. Instead of “wishing my preaching could be more effective “ __often__”, our control pastor now upgrades one point to “__sometimes__.”

Graphically, we can compare Rev. M's exit questionnaire with his initial survey by

looking at Chart 6 below. Note that the lines appear as one through most of the chart. This represents areas of no change.

Chart 6 Comparison of Responses by Rev. M. – Initial and Exit Surveys



Finally, Rev. M again completed the Total Christian Leader inventory. In Table 11 his scores are compared with the levels we have found to be high and low: (Russo 1995: 8; also, personal correspondence with Dr. Russo)

Table 11 Rev. M. scores on closing Total Christian Leader Inventory

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. M (control) score	38	42	30	40	42
High score (top 20 % of scores): > #	> 35	> 40	> 39	> 44	> 40
Low score (bottom 20 % of scores): < #	< 23	< 26	< 25	< 29	< 24

It is very interesting to compare those scores with Rev. M’s initial responses, as detailed in Table 13. These differentials will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 12 Rev. M. score comparison on Total Christian Leader Inventories

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. M (control) Score – Initial	34	42	33	40	43
Rev. M (control) Score - Closing	38	42	30	40	42
Differential	Gain 4	Equal	Loss 3	Equal	Loss 1

Treatment Preachers’ closing assessments

The closing assessment was administered to Rev. T. on the 16th of June, 2004. 11 of the 25 answers were different from his original scores, a 44% change.

Regarding the first category, the preacher and his delight in preaching, Rev. T was mostly positive, as he was upon our first assessment. However, one score had changed in the year of intervention. Question 2 read, “Regarding my capacity to connect with the audience, I feel ____ confidence.” Originally, Rev. T answered “__Great__.” On the final measurement, however, he chose “__I could use more__.” This intriguing discrepancy is discussed in the next chapter.

The performance of preaching was covered in the second series, and here Rev. T changed only two answers from his original evaluation. Number 9 read, “I ____ objectives for each message I give.” He advanced to “__set__” rather than the lower answer given on his first evaluation, “__Do not think in terms of__.” Question 7 saw him slip from the prime “__highly aware of my physical movements and gestures__” to “__somewhat aware__.”

The third part questioned the preacher’s resources. This time, Rev. T. faced no confusion and was able to confidently respond to question 11 in the positive, “I __work with__ a regular team who grant feedback on my messages.” Question 13 represents a marked improvement, as he now finds that “there are __some__ occasions for me to receive truly constructive criticism.” This is contrast to his previous admission that there were “__few__” such occasions. Rev. T’s choice on question 15 likewise displays great growth. On the first assessment, he declared that “Most lay criticism is __wounding to me__.” Now, he instead takes the most positive answer, “__constructive__.”

Our fourth pericope discusses the preacher’s reaction to feedback in general and criticism in particular. Here we witness the marked improvement in Rev. T. through the treatment period. Question 16, “I ____ seek input regarding the crafting of series and individual sermons” had previously been answered “__sometimes__.” On the final evaluation, it becomes “__actively__.” We recall that on the first assessment, Rev. T chose the lowest response, “__is rarely delivered in a helpful manner__” to question 18, “Constructive

feedback on a sermon ____.” Again, this most negative response is quite telling, given the aforementioned positive slant of that question. It was very instructive to see his answer on this closing estimation change to the most positive choice, “__is a great gift__.”

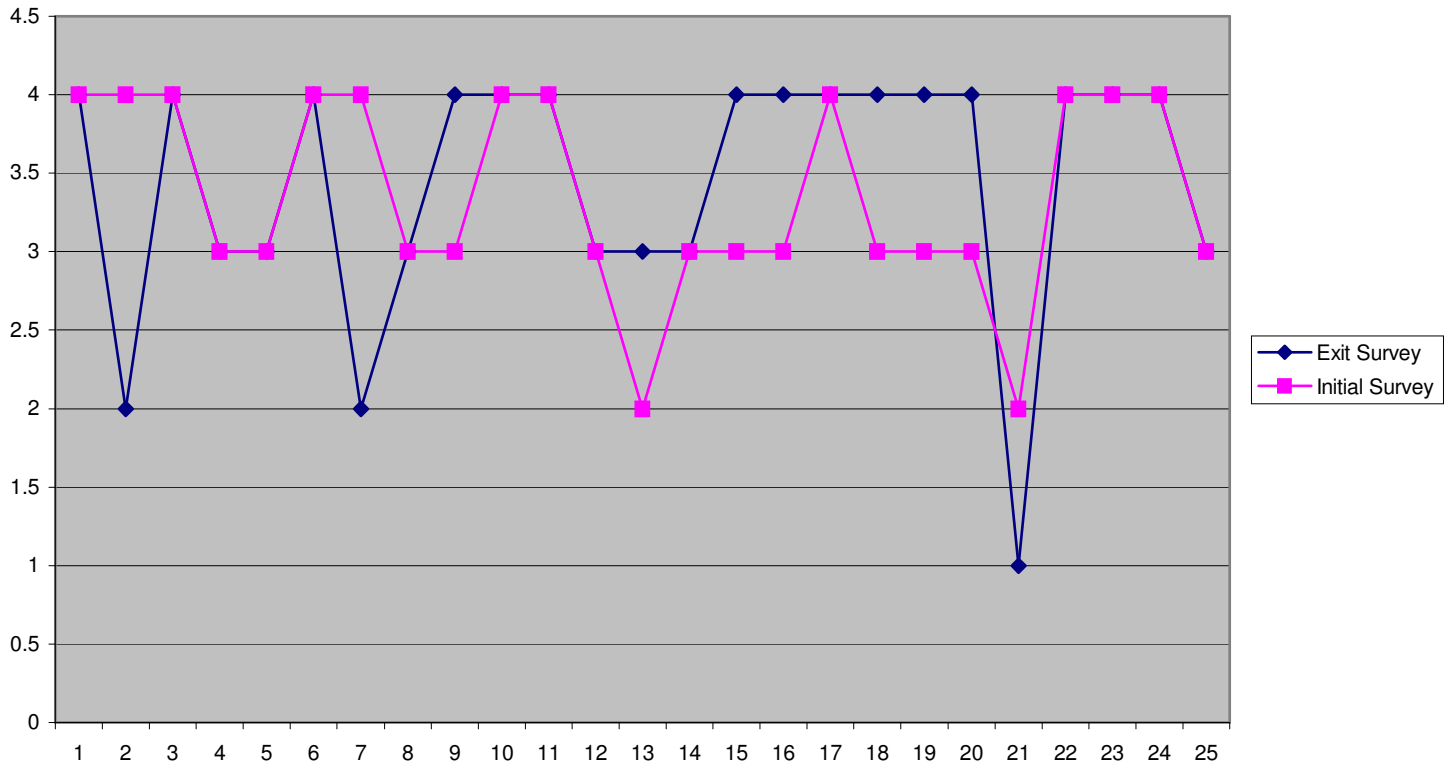
Question 19 represents a common pastoral situation regarding the receipt of un-requested feedback on a sermon. Pastor T. gave a common response his first time, saying, “__I try to control my face so it won’t appear I am recoiling__.” Yet, on the final assessment, he upgrades his answer to “__look forward to the input__.” Finally, he promotes another second-rank answer, this on number 20. His answer before intervention was, “I have __sometimes__ found constructive feedback on my preaching to be helpful.” That changes to the most positive response on the final questionnaire, “__usually__.”

Sector 5 described internal desires of the preacher. Rev. T. saw two changes, the first on question 21. Previously, he had “__sometimes__ wished his preaching could be more effective__”; yet now he wishes such “__often__.” Also of note was his revised response to question 25. There he tells us that “My greatest insecurity in preaching is (generally) __the thought that I am repeating myself __.” The interesting aspect isn’t that answer per se, but that it shows a deviance from the most common response – the one he chose in the original inventory, “__the thought that I am not connecting with the congregation__.”

Graphically, we can compare Rev. T’s exit questionnaire with his initial survey by examining at Chart 7. Where his responses were the same, only one line appears.

Chart 7 Comparison of Responses by Rev. T. – Initial and Exit Surveys

Comparison of Rev T Responses



Finally, Rev. T again completed the Total Christian Leader inventory. In Table 13 his closing assessment scores are compared with the levels we have found to be high and low:

Table 13 Rev. T. scores on closing Total Christian Leader Inventory

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. T score	38	42	38	45	49
High score (top 20 % of scores): > #	> 35	> 40	> 39	> 44	> 40
Low score (bottom 20 % of scores): < #	< 23	< 26	< 25	< 29	< 24

It is very interesting to compare those scores with Rev. T's initial responses, as detailed

in Table 14. These differentials will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 14 Rev. T. score comparison on Total Christian Leader Inventories

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. T Score – Initial	34	39	34	41	45
Rev. T Score - Closing	38	42	38	45	49
Differential	Gain 4	Gain 3	Gain 4	Gain 4	Gain 4

Reverend J completed the post-test of the experiment on July 22, 2004.³⁰ He also changed over 1/3 of his responses, specifically adjusting 9 answers (36%). He had two different responses in the first section, which discussed the preacher’s joy in preaching.

Fascinatingly, his one downward adjustment was the same as Rev. T’s – number 2 and the question of audience connection. Like Rev. T., Rev. J originally answered

“__Great__.” On the final assessment, however, he also chose “__I could use more__.”

His other change was on question 5 where he previously had selected the second-highest response. He formerly said, “I read and learn about preaching __selectively__.” This time, he raised to the most positive answer, “__regularly__.”

The performance of preaching (second question set) represented the most movement for Rev. J, with four of the five answers morphing from his original replies. On number 6, he formerly said, “When I prepare a sermon, I do so with __the normative members of our church__ foremost in my mind.” On the final inventory, he moved to the highest answer, “__many different people groups__.” A similarly positive move occurred on number 10,

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³⁰ Rev. J and his team were scheduled to conduct their closing assessments on the 12th of June, marking one year of treatment. However, a team member went into labor the night before and the meeting was delayed until the 22nd of July.

where he progressed from saying that “Planning plays __not enough of a__ role in my preaching and preparation” to “__a great__ role.”

Yet, on number 7 we find Rev. J. facing the same correction seen in Rev. T. He moved from thinking he was “__highly aware__” of his physical movements and gestures to confessing that he is merely “__somewhat aware__.” In a like manner, number 8 finds our pastor reassessing his utilization of basic preaching principles. He formerly said, “I __do__ utilize basic preaching principles.” On the final assessment, he modifies that to “__somewhat__.”

The third cluster, the preacher’s resources, saw little change with Rev. J.³¹ However, the one change was very positive. Question 13 read, “There are ____occasions for me to receive truly constructive criticism.” Rev. J. upgraded from “__some__” to “__many__.”

Regarding the preacher’s reaction to feedback in general and criticism in particular (the fourth group), Rev. J. showed strong growth similar to Rev. T’s. Question 17, “Criticism ____” was completed originally with the second-ranking answer, “__is unavoidable__.” Yet on the final assessment, Rev. J. declared that criticism “__helps__.” Further, question 19 moved from, “When I am approached with feedback on a sermon, I honestly__try to control my face so it won’t appear I’m recoiling__” to “__look forward to the input__.”

This is a graphic upgrade in the area of reaction to feedback.

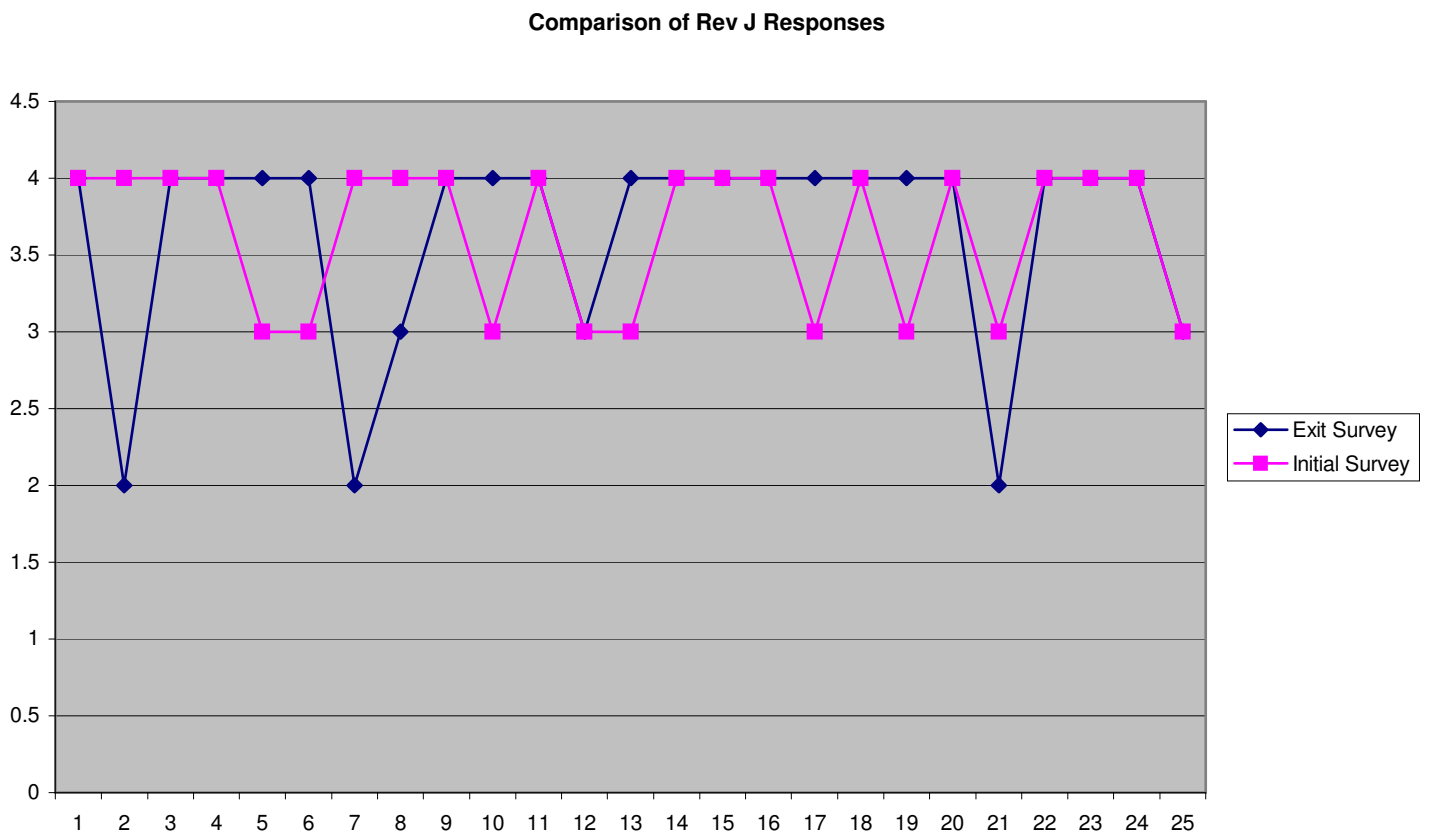
I. _____

³¹ Respondent validation uncovered a discrepancy. Both Rev. J. & Rev. T found question 11 unclear and Rev. J (as noted above) would have answered lower on his original inventory. This of course would have led to an improvement mark between the two assessments.

Rev. J's internal desires, displayed in section five, contained no changes from his original responses.

Chart 8 graphically juxtaposes Rev. J's exit questionnaire over his initial survey. Where his responses were the same, only one line appears.

Chart 8 Comparison of Responses by Rev. J. – Initial and Exit Surveys



Finally, Rev. J completed the Total Christian Leader inventory anew. In Table 15 his scores are compared with the levels we have found to be high and low:

Table 15 Rev. J. scores on closing Total Christian Leader Inventory

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. J score	36	42	39	46	48
High score (top 20 % of scores): > #	> 35	> 40	> 39	> 44	> 40
Low score (bottom 20 % of scores): < #	< 23	< 26	< 25	< 29	< 24

It is very interesting to compare those scores with Rev. J’s initial responses, as detailed in Table 16. These differentials will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 16 Rev. J. score comparison on Total Christian Leader Inventories

Category of knowledge	The world	Your church	Others	Yourself	God
Rev. J Score – Initial	35	44	35	43	47
Rev. J Score - Closing	36	42	39	46	48
Differential	Gain 1	Loss 2	Gain 4	Gain 3	Gain 1

Participating teams closing assessments

Remember, the study of the team itself is not our arena. Thus, they were again queried only on their pastor’s openness to feedback. Their answers grant us another glimpse into the closed-loop growth of these pastors, particularly regarding the role of the pulpit team in that growth.

Each team member completed the “Closed Loop Team Survey” a Rev. J’s team on 22 July 2004, and Rev. T’s group fill on June 16th 2004. The numbers for each answer have been plotted on charts and averaged. Discussion of the comparison between these exit survey charts and the initial surveys will be covered in the analysis. Please see Chart 9 for

a summary of Rev. J's team exit survey results, and Chart 10 for a comparison of their average exit survey with their initial survey. Chart 11 on the page following displays the exit survey responses for Rev. T's team, while Chart 12 compares that average answer with their initial survey responses.

Chart 9

Closing Survey Results for Rev. J's Team as Revealed in "Closed Loop Team Survey"

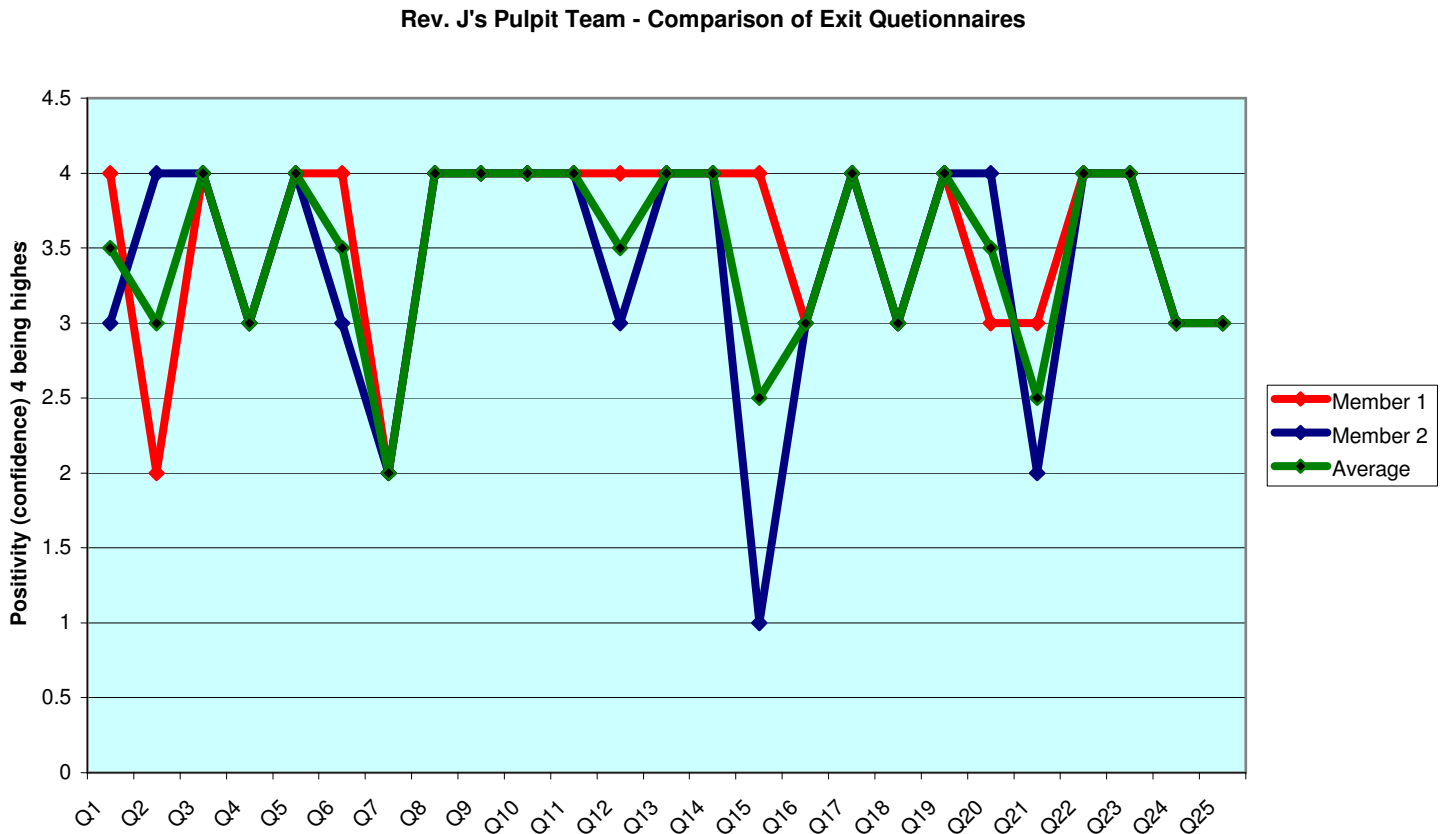


Chart 10 Comparison of Results for Rev. J's Team – Initial and Exit Surveys

Comparison of Questionnaires - Rev J Team

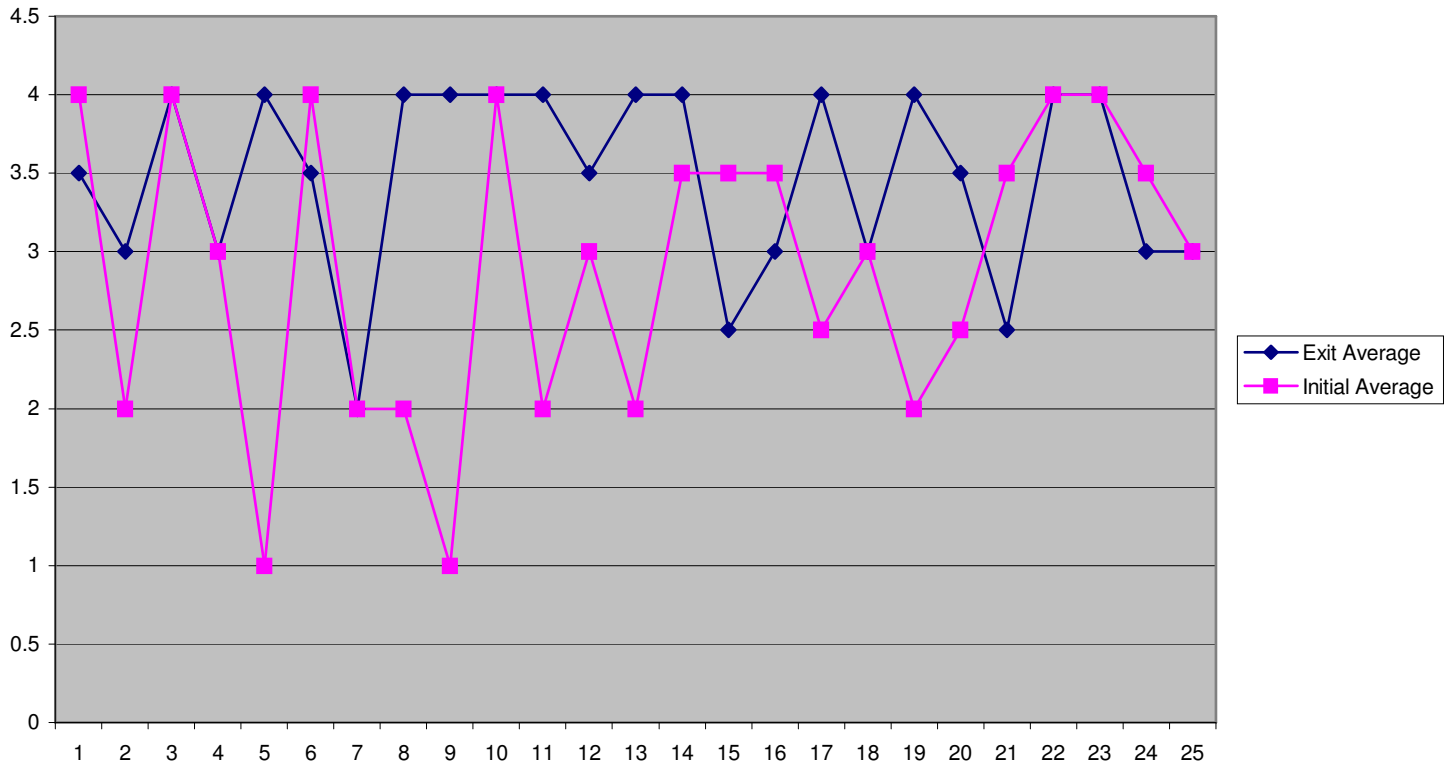


Chart 11
Closing Survey Results for Rev. T's Team as revealed in "Closed Loop Team Survey"

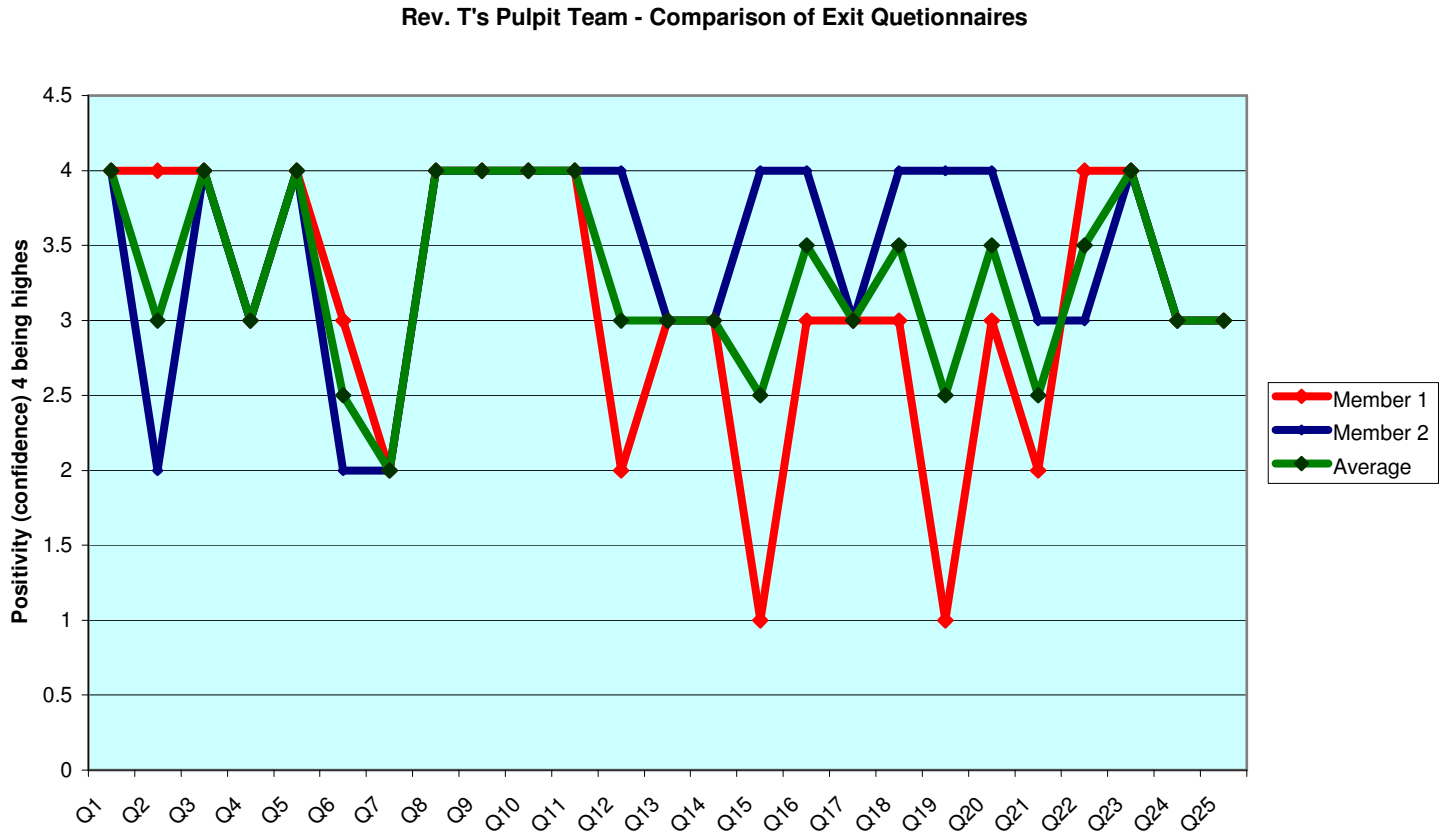
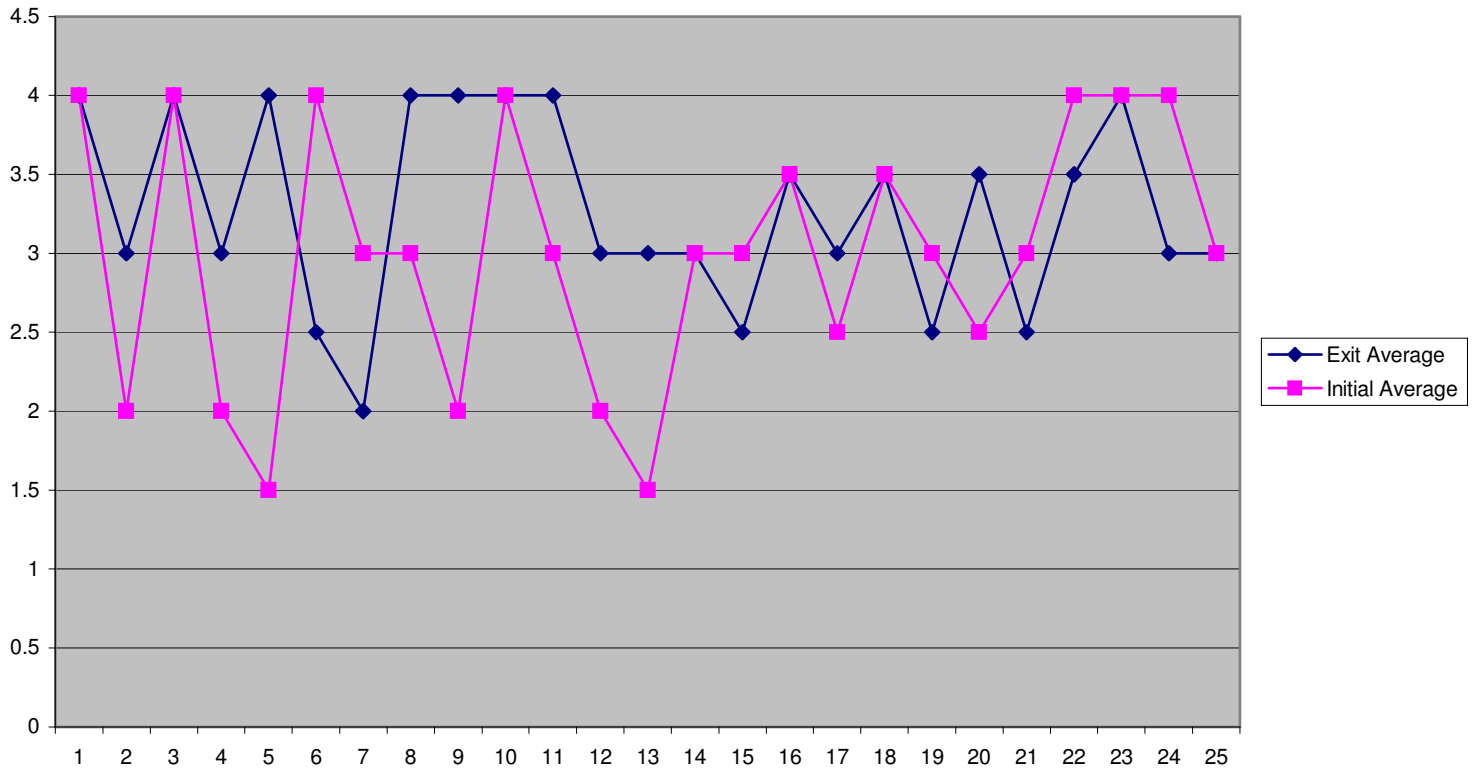


Chart 12 Comparison of Results for Rev. J's Team – Initial and Exit Surveys

Comparison of Questionnaires - Rev J Team



Chapter 7 Analysis – Themes and Deductions

*Virtutem primam esse puta compescere ligwam. – Cato
(Consider that the first among all virtue is to hold your tongue.)*

Proverbs 27:5-6 Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy. (NAS)

Discussion of the interviews

The information obtained from the interviews with the participants themselves is telling, and a number of themes arise from their responses. We will examine each theme in turn and then deduce what can be learned from this information.

Themes voiced in the interviews

1. The team was beneficial.

Looking at the responses, we see unqualified agreement that the team was a positive intervention. Female on Rev. J's team said, "This made our hour on Sunday a lot richer. I could feel Rev. J benefiting." Rev. J shared, "Think it's been awesome!...I now think ahead and think about our audience more proactively."

Rev. team T Female agreed, saying, "Felt (it was) very beneficial. I saw change in areas that I thought needed improvement." And Rev. T expanded, "Humor was previously used to mask insecurity – now I've been called on that. Who would have said anything before? I now have roadblocks on negative things." In that statement, Rev. T displays the key advantage of the acquisition of regular lay feedback – someone is there to say things that the preacher needs to know.

Further, the team was an advantage to the team members as well as the pastors. Female of the Rev. J team summarized, “I am (benefiting) also – I now pay closer attention to feedback from others.” Female of the Rev. T team adds, “It was good for me, too; brought me deeper into the Word... I think it’s very beneficial. I thought it was real encouraging.”

2. Preachers are more open to feedback as a result of the team treatment.

Looking at a montage of Rev. J’s responses, one is struck at the theme of desiring more feedback. “ Before, I wasn’t open in the same way...Knowing that, and that we can sit and talk in a relaxed small group, has allowed me to see input as really constructive.”

Rev. T likewise calls the team’s input “real help,” implying that he is more open to feedback.

Most of the team members agreed that the preachers were more open. Male of Rev. J’s team describes Rev. J actively seeking a closed feedback loop: “Definitely, he is more open to feedback. He now even tries to drag information out of us by asking specific questions. I think in its simplest form the act of coming and soliciting this makes a huge change.” Female on that team agreed, “I have seen an immediate change, especially regarding the implementation of ideas now. At first, we kept saying the same things over and over. Now, there have been changes and we are able to move on to other things. Accountability is there now for him. To be able to go back and praise and criticize has given him something valuable to be used.”

Rev. T's Male was the one dissenting voice, saying, "I think it's about the same. He was open in the beginning, which allowed us to give and give more." However, female of Rev. T's team disagreed, "He was open. But (stressed) he was uneasy, somewhat. He became more and more open – especially after realizing we were for him." Rev. T diplomatically side with Female. "I was (open) before, but that's easy to say when I didn't have any (feedback)! I have involvement now, real help with delivery and knowing that I'm connecting.

A useful summary comments came from Female on Rev. J team, "One more thing – there is an honest accountability there (in Rev. J's attitude) now." That "honest accountability" is what we are calling closed-loop preaching – a system wherein the clergy are in real dialogue with the rest of the audience. This intervention, the pulpit team, seems to have brought such dialogue about.

3. As anticipated by the literature review, openness to feedback proved to be directly related to improved teaching effectiveness.

Rev. T's Female declared, "Accuracy (improved). Particularly if it's a well-known passage, he began to make sure all was in context and well-used." Rev. T Male also saw improved performance, noting, "(He's) Making sure scriptures are used more and fit the whole message, not merely inserted. That's the change I saw, and the research became much better."

Rev. J's Male also noted improvement in preaching. He said, "At first, Rev. J's approach was very academic. As we went along, Rev. J was making a lot of changes. We could see on Sundays that Rev. J was listening – things where I said to myself, "Hey, Female mentioned that in our team." Rev. J Female also noticed better flexibility and creativity. She said "Variety. He's putting himself out there more, taking more risks. Also, I now can approach him with changes between services and he's more open."

Rev. J concurred, exclaiming, "True! For example, I recently had an illustration that meant nothing to the people. Female flagged it and I made a change." Female on Rev. J's team made this strong statement to the researcher, "Thank you for doing this. Our preacher was good before and we loved him. But he gets better and better, he's becoming great."

Certainly, the literature was overwhelming, and I expected increased effectiveness as feedback receptivity increased. Nonetheless, this was encouraging for the participants and for the researcher, affirming that this work has direct bearing on improved leadership communication.

4. The congregation responded differently to their preacher as a result of the team treatment.

Rev. T shared, "They've (congregation) become more expectant. The way the team has helped me deliver and prepare for the next message, the people are prepared." Female on Rev. T's team added, "They are more attentive, more attuned." Female on Rev. J team

said, “They seem to share more clearly and buy in to what he’s saying.” Male on that team observed, “I’ve been watching the church as he preaches. Church has changed – before there was lots of sitting back, few taking notes. Now, they’re sitting like this (forward) and taking notes. Taking it more seriously.” Rev. J expresses the following, “ I would have to say that I got more positive feedback from the congregation the last six months than I have ever. This is the best year of my preaching career. Their comments have reinforced what the team says, which builds confidence in the team and self.”

These comments are very instructive. They speak to change that brought about by the pulpit team process, especially informing us that such change is noticed beyond the borders of the team. In fact, the congregation as a whole seems to have been encouraged by the pulpit team work.

5. Preachers were encouraged and emboldened by the team.

Rev. T shared, “I enjoyed it. My expectations changed after the first meeting. I thought it would be more of getting info – that was true, but I got spiritual prompting as well. Also, maturity grew in me. My study habits deepened. I began to carry a mandate instead of just words. Female, for example, talked about my illustrations being one-dimensional. That helped me diversify and be more inclusive... These people really cared about our church and really cared about me... I have involvement now, real help with delivery and knowing that I’m connecting... This has been like driving through a full-service gas station – you feel rich and got good service. I get less flustered, also.

Rev. J's comments show a similar strengthening, "Before, I wasn't open in the same way. I trust these people's hearts and that they have the pulse of our church...One word comes to mind – confidence...I think the knowledge that they love me and want the best for the church. Knowing that, and that we can sit and talk in a relaxed small group, has allowed me to see input as really constructive. Also, they've been so kind and affirming, it has helped greatly. I can really trust them."

The teams expressed similar observations of transformation in such statements as, "I think he's taking more risks...he's more relaxed...he's more confident and personal...he seems more comfortable. He's more self-confident... I see more genuine heart – he's really being himself...it's less mechanical...relaxed. He's more relaxed."

As these and other comments make evident, the preachers were not unhorsed by lay feedback. Neither were they stifled under a blanket of harsh criticism. Rather, they took more risks in the confidence that people were upholding them in their preaching ministry. Seeing the heart and commitment of those selected to serve with them, the preachers were emboldened. It will be for other studies to determine the

6. Regular meetings were desired and seen as necessary.

Rev. J expressed desire for more steady input, saying, "Only thing I would say is that meeting more regularly would be even more beneficial." Female on Rev. J team agreed and went further, "I wonder if meeting weekly would help fulfill these changes faster? That has been my secret desire – to meet weekly instead of monthly."

This confirmed an assumption visible throughout this study, from the abstract through to the training materials in Appendix D, that regular feedback is best. The team that would genuinely desire to close the loop must develop according to the practices of action research and see themselves as an ongoing tool for transformation. (Holmes, 1978)

7. With some qualifiers, all felt other churches should adopt similar strategies. Male on Rev. J's team expressed, "(I) know it's risky to solicit criticism, but in this controlled environment I recommend that every church do this... Pretty bold move for a pastor (or anyone, really) to do this. But, it's so great that every church should do it. I know the tough part is finding a group you can trust." His female counterpart agreed, "Absolutely. There was absence of this in the church I grew up in. My childhood pastor was a dear man, but I can't imagine him being open to this or people feeling free to share with him. And lots of problems came from that lack of honesty... As a teacher (her previous career), I found this kind of input great, because I was evaluated all the time."

Her comments take us back again to an observation expressed in Chapter 1, that preaching lags other communication fields in the use of feedback. After more than a year of pulpit team meetings, these participants seemed zealous to change that. Discussing the usefulness of feedback, Rev. J issued a call that applies to all preachers, "It just seems logical. This is the most important communication in the world, so why shouldn't we want to make it the best possible message we could?"

Rev. T offered one qualifier when he said, “Yes and No. Not just to do it. If the pastor is not ready, it could kill him. I grew to trust them – they had no ulterior motive. Never was their input destructive.” He also said, “I didn’t experience much difficulty. I did experience discomfort. I think my desire to get better for my people helped. I think longer tenured pastors may have more trouble, as they might be more settled and less open to learn.”

This surmise could indeed prove helpful for the church looking to form a pulpit team, especially when coupled with the other qualifier, a warning to select purposeful team members. Rev. T’s Male conveyed the concept, “I think along with Rev. T that it takes a very mature person to invite criticism. It can really elevate the message God wants to get to the people, but when the pastor chooses the people, their motive must be examined to be found as a constructive way to further the kingdom.”

Deductions drawn from the interviews

7. The teams and participating pastors considered the pulpit team to be of great value to their ministry.

This perceived value seems to have arisen from observations of discernable progress not only in receptivity towards feedback but in more effective preaching. Thus, the hypothesis is strongly supported by the interviews. Closing the feedback loop through the regular input of a lay team makes the preacher more open to feedback and thus leads inexorably to more effective preaching.

8. There was a support failure on the part of the researcher.

Repeatedly, the team members mentioned the problems inherent in remaining a learner while being a helpful critic. They each adjusted to the dual roles within a few months, but their struggle could have been eased by better preparation. Had the training booklet covered such issues, the team members might have had an easier transition.

This difficulty was summarized by Male on Rev. J's team, "The first two or three weeks, the hardest thing was disengaging from wearing the critic's hat only. (Female interjected a strong "Yes!" at this point.) It took a while to really enjoy the message and still get good input for Rev. J." This will be discussed in depth in the *ethical implications* section below.

9. There exists a perceived distance between the laity and the clergy.

This did not seem to limit the teams' effectiveness in any way, but is a point of dynamic tension. Rev. T exemplified this tension in his comment, "I don't think the team can grasp the pastor's passion to deliver God's Word. In turn, having that passion, yet being sure there are flaws in your delivery is a burden. This (team feedback) helps, but the pain of being a flawed vessel still isn't eliminated. It's good (stressed) to get this input, but it still hurts."

Interestingly, Female on his team remarked at that juncture, "But this kind of group can validate so that off-the-cuff criticism doesn't hurt." To which Rev. T replied, "Yes, it protects me. That's true."

In my analysis, Rev. T genuinely appreciates the team and what he calls “protection” from unkind criticism. Nonetheless, he feels isolated from the rest of his team as the object of the potential criticism, whether constructive or not. It would be helpful for other studies to determine if this separation feeling is inherent in the preaching role and the long-term effects of pulpit team feedback on this perceived isolation.

Discussion of the initial surveys

While there were some differences among the three preachers, they shared the same overall weaknesses and strengths. Likewise, each treatment team exhibited similar attitudes and concerns. A comparison of these original surveys reveals strong similarities and leads us to the following analytical observations:

Themes observed in the initial preacher’s surveys:

1. The preachers were weakest in their knowledge of others.

In the Total Christian Leader inventory, crafted to ascertain where these communication leaders are gathering knowledge, each pastor scored lowest on knowledge of others. They also were uniform in scoring highest on knowledge of their churches and God. This means they are greatly in danger of not understanding the realities of life today in the community. (Hall 1971: 71) *As we previously observed, this uniformity provides a fertile testing ground for the study hypothesis.*

2. Preaching received less attention than seems merited.

The preachers each ranked preaching as something they enjoy very much (Q. 1) and further describe the task as either the “most enjoyable” part of their job or as the next highest response (Q. 4). Yet, they do not seek continuing education in this effort.

Question 5, “I read and learn about preaching _____,” did not receive the highest possible score from any of our preachers. It is of interest to notice that this is not particularly rare among preachers, as change is difficult and reading more about preaching might necessitate change. (Miller 2002: 92-95)

3. The gap between communication theory and practice was evident across the board.

For example, every one answered question 2 with the highest rank, saying, “Regarding my capacity to connect with the audience, I feel __great__ confidence.” Yet, they each stated that, “My greatest insecurity in preaching is (generally) __the thought that I am not connecting with the congregation__.” (Q. 25)

By way of further illustration, they each had different responses to question 6, “When I prepare a sermon, I do so with _____ foremost in my mind.” However, two of these answers they selected were written to expose a need for congregational feedback. Rev. J chose “the normative members of our church,” a response displayed by Johnston to be fraught with the danger of eventual disconnection. (Johnston 2001: 79-80) Rev. M selected “those who are hurting,” a typically compassionate pastoral response. Hybels rightly describes this as a serious danger in preaching, (the same can be said for the other negative answer, “myself.”) Hybels’ solution was to form his pulpit preparation team

based on the other available answer in our question, “Many different people groups.” Without such a group, our control will likely remain stuck envisioning primarily the hurting, until such time as it begins to warp his preaching to reach merely a minority. (Hybels 1989: 161-167)

4. Preachers **lack** the support of other humans in their preaching.

It is significant that each one admitted to feeling “__Occasionally__ alone in my preaching ministry.” (Q. 12) And, none of them could say they had “__many__ occasions to receive truly constructive criticism.” Rather, they had to settle for “few” and “some.”

5. The preachers in this study displayed uncertain attitudes towards lay feedback.

They show some recognition of the benefits of feedback, but are hesitant. While all gave high marks to lay input in theory (Q. 14), in practice they are less certain. For example, on question 20 two of the preachers answered that they __“sometimes”__ have “found constructive feedback on my sermon to be helpful.” This despite the aforementioned skewing of the question towards the positive by the insertion of the word “constructive.” Only one chose the most positive answer, “usually.” Most significant was question 19, “When I am approached with feedback on a sermon, I honestly__.” None selected the most positive answer, “look forward to the input.”

6. They shared a common and deep desire to be more effective as preachers.

On question 21, “I __ wish my preaching could be more effective,” they each indicated one of the two most negative choices, “often” or “sometimes.” None selected “rarely” or

“never.”

7. Like most of us, preachers were somewhat blinded to their flaws. For example, question 7 reads, “As I preach, I am ____ physical movements and gestures.” Pastor M. replied, “Somewhat aware of my.” Note that by not receiving regular input on the important non-verbal aspects of his preaching, our control is in danger of operating at less than maximum. (Robinson 2001: 210-213; Chartier 1981: 92-95)

Themes observed in the initial teams’ surveys:

1. On the whole, the teams rated the preachers lower than the preachers did themselves.

For example, Rev. J’s team assumed he read about preaching “never” (Q. 5) when in fact he reads “selectively,” the second highest answer. Even more graphically, he rates himself as high on question 9, setting objectives for each message he delivers. Yet the team unanimously gave him the lowest setting, assuming he felt uncertain about setting objectives. Despite Rev. J’s helper for planning sermon series, the team across the board declared their thought that he “__is likely skeptical of__ a regular team who grants feedback.” (Q. 11) This is especially remarkable given that Rev. J’s existing helper had been elevated to be part of his pulpit team and was one of the evaluators!

Rev. T’s team had similar discrepancies, though not as many graphic ones. Of course, none of this is intended to belittle men that are excellent preachers. Rather, it illustrates

the gap between the thoughts of preacher and congregation before the pulpit team is instituted.

2. The teams saw the preacher's greatest weakness as disconnection with the audience.

Three out of the four team members assumed that the preacher's "greatest weakness in preaching is (generally)___not connecting with the congregation___." This makes a total seven out eight respondents who chose that answer on question 25. This is of great interest to us in evaluating the necessity of a pulpit team, as the team's feedback could demonstrably change such disconnection. Whether such change indeed happened is discussed below.

Deductions drawn from the initial surveys:

1. Preachers need a committed group that helps them grow in knowledge of others. It is the hypothesis of this study that a regular, committed, lay feedback team will cause preachers to grow in their knowledge of others.

2. Preachers, relatively weak in the knowledge of others, are in grave danger of not connecting with the congregation.

3. Without a team, preachers do not necessarily judge their preaching accurately. It is very telling that the teams rated the preachers lower than the preachers rated themselves.

4. In praxis, preaching receives less focus than the preachers themselves would find appropriate.

The creation of a pulpit team could, ipso facto, make a determinative difference. By virtue of regularly discussing preaching theory and evaluating praxis, the team should (according to our hypothesis) assist in elevating the practice to match the preacher's communication theory.

Discussion of the comparison of the treatment pastors' and teams' initial surveys with their exit questionnaires

After more than a year of intervention, it was important to re-administer the surveys. This "exit" strategy opened another avenue for perceiving the presence or absence of change as a result of the pulpit team.

Themes observed in the initial/exit preachers' survey comparisons:

1. Each treatment preachers' knowledge of others jumped dramatically.

On the "Total Christian Leader" survey Rev. T realized a gain of 4 points, equivalent to an 11.8 % increase. Though Rev. T increased his knowledge across the board, knowledge of others represented his most significant gain. His average gain was 10 % while his increase in knowledge of others was 11.8 %.

Rev. J's results in this field were even more noticeable. Overall, Rev. J voiced a 3.8 % increase overall, while his knowledge of others increased by 11.4%. This was by far his

most significant increase.

2. Each preacher showed great increase in the acceptance of feedback.

In the fourth pericope of questions, the treatment preachers' showed their most distinguishable growth. Criticism moves from "unavoidable" to "helpful" and constructive feedback from a burden to be endured to "a great gift." Even unsolicited input is now treated as something to which the pastors look forward.

3. Minimal increase was seen overall in the Closed-Loop Preaching self-survey.

According to his survey scores, Rev. J saw an overall net effect of no change. Rev. T saw a raw score increase of 2 points, a mere 2.4 % increase. While many of their scores increased, a few questions posted decreases – some drastic.

Two possibilities come to mind in interpreting these decreased scores. One is that the pulpit team was ineffective. Considering the teams' scores on this same survey (below), and the preponderance of data suggesting otherwise, this seems insupportable. The other possibility is that the preachers have gained a more accurate picture of their performance.

For example, both Revs. T & J slipped from (Q 7) "___highly aware___ of physical movements and gestures" to merely "___somewhat aware___." It seems likely that they now see themselves through lay eyes & realize their previously unnoticed mannerisms. Similarly, Rev. J changes on Q8 from "___do___" utilize basic preaching principles" to "___somewhat___;" while Rev. T changes on 21 from "I ___sometimes___" to "___often___"

wish my preaching could be more effective. According to this second possibility, these new answers represent realistic understandings of their preaching. Given regular feedback, Rev. J is now aware of lapses in his practice of basic preaching principles and Rev. T is more zealous to preach effectively.

In another quadrant, regarding connection with the audience, Rev. T & J both changed from “great” to “I could use more” confidence. Why? Again, it could be that the presence of evaluation beat them down to where confidence was actually eroded. However, an analysis of the other data (see especially the interviews) would lead us to instead believe that each had begun to see how disconnected he was from the audience – a truth heretofore hidden from him.

Themes observed in the initial/exit teams’ survey comparisons:

1. The Closed Loop Preaching surveys showed strong performance increase.

The teams’ scored each preacher noticeably higher on the exit survey. Let’s discuss this theme as revealed in Tables 17 and 18 on the next page:

Table 17 Comparison of Closed Loop Preaching Survey Scores (Q1-12)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12
T team exit average		4	3	4	3	4	2.5	2	4	4	4	3
Rev. T exit survey		4	2	4	3	3	4	2	3	4	4	3
Difference		0	1	0	0	1	1.5	0	1	0	0	0
J team exit average		3.5	3	4	3	4	3.5	2	4	4	4	3.5
Rev. J exit survey		4	2	4	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	3
Difference		0.5	1	0	1	0	0.5	0	1	0	0	0.5
T team initial avg		4	2	4	2	1.5	4	3	3	2	4	2
Rev. T initial		4	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	3
Difference		0	2	0	1	1.5	0	1	0	1	0	1
J team initial avg		4	2	4	3	1	4	2	2	1	4	2
Rev. J initial		4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3
Difference		0	2	0	1	2	1	2	2	3	1	2

Table 18 Comparison of Closed Loop Preaching Survey Scores (Q13-25)

	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25
T team exit avg	3	3	2.5	3.5	3	3.5	2.5	3.5	2.5	3.5	4	3	3
Rev. T exit survey	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	4	4	4	3
Difference	0	0	1.5	0.5	1	0.5	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	1	0
J team exit avg	4	4	2.5	3	4	3	4	3.5	2.5	4	4	3	3
Rev. J exit survey	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	3
Difference	0	0	1.5	1	0	1	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	1	0
T team initial avg	1.5	3	3	3.5	2.5	3.5	3	2.5	3	4	4	4	3
Rev. T initial	2	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	4	4	4	3
Difference	0.5	0	0	0.5	1.5	0.5	0	0.5	1	0	0	0	0
J team initial avg	2	3.5	3.5	3.5	2.5	3	2	2.5	3.5	4	4	3.5	3
Rev. J initial	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	3
Difference	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	1	1.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0

Note: Differentials are noted in blue ink where the team's average score exceeded the preacher's mark for himself. Where the preacher's self-score was higher, the differential is displayed in pink ink.

Totaling up the raw scores, Rev. J received much higher marks. His raw cumulative score

on the initial survey was 72.5, according to the team average. On the exit survey, the team awarded him an 87, and increase of 24.5 points or 20%. Rev. T's team gave him a cumulative 75 on the initial survey. On the exit survey, they graded his preaching work at 82 points. That represents an increase of 7 points, or 9.3%.

These numbers show a manifest change in the team's appraisal of the preacher and his performance in the preaching task as queried in the Closed Loop Preaching Survey. In this data, one sees a resonance with the interviews, where the team members repeatedly praised improvement in the preachers.

2. The differential between the preachers' self-perception and the teams' perception of them narrowed sharply by the end of the study.

The exit scores show a dramatic turnaround from the initial assessments, where the differential was much greater. The preachers' self-scoring was higher than the team scores in both the initial and exit surveys. However, the differential between the two scores had narrowed considerably in the exit survey.

Tables 17 and 18 reveal a narrowing of the differential between the preacher's self-scores and the team's score. This differential can be accurately characterized numerically by assigning a negative value when the team's score is higher, a zero value when the scores are equal, and a positive value when the preacher's score is higher. Thus, the initial differential "score" can be easily compared with the exit survey differential "score".

Table 19 summarizes:

Table 19 Summary of differential changes between initial and exit surveys when comparing preacher scores to team average

Rev. J – differential score on initial survey	20.5
Rev. J – differential score on exit survey	4
Rev. T – differential score on initial survey	9
Rev. T – differential score on exit survey	5

Thus we see that Rev. T closed the gap between himself and his audience (or at least his team as representative of his audience) by 44%. Rev. J experienced an 80% closing of the perception differential between himself and his audience. Closing the feedback loop could therefore be said to close the perception differential considerably.

Deductions drawn from the initial/exit survey comparisons:

1. During the study, treatment preachers showed marked increases in connecting with their congregations.

Knowledge of others jumped dramatically as did acceptance of feedback. Similarly, the differential between the priests' self-perception and the teams' perception narrowed significantly. These areas of growth seem to have played some role in the lower scores posted by the pastors on their exit surveys. They also may well have influenced the higher scores given by the teams.

2. Teams were much more positive about the preachers' work as a result of the year of treatment.

Just as the preachers experienced a dynamic shift from mere self-evaluation to a closed feedback loop, the teams made a quantum leap from no input to open feedback. As a

result, the teams appear much more delighted in the preachers' performance.

That is not to suggest that the teams merely became "poodles" for the pastors. As the interviews above make clear, they saw real change that led to better performance. Further, the observation studies (discussed below) showed an increase in corrective comments – hardly the actions of yes-men.

Discussion of the comparison of the treatment group and the control

Themes observed in comparison between the control initial and exit surveys:

8. The control pastor dropped in his knowledge of others.

Given the critical nature of understanding the audience, knowledge of others is a key for preaching success. While the treatment pastors saw striking increase in their knowledge of others, the control pastor's score actually slipped significantly. Over the year of the study, Rev. M. experienced a loss of ten percent in his knowledge of others (as seen in Table 12 "Rev. M. score comparison on Total Christian Leader Inventories" on page 114). His other scores were relatively flat, save an increase in world knowledge. This telling change represents an important contrast to the experience seen in the treatment groups.

9. Rev. M., the control, showed little variance in his approach.

Regarding his questionnaires, there is little for comment as Rev. M scored very similarly on both the initial and closing surveys. This shows a very different trend than that of the

treatment pastors, who saw decreases, possibly because of their increased self-awareness.

Themes observed in comparison between the treatment pastors and the control:

1. The treatment pastors showed more malleability.

Given the uniformity of the priests involved (see Table 2 “Eight categories of comparison among participant pastors”, page 63), there seems no plausible reason why the treatment pastors should show great change than the control – save the intervention of the pulpit team.

2. The treatment pastors show greater positivity regarding feedback.

Regarding the preacher’s reaction to feedback in general and criticism in particular Rev. J. and Rev. T. both showed strong growth. Meanwhile, Rev. M., the control, showed limited improvement. We saw that even on questions slanted toward a positive response, Rev. M. remained hesitant.

3. The treatment pastors grew in knowledge of others while the control decreased in other-knowledge.

This has been referenced above, but needs to be graphically understood. Knowledge of others is intrinsically tied to feedback receptivity, and, as we observed in the literature review, receptivity to feedback is unilaterally connected with better teaching. Therefore, gauging growth of knowledge of others is revealing. Table 20 summarizes the improvement of those with pulpit teams juxtaposed upon the real and comparative loss of the control:

Table 20 Comparison of changes in knowledge of others among study pastors

Rev. J Score – Initial	35	Rev. T Score – Initial	34	Rev. M (control) Score – Initial	33
Rev. J Score - Closing	39	Rev. T Score - Closing	38	Rev. M (control) Score - Closing	30
Rev. J Differential	Gain 4	Rev. T Differential	Gain 4	Rev. M Differential	Loss 3

Deductions drawn from comparison between the treatment pastors and the control:

10. The intervention of the pulpit team led pastors to increased knowledge of others.

11. Pastors using a pulpit team were more developmentally malleable and showed a more positive attitude toward feedback.

Discussion of the observation studies

Themes arising from the observation studies:

1. The teams granted feedback the preachers had previously lacked.

Each preacher received input the like of which they had not previously gotten. The team meeting, geared as it was around the positive critique of each sermon, sparked original discussion and opened new avenues of thought.

2. The teams gave great encouragement to the preachers.

The bulk of the comments made in the team meetings were positive – comprising correction, edification, clarification, and direction. This supports the research hypothesis that fears of lay feedback becoming overwhelming negative were groundless.

3. Repetition led to greater input and effectiveness.

We saw in the last chapter that the second observation highlighted a dramatic decrease in feedback-limiting behaviors like dominating conversation, self-defending and interrupting. Table 21 shows the remarkable change in each team throughout the year:

Table 21 Changes in negative behavior for each pulpit team

	i	D	⌚⌚⌚	Total negative behaviors
	interruptions	defensive comments	dominating speaking	
Rev. T team Observation 1	3	3	4	10
Rev. T team Observation 2	0	0	1	1
Rev. J team Observation 1	5	1	7	13
Rev. J team Observation 2	0	0	2	2

Repetition of meeting thus accomplishes something very good in both the pastor and the rest of the team. Negative behaviors decreased 87%. This healthy change seems to indicate teams more accustomed to their task and pastors sold on the benefit of closing the feedback loop.

4. The treatment preachers bought in to the process and positively impacted their teams.

In the first meetings, each of the treatment pastors continually asked for feedback and restated the purpose for the meeting. This seemed to have a positive impact on the teams’

willingness to give him straight shooting. I believe this had a big impact on the success of the teams. (Hudson 1992: 12)

5. The preachers were somewhat unprepared for real feedback.

The preacher's defensiveness and interruptions in the first meetings were responses to corrective comments from the team. This is a clear example of failure by the researcher. Had the preachers been better prepared for the blessing of faithful wounds from friends, they might have responded better. Note that they corrected such reactions – by the second observations they had nearly eliminated those actions. This will be discussed further below under ethical considerations.

Deductions drawn from the observation studies:

1. Lay input allows the pastor a true read of his effectiveness.

As Rev. T's female team member observed, "That's why we're here. None of your audience knows those concepts, not in those terms, and you've asked us to tell you when it isn't clear." By getting real response from the people with whom they are supposed to communicate, the preacher is allowed an accurate read on his communicative connection with the congregation.

2. Regular input from lay people leads to greater receptivity to feedback.

The preachers were increasingly positive about the benefit of the feedback they could receive from their lay teams. The repetition of regular evaluation thus seems to effectively close the loop between preacher and audience.

3. The preacher using a pulpit team must be prepared for the pain.

The team that functions well will on occasion actually hurt the pastor's feelings. That is unavoidable, and a by-product of any honest critique of creative work. By accepting such wound as part of the overall blessing and by keeping the goal in mind of more effective service, the preacher can prepare himself to receive even painful feedback. Further, as he stays with the regular team meeting, his defensiveness eases naturally in light of his pleasure over better teaching.

Assessment of the diary entries

Themes observed in the diaries:

Though journaling information was limited, there were a few themes that emerged from the comments. These basically repeat issues seen in other data, so we will mention them briefly.

12. The teams shared genuinely constructive information with the preachers.

These comments illustrate: "... It's really good to hear things I need to know...things I wouldn't have known...Tonight they finally gave me both barrels. It was awful, but it really felt good. I hadn't felt they were coming completely clean with me until now..."

13. The pastors really appreciated the process.

In February 2004, Rev. T summarized well, "It's the best change I've ever made."

14. The connection between reception of regular feedback and knowing others better was clear to all.

Remember Rev. M's telling comment on his closing assessment, "I scored lowest on knowing others. I would have more influence if I knew the people better. I (could) make better use of people & giftings." This comment also exposes the oft-repeated theme that increased openness to feedback leads to increased effectiveness.

Deduction drawn from the diaries:

1. The pulpit team is a benefit to the pastor.

The comments show a complete appreciation for the team's function and a sense of joy in the change engendered by the team. The teams gave honest feedback and it was seen as beneficial.

My thoughts based on the time in the field

When the teams gelled and began to feel like a unit on a mission together, it was marvelous to observe. Jones summarized what I saw, "Within a shared ministry the laymen and the clergyman together are more likely to produce the right questions with corresponding answers, and the parochial syllabus becomes the shape of training in which the layman can gain skills and confidence to meet the world." (Jones 1974: 24) These people did feel that they were shaping their training through the pulpit to better prepare people to live effectively in the world.

Respondent validation

On the 8th of December, 2004, Rev. J and Rev. T met the researcher for breakfast. The concept of respondent validation having been explained to them, they agreed to meet and discuss the themes seen in the research data and the deductions drawn from them by the researcher.

Regarding themes voiced in the interviews

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each theme:

1. *The team was beneficial.* Rev. J said, “Agreed” while Rev. T added, “Without a doubt.”
2. *Preachers are more open to feedback as a result of the team treatment.* “Absolutely!” said Rev. J as Rev. T nodded.
3. *As anticipated by the literature review, openness to feedback proved to be directly related to improved teaching effectiveness.* Rev. T said, “I agree. I can tell I’m doing a better job.” Rev. J said, “I agree.”
4. *The congregation responded differently to the preacher as a result of the team treatment.* Rev. J said, “Again, I agree.” Rev. T added, “Feedback from outside of my group (pulpit team) began to decline, especially the wild Mrs. McGillicuddy-type who come up with their own negative evaluations after church. I think the team buffered me from that. I began to get other people’s input through them.”

5. *Preachers were encouraged and emboldened by the team.* Rev. T shared, “Even when I got hammered, they encouraged me because it was obvious that they cared for the church.” Rev. J said, “I felt very uplifted.”

6. *Regular meetings were desired and seen as necessary.* “Yes,” commented each pastor.

7. *With some qualifiers, all felt that other churches should adopt similar strategies.* “Yes,” said Rev. J, “Like we said at your house, the pastor must really desire to improve and then it will work.” Rev. T agreed.

Regarding deductions drawn from the interviews

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each deduction:

1. *The teams and participating pastors considered the pulpit team to be of great value to their ministry.* “Yes,” said both together.

2. There was a support failure on the part of the researcher. (Here I had each preacher read through the provided copy of the project to date as I highlighted the support faux pas of the study. I reviewed that I did not have the teams sufficiently prepared for the short-term struggle of learning to evaluate while still maintaining a soft heart toward personal application of preaching. Further, I didn’t sufficiently prepare the preachers for the pain. These are discussed at length below.) Rev. T responded, “Yes, but they got the hang of it pretty easily and

there's no way to be completely ready for constructive feedback." Rev. J said, "I understand, but don't think it was a problem."

3. There exists a perceived distance between the laity and the clergy. Rev. J had no comment. Rev. T said, "Yes, I did feel that a bit at the beginning."

Regarding themes observed in the initial surveys

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each theme:

1. *The preachers were weakest in their knowledge of others.* "That is interesting," said Rev. J. "I believe it," agreed Rev. T.
2. *Preaching received less attention that seems merited.* "True," was Rev. J's reply. Rev. T said, "Yep."
3. *The gap between communication theory and practice was evident across the board.* "Yes," said each pastor, Rev. T adding, "I see that."
4. *Preachers lack the support of other humans in their preaching.* "I think that was true," said Rev. T. Rev. J said, "I don't know. I had support, but just not this kind...not this helpful."
5. *The preachers in this study displayed uncertain attitudes towards lay feedback.* "I find that convicting," said Rev. T. Rev. J said, "Yes."

6. *They shared a common and deep desire to be more effective as preachers.* “Yes,” was the only comment, from Rev. T.

7. *Like most of us, preachers were somewhat blind to their flaws.* (For discussion purposes, this question was combined with theme 1 below.)

Regarding themes observed in the initial teams’ surveys

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each theme:

1. *On the whole, the teams rated the preachers lower than the preachers did themselves.* In response to these two themes, Rev. J said, “Wow.” Rev. T looked at the Table 19 and said, “That’s incredible.”

2. *The teams saw the preacher’s greatest weakness as disconnecting with the audience.* “No surprise,” said Rev. T. Rev. J agreed.

Regarding deductions drawn the initial surveys

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each deduction:

1. *Preachers need a committed group that helps them grow in the knowledge of others.* “Yes,” said both together.

2. *Preachers, relatively weak in knowledge of others, are in grave danger of not connecting with the congregation.* “That is the biggest concern,” commented Rev.

J. Rev. T agreed.

3. *Without a team, preachers do not necessarily judge their preaching accurately.*

“That is evident in the results!” said Rev. T. “We viewed ourselves higher than our own friends.” Rev. J agreed with the deduction as well.

4. *In praxis, preaching receives less focus than the preachers themselves would find appropriate.* “True,” said Rev. T. “I agree, though this (pulpit team) has made a big difference,” said Rev. J.

Regarding themes observed in the initial/exit preachers’ survey comparisons

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each theme:

1. *Each of the treatment preacher’s knowledge of others jumped dramatically.*

“Wow,” remarked Rev. T. “I believe it,” said Rev. J.

2. *Each preacher showed great increase in the acceptance of feedback.*

“Undoubtedly,” said Rev. T. Rev. J chimed in, “That’s true.”

3. *Minimal increase was seen overall in the Closed-Loop Preaching self-survey.*

Rev. J commented, “I agree with your analysis. I think I have a much more accurate view of how I’m doing.” Rev. T concurred, saying, “No question. I have a better picture.”

Regarding themes observed in the initial/exit teams survey comparisons

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each theme:

1. *The Closed Loop Preaching surveys showed strong performance increase.* “I believe that,” said Rev. J. “My messages are shorter now but more effective.” Rev. J had no comment.
2. The differential between the preachers’ self-perception and the teams’ perception of them narrowed sharply by the end of the study. “Wow!” said Rev. J, as he pointed to Table 19. “That is great!” “I wasn’t as bad as you to start with, Rev. J!” joked Rev. T! “Seriously, that really shows why we did this.”

Regarding deductions drawn from the initial/exit preachers’ survey comparisons

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each theme:

1. *During our study, treatment preachers showed marked increases in connecting with their congregations.* “I agree. This is all so obvious, do you really need us to comment on each one? We have agreed with almost everything. Could we just comment when we disagree or have a question?” said Rev. J. Rev. T added, “I agree.” As we laughed, I said that would be fine.
2. *Teams were much more positive about the preachers’ work as a result of the year of treatment.* They nodded.

Regarding themes observed in comparison between the treatment pastors and the

control.

The following comments were made by the preachers in response: “You have a typo on Table 20,” said Rev. T, “Other than that, I agree with it all.” “Same here,” said Rev. J. (The typo has been corrected.)

Regarding deductions drawn from comparison between the treatment pastors and the control:

The following comments were made by the preachers in response: “Those certainly appear to be right on,” said Rev. J. I agree,” said Rev. T.

Regarding themes arising from the observation studies:

The following comments were made by the preachers in response: The first four received affirmative nods.

5. On number five, *The preachers were somewhat unprepared for real feedback*, Rev. T remarked, “In the beginning, I didn’t know what to do with it (feedback). I felt misunderstood.”

Regarding deductions drawn from the observation studies:

The following comments were made by the preachers in response to each deduction:

1. *Lay input allows the pastor a true read of his effectiveness.* “Sure,” said Rev. J, “It just makes sense.”
2. *Regular input from lay people leads to greater receptivity to feedback.* “Once I

understood what they were talking about, I was able to process and apply it,” shared Rev. T. Rev. J added, “That’s why the regular meetings helped so much. We understood each other better all the time.”

3. *The preacher using a pulpit team must be prepared for the pain.* “It does hurt,” said Rev. T. “Yes, but if they know it’s worth it, they won’t mind,” said Rev. J. “I now have a Friday meeting with the team to get their input before I give the message. We go over what I’ve written together.”

Regarding themes observed in the diaries:

The following comments were made by the preachers in response: “Boy, we really didn’t help much with the diaries, did we?”

Regarding deductions drawn from the diaries:

The following comments were made by the preachers in response: “True,” observed Rev. T. “Absolutely,” said Rev. J.

Regarding the overall conclusions of the project study:

The following comments were made by the preachers in response: There was complete agreement, including an assortment of “Agree,” “Absolutely,” “Right,” and “Yep.”

1. Conclusion number 1, *“The creation of a pulpit team effectively closed the feedback loop for these preachers,”* elicited this from Rev. J, “In my study, I am constantly thinking now, ‘How well will this connect? What will the team say

about how I'm explaining this? I know that could become unhealthy, but it's not that I'm trying to please people. I am just now very aware of how well I'm getting the biblical point across.'"

6. Regarding number 6, *The preacher who engages in regular feedback sessions with a lay team will become not only a better teacher, but a better person*, Rev. T commented, "This was true because we had to mature. You have to be willing to open up and allow them in order to become a better preacher. That requires security in Christ. So, it really led a growth in security."

Ethical implications

Preparing preachers for the pain

As noted in the observation studies, the participating pastors were too defensive, especially at first. This led to forceful responses from the participating teams and created a bit a constriction in the flow of communication. Rev. T's diary contained the comment, "At first I hated this. Now it has become the greatest meeting of my month." His reason for hating the pulpit team at first? The evaluations hurt. John Hull details the reasons for this in writing, "The desire to be right, the need to be right are very important in the lives of most adults. This is no less true of religious adults." (Hull, 1985: 91) In his chapter, 'The Need to be Right and the Pain of Learning,' Hull goes on to describe how most Christians' resistance to personal growth, brought about because of the need to be right and the pain of learning, leads to a "general feeling of anxiety about the stagnation of personal growth." (Hull, 1985: 134)

Gordon Jones describes the problem well in saying, “The average clergyman...can be very out of touch with the layman’s world, as may become alarmingly evident when he preaches on Sunday.” When confronted with this gap, Jones says, “A clergyman may...feel threatened and want to overstate his position.” (Jones 1974: 23)

Because of the reality of resistance even in the willing participants of this study, further adjustments to the teaching of the pulpit team method should be made before presenting the tool to a wider audience. The classic carrot-and-stick method might prove useful. Preachers should be made aware of their natural proclivity to resist feedback, and exhorted to keep moving and not be mulish (the stick). They should also be encouraged to see pulpit team as an opportunity to alleviate that “general feeling of anxiety about the stagnation of personal growth” (the carrot.)

Further, since feedback is a precious gift, the final word offered by Woods in User Friendly Evaluation might prove useful:

My daughter, Kelsey, was almost out the door on the last day of kindergarten before Christmas vacation, when she voluntarily recited the instructions for the day. She had apparently filtered the instructions from her teacher through her mind and felt the need to go over them prior to leaving for school.

“Everyone is to bring a boy gift or a girl gift valued from two to five dollars,” she

began, “then they play the music, and when the music stops, that’s your gift, and we have to say thank you even though we won’t like what we got.”

That’s not bad advice for evaluation. Accentuate the positive. Begin with strengths and, only then, move on toward the negatives. Always keep your cool, even when you don’t like what you hear. Never try to convince someone that you’ve already received this piece of information before. Always say thank you.”

(Woods 1995: 75)

Other ethical and resource implications

Professionally, the literature outlines a few of the ethical situations. Leavitt & Mueller (Leavitt & Mueller, 1951) noted something rather sinister, that “*free feedback* after *zero feedback* is accompanied by hostility.” In other words, the participating preacher who tries this tool will at first resent his team’s feedback. However, the researchers also noted that this feeling dissipates after the first two feedback sessions. In fact, they concluded that this hostility is related not to the acquisition of input, but rather the zero feedback previously experienced and the uncertainty which naturally accompanies it (Leavitt & Mueller, p. 407).

To completely counter this situation may well prove impossible. Troeger rightly termed it the “mountain of suffering,” as we all naturally recoil at criticism. However, education of the participating pastor does help. By making him familiar with these issues, we were able to prepare him for the natural feelings that will likely ensue and enable him (and the

team) to deal with them appropriately.

Litfin's warning will no doubt be realized everywhere this tool is practiced: "Such tactics inevitably take a toll on the preacher's ego, but research in communication suggests that the result will be increasingly pertinent sermons as the pastor becomes increasingly sensitive to the needs of his listeners." (Litfin 1973: 7) This quote encapsulates an important ethical principle for this research: the participants need to be granted a clear vision of the good they can accomplish together. This is not manipulative but honest and compassionate preparation for the rigors of engaging together in a critical arena. Woods would declare this an important step in formulation. (Woods 1995: 61) Having now walked through the initiation of feedback in three churches, I can confirm the importance of being constructive, and appreciate the formative attitude of our two treatment groups. However, this was greatly due to the wisdom of their pastors and not through any focused training from me. For example, as already mentioned, the training materials found in Appendix D do not properly prepare the team member for the struggle involved in being a critic while at the same time remaining a learner. Others who implement a pulpit team should be more intentional and proactive.

Malcolmson sees two great dangers in lay criticism sessions within the church. He fears that "the preacher can become too 'other directed'...The preacher can learn the technique of gearing what he says to the audience to such an extent that he is dishonest with himself and he does not say what they may *need* to hear rather than what they *want* to hear." (Malcomson 1967: 39) Frankly, this is the most serious concern over the long-term. It is

disconcerting that Malcomson offers no solution; however, he is not inaccurate in assuming that voicing the concern is a major step in itself. In the training of pastors and teams, this warning must always be raised as it was in our study. Also, the Discovery system has settings that are designed to add people with strong discernment onto the pulpit team. This is significant, as such persons will be more capable of guiding the preacher away from becoming overly 'other-directed,' even when the 'others' are on the pulpit team. Finally, any popular printing of this data intended to train churches must include Inrig's reminder, "God's approval, not men's applause, is the only adequate standard of evaluation." (Inrig 1983: 338)

Malcomson's second concern is that the sermon will become disconnected from the whole of worship. "The preacher can come to think of the sermon as a 'thing in itself' – a performance that stands alone. He needs to think in terms of a total event – the total worship event, the total event of living with the congregation." (Malcomson, 1967: 39) Though also serious, this ethical bog can more easily be avoided by keeping the fourth part of preaching epistemology (see chapter 3) in the training and literature.

In analyzing these results we must deal with the professional struggle regarding informed consent. Again, the basic principle under which we operated was described by Leedy and Ormrod: "Research participants should be told the nature of the study to be conducted and be given the choice of either participating or not participating." However, they recognize that the detail of information given can be problematic. They continue, "If people are given too much information – for instance, if they are told the specific

research hypothesis being tested – they may behave differently than they would under more normal circumstances” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 107). As stated above, it would be nearly impossible for the participants not to have perceived that the preacher’s receptivity to feedback was the issue at hand, as the [study](#) was of course constructed in such a way as to measure just that. Therefore, how was the researcher to account for the discrepancies in behavior prompted by such perception?

Some adjustment can be realized through analysis of our observation studies. By observing team meetings and recording conversation patterns, we discerned through an unobtrusive device the depth of change occurring in the preacher’s receptivity to feedback. For example, since the entire team agreed to videotape their sessions, the openness of the preacher was gauged without fear that he was merely trying to fulfill the researcher’s wishes. This is especially true since sessions from earlier in the [multiple case studies](#) were compared with later ones (Leedy & Ormrod 2001: 206).

Furthermore, an accounting for changed behavior may not be necessary. Those who use the final product will of course know the outcome desired – better preaching through the acquisition of lay feedback. They will of course willingly use the tool knowing the expected outcomes, and their behavior will be inevitably influenced in the same manner as the willing participant in the [multiple case studies](#). Thus, the study more closely resembles the use and needs of its intended audience if the participants were aware of the desired outcome. [Thus, the interviews became key data in the evaluation of the intervention.](#)

Personally, I was at the outset concerned about my relationships with my peers. This exercise had the potential to lead to even deeper camaraderie, or could just as easily have eroded our strong commitment to Christian unity. Thanks to good research guidance and God's grace, the former outcome prevailed.

I did not promise the pastors that they would either have review privilege nor that they will remain hidden from publishing. The critical trait of being open – the lynchpin of success in this venture – required the exact opposite. I have worked to protect them in every way I can and guarded their information religiously from others. However, to offer to not publish would attract the very person least likely to benefit from or be helpful to the study. The names of all participants were changed in this report.

Keeping each church's data separate and open to my eyes only has protected confidentiality. However, part of dealing with teams is that complete security is impossible. It was entirely possible if not probable that at least one member of the teams would ignore our literature and warnings re: confidentiality. As is evident from the many New Testament references to the sin of gossip, Christians are not immune to this struggle. Thankfully, those who joined the teams recognized the need for trust if the pulpit team was to achieve its main purpose of opening the preacher to input. Thankfully, too, my relationships with my peers has not only remained safe; it has grown along with my respect for them.

It is also important to confess that I have not been an unbiased observer of the process. I care for the participants in particular and the universal church in general. Far from discrediting my learning, recognizing this bias allows me to accentuate the benefits of inside research, such as increased creativity and clearer participant communication. (Wilhite 1996: 15) Of course, Ecclesiastes 7:23 applies to me: “All this I tested by wisdom and I said, ‘I am determined to be wise’-- but this was beyond me.” (NIV) Solomon goes on to say that only reliance upon wise partners and the all-wise God can guide one to wisdom beyond one’s personal bias. Therefore, I unabashedly declare my reliance upon God and my committee and stakeholders. Their adjustments have been a great gift and have allowed this research to broaden beyond my comprehension. (moved here)

Finally, we should note that the control group will be given all the rights and privileges accorded the others, including free training for their own pulpit team.

Chapter 8 Summary and Conclusions

“Esto quod appares.” (Be in truth what you appear to be!) – St. John Chrysostom, Imperfect Work on Matthew, Homily 4

Summary

The pulpit team has been proven to be an effective tool for the acquisition of lay feedback on preaching. In fact, regular input from lay people was convincingly proven to lead to greater pastoral receptivity to feedback.

Conclusions

1. The creation of a pulpit team effectively closed the feedback loop for these preachers.

Our pastors using a pulpit team were more developmentally malleable and showed a more positive attitude toward feedback. Not surprisingly, they also increased greatly in their knowledge of others.

2. The teams and participating pastors considered the pulpit team to be of great value to their ministry.

All participants found the pulpit team to be a benefit to the pastor, especially in granting the priest a broader measure of his effectiveness.

3. The pulpit team intervention improved preaching.

We noted that teams and preachers were much more positive about the preachers' work as a result of the year of treatment. Based on the interviews and diaries, it is a reasonable

supposition that persons throughout the congregation noted this positive change.

However, we cannot make such a claim from this evidence. Though congregational surveys were outside the realm of this study, other research should be conducted to affirm this surmise.

4. The pulpit team exposed serious flaws in preaching praxis existing prior to the team's creation.

We noted that preaching receives less actual focus than the preachers themselves would find appropriate. Further, without a team, preachers are rather inaccurate in their self-analysis of their preaching, especially regarding their congregational connection. In fact, it appears that preachers, relatively weak in the knowledge of others, need assistance connecting with the audience. The solution reached by the study concludes that preachers need a committed group that helps them grow in knowledge of others, especially as the treatment pastors displays profound growth in congregational connection.

5. The preacher who wishes to maximize his ministry will get regular feedback from his congregation.

As Litfin said, so [this study](#) found to be true, "Feedback is absolutely mandatory for a maximally effective preaching ministry." (Litfin 1973: 8)

6. The preacher who engages in regular feedback sessions with a lay team will become not only a better teacher, but a better person.

Over the course of the study, the preachers became what they had wanted to be. That is,

they genuinely found themselves desirous of feedback, whereas they merely wanted to be desirous of feedback at the beginning of the journey. They found themselves living Chrysostom's words, "Be in truth what you appear to be." Rather like the Velveteen Rabbit, they became more real as the sharpening love of their team rubbed them down. (Williams 1922: 8)

7. The lay people who join pulpit teams will not only assist their preacher, but be blessed themselves.

Our lay teams were encouraged and built in community. [We even noted them practicing purposeful feedback acquisition in their secular workplaces.](#) Throughout the study, I observed the same thing Malcomson saw in his [multiple case studies](#) with student preachers, "(an) interesting by product of the sessions was the sense of fellowship or community that developed in the groups." (Malcomson 1967: 36)

Impact

[There has long been a desperate need for preachers to close the feedback loop and thus connect with their audiences such that God's word as it is becomes useful to people as they are. \(Chesterton 1903: 34 \)](#) Nearly two hundred years ago, during the great age of preaching when the attendance of sermons was a popular kind of sport (Meisel, 2001) and preachers held in high regard, Washington Irving would encapsulate the problem. Describing his experiences in British churches, he writes, "Under the ministry of such a pastor, I found it impossible to get into the train of thought." (Irving 1819: 117) Describing another of his many visits to English churches, Irving says, "The worthy

parson lived but with times past, and knew but little of our present.” (Irving 1819: 252)

Though grand advancements have been made in preaching over those 200 years, I still regularly hear echoes of these same comments from pastors and from their congregations. People still struggle with the preacher’s train of thought, feeling he is not connecting with their world. The desire for some tool designed to close the feedback loop is so intense that rumors of this work have spread such that I regularly receive communications like this one:

“Dear Wayne Braudrick,

It is my understanding that you have some information on the construction of evaluation systems for preachers re: their preaching. Might you please share with us some guidance and some tools to assist in this area?

We heard from (a mutual friend) that you have a pulpit team that helps you by critiquing every one of your sermons. Could you teach us how to do the same?

I understand if you are too busy to reply, or if you merely want to refer us to some book.

We have searched and can’t find anything practical on the subject.”

The final word on impact should come from Melville’s insight earlier recorded: “Yes, the world’s a ship on it’s passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is the prow.”

(Melville1851: c. 8 page 43-44)

Charges

I would like to conclude with two charges. The first is for researchers, practitioners, and students to conduct more research on the impact a lay pulpit team upon the preacher. This is especially important given the singularity of culture examined in this work and the scarcity of prior study upon which to draw.

In his preface of 1942, D.R. Davies summarized a parallel situation:

I then looked about for a book...(on his subject) but even in the magnificent Library of St. Deiniol's – a library of 60,000 volumes,³² there was not a single book (on his subject.)...So I am what must be a rare and happy situation for an author; I am not under necessity for adding another book to already existing voluminous literature...So, as a stimulus to other Anglican thinkers, better equipped than myself, I am offering this study...in the hope that they will go one better. (Davies 1961: 9-10)

My second charge is for pulpit teams to be encouraged & fostered through training.

Of course, the use of a pulpit team, like the use of any other tool, is limited. My prayer is that pulpit teams will be formed in order to assist clergy and laity alike to ultimately learn

I. _____
³² Interestingly, much of my writing and research was also conducted at St. Deiniol's, today housing well over four times that number of volumes.

from Jesus. In the words of Herman Harrel Horne, “It is this author’s sure conviction that our methods of moral and religious education will not be perfected until we have sat at the feet of Jesus – the Master Teacher.” (Horne 1920: xi)

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Appendix A

Communicating with Self and Others: A Feedback Form

THIS DOCUMENT WAS PRODUCED BY THE NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM. IT IS POSTED BY THE CENTER FOR RURAL STUDIES FOR PUBLIC USE. THE CENTER FOR RURAL STUDIES ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONTENTS. FOR MORE INFORMATION, REFER TO THE USERS GUIDE.

EXERCISE 1

Communicating with Self and Others: A Feedback Form

> Instructions:

- 1) Read the list of statements for each skill area and check the column that generally describes your own practices.
- 2) Go over the entire feedback form to see if there are skill areas in which you clearly sense the need for improvement.
- 3) For each of the six skill areas, make note of individual statements that you didn't understand or sense you need to work on.
- 4) Select three or four of those skills or practices where you feel the need for improvement and write a short goal statement (i.e., "I will improve my active listening skills") and build this goal into your learning contract.

COMMUNICATING WITH SELF AND OTHERS: A FEEDBACK FORM

	Seldom	Some- Times	Often	Don't Know
> Self Observation and Feedback				
I give myself supportive, objective messages.				
I am aware of what is going on inside (my thoughts, feelings, direction).				
I view myself as competent, capable, lovable.				
I can state what I want for myself in a simple, positive picture of how I'd like things to be.				
I create symbols or images of the directions I wish to go.				

> Receiving Feedback

I listen actively to suggestions of others.

I ask for feedback from others.

I sort out the feelings of others from their objective observations.

I share generous amounts of who I am with others.

> Giving Feedback

I let others know when I:

do not understand what they have said.

appreciate something they have said or done.

disagree with them.

feel hurt, embarrassed, or put down by something they have said or done.

I seek appropriate times/places to give feedback.

I separate my feelings from objective observations when giving feedback.

I use feedback to build/empower others.

	Some-		Don't
Seldom	Times	Often	Know

> Active Listening

I use appropriate non-verbal cues to indicate I am actively listening (eye contact, body language, silence).

I am aware of how my verbal responses as a listener maintain or change the focus of the speaker.

I use "open questions" (how, what, would, could) to help the speaker clarify his or her thinking.

I use reflections (statements which reinforce or clarify the speakers statements of fact or feeling).

Others seem to seek me out as a good listener.

I see my ability to listen as a means of giving support and empowering others.

> Non-Verbal Expressions

I am aware of my own body language.

I am aware of the body language of others.

I use effective non-verbal skills when:
listening to others
influencing others

I know and practice relaxation techniques.

I am aware of my breathing patterns.

I am aware of the use of touch in communications.

	Some-		Don't
Seldom	Times	Often	Know

> Public Speaking

I talk in public in formal and informal settings. I am comfortable when giving public presentations.

My public presentations are well organized and well received.

I use a variety of styles when speaking in public.

My speaking voice is clear; my volume and rate are appropriate.

I practice my public presentations to see how they will sound, how long they will take.

I use humor appropriately in public presentations.

I use a variety of audiovisual
aids and equipment when
speaking before groups.

> Written Expression

I write using a wide variety
of formats (memos, reports,
press releases, grants).

I research and organize my
thoughts before writing.

I think about my audience(s)
when writing.

I ask others to read and comment
on my content, style, organization.

I allow time for two or more
drafts of important written
products.

The local paper runs my releases
without revision.

I use informal writing (journals,
letters to friends) to improve
my formal writing.

Appendix B

THE TOTAL CHRISTIAN LEADER

“...set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love,
in faith and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

“example” is the Greek *typos*:
an explosive impression...

THE TOTAL CHRISTIAN LEADER

an impressionable view of explosive leadership

Self-Evaluation Form

This tool was developed to assist you in taking an honest look at yourself and your function as a leader in Frisco Bible Church. *The Total Christian Leader* will help you identify your strengths in the area of strategic and visionary leadership, as well as suggest areas for improvement.

Directions

On the following pages are 50 statements regarding your current beliefs and behavior. Please read each statement carefully. Then, using the Carbonless Response Key, decide how characteristic each statement is of you. By “characteristic,” we mean your actual life matches that of the statement. Record your responses by circling the appropriate pair of letters on the Response Form.

Please keep in mind that you will benefit from this learning experience *only* when you respond *candidly*.

Response Key

- CC = Completely Characteristic of my current behavior
- MC = Mostly Characteristic of my current behavior
- SC = Somewhat Characteristic of my current behavior
- MU = Mostly Uncharacteristic of my current behavior
- CU = Completely Uncharacteristic of my current behavior

Please turn the page and begin.

Self-Evaluation

1. I am aware of trends long before they impact the church.
2. I can explain my ministry's purpose in terms simple enough that someone completely unfamiliar with the church could understand.
3. I know the single most important concern of each person in my ministry.
4. I know my strengths.
5. I thank God daily for who He is and what He is doing in my life.
6. I consult with experts outside the church.
7. I seldom talk with others about our church's future.
8. I am willing to see people fail in order to help them grow.
9. I seek feedback about myself from others.
10. I seek God's leadership through prayer.
11. I follow an established routine for keeping track of what's going on in the world.
12. I could give a descriptive profile of the typical person served by my ministry.
13. I create opportunities for potential leaders to take risks and test their competencies.
14. I base my day-to-day decisions on the Bible.
15. I read the Bible daily.
16. I pay attention only to those issues that are closely related to my profession, church, or ministry.
17. The projects I support are consistent with our church's long-term purpose.
18. I spend one-on-one time getting to know the people in my ministry on a personal basis.
19. I believe I am forgiven and accepted by God.
20. I exist to know, love, and serve God.
21. I think about what the world will be like 10-20 years from now.
22. I know the primary reasons why people choose to worship at our church.
23. I daily pray for and support other Christians.
24. I avoid projects that would require learning new skills.
25. I think and act in agreement with this statement: Nothing I do or have done can earn my salvation.

Self-Evaluation, continued

26. I have a diverse network of contacts with whom I exchange observations about emerging trends.
27. I am passionate when I talk to others about the church's future.
28. I could list the top capabilities of everyone on our team.
29. I regularly confess my sins to God.
30. I make the Bible my authority for what I say and do.
31. I do not attempt to predict the future.
32. I can explain how the church's mission differs from those of similar churches.
33. I place people in positions that allow them to put their beliefs into practice.
34. I could summarize my key principles in a one-page memo.
35. I give God the credit for all that I am and all that I possess.
36. I attempt to influence the external environment in which the church will operate in the future.
37. I use stories from my personal experience to convey the spirit of our ministry to others.
38. I try to protect those who serve from experiencing the negative aspects of service.
39. I am actively working to let God improve at least one aspect of myself.
40. I have a good understanding of the contents of the Bible.
41. I put seemingly unrelated facts together to form new ideas.
42. I know how each ministry of the church affects other ministries.
43. I know what the people on our ministry team spend their time on.
44. I use constructive criticism from others to improve myself.
45. I am not ashamed for others to know that I worship God.
46. I scan the environment for developments that could pose a risk or threat to my ministry or team.
47. I capitalize on emerging opportunities that benefit the church.
48. I don't ask the people I lead about their personal values.
49. I regularly take time for personal reflection.
50. I am willing to risk my career, my relationships, everything I own for Jesus Christ.

THE TOTAL CHRISTIAN LEADER

an impressionable view of explosive leadership

Leaders today need to be visionaries. They need to move their ministries forward, inspire others, and impact the world outside the church.

Yet, a Christian leads first by serving. In Matthew 20:26, Jesus sets the standard: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant..."

Thus, the problem persists - we humans struggle with this juxtaposition of service and leadership. How do I, a nursery worker whose most exalted function is to change poop diaper, remember that I am a leader at a critical position in an eternally significant organization? How can I, an Elder who deals with weighty issues of spiritual lives every day, remember that I am a servant of Christ and His church?

The answer seems to lie in knowledge and the behavior based upon that accurate knowledge. The servant-leader who knows his Lord, himself, his peers, his church, and his world well positions himself to remember the truth and act on it as a true servant-leader.

The truth shall set you free (Jesus Christ, Jerusalem: published teaching notes, 30)

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.

(Paul, Ephesus: published letter, 55)

Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.

(Peter, Rome: published letter, 57)

We are looking out across the vast horizon called knowledge, and as we seek to be leaders of others, we proceed forward with caution, using knowledge as a resource to help us, but never forgetting that if we can "fathom all mysteries and all knowledge...but have not love, [we are] nothing."

(Borthwick, Colorado Springs: Leading the Way, 1989)

The most significant contributions leaders make are not to today's bottom line; they are to the long-term development of people and institutions who adapt, prosper, and grow.

(Kouzes & Posner, Chicago: The Leadership Challenge, 1995)

The pressures of leadership have mounted as the world has moved faster and has become at once more fragmented and more global. But how do you become a visionary leader in the midst of completing your own work, helping others with theirs, and responding to constant change? The answer lies in getting as firm hold on who you are and how you fit into the various parts of your organizational world. (Russo, King of Prussia, PA: The Comprehensive Leader, 1996)

The Total Christian Leader is designed to give you a simple model for growing as a servant-leader. As Russo writes, "The model is built on a deceptively simple principle - at the heart of strong, visionary leadership is strong, active knowledge." Growing in truth, building on truth, and using truth effectively sets you free to enjoy your ministry.

Your ability to lead in today's church hinges on building and maintaining truth in five key leadership dimensions: knowledge of God, knowledge of yourself, knowledge of your comrades, knowledge of your church, and knowledge of the world.

an impressionable view of explosive leadership

Your capacity to shine brilliantly, to leave the greatest possible “explosive example,” rests on two key activities:

1. Developing a comprehensive knowledge of each of these five dimensions: knowledge of God, knowledge of self, knowledge of others, knowledge of the church, and knowledge of the world.

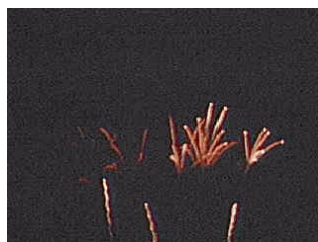
2. Working to build present and future service based on that knowledge.

Your personal behavior provides many signs of how well you have accomplished these two activities. As a result, both you and others can assess your performance based on observing your behavior.

Then, you can concentrate on praising God and continuing in dimensions of strength, and work to shore up areas of weakness.



KNOW GOD



KNOW SELF



KNOW OTHERS



KNOW CHURCH



KNOW WORLD

Scoring *The Total Christian Leader*

To score *The Total Christian Leader*, first separate the Carbonless Response Key from the Scoring Form. You will notice that the items have been arranged in columns. These columns are labeled with the five dimensions of servant-leadership.

Add the circled numbers down each column and place the resulting Subtotals in the boxes below the columns. Then add the Subtotals across to arrive at your Total Leadership Score.

Total Christian Leadership Dimensions

The self-evaluation you have completed and scored was designed to assess the extent to which you practice behaviors associated with a comprehensive knowledge of five dimensions of leadership. The totals are less important than the relationship between the parts. However, the following scores are considered high: >40 (God); >44 (self); >39 (others); >40 (church); >35 (world).

Keep your individual results in mind as we take a closer look at each dimension.



Know the Lord and Practice Worship

Knowing the Lord is demonstrated through the seeking of Him in confidence and the assurance of His provision. With a strong understanding of what little we can grasp regarding the Almighty, you position yourself to serve Him in integrity of heart. With continuing growth in worship, you can enjoy the most important aspect of leadership - the fulfillment of knowing whom you serve.

The statements that relate to **KNOWING GOD** are:

5. I thank God daily for who He is and what He is doing in my life.
10. I seek God's leadership through prayer.
15. I read the Bible daily.
20. I exist to know, love, and serve God.
25. I think and act in agreement with this statement: Nothing I do or have done can earn my salvation.
30. I make the Bible my authority for what I say and do.
35. I give God the credit for all that I am and all that I possess.
40. I have a good understanding of the contents of the Bible.
45. I am not ashamed for others to know that I worship God.
50. I am willing to risk my career, my relationships, everything I own for Jesus Christ.



Know Yourself and Practice Discipline

Knowing Yourself is demonstrated in the paradoxical practice of accepting yourself as redeemed of Christ and aggressively seeking holiness in practice. With strong personal knowledge, feedback, and conviction, you can make the best use of your G.E.A.R.. You can thus overcome your weak spots and consistently serve well.

The statements that relate to **KNOWING YOURSELF** are:

- 4. I know my strengths.
- 9. I seek feedback about myself from others.
- 14. I base my day-to-day decisions on the Bible.
- 19. I believe I am forgiven and accepted by God.
- 24. I avoid projects that would require learning new skills. (-)*
- 29. I regularly confess my sins to God.
- 34. I could summarize my key principles in a one-page memo.
- 39. I am actively working to let God improve at least one aspect of myself.
- 44. I use constructive criticism from others to improve myself.
- 49. I regularly take time for personal reflection.

* This statement is reverse-scored. All reverse-scored statements are identified with a (-) sign.



Know Others and Help Them Grow

Knowing Others is demonstrated through the purposeful cultivation of close, personal relationships within the church and your particular ministry. This in turn enables you to effectively help others follow Christ and serve with unity. When you know others, you can help them build on their strengths.

The statements that relate to **KNOWING OTHERS** are:

- 3. I know the single most important concern of each person in my ministry.
- 8. I am willing to see people fail in order to help them grow.
- 13. I create opportunities for potential leaders to take risks and test their competencies.
- 18. I spend one-on-one time getting to know the people in my ministry on a personal basis.
- 23. I daily pray for and support other Christians.
- 28. I could list the top capabilities of everyone on our team.
- 33. I place people in positions that allow them to put their beliefs into practice.
- 38. I try to protect those who serve from experiencing the negative aspects of service. (-)
- 43. I know what the people on our ministry team spend their time on.
- 48. I don't ask the people I lead about their personal values. (-)



Know Your Church and Fulfill It's Vision

Knowing Your Church is demonstrated by an in-depth understanding of its history, purpose, unique capabilities, and functions. Commitment to the organization flows from the alignment of your personal values and those of the church. When you believe in and share the biblical vision of your church, you look for opportunities to help it succeed accord to that purpose. Such ministry is motivating and rewarding.

The statements that relate to **KNOWING YOUR CHURCH** are:

2. I can explain my ministry's purpose in terms simple enough that someone completely unfamiliar with church could understand.
7. I seldom talk with others about our church's future. (-)
12. I could give a descriptive profile of the typical person served by my ministry.
17. The projects I support are consistent with our church's long-term purpose.
22. I know the primary reasons why people choose to worship at our church.
27. I am passionate when I talk to others about the church's future.
32. I can explain how the church's mission differs from those of similar churches.
37. I use stories from my personal experience to convey the spirit of our ministry to others.
42. I know how each ministry of the church affects other ministries.
47. I capitalize on emerging opportunities that benefit the church.



Know The World and Impact It for Christ

Knowing The World is demonstrated through an eager curiosity about, and expansive awareness of, issues outside your day-to-day personal and professional realm and how those issues relate to the church and your ministry in the church. Scanning the world outside your church provides you and your ministry with fresh ideas, which raises your service to a new level.

The statements that relate to **KNOWING THE WORLD** are:

1. I am aware of trends long before they impact my church.
6. I consult with experts outside the church.
11. I follow an established routine for keeping track of what's going on in the world.
16. I pay attention only to those issues that are closely related to my profession, church, or ministry. (-)
21. I think about what the world will be like 10-20 years from now.
26. I have a diverse network of contacts with whom I exchange observations about emerging trends.
31. I do not attempt to predict the future. (-)
36. I attempt to influence the external environment in which the church will operate in the future.
41. I put seemingly unrelated facts together to form new ideas.
46. I scan the environment for developments that could pose a risk or threat to my ministry or team.

THE TOTAL CHRISTIAN LEADER

an impressionable view of explosive leadership

Taking Action to Continue Growing

Answering the following questions can help you gain additional insight into the results of your self-evaluation. You may also wish to obtain copies for others to fill out as an evaluation of you. Then, you can compare results and discuss these questions together.

On which dimension did you score the highest? How is that strength reflected in your daily service to Christ?

On which dimension did you score lowest? How might your servant-leadership be different if you could increase your knowledge of that dimension?

If there are obstacles that make it difficult for you to increase knowledge in a particular dimension, what might you do to overcome those challenges?

What could you do on a daily or weekly basis that would help you expand and better use your knowledge of:

God?

yourself?

others?

your church?

the world?

Response Key – carbon takes marks through to scoring form

CC 1 MC SC MU CU	CC 2 MC SC MU CU	CC 3 MC SC MU CU	CC 4 MC SC MU CU	CC 5 MC SC MU CU
CC 6 MC SC MU CU	CC 7 MC SC MU CU	CC 8 MC SC MU CU	CC 9 MC SC MU CU	CC 10 MC SC MU CU
CC 11 MC SC MU CU	CC 12 MC SC MU CU	CC 13 MC SC MU CU	CC 14 MC SC MU CU	CC 15 MC SC MU CU
CC 16 MC SC MU CU	CC 17 MC SC MU CU	CC 18 MC SC MU CU	CC 19 MC SC MU CU	CC 20 MC SC MU CU
CC 21 MC SC MU CU	CC 22 MC SC MU CU	CC 23 MC SC MU CU	CC 24 MC SC MU CU	CC 25 MC SC MU CU
CC 26 MC SC MU CU	CC 27 MC SC MU CU	CC 28 MC SC MU CU	CC 29 MC SC MU CU	CC 30 MC SC MU CU
CC 31 MC SC MU CU	CC 32 MC SC MU CU	CC 33 MC SC MU CU	CC 34 MC SC MU CU	CC 35 MC SC MU CU
CC 36 MC SC MU CU	CC 37 MC SC MU CU	CC 38 MC SC MU CU	CC 39 MC SC MU CU	CC 40 MC SC MU CU
CC 41 MC SC MU CU	CC 42 MC SC MU CU	CC 43 MC SC MU CU	CC 44 MC SC MU CU	CC 45 MC SC MU CU
CC 46 MC SC MU CU	CC 47 MC SC MU CU	CC 48 MC SC MU CU	CC 49 MC SC MU CU	CC 50 MC SC MU CU

**CARBONLESS
RESPONSE
KEY**

Read each statement carefully.

Circle the response that corresponds to your choice for each statement.

Response Key	CC	= Completely Characteristic
	MC	= Mostly Characteristic
	SC	= Somewhat Characteristic
	MU	= Mostly Uncharacteristic
	CU	= Completely Uncharacteristic

Scoring form – hidden from view until response key is completed

5 3 2	1 4	5 3 2	2 4	5 3 2	3 4	5 3 2	4 4	5 3 2	5 4
5 3 2	6 4	1 4 5	7 2	5 3 2	8 4	5 3 2	9 4	5 3 2	10 4
5 3 2	11 4	5 3 2	12 4	5 3 2	13 4	5 3 2	14 4	5 3 2	15 4
1 4 5	16 2	5 3 2	17 4	5 3 2	18 4	5 3 2	19 4	5 3 2	20 4
5 3 2	21 4	5 3 2	22 4	5 3 2	23 4	1 4 5	24 2	5 3 2	25 4
5 3 2	26 4	5 3 2	27 4	5 3 2	28 4	5 3 2	29 4	5 3 2	30 4
1 4 5	31 2	5 3 2	32 4	5 3 2	33 4	5 3 2	34 4	5 3 2	35 4
5 3 2	36 4	5 3 2	37 4	1 4 5	38 2	5 3 2	39 4	5 3 2	40 4
5 3 2	41 4	5 3 2	42 4	5 3 2	43 4	5 3 2	44 4	5 3 2	45 4
5 3 2	46 4	5 3 2	47 4	1 4 5	48 2	5 3 2	49 4	5 3 2	50 4

SCORING FORM

Add the circled numbers down each column.

Write the subtotals in the shaded boxes at the bottom of each column.

Add the subtotals across and write the sum in the *Total Christian Leader* score box.

SUBTOTALS

know the world

know your church

know others

know yourself

know God

Total Christian Leader

Appendix C

The Discovery System's spiritual gift evaluation guide for the individual will be attached here in the final version of this report. It is only available to me electronically, and the printed document is too massive to scan in.

Appendix D

ALL THE
DIFFERENCE

a guidebook for maximizing the preaching
ministry in your local church

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v.3

GUIDE TO THIS GUIDEBOOK

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In eternity	
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Reasons for a Pulpit Team
Or, “The Gossip About George”

George’s wounds

George is a wonderful pastor. Nearly everyone in his congregation loves George, mainly because they can palpably feel his affection for them. In describing George’s visitation capacity, one of the parishioners described him this way, “George is the kind of priest who gets to the hospital before you do!”

Now please don’t think of George as one-dimensional. He dearly loves the pastoral care aspects of ministry, but he also enjoys preaching. The Bible means a great deal to George personally, and he studies it deeply. George describes the Bible as “God’s Holy Word.” He is very passionate about the scriptures and the preaching of scriptural truth.

However, George is limited in this part of his ministry, even as he prospers in the visitation aspects. George senses that something is wrong, but can’t seem to put his finger on it. He really works hard on his messages, and laboriously practices them in front of his long-suffering wife on Saturday nights. She likes them, and on the rare occasion that she offers comment, George accepts her input and makes changes.

Within the parish, there is a great deal of gossip about George’s preaching. Little of it is positive. Even George’s staunchest supporters give way before the inevitable criticism of his preaching, retreating onto the safe high ground of George’s affable affection. Tragically, the priest is becoming a rather comic figure to many in the parish. They want him by their side when the rare emergency occurs, but they have stopped listening, having given themselves over to somewhat cynical internal humor instead.

George is rather blind to all this. The wool is pulled firmly over his eyes in two protective layers – the external kindness of his flock and his own natural defense mechanisms that do not wish to see the problem. Yet, such is George’s sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and to people, that he can indeed tell something is not quite right with the preaching situation at his church.

So, George calls me, a fellow pastor whom he knows cares for him and whose preaching he respects. I likewise appreciate George’s fine qualities, being in fact a bit jealous of his pastoral care brilliance. Over lunch, we discuss his situation. This dear man shares his suffering over the unsolicited and sometimes unkind preaching advice with which he is continually encumbered. He shares frustration and even some anger over not only the volume of this advice, but its maddeningly conflicting nature. He is wise enough to recognize that the presence of a few vocal supporters does not mean he is really hitting his goal in preaching the Word of God. After an hour of listening, we come to the conclusion that it would help for me to privately meet with some members of his congregation.

I ask if George has any suggestions regarding who would make good candidates for me to interview? We agree that these persons should be discerning, wise, and Christians who

have a fair grasp of what is involved in teaching the Bible. If they also exhibit the spiritual gift of teaching or exhortation, that will be a welcome bonus. After some discussion, George equips me with four names, and the investigation is on.

I manage to get all four together for a breakfast gathering. Three women and one man, they impress me with their candor and their compassion for their preacher. They see George trying too hard. They notice a scattered aspect to his thinking, in which he attempts to be so biblically accurate that his loving heart for people is obscured. They are bothered by the lack of objectives and the common question after a sermon, “What was the big point?” However, George apparently does use humor and illustrations well.

It becomes obvious that George’s sensitivity has served him well. These people are most insightful and genuinely have the best interests of the preaching ministry of their church at heart. I thank them in George’s name, genuinely delighted that each of these fine folks is loyal to their pastor.

Later, George and I go over the findings. He has joined in the spirit of discovery and growth admirably. In fact, he is so happy to be getting healthy and positive help that his prideful ego seems not to have joined us at the table. As a sinful, prideful pastor myself I know what a major miracle this is! As I praise George for this and thank him for the honor of being a part, I ask the big question, “Will you please prayerfully consider forming these four folks into a pulpit team?”

As George has learned, I operate with a pulpit team. These dear brothers and sisters evaluate and guide every message I give. They channel input for me so that I receive necessary corrections and helpful suggestions in the most positive manner possible. I sense that George has the makings of a fine pulpit team and recommend he mold this ad hoc group into something that can have an ongoing impact.

Getting Within the Story

Most of us who teach or preach the Bible are very conscientious. We desperately want to do a good job, fulfilling our ministry and working heartily as to the Lord. We particularly feel privileged to be a part of those moments when the eyes of people are opened to what God has to say. Words can scarcely describe that electric thrill we feel when we see in a listener’s eyes that she or he has captured a concept. We listen with pleasure as he describes to us after the lesson that he felt “like a light bulb went on” in his head. We are energized to run the preaching race with endurance and zeal.

Yet, we struggle with many blockades and hurdles to effective biblical preaching. Well under one-half of the preachers who labor around the world have any formal Bible training. Even those who attended seminary regularly describe the struggles of applying the never-changing scripture to an ever-changing environment. And most especially, our own pride hampers us by making us inflexible. We labor diligently, but like contemporary CEOs in the business world, we often take input as threat.

In order to overcome the hurdles and race forward in the preaching ministry to which we

have been called, we need assistance. The pulpit team offers the help every pastor needs to run this race with integrity and flexibility. It will not be easy for you to establish and work in submission with a pulpit team, but you will improve your service dramatically as a result. Also, opening yourself to feedback and assistance is the right thing to do. It will make all the difference.

God's Word (please meditate upon these passages)

Ecclesiastes 10:10

10 If the axe is dull and he does not **sharpen its edge**, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success. (NAS)

Proverbs 15:22

22 Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but **with many counselors they succeed**. (NAS)

Proverbs 27:5-6

5 Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.

6 **Faithful are the wounds of a friend**, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. (NKJ)

Good work (please answer the following questions)

1. Are there aspects of my preaching that I feel could be improved?
2. Am I receiving input from members of the congregation about my delivery, preparation, sermon length or content? Is such feedback uniformly positive?
3. In what ways am I frightened or concerned about setting up a pulpit team?
4. What advantages and disadvantages do I see in forming a pulpit team?
5. What would a faithful wound from a pulpit team friend be like? How does that differ from "surprise" board or council meeting in which my preaching is discussed negatively?
6. Do you trust that there exist people in your congregation who can share truly constructive criticism with you? Could you trust yourself to accept it?

Responsibility of the Team

Or, “The Tale of Tina”

Tina’s Reign of Terror

In the eyes of the new senior pastor, Tina was a model parishioner. Coming in from a city congregation to this rural parish, the pastor had been concerned about the biblical knowledge base of his new flock. He knew that fewer of these people had been to college, and he had feared that would demand he simplify his theologically complex messages. As the College pastor at the largest church in the city, he had become quite accustomed to hundreds of eager young faces looking up to him for what he called “deeper truths, the real meat of the subject.”

Now, his worries over having to change that esoteric style were happily evaporating. Tina, or Mrs. Hector Martinez, had been a serious student of the Bible for over forty years. She was also a serious force in the congregation. Tina, as the most outspoken member on the subject of teaching, had been proclaimed head of the pastoral search committee. It was she who had personally steamrolled the selection of Leo Gomez as the new Senior Pastor. Young Leo was quick-witted, brilliant, and highly educated – all traits admired by Mrs. Martinez.

In fact, these were Leo’s favorite traits in himself. He accepted the position quickly, greatly because of the affinity he felt with Tina’s way of thinking. He reasoned with his wife, “If this is how the leaders think, we should really go somewhere together!”

And go they did. The church grew significantly, almost from the first day Pastor Leo (as he liked to be known) stepped in to the pulpit. People truly enjoyed his wit and charm, though they admitted that some of the illustrative examples were a bit citified for their understanding. Yet, he was so vibrant and different that the people were genuinely intrigued by what Pastor Leo had to say.

At first, Tina was thrilled. That was her boy standing up there! Each praise that came to Pastor Leo was overheard and treasured as a personal compliment. This was what she had been trying to get these simpletons to understand for years! These “deeper truths” that the new pastor discussed were in effect what Tina had been trying to share in every Bible study and small group in the church. In fact, Tina reasoned, these truths weren’t so deep after all. They were old ideas she had trotted out before. Yet no one would listen to her.

After a time, Pastor Leo began to notice a change in his relationship with the Martinez family. Tina was more distant, and no longer invited the Gomez family over for lunches after church. Leo was disappointed, for he had really enjoyed those times of discussion, especially as they had always helped him feel good about his just-delivered sermon. Worse still, Tina began to criticize aspects of the messages – not directly to the pastor, but to her Bible study and small group.

Finally, that inevitable Sunday came when Tina frankly and violently disagreed with a point in Pastor Leo’s sermon. It wasn’t a major point, but she was furious! She made an

appointment with the chairman of the church deacons immediately after the service. Tina fumed and fretted all week leading up to the meeting with Stephen Angelos, chairman of the board. How could she have let a heretic in as pastor? What was she thinking when she pushed forward such a slick young shyster? He obviously couldn't even think straightly, or, she reasoned in her most fair mindset, he at least couldn't double check his cross references to see if he was accurate.

Poor Mr. Angelos dreaded the meeting all week. He knew that he did not have the fortitude or training to handle a biblically-based conflict with Tina. When right after the coffee was served Tina launched into a description of her concern in biblical language, Stephen's heart sank into his shoelaces. Did the church board realize that Pastor Leo was a heretic? No, they didn't. Were they reviewing his messages, approving a manuscript weekly? No, they weren't. Did they realize that she did that for the ladies who taught in the ladies Bible study? If that is good enough for a simple Bible study, why not for the preaching? Stephen had no answer.

Would Mr. Angelos bring this up at the next board meeting? Before answering, Stephen was informed that one of the deacons (each of whom Tina had already called) had suggested a special session for something this serious.

A few blocks away, Leo Gomez was tucking his young children into bed. He felt a heaviness of spirit which he could not explain and asked his wife to join him for a time of prayer. As they were just beginning to pray, the telephone rang. Startled, Leo grabbed it. His wife watched as his face turned white. Leo was receiving a warning from one of the deacons that a big meeting was going down over at the Angelos home and that Tina was taking steps to have Pastor Leo called before the deacons on charges of heretical preaching.

Leo thanked the caller calmly. He turned with a stunned face toward his wife and began to relate what he'd just heard. As he shared with her, his anger grew. This was Satanic! His face grew red as he thought of the damage to his reputation and to the church of Jesus Christ. His final words before he flew out of the house were to command his wife, "You pray. I'm going to put a stop to this!"

He arrived at the Angelos home before it was too late. Tina had not finished, though Stephen looked completely washed up. Pastor Leo immediately sized up the situation and asked in a threatening tone, "What in the world is going on here?" Stephen moaned. Tina inhaled deeply and swelled up all five feet of her stature. A fight was just to her liking. Defending the Word of God was her life and this wolf in sheep's clothing needed shearing.

Before Leo could prepare a defense, Tina was at him. She asked him questions about the controversial passage. He fumbled a reply. She then asked him to look at her Bible and read the scriptures she had highlighted. Did he notice how they contradicted his comment from the pulpit? He did, but countered that she wasn't seeing the whole picture. Did he think these people were too stupid to understand what he was doing? Leo rallied at this

and stated his defense that he wasn't "doing" anything particular, it was just a simple mistake.

Tina pounced like a cat who is tired of playing with a mouse. "If you think so little of any part of the sermon that you are willing to overlook careless mistakes made in the preaching of the Holy Bible, then I am going elsewhere." She half closed her eyes, looked at Stephen Angelos and said in a quiet, firm voice, "And if things don't change, I'll take most of the church with me."

Tina walked out with wounded dignity and firmly shut the front door. Leo was stunned. He looked to Mr. Angelos for support, but Stephen had suddenly taken great interest in his shoelaces. After an awkward pause of over a minute, Angelos muttered, "I think there'll be a deacons meeting tomorrow night."

Taking the real meaning

Those who preach as a vocation are especially vulnerable. We are in danger not only from the attacks of the Tinas who share our brotherhood in Christ, but from our own rash defensiveness as well. Deacon and Elder boards are ill-equipped to manage our continuous preaching development, some would even argue that such is not under their aegis as laid forth in the New Testament.

Boards and leadership certainly can do a better job than Stephen Angelos at defending their preachers, but we often limit their effectiveness ourselves. When I run in to a trouble situation with my spiritual guns blazing, I have effectively communicated my lack of rest in the Lord. When I have no trusted path for receiving sermon criticism, I have tied the hands of the leadership in redirecting the insubordinate member. By forcing confrontation instead of redirection, we pastors and priests miss opportunities to learn and subsequently strain our fellow leaders.

The solution is a pulpit team. Recognized in the congregation, the pulpit team oversees our continuous growth and like love, covers a multitude of sins. Angelos could defuse Tina by letting her rail against a pulpit team designed to continually improve Pastor Leo. Then, her sin for gossip and insurrection could be dealt with by the board.

Of course, redirecting feedback to constructive channels is merely a bonus of having a pulpit team. The team also exercises three main functions: evaluating the preacher, examining the audience, and establishing the preaching schedule.

Turning to real guidance

Evaluating the preacher – Galatians 6:6

6 Let him that is taught in the word **communicate unto him that teacheth** in all good things. (KJV)

Examining the audience – Acts 10:42-43

42 "And He ordered us to preach **to the people**, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." (NAS)

Establishing the preaching schedule – Proverbs 20:18 & 21:5

20:18 **Plans are established by counsel;** by wise counsel wage war. (NKJ)

21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty. (NAS)

Total restructuring

1. Evaluations –

a. *Forms.* For the pulpit team to really help the preacher, it must be given the authority to evaluate. Section 2 contains two forms used by the members of my pulpit team. The team members will develop their own preferences as their skills sharpen and team chemistry grows richer. Should your team design a new form to better your evaluations, please send me a copy that I might share it with others.

b. *Training.* Of course, the team must receive some training. Although three of the members of the team that evaluates my work have been to seminary, most of our participants will be uneducated at that level. Use books such as Haddon Robinson's Biblical Preaching, John R.W. Stott's Biblical Preaching Today, The Power Sermon, by Reg Grant and John Reed (available only through Dallas Theological Seminary), or Preaching That Connects, by Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson to develop their understanding of an effective sermon. Use tapes from preachers you respect to share your vision. Do not confuse humility with insipid shyness! You are the point person for this team. You are the one set aside to lead. So lead! Train your team even as you willingly and humbly open yourself to their feedback.

c. *Meetings.* The pulpit team should meet monthly to share their evaluations. Much longer has proven to dull the effectiveness of the memory and thus the feedback. Weekly or biweekly meetings seem excessive to most preachers (and teams.) Thus, a monthly gathering is recommended. The meeting should follow an agenda like the one attached in section 3 of this guidebook. Each member shares his or her comments regarding the sermon listed, and the priest collects their evaluations, making notes as appropriate to cement a good idea in his mind. The attitude should be one of camaraderie. This group is committed to the same goal – producing the highest quality preaching of the scriptures. Please let disagreements arise. What one member loves is almost always what another most disliked. That is productive! Don't squelch it, rather, draw out the dialogue such that deeper bonds are forged through the fiery necessity of talking through a disagreement.

2. Examination of the audience –

- a. *Understanding.* The greatest preparation does no good if the speaker does not speak the audience's language. One of the most severe criticisms of pulpits in wealthier countries is that the preacher doesn't understand the person in the audience. Interestingly, I have not heard this critique in developing countries nearly as often. I am convinced the reason is that the pastor in a poorer parish often is bi-vocational and must work 40+ hours per week in a job similar to those of his flock. Though this is certainly a strain on his time, it does have the advantage of giving his great authenticity in his illustrations and applications.
- b. *Normality.* Those not in bi-vocational ministry can get the same advantage from a pulpit team. That small body of lay people, trained and given the environment to shape the messages and the messenger, usually proves very quick to reconnect the giver of the sermon with its recipients. I have had a pulpit team member refer to an illustration and bluntly ask me, "Do you realize that nobody understood that? We don't sit around reading church history all day!" They will continually call their preacher back to what he knows about business, home, and the beautiful normality of the typical church member's life.
- c. *Exegete the audience.* Thus, part of each team member's duty is to share like my friend did with me in that comment above. The team is to help the preacher know the audience. As Walt Kaiser of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School used to tell all his students, "You must not exegete merely the text. You must also exegete the audience!" In establishing the preaching schedule, this skill of examination is put to particular use.

3. Establishing the preaching schedule –

- a. *Categorical thinking.* The pulpit team has one other responsibility. They must assist the priest in the choices of sermon material for teaching in series. Even if you preach in a very liturgical setting and follow a common guide to passages, you can and should organize that into series. The typical person thinks in blocks. This categorization desire is what allows us to group data and find patterns and connection between ideas and fields. If the preacher does not take advantage of these categorical needs and merely presents a new and unknown topic each Sunday, connective learning becomes very difficult. It will be rare for parishioners to build upon prior biblical learning.
- b. *Planning.* Yet, preaching in a series has its own challenges. What book or topic should we study? How long should the series last? As your team grows in experience and you grow in your trust of them, such serious plans can be "established by counsel." Preaching in series also demands forethought and careful planning. For this reason, the preacher should regularly retreat on a study leave. A few weeks before each new series is slated to begin, I retreat to a cabin owned by a friend. Conference centers often will also suffice, many of them letting pastors stay for free during the week. The purpose of this leave is for the preacher to develop the series outline. I cloister myself with all the books on the

topic at hand that I can check out, beg or borrow, a laptop computer, and my favorite teas. For at least the first day, I do nothing but read, pray, and make notes. Then, I begin to tailor a way to express what I am finding to be the big picture – what God is telling us in these passages. That becomes the theme for our series.

- c. *Theme, objective, premise.* That theme for the series then calls for what becomes a fairly obvious objective. For example, if the theme is the majesty of God, then an objective would clearly be that we worship Him. Once the objective is set, I adopt the mindset of our pulpit team as much as I can. I need to relate this to our wonderful people. What is the premise for this series? Why do they need to hear this? If I'm struggling with the premise, I sometimes call a pulpit team member from the cabin and let them assist my thought. The great debate in educational circles over the effectiveness of cognitive objectives versus affective ones is not our purview here. Suffice it to say that the preacher should plan a theme, objective, and premise for the preaching of the series.
- d. *Worship outlines.* From there, as you will see in the examples of finished notes in section 4, the study leave should concentrate on the content and presentation of each particular sermon. First, I begin with the worship outlines. Special holidays, liturgical issues, future study leaves, etc. can be thus thought through in light of the whole series of study. Each passage of scripture used in the sermon is listed and studied. From that study a theme and life-change objective can be realized, and ideas for worship in music and other arts generated. After the study leave, it is important that the worship, drama, or other affected ministry committees in the church receive a copy. This allows for powerful concentration of effort each Sunday.
- e. *Sermon outlines.* Once the worship outlines are complete, I turn my energies to the sermon outlines. If I am able to develop an outline of each message, I know the ease that will bring in to my life each week of the series. This leaves much more time for me to devote to the leading and pastoral care aspects of my ministry on a weekly basis. The other great advantage to creating sermon outlines involves particular tools, or illustrative material. Sometimes we have a brilliant idea for making the text alive, but no time for developing that tool. For example, on Friday night it occurs to you that it would be marvelous to bring in some trellised grape plants before preaching John 15 on Sunday. Yet, on Saturday you have three meetings, a funeral to officiate, and your son's soccer game to cheer for. The arbor is not going to grace the stage, and you are left feeling as if you did less than you could have done. Now, replay that idea, this time with the grape arbor idea in your notes from the study leave. With weeks of notice, you present the idea to the pulpit team and ask one of them to oversee the procurement of the container-grown grapes for the platform. You are free to enjoy your Saturday, and have just the tool you need to preach with excellence.
- f. *Pre-sermon evaluation.* What could be more helpful than being told how

to improve a message before it is ever preached! In section 5 of this guidebook you will see examples of notes from our pulpit team to me regarding an series outlined in section 4. These notes are, as Solomon puts it, “like apples of gold in settings of silver.” They afford the opportunity to improve the message as it is being prepared.

- g. *The active list.* The pulpit team’s assistance is invaluable! Think back to their help in examination of the audience. As they perceive certain needs or trends in the church or community, we attempt together to develop a particular study which will prove to be the right match for that need. Thus, I leave for the study leave already armed with a particular series in mind. How does the team choose the next series? Where do the ideas come from? The team should have a continuously changing pool of ideas, fed by two streams. First, each member of the team should be always reading and translating their thought into topical ideas for sermon series. Second, the priest should keep what I call an “active list.” (See section 3 for an example.) As the priest is regularly studying the Bible for personal spiritual growth, he is doing the most important work that can be done for the preaching in his church. Even as the Apostle Paul himself feared being disqualified for rewards, we must be diligent to continue our private spiritual growth. From that growth comes the greatest preaching. In our church, the “active list” contains those books of the Bible which I have studied just for me in my private quiet time and which pass an annual examination.
- h. *Examination.* That examination works as follows: In October of 1999 I studied Hebrews, certainly not for the first time but for the first time in a while. This study was just so I can learn what needs to happen between God and me. I made notes in the margins of my Bible (one could also keep a notated journal) about the deficiencies of my character and the convictions that come from this beautiful word of God. In October of 2000 I went back through those notes in my Bible, asking a pointed series of questions which all revolved around, “Have I experienced significant growth in that area?” Since the answers were mostly positive, I recommended the book for the active list, feeling that I can now preach it with some personal integrity. If I had not experienced personal growth as reflected against those margin notes, I would have revisited the book in October 2001. It is a humbling fact, that a few books have not yet made it to our active list. If a book doesn’t make it to the active list or isn’t chosen for a series within four years of your original personal study, please reread the text and pull it from the list.
- i. *Separate series.* One final note – when preaching through a longer book, such as Romans, a gospel, or a major prophet, consider breaking the book into a few separate yet connected series. This allows for the building necessary for learning, but alleviates the tedium that can bore people with a seemingly endless study. Sections 6-8 include an example of three series outlines that comprise a thorough preaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

4. What positives and negatives would accompany the adoption of this type of plan in my preaching?

5. What aspects of my current style and schedule would be most difficult to change?
Am I willing to risk this change in order to grow myself in the ministry?

6. Who is already coming to my mind as an insightful person who would be a blessing to have on our pulpit team?

7. How can I adapt this plan so that it fits my situation better?

Roles on the Team

Or, “The Legend of Lars”

Lars’ love

Pastor Nilsson balanced his coffee cup and cookies on his knee as he sank back onto the Raask’s couch. The Raask family were among his favorite in the parish. Their many children were well-behaved, their loyalty to the church was stout in an age of decaying church attendance, and their coffee was always strong and hot.

Pastor Nilsson peered over the rim of his cup. Through the steam he could see the smiling face of Lars Raask. The patriarch of the clan, Lars was a brilliant scholar who spoke several languages. Lars could even read and translate Greek and Hebrew with considerable skill; indeed, with talent superior to that of Pastor Nilsson. Such thoughts always made Rev. Nilsson slightly uncomfortable, so he shifted his gaze to Ingrid Raask. A strong, godly woman, Ingrid was the most respected woman in the church.

Lars started the chat by asking about church affairs and other small talk. The Chatting was pleasant, but it was evident that Lars hadn’t asked Pastor Nilsson over to discuss any of those things. Finally, Lars came out with it, “Eric, I was wondering if you would be willing to receive constructive input on your sermons.”

Pastor Nilsson’s stomach tightened. So, this was it. Lars was about to attack! And he had always considered the Raask’s to be his friends. As these thoughts raced through Eric’s mind, Ingrid interrupted with a smiling voice, “Relax, Pastor. Lars is your friend. Just listen to him for a minute.”

Brought out of his fearful reverie, Nilsson tried to smile. He managed a fairly believable, “Of course. I would love to hear your thoughts.” Then Pastor Nilsson sank down in his chair and pulled his coffee cup up as if to protect his face. Lars smiled, leaned back, and began to share some observations...

At some point, Eric Nilsson realized that this was not an attack. He began to relax and really focus on Lars. A bit later, it became clear that to him that Lars really was his friend and that some of his ideas were actually quite sound. By the time Lars was through, Eric was sitting up. He was enthusiastic. Indeed, he was on the verge of grateful tears. “Thank you, Lars. Thank you, Ingrid. I really appreciate that. And if you don’t mind, I’d like to discuss these things with you more in the future.”

Lifting lessons

From Lars we learn one of the most critical aspects of this ministry – exhortation. Lovingly, Lars spoke the truth. It became a bulwark for Pastor Nilsson and a powerful blessing to the whole church. Earlier, we alluded to team dynamics. It is critical for the pulpit team to genuinely feel like and function as an exhorting team.

If your team is not outspoken enough, you cannot realize team synergy. The silent members are robbing the whole of their input. Thus, I recommend that each member

speak out on each message in each meeting. This of course demands that the team remain smaller in size. Group dynamics experts recommend no more than eight persons belong to a focus group of this type. If the group is struggling with synergy, you could be facing a role definition difficulty. Like Lars, the team must accept that its role is to exhort. They are to speak the truth in love. By withholding either portion of that directive, they are stealing from the one who teaches.

If the preacher limits the team's input or in any way creates an environment of less than complete honesty, he is cheating himself and the church. The pastor's role is to teach and listen. George Cladis, in his book Leading the Team-Based Church says, "I am convinced that a church that builds and maintains a strong culture of honesty and trust is able to encourage new attitudes of trust in otherwise suspicious and fearful people. Church leadership teams have a wonderful opportunity to model and inculcate trust and, in so doing, show the congregation honest and authentic ways of living the Christian life."

Lord's leadership

Romans 12:6-8

6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;
7 if service, in his serving; or **he who teaches, in his teaching**;
8 or **he who exhorts, in his exhortation**; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (NAS)

Ephesians 4:15-16

15 Instead, **speaking the truth in love**, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as **each part does its work**. (NIV)

Living lift

1. How could a pulpit team become like a "living lift" or elevator of my spirits in this difficult spiritual ministry?
2. What attitudes on my part most threaten that lift?
3. What attitudes could keep the team from fulfilling its role to exhort?
4. What steps can be taken in our church to help guard against those mistakes?
5. How might team dynamics and composition help or hinder the effectiveness of the group? What could be done to avoid these traps?

Rewards

Or, “The Chronicle of Carlos”

Carlos’ depression

Carlos Santana led a new church in the middle of the banana plantations & jungles of Central America. Carlos was a good preacher – a very talented expositor and a captivating speaker. He had planted this church with a great deal of personal sweat and sacrifice. At first, Carlos was amazed at how God provided for them. Time and again the needs of the fledgling congregation were met. People came to faith in Jesus, and word spread through the settlements that this young Carlos could really preach.

The first few years, the church grew dramatically and even purchased land and built a small building. All the people were proud and excited, but Carlos felt somewhat uneasy. He sensed a vague discomfort that some other churches were growing more rapidly and that his church had begun to plateau. Carlos began to ask questions of himself, “What are we really achieving?”

Publicly, Carlos began to change slightly. He became quick to talk from the pulpit about other churches. He especially highlighted the expansion of cults and the churches that were growing by “watering down” the gospel. Carlos became a man obsessed with exposing falsehood and people who preached unbiblical nonsense. His church’s growth did indeed plateau and even diminish slightly as the inevitable internal conflicts took their toll. By the church’s sixth year, Carlos had begun to seriously consider leaving the ministry. He began to mutter about how much more money could be made working as a government translator.

When the church was eight years old, I preached a week of revival meetings there. Carlos was my translator, and preached himself at some of the meetings. I was fascinated with Carlos. Despite four years of study, my Spanish skills are limited. Nonetheless, I was moved by the talent in this man. Carlos really was a remarkably gifted expositor of the scriptures and I enjoyed listening despite my inability to catch all the words. I also detected the note of bitterness.

Between our gatherings, Carlos and I spoke at length, thanks to his excellent English. I drew out of Pastor Santana his anger that others with less talent were seeing greater rewards here on earth. Carlos was definitely miffed that a church younger than his was much bigger – even though that preacher denied the deity of Christ! Finally, Carlos asked me his burning question, “What are we achieving? Others grow faster by preaching nonsense. Is there no reward for doing things right?” I listened and commiserated. Most preachers, in particular church planters, have dealt with similar struggles. After a short discussion, I set down on the rough wooden table a coin from Carlos’ country. Next to it I placed one of my American dollars. I then asked Carlos, “When you get paid in your culture on this earth, what is the currency you receive?” He pointed rather sullenly to the coin.

“Does it bother you that I get paid in dollars?” He smiled thinly, too polite to utter “Si.” I

smiled back and asked him if he knew that comparison was the language of the devil. Being a good preacher, Carlos could feel a story coming. He settled back, laced his hands behind his head, and sighed, “Go ahead.”

I related the lengthy story of my daughter’s health struggles after birth. Jessica was born with serious heart defects that required numerous surgeries. Despite having the greatest health care in the world available to us, none of the surgeries was completely successful. She unfortunately developed horrible complications that caused her to actually die twenty-one times. Each time, she was resuscitated, once by my wife who was alone in the isolation room with Jessica and had to bang on the door with her shoe and scream for help while “bagging” air into the baby’s inelastic lungs. Carlos listened with horror as I described a healthy child at birth dropping down to less than four pounds and being purposefully paralyzed with medication so she wouldn’t use up calories trying to breathe.

The Santana’s old chair creaked as I leaned forward. “Carlos, do you know what I did? (A silent shake of his head.) I envied those parents whose children were healthier than mine. I would stand outside the Intensive Care Unit and see other parents whose children were strong enough to take rides in little wagons. Our special Children’s Hospital had these little red wagons to which an IV pole could be attached and the parents would take their kids for a ride around the hospital. One day, as I was waiting to be allowed in to ICU to see my dying daughter, I overheard one mother say in an audible whisper, ‘See, honey? This is where the really sick babies are. They don’t get to take rides like you. Thank God we aren’t like them!’ Suddenly, Carlos, I hated that parent. I know it’s wrong, but I was furious at her and at God. Yes, I was mad at a God who would allow such inequity!”

“With tears in my eyes, I ran to a stairwell in the hospital. Carlos, I knew I was wrong. I could feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit, hear the reproof of my Lord’s Word ringing in my ears. But I couldn’t just ignore the feeling. I was angry. This was not fair! So, I needed to cry out to God in a place of privacy. The stairwell became my cloister. I don’t know how long I cried. It was a long time. My wife had come and sat beside me, arm around my shoulders. At last, through the tears, I began to reason together with God. I cried the cry of Habakkuk, ‘Lord, the wicked surround the righteous and justice comes out perverted.’”

“And God met me there. Just as He met Habakkuk, He met me in my distress. The answers are there in Habakkuk’s prophecy. Like Habakkuk, I wasn’t getting paid in the currency I preferred. In fact, my rewards seemed to compare most unfavorably with the red wagons of others. Yet, like Habakkuk, I found myself ending with a renewed zeal and comfort. My God was indeed the God of my salvation. He was paying me with the currency of trial and shaping my feet into hind’s feet to stomp down my idolatrous high places. I don’t want to spoil the journey for you, Carlos, but the answer seems to revolve around God being God and being good.”

I settled back in the chair. Carlos also moved, as we both realized we’d been still for a long time. I wrapped up by describing briefly how much that stairwell came to mean to

me and how I visited that spot for private prayer battles nearly every day for the four months we were in the Children's Hospital. Carlos reflected and excused himself. He returned a few minutes later with two cold Cokes. He turned on a soccer game for a while and we watched in silence. The afternoon turned unbearably hot and we performed the daily ritual of removing shirts & ties to keep them from becoming sweat-stained before the evening meetings.

Finally, Carlos switched off the set and looked hard at me, "So, what happened to your daughter?" I explained that God decided to show off in her case. Despite being given the very realistic pronouncement that she had no chance to live, Jessica somehow pulled through. Despite appropriate predictions of serious brain damage due to the many episodes without oxygen, our daughter became a completely normal and healthy girl. She plays sports and makes high grades. Most importantly, Jessica became a blessing to all who know her – a believer in Jesus who spreads light all around her.

"Carlos," I suddenly asked, "Why are you preaching?" Carlos fumbled a reply about loving God and being led to speak His truth. As his answer gained momentum, Carlos added, "I know of the ultimate rewards for faithfulness in heaven. But I am struggling with rewards here on earth. Should I just work hard & exhaust myself, even if nothing seems to be getting better?"

Rather than walk you through our conversation, I recommend you pursue the answer yourself. God calls us to His divine Word in 1 Timothy 5:17 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Please study these passages now.

Called to the divine

On Earth – 1 Timothy 5:17

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially **those who work hard at preaching and teaching.** (NAS)

In Eternity – 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an **imperishable.**

For Both – 1 Corinthians 9:26-27

26 Therefore I run in such a way, as **not without aim**; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

27 but **I buffet my body** and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. (NAS)

Catching the depth

Pastors compare all the time. Stop it! We do it for many reasons, the ugliest being a desire for self-validation – a desire rendered ludicrously unnecessary by the Cross. Carlos was working hard, but without aim, because his eyes were not on the imperishable

rewards of Jesus to His servants. By looking at those around me in comparison, I inevitably adopt a persona of either defeat or condescension. And it does show up in my preaching. Instead, let's avoid such depression of our ministry by working smarter with our eyes on the Lord and His work through and in ourselves. The pulpit team can help you focus on your work and God's grace, removing your eyes from the things going on around you.

I feel confident that you can overcome this tendency and enjoy your rewards. I know you can learn to see the richness of the currency in which you are being paid. I would even dare to say that if God can achieve this miracle in my life, He certainly can in yours. Perhaps the miracles in my office over the past few years have been as great as those in the stairwell. I have faced a reward struggle that threatened to derail me completely from my pulpit purpose and condemn me to comparison misery.

Three years ago, the most talented and widely recognized living preacher on earth decided to come out of retirement. He decided to plant a church. He chose to plant that church in the same little suburb where I planted our church four years previously. That news led to a great many "stairwell –type" conversations. I was at first shocked and dismayed. Yet, the Lord has met me there once again. I now find myself thrilled over the impact they have had in our community. That great preacher has become an acquaintance and has joined our extremely close-knit Christian Alliance. Once again, I have my reward in the blessing of learning to love others and grow closer to my God.

The team who proved most encouraging during all this was our pulpit team. They reminded me regularly that I am to do my job and sing in my own voice. They joined me in prayer for the new church and yet clearly kept our focus on our work in the Lord. Interestingly, our church has not diminished during the subsequent three years, but has actually grown a great deal bigger.

Correlation to the daily

Most of us are tempted at some point to quit in the preaching task. This happens when you slip into comparisons or especially when you detect wrong attitudes in your heart that force you to a stairwell with God. In these cases, please let your pulpit team help. Let them sit beside you in the stairwell and remind you of the greatest reward – the presence of the Almighty. Allow them to shoulder your burden and remind you that God is God and that He is good.

Finally, here is some encouragement from Eugene Petersen (from Working The Angles):

“Century after century Christians continue to take certain persons in their communities, set them apart, and say, “We want you to be responsible for saying and acting among us what we believe about God and kingdom and gospel... We need help in keeping our beliefs sharp and accurate and intact. We don't trust ourselves – our emotions seduce us into infidelities. We know that we are launched on a difficult and dangerous act of faith, and that there are strong influences intent on diluting or destroying it. We

want you to help us: be our pastor, a minister in word and sacrament, in the middle of this world's life...This isn't the only task in the life of faith, but it is your task. We will find someone else to do the other important and essential tasks. *This is yours: word and sacrament.*"

"One more thing: we are going to ordain you to this ministry and we want your vow that you will stick to it. This is not a temporary job assignment but a way of life that we need lived out in our community. We know that you are launched on the same difficult belief venture in the same dangerous world as we are. We know that your emotions are as fickle as ours, and that your mind can play the same tricks on you as ours. That is why we are going to *ordain* you and why we are going to extract a *vow* from you. We know that there are going to be days and months, maybe even years, when we won't feel like believing anything and won't want to hear it from you. And we know there will be days and months, maybe even years when you won't feel like saying it. It doesn't matter. Do it. You are ordained to this ministry, vowed to it. There may be times when we come to you as a committee or a delegation and demand that you tell us something else than what we are telling you right now. Promise right now that you won't give in to what we demand of you. You are not the minister of our changing desires, our time-conditioned understanding of our needs, or our secularized hopes for something better. With these vows of ordination, we are lashing you to the mast of word and sacrament so that you will be unable to respond to the siren voices. There are a lot of other things to be done in this wrecked world and we are going to be doing at least some of them, but if we don't know the basic terms with which we are working, the foundational realities with which we are dealing – God, kingdom, gospel – we are going to end up living futile, fantasy lives. Your task is to keep telling the basic story, representing the presence of the Spirit, insisting on the priority of God, speaking the biblical words of command and promise and invitation."

Clear discernment

1. In what ways am I not living as one lashed to the mast?
2. How could the pulpit team keep the message tied to the mast of God instead of merely following the whims of man?
3. How can I get my eyes off of others and onto my rewards in Jesus?
4. How could the pulpit team help me work smarter, not merely harder?

Routing the enemies of your team
Or, “The Triumph of Team Hesed”

Michael’s decision

Michael was brilliant. His first love was maths, and he excelled in the state university of his East African homeland. In college, Michael was brought face-to-face with the person and claims of Jesus as Christ, and he received Jesus as Savior. Nearly overnight, Michael’s love shifted allegiance, from maths to the Bible. He became as grand a student of the scriptures as he had been of calculus.

After graduating with honors in mathematics, Michael went rapidly through all the biblical training his state church offered. He proceeded to Nairobi to study at the International School of Theology, again graduating with honors. His studies then led to the US, where Michael Nagamu earned another master’s degree and a doctorate in theology.

Passionate for the training needs in East Africa, Michael returned to Nairobi to teach and act as dean at the theological school. Eventually, Dr. Nagamu rejoined his old state church as a priest. Though he loved the preaching and practical work of his ministry, Michael’s desire to see priests well trained drove him to attempt a new venture. He formed Hesed Ministries, funded mainly by gifts from abroad. *Hesed* is the Hebrew word for covenant love often translated “loving kindness.” Hesed Ministries was formed to bring the best possible training to the priests of their area, and a team of twelve employees was soon brought together under Michael’s leadership.

Not surprisingly, Michael was chosen when the opening came for a new bishop in that area. What was a bit shocking was that the outgoing bishop and many of the priests hold vastly different views from Dr. Nagamu on many theological issues. Yet, they recognized that this man cares for them and wants to get the best tools possible into their hands.

A year after his installment, Bishop Nagamu asked me to come to East Africa and conduct a training session for the priests of his diocese. Representing over 1000 churches, the priests came together for a three-day training seminar. It was a great honor to work with these men and women. Their brilliance, humility, and wit made the hours fly past. I was energized by their desire to grow and continually invigorated by their passion for learning.

Hesed Ministries hosted the seminar, feeding and housing the priests, and providing the materials. The Bishop himself came for a time and encouraged his priests. Dr. Nagamu’s eyes shone as we discussed privately the ministry he had been privileged to generate. Michael’s decisions to go back to his homeland, take the politically difficult appointment as bishop, and to create Hesed were reaping great fruit.

That does not mean there were no problems. There were significant struggles throughout the diocese, and particularly rough times in the preaching ministry of many of the priests. As we sat in the shade and talked or as the priests raised their hands in seminars, I

listened to their pains. Patterns began to emerge revealing the enemies to the work of the local preachers and of the whole Hesus team. Considering these at night under the mosquito netting, I recognized that they are at least parallel to if not congruent with the enemies that threaten the work of my own pulpit ministry and team.

First came discouragement. If there is a drawback to having a highly-educated genius for one's bishop, it might be that attention is drawn to one's personal lack of education. Add to that the chagrin over hearing great preaching at the cathedral, knowing the limitations of one's own preaching ability.

Secondly, I noted disillusionment. Non-Christian cults had made strong inroads into the diocese, as had a growing materialism that followed on the heels of years with no war. Between them, mounting greed and false gospels had begun to insinuate themselves into the church's thought and life. There were even rumors of priests who were giving in and adapting their messages to ensure positive responses from this newly syncretistic and materialistic audience.

Thirdly, the idea of a pulpit team led to considerable defensiveness. There was great laughter over the following comment made by a priest, "Why do I need a pulpit team? I already have three women who give me more advice than I can manage in a lifetime!" Isn't that true! Yet the need is only emphasized by that comment. The natural defenses the pastor erects against such unsolicited and often unwise advice is a discredit to our faith and a deterrent against healthy advice that could greatly bless his work.

Main details

Most of us who lead in the pulpit have experienced discouragement. We have certainly had those Sundays when we recognized that we quite frankly were flat...that we made little sense...that we never got the audience off of the ground, much less soaring in the rarified airs of God's Word. In my ministry, at least, these discouragements are quite real. The pulpit team is a balm to my soul on such occasions. They speak the truth to me, including the ugly news of a sermon gone bad. Yet, they do so in love and with real suggestions as to the repair and prevention of such mistakes. I do not feel cold and alone, for others are with me and keep me warm.

Each of us has faced situations of disillusionment. Like Carlos in Central America, we are troubled at the growth of that which is evil. We must be very alert for such disillusion. If not properly handled, it leads to cheap substitutes – sarcasm for wit, depression for deep thought, and appeasement for application.

Dear preacher, we also struggle with defensiveness. It is understandable, as East Africa has no corner on the market for unsolicited advice! Yet, our defensiveness is inexcusable. Creating and trusting a pulpit team is a fantastic means for eliminating unhealthy defenses.

Master's declarations

Discouragement due to your performance – Isaiah 55:11

11 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; **it shall not return to me empty**, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. (NAS)

Disillusionment due to audience response – 2 Timothy 4:1-5

1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:

2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction.

3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

5 But **you, keep your head** in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (NIV)

Defensiveness – Psalm 69:32, The humble have seen it and are glad; you who seek God, let your heart revive...Psalm 25:9, He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way...Proverbs 11:2, When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom...Proverbs 29:23, A man's pride will bring him low, but **a humble spirit will obtain honor**. (NAS)

My decisions

1. Will I agree to rest in the biblical truth that God's Word shall not return empty? In other words, will I today commit to forsake putting extra pressure on my preaching and instead trust in God's successful plan?
2. What does it mean to "keep my head" when no one seems to be growing as a result of my preaching of the Bible?
3. How can our pulpit team help me keep my head, especially in light of disillusionment or occasional bad advice from the congregation?
4. Will I commit today to keep my head and do the work of the ministry entrusted to me without an unhealthy focus on the response of the congregation or community?
5. Will I commit right now to forsake defensiveness? Will I accept God's blessing through humility and accept the wisdom of others?
6. How will I share these decisions with our pulpit team and begin to live them out?

OVERVIEW OF ALL THE DIFFERENCE

The Premise

All the Difference is designed, as the title suggests, to effect a marked difference in the lives of the preachers who participate. Of course, any positive change in the life and work of a preacher should lead to positive growth in his parish.

The premise of All the Difference is that a pulpit team formed of lay people specially trained and set aside to assist the priest will heighten creativity and quality in the preached word.

The Project

Our desire is to craft a notebook that will serve as an effective training tool for the local pastor in developing his own pulpit team. Middlesex University in the UK will be reviewing and critiquing the work for pedagogical effectiveness as part of Wayne Braudrick's Ph. D. studies. However, an even broader base of input is needed to design a tool that will have maximum impact globally. To this end, two teams are kindly and diligently offering continual feedback on the project.

The Personnel

The first team is the actual pulpit team of Frisco Bible Church in the USA. They bring an experienced perspective from the actual trenches of this ministry that they value and enjoy. David Dietz, Cathi Layfield, Mark Mattay, Cindy Sharp, and David Wade make up this invaluable group.

The second team is the international dissertation committee for Wayne Braudrick. Dr. David Lane, Dr. John Reed, and Dr. Jerry C. Wofford bring a wealth of academic experience to this task. They are widely published in leadership, preaching, and team dynamics.

The Plan

The two teams anticipate a twelve-month, graduated qualitative study using participating preachers. For the ensuing twelve-months, these participating pastors will be studied in a variety of ways designed to ascertain their attitudinal, behavioral, and group dynamic changes resulting from use of the tool. Their teams will also be surveyed and the team meetings taken through observation studies.

In order to gauge true effectiveness of this intervention, a control group will also be crafted. They will complete the initial survey, and will be promised a special training session at the end of the twelve-month cycle. Of course, they will be receiving an improved and tested tool – modified to better fit the milieu of their area.

If you have any questions about this work, please write to wbraudrick@friscobible.com.

Appendix E

Evaluation Form

Preacher _____

Date _____ Bible Text _____

Please evaluate the presentation based on the following issues and concerns (1=poor
5=excellent). Feel free to add any appropriate comments.

Poor - Exc.

"So What": Creating an Experience of the Text:

*The preacher quickly aroused my interest. I was emotionally engaged in the sermon. 1 2 3 4 5

*The preacher helped me identify with the people and issues of the original Bible story. 1 2 3 4 5

"What's What": Offering an Explanation of the Text:

*The preacher had a significant point, faithful to the Bible passage and relevant to my life. 1 2 3 4 5

*The preacher's explanations were clear and compelling, not shallow and simplistic. 1 2 3 4 5

"Yeah, But": Struggling with the Implications from the Listener's Perspective

*The preacher wouldn't let me off easily, but helped me consider deeper implications. 1 2 3 4 5

*The preacher "read my mind," taking seriously my honest objections and concerns. 1 2 3 4 5

"Now What": Motivating a Significant Life Response

*The preacher helped me imagine how this message could change my world. 1 2 3 4 5

*The preacher made me *want* to respond obediently to whatever God was calling me. 1 2 3 4 5

Further Issues in Preaching

*The preacher looked me in eye and appeared comfortable and confident throughout. 1 2 3 4 5

*The preacher appeared to value me as a listener. I did not feel abused or manipulated. 1 2 3 4 5

I would summarize the point of the message in the following sentence:

Other Comments?

Anderson's proposed evaluation form, taken from Preaching With Conviction.

New Evaluation of Sermons (Simple Form)

What did I like?

What did I not like?

What did I not understand?

What did I learn about God?

What should I do?

What phrase or thought can I take with me today?

Source: Our Daily Bread- June 1, 2003, Dave Brannon

BIG IDEA SERMON EVALUATION

Pulpit Team member:

Date:

ORGANIZATION

Introduction (getting the audience off the ground)

Does it get attention? _____

Does it touch some need directly or indirectly? _____

Does it orient you to the subject? _____ or to the main idea? _____ or to the first point? _____

Is it the right length? _____

Structure (guiding them through a smooth flight)

Is the development clear? _____ Is the overall structure clear? _____

Can you state the sermon's central idea or objective? _____

Are the transitions clear? _____ Is there a logical or psychological link between the points? _____

Do the main points relate back to the main idea? _____

Are the subpoints clearly related to their main points? _____

Conclusion (coming in for a safe landing)

Does the sermon build to a climax? _____ Is there appropriate tie-in to other worship? _____

Is there an adequate summary of ideas? _____

Are there effective closing appeals or suggestions? _____

CONTENT

Textual material

Is this subject significant? _____ Does it fit the rest of the series? _____

Is the sermon built on solid exegesis? (biblical scholarship) _____

Does the speaker show where he is in the text? _____

Is the analysis of the subject thorough? _____ logical? _____

Does the speaker convince you that he is right? _____ Does the content show originality? _____

Supporting material (illustrations & props)

Is the supporting material logically related to its point? _____ Is it interesting? _____ varied? _____ specific? _____ sufficient _____

STYLE

Does the speaker use correct grammar? _____
Is his vocabulary concrete, vivid? _____ varied? _____ Are words used correctly? _____

DELIVERY

Intellectual directness

Does the speaker command (not merely demand) attention? _____ Is he alert?

Do you feel he is talking with you? _____ Is he friendly? _____

Does the delivery sound like a lively conversation? _____

Does the speaker look people in the eye? _____

Oral Presentation

Is there clear articulation? _____ Is there vocal variety? _____ Does the pitch level change? _____

Is there a variety in force? _____ Does the rate vary enough? _____

Does the speaker use pauses effectively? _____ Are the words pronounced correctly? _____

Physical Presentation

Is his entire body involved in the delivery? _____ Does he gesture? _____

Are there distracting mannerisms? _____

Is the posture good? _____ Is there good facial expression? _____

GENERAL EFFECTIVENESS

Is the sermon adapted to the audience's interests? _____ attitudes? _____

Is it related to the group's knowledge? _____ Does it meet needs? _____

Do you feel he is aware of audience response? _____

Rate this message on a scale of 1-10 in terms of impact: _____

adapted from Biblical Preaching by Haddon Robinson

Orthodox Presbyterian Church Sermon (Seminary) Evaluation Form

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

Preacher _____
 Scripture _____
 Sermon Title _____
 Date _____

Poor ... Excellent

I. SCRIPTURE READING

A. Appropriate to theme of sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Read with expression 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Read with clarity 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

II. INTRODUCTION

A. It got your attention 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Laid foundation for sermon theme 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Sermon theme was obvious 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. Desire was aroused 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. Touched a need directly or indirectly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

F. It was relevant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

III. BODY OF SERMON

A. Main headings were clear (list them on the back) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Main headings flow naturally from the biblical passage 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Content of main headings adequately developed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. Biblical passage adequately explained 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. Illustrations/arguments/metaphors were helpful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

F. Application was specific/poised 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

G. Transitions were clear, obvious, and helpful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

H. You learned something new from this Sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I. You were refreshed by something you knew 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Well-rounded wrap-up 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Theme of biblical passage restated 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Message of sermon was obvious and achieved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. Focus of conclusion appropriate to Sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. You were challenged to think or to do something in your life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

V. GENERAL EVALUATION

A. Delivery and style

1. Understanding vocabulary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Varied and imaginative language 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Voice inflection, volume, and cadence 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Gestures and facial expression 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Eye contact with audience 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Poised presence commands attention 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Length of sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. Sense of momentum in sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. Sense of coherence in sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Effectiveness

1. Speaker spoke with confidence and conviction 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. You were moved and/or persuaded by the sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Scripture was shy and coyly brought insight and applied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Title of sermon appropriate to theme 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Your overall evaluation of the sermon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

VI. PREACHING CHRIST FROM ALL THE SCRIPTURES

A. The gospel is worked into the sermon naturally (not artificially) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. The gospel is presented clearly for unbelievers 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. The gospel is presented so as to challenge unbelievers 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. The gospel is presented so as to encourage and strengthen believers 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Frisco Bible Church Sermon Evaluation Outline

Introduction/Illustrations/Music/Drama/Visual Aids

Comment on relevance, impact, and clarity?

Did the introduction get the message “off the ground?”

Did the use of teaching tools keep it moving the right direction?

Sermon Content/Exegesis of Biblical Text/Theology

Comment on clarity, accuracy, truth.

Big Picture

Please write down the main idea that you took away from the sermon.

Overall Evaluation

Comment on strengths or weaknesses not covered above.

Comment on overall flow? Did it hang together as a message?

Circle one: Outstanding Good Needs Improvement

The Audience Visualization Evaluation Form

How well did the preacher use language, illustration, movement, and reference to connect with each of the following “types” as considered by age and present in the audience? Rate in each box using a scale of 1-5, 5 being highest.

Type →	Female	Male	Single	Parent	Non- Parent	Non- Christian	Ethnic minor. (as gauged vs. church norm)
Age ↓							
6-12 children							
13-18 youth							
19-24 college							
25-35 young adults							
36-49 middle age							
50-65 pre- retirees							
66-79 retirees							
80+ aged							

Based on the work of Graham Johnston (2001), in Preaching to a Postmodern Word – drawn from the personal practice of Pastor Don Sunkijian, Westlake Bible Church, Austin, Texas.

Appendix F

Closed Loop Preaching

Initial Survey, Team

- Preacher
- Preaching
- Resources
- Responses
- Desires
- Discernment

Team Member Information

Name _____

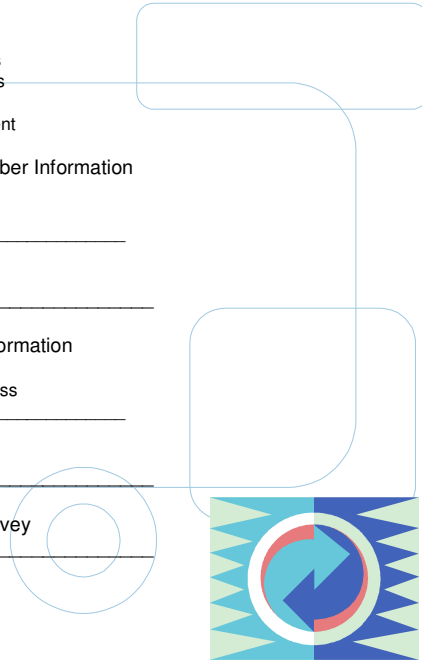
Church _____

Contact Information

E-mail address _____

Office phone _____

Date of Survey _____



Closed Loop Preaching

Initial Survey, Preacher

- The Preacher
- His Preaching
- His Resources
- His Responses
- His Desires
- His Discernment

Participant Information

Name _____

Normal Preaching Venue _____

Contact Information

E-mail address _____

Office phone _____

Date of Survey _____



Preacher Initial Survey, v.2

The purpose of this survey is to assist you in determining areas in which you might benefit from the pulpit team ministry tool. Please answer honestly and as rapidly as possible. Please circle your answer on the inventory sheet provided. Though more than one answer may apply, select the one with which you resonate the strongest.

Note: Resist the normal temptation to respond in the ideal; i.e., do not answer according to how you wish you were, but according to how you actually are.

❖ The Preacher

1. I enjoy preaching ____.

- a. Very much
- b. Usually
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely

2. Regarding my capacity to connect with the audience, I feel ____ confidence.

- a. Little
- b. Great
- c. I could use more
- d. A slight lack of

3. When I study for a message ____.

- a. I see that work as critical to success
- b. I like my work on paper, but know it won't preach as well as it reads
- c. I get too academic in my thinking
- d. I avoid commentaries or the works of others on the subject

4. Of all my duties, preaching ____.

- a. Is my least favorite
- b. Ranks as most enjoyable
- c. Falls somewhere in the middle in terms of personal enjoyment
- d. Is the one I dread most

5. I read and learn about preaching ____.

- a. Regularly
- b. Selectively
- c. Rarely
- d. Never

❖ His Preaching

6. When I prepare a sermon, I do so with ___ foremost in my mind.
 - a. Myself
 - b. The normative members of our church
 - c. Those who are hurting
 - d. Many different people groups

7. As I preach, I am ___ physical movements and gestures.
 - a. Highly aware of my
 - b. Somewhat aware of my
 - c. Alert to the point of regularly practicing different
 - d. Greatly unaware of my

8. I ___ utilize basic preaching principles.
 - a. Do
 - b. Do not
 - c. Somewhat
 - d. Occasionally

9. I ___ objectives for each message I give.
 - a. Set
 - b. Am determined not to set
 - c. Do not think in terms of
 - d. Feel uncertain about setting

10. Planning plays ___ role in my preaching and preparation.
 - a. A very limited
 - b. Too much of a
 - c. A great
 - d. Not enough of a

❖ His Resources

11. I ___ a regular team who grants feedback on my messages.

- a. Work with
- b. Cannot imagine
- c. Would appreciate
- d. Am skeptical of

12. I ___ feel alone (humanly) in my preaching ministry.

- a. Sometimes
- b. Often
- c. Occasionally
- d. Never

13. There are ___ occasions for me to receive truly constructive criticism.

- a. Some
- b. Few
- c. No
- d. Many

14. How helpful can lay person's input be to my preaching development? Rate on a 1-10 scale; 1 representing no help & 10 meaning great help.

- a. 1-2
- b. 3-5
- c. 6-7
- d. 8-10

15. Most lay criticism is ___.

- a. Inane
- b. Unhelpful
- c. Wounding to me
- d. Constructive

❖ His Responses

16. I ___ seek input regarding the crafting of series and individual sermons.

- a. Sometimes
- b. Actively
- c. Never
- d. Once in a while

17. Criticism ___.

- a. Hurts
- b. Helps
- c. Is unavoidable
- d. Is almost always negative

18. Constructive feedback on a sermon ___.

- a. Is of limited effectiveness, as the message is already preached
- b. Is a great gift
- c. Is usually delivered with mixed motives
- d. Is rarely delivered in a helpful manner

19. When I am approached with feedback on a sermon, I honestly ___.

- a. Try to control my face so it won't appear I am recoiling
- b. Attempt to end the conversation as quickly as possible
- c. Look forward to the input
- d. Prepare to defend myself

20. I have ___ found constructive feedback on my preaching to be helpful.

- a. Sometimes
- b. Rarely
- c. Usually
- d. Never

❖ His Desires

21. I ___ wish my preaching could be more effective.
- a. Often
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Never
 - d. Sometimes
22. For my preaching to improve, I need ___.
- a. A more responsive audience
 - b. A more intelligent audience
 - c. A more godly audience
 - d. Things that have nothing to do with my audience
23. I compare my preaching ___.
- a. To the preachers on international radio
 - b. To others in my denomination
 - c. To no one, as comparison is inherently ungodly
 - d. To myself and the capacities God has given me to develop
24. Deep down, I would describe the goal of my instruction as ___.
- a. Church growth
 - b. For congregants to learn
 - c. Love exhibited in changed lives
 - d. To limit the effects of sin in our church
25. My greatest insecurity in preaching is (generally) ___.
- a. The thought that I am not connecting with the congregation
 - b. The thought that I am boring or irrelevant
 - c. The thought that I am speaking over people's heads intellectually
 - d. The thought that I am repeating myself, i.e., preaching similar themes or using similar illustrations over a period of time

❖ His Discernment

For this section, please complete the complementary survey, [The Total Christian Leader](#).

Team Initial Survey, v.2

The purpose of this survey is to assist your pastor in determining areas in which he might benefit from the pulpit team ministry tool. Please answer honestly and as rapidly as possible. Please circle your answer on the inventory sheet provided. Though more than one answer may apply, select the one with which you resonate the strongest. If you are uncertain, base your answer on your observations and make an educated guess.

Note: Resist the normal temptation to respond in the ideal; i.e., do not answer according to how you wish your preacher were, but according to how he actually is.

❖ Preacher

1. He enjoys preaching ____.

- a. Very much
- b. Usually
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely

2. Regarding his preaching ministry, he exudes ____ confidence.

- a. Little
- b. A slight lack of
- c. He could use more
- d. Great

3. When he studies for a message ____.

- a. He sees that work as critical to success
- b. He seems a bit shallow academically
- c. He gets too academic in his thinking
- d. He appears to avoid commentaries or the works of others on the subject

4. Of all his duties, preaching appears to ____.

- a. Be the one he dreads most
- b. Be his least favorite
- c. Fall somewhere in the middle in terms of personal enjoyment
- d. Rank as most enjoyable

5. He reads and learns about preaching ____.

- a. Never
- b. Rarely
- c. Selectively
- d. Regularly

❖ Preaching

6. When he prepares a sermon, he does so with ___ foremost in his mind.
 - a. Himself
 - b. The normative members of our church
 - c. Those who are hurting
 - d. Many different people groups

7. As he preaches, he is ___ physical movements and gestures.
 - a. Greatly unaware of his
 - b. Somewhat aware of his
 - c. Highly aware of his
 - d. Alert to the point of regularly practicing different

8. He ___ basic preaching principles.
 - a. Does not utilize
 - b. Often forgets to utilize
 - c. Somewhat utilizes
 - d. Does utilize

9. He ___ objectives for each message he gives.
 - a. Does not think in terms of
 - b. Feels uncertain about setting
 - c. Sets but rarely meets his
 - d. Sets and often meet his

10. Planning plays ___ role in his preaching and preparation.
 - a. A very limited
 - b. Not enough of a
 - c. A great
 - d. Too much of a

❖ Resources

11. He ___ a regular team who grants feedback on my messages.

- a. Has never considered
- b. Is likely skeptical of
- c. Would appreciate
- d. Works with

12. He ___ feels alone (humanly) in his preaching ministry.

- a. Often
- b. Sometimes
- c. Occasionally
- d. Never

13. There are ___ occasions for him to receive truly constructive criticism.

- a. Many
- b. Some
- c. Few
- d. No

14. How helpful can lay person's input be to his preaching development? Rate on a 1-10 scale; 1 representing no help & 10 meaning great help.

- a. 1-2
- b. 3-5
- c. 6-7
- d. 8-10

15. Most lay criticism is ___.

- a. Inane
- b. Unhelpful
- c. Wounding to the preacher
- d. Constructive

❖ Responses

16. He ___ seeks input regarding the crafting of series and individual sermons.

- a. Actively
- b. Sometimes
- c. Warily
- d. Never

17. Criticism ___.

- a. Hurts
- b. Erodes his leadership capacity
- c. Is unavoidable
- d. Helps

18. Constructive feedback on a sermon ___.

- a. Is of limited effectiveness, as the message is already preached
- b. Is rarely delivered in a helpful manner
- c. Is usually delivered with mixed motives
- d. Is a great gift

19. When he is approached with feedback on a sermon, he appears ___.

- a. To work at controlling his face so it won't appear he is recoiling
- b. To attempt to end the conversation as quickly as possible
- c. To prepare to defend his self
- d. To look forward to the input

20. To the extent of my knowledge, the preacher has ___ found constructive feedback on his preaching to be helpful.

- a. Usually
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never

❖ Desires

21. I ___ wish his preaching could be more effective.

- a. Never
- b. Rarely
- c. Sometimes
- d. Often

22. For his preaching to improve, he needs ___.

- a. A more responsive audience
- b. A more intelligent audience
- c. A more godly audience
- d. Things that have nothing to do with the audience

23. I compare his preaching ___.

- a. To the preachers on international radio
- b. To others in our denomination
- c. To no one, as comparison is inherently ungodly
- d. To himself and the capacities God has given him to develop

24. Deep down, I would describe the goal of his instruction as ___.

- a. Church growth
- b. For congregants to learn
- c. Love exhibited in changed lives
- d. To limit the effects of sin in our church

25. His greatest weakness in preaching is (generally) ___.

- a. Not connecting with the congregation
- b. Being boring or irrelevant
- c. Speaking over people's heads intellectually
- d. Repeating himself, i.e., preaching similar themes or using similar illustrations over a period of time

❖ Discernment

For this section, please complete the complementary survey, The Total Christian Leader. Answer those questions for yourself, not the preacher.

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