

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE PUBLIC INVITATION IN THE
PREACHING OF DON WILTON

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty
of the
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Division of Pastoral Ministries

Robby Gallaty

B.G.S., William Carey College, 1998

M.Div., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007

Th.M., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010

December 2011

UMI Number: 3504818

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI 3504818

Copyright 2012 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This edition of the work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

©Copyright 2011

Robert Frederick Gallaty III

All Rights Reserved.

Neither this dissertation nor any part may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.

Report of Dissertation Defense

Candidate: Robby Gallaty

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Preaching

Dissertation Title: A Critical Examination of the Public Invitation in the Preaching of Don Wilton

Date of Defense: October 28, 2011

Approved:

Reggie R. Ogea
Guidance Committee Chairperson

Dennis L. Phelps
Guidance Committee Member

Eddie Campbell
Reader

Preston L. Nix
Chairperson of the Division of Study

Charlie Ray
Associate Dean of Research Doctoral Programs

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
3939 Gentilly Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70126

To Kandi,
my precious wife,
you inspire me to
do great things
for God

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for those who have supported me throughout my academic journey. First, I need to thank my wife, Kandi, who encouraged me every step of the way. Your constant love and support have motivated me to finish. To my children, Rig and Ryder, who inspire me to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. To my mom and dad, thank you for believing in me when no one else did. To my sister, Lori, thank you for always standing by my side. To the members of Immanuel Baptist Church in Morgan City, La. and Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tn., thank you for allowing me to live out the calling that God has on my life. Your prayers and support have spurred me on. To my administrative assistant, Linda Brown, thank you for investing countless hours in proofing my work.

Additionally, I express gratitude to the professors and mentors who have shaped me. To Tim Lafleur and David Platt, thank you for investing in my life. You not only taught me the ways of Christ but you lived them out for me to see. I am indebted to my chairman, Dr. Reggie Ogea. In his class Evangelistic Preaching, I began formulating my

dissertation. R. Alan Streett's book *The Effective Invitation* was the textbook for that class. Thank you for providing guidance and wisdom throughout the process. To Dr. Don Wilton, thank you for loving me like a son. After Kandi and I lost everything we owned in Hurricane Katrina, you brought me on staff at First Baptist Spartanburg and provided me with a place to stay.

Finally, I am eternally grateful for the salvation I have in Christ. In 2002, Jesus forgave me of my sins, exchanged my old life for a new one, adopted me into the family of God, and set me on a path for his namesake. I am amazed by the grace that he has given me. Without him, I am nothing; but with him, I can do all things.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

ABSTRACT xi

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION 1

 Research Question

 Hypotheses

 Definitions of Terms

 Invitation

 Preaching

 Delimitations

 Assumptions

2. STATE OF RESEARCH 8

 History

 Great Awakenings

 Twentieth Century

 Works Discouraging the Use of the Invitation

 Works in Favor of the Invitation

 Importance of the Study

3. METHODOLOGY 27

 Subject of the Study

 Method of Analysis

 Theological Content

Repentance	
Faith	
Preparation of the Invitation	
Transition	
Theological Instruction	
Persuasion	
Motivational Theme	
4. DISCUSSION	40
Analysis of Sermons	
Theological Content	
Repentance	
Faith	
Preparation of the Invitation	
Transition	
Connective Questions	
Connecting the Theme of the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ	
Challenge	
Choice	
Promise from the Word	
Theological Instruction	
Did the Preacher Instruct the Hearers to Repent?	
Were Illustrations Used to Explain the Term?	

Was Biblical Evidence Incorporated?

Did the Preacher Instruct the Hearers to Believe?

Were Illustrations Used to Explain the Term?

Was Biblical Evidence Incorporated?

Did the Preacher Instruct the Hearers to Follow Christ?

Were Illustrations Used to Explain the Term?

Was Biblical Evidence Incorporated?

What Were the Preacher's Final Remarks to the Congregation?

Persuasion

Was the Audience Made Aware that Jesus was the only Way to Salvation?

Was the Invitation Personal?

Motivational Theme

Comments

5. CONCLUSION 109

Summary of the Findings

Theological Content

Preparation of the Invitation

Implications

Suggestions for Further Research

Appendix

1. SERMON ANALYSIS TOOL 124

2. SELECTED SERMONS	128
3. ANALYSIS SUMMARY	133
4. PERSONAL INTERVIEW	136
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	137
VITA	146

ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE PUBLIC INVITATION IN THE PREACHING OF DON WILTON

Robert F. Gallaty, Ph.D.
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Reggie Ogea
Associate Dean, Professional Doctoral Programs;
Professor of Leadership and Pastoral Ministries

The purpose of this dissertation was to answer the question, To what extent does the preaching of Don Wilton utilize the elements of R. Alan Streett's model for extending an invitation? An analysis tool was created according to Streett's *The Effective Invitation*. Then a random sampling of Wilton's sermons was evaluated based on that tool. After examining sixty sermons according to the tool previously outlined, the researcher identified distinctive elements utilized in Wilton's preaching.

The research revealed that Wilton employed Streett's methodology. The research instrument was divided into two major categories: theological content and preparation of the invitation. Wilton incorporated one of the two

theological terms *repentance* and *faith* in 73.3% of the messages analyzed. Although Wilton did not incorporate all four of the elements in every message, he used one of the preparatory techniques in 86.6% of the Old Testament messages and in 88.8% of the New Testament messages.

Wilton's preferred preparatory element was personalizing the invitation. The invitation was personalized to the audience in 86.6% of the sermons, in which he used personal pronouns, questions, and life application. Wilton offered an invitation to the hearers in 82.2% of the New Testament sermons and in 86.6% of the Old Testament sermons. On the whole, he instructed the hearers to respond in 83.3% of the sermons. Subsequently, he instructed his hearers to follow Jesus in 53.8% of the sermons in which he offered an invitation.

In conclusion, the research displayed that the study of an individual preacher could yield insight into preparing and delivering an invitation at the end of a sermon. Streett and Wilton contributed significant elements for the invitation, which provided a basis for concluding the message.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The significance of the hundreds who followed Jesus during his time on earth is undeniable, yet Christ spent most of his ministry investing in twelve men through an intimate discipleship relationship. This discipleship relationship began after Jesus extended the invitation to follow him. The same invitation to follow Christ is available today. How should this invitation be extended? According to John R. W. Stott, "We must never issue an appeal without first making the proclamation. Men must grasp the truth before they are asked to respond to it."¹ Issuing an appeal to respond to Christ is a necessary conclusion to the end of a gospel presentation.

At a time when material devoted to the invitation was scarce, R. Alan Streett published *The Effective Invitation*, a book exclusively devoted to the development and delivery of the invitation. According to the author, two necessary elements must be included in the evangelistic sermon—

¹John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 55.

proclamation and invitation. "Although related to each other in the evangelistic process," explained Streett, "the preaching of the gospel must always precede the call for listeners to respond to its truth. Any sermon that does not include an invitation as well as a proclamation is not New Testament-style preaching."²

Even though Streett's work has circulated through preaching circles for over twenty-five years, no dissertations examined his model. For that matter, a synthesized tool for critiquing a preacher was nonexistent as well. Consequently, the researcher critically evaluated the use of the invitation by examining sermons preached by a contemporary preacher through a sermon analysis tool developed from R. Alan Streett's book *The Effective Invitation*.

Research Question

The research problem focused on the examination of the invitation in the preaching of Don Wilton. Subsequently, the research question was, To what extent does the

²R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 37. Streett outlined the necessary components of a gospel presentation as well as the theological terms necessary for extending a biblical invitation.

preaching of Don Wilton utilize the elements of R. Alan Streett's model for extending an invitation?

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis was that Wilton would use the theological terms outlined in Streett's book in every message preached.³ Second, Wilton would integrate the same theological terms in the conclusion section of his sermons in every case. The third hypothesis was that he would incorporate all four of the elements for preparing an invitation in each of his messages.⁴

Definitions of Terms

Invitation

While many authors have offered a definition of the invitation, Streett provided a clear, concise explanation: "The evangelistic invitation is that act by which the preacher of the gospel exhorts his hearers and instructs them how to appropriate the content of the *kerygma* in their

³Mark captured the words of Jesus as he began his earthly ministry: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." According to Streett, these two terms, *repentance* and *faith*, are the common denominators of the gospel.

⁴If one of the subdivisions is present, the entire category will be counted.

individual lives."⁵ Used eight times in the New Testament, the word *kerygma* is translated as preaching. In contrast to *didache*, or teaching, *kerygma* "signifies not the action of the preacher, but that which he preaches, his message."⁶

According to Streett, two forms of the invitation are used in the New Testament: "The first called sinners to demonstrate publicly their desire to repent and believe and was used as a means of bringing them to a state of conversion. The second called upon new converts, who had been supernaturally transformed by the message, openly to witness to their new-found faith."⁷

Given at the conclusion of the message, the evangelistic invitation is a public appeal to repent of one's sins and respond to Christ through faith.⁸ Appropriately, an invitation can be extended for other decisions: baptism, membership, and mission. However, for this study, the appeal for salvation will be the only area investigated. The term *invitation* is used interchangeably with the terms *appeal*, *public pledge*, and *altar call*.

⁵Streett, 37.

⁶Ibid., 22.

⁷Ibid., 55.

⁸Salvation can and does take place outside of a public appeal issued by a preacher.

Preaching

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix defined preaching as the "oral communication of biblical truth by the Holy Spirit through a human personality to a given audience with the intent of enabling a positive response."⁹ John Stott explained biblical preaching as the art of explaining "the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey him."¹⁰

Delimitations

The nature of the paper required certain delimitations. First, only the messages delivered during the morning service at First Baptist Spartanburg were examined. Even though Wilton preached Sunday night messages, a broader, larger audience attended the morning service.¹¹ Second, whether or not Wilton incorporated doctrinal terms was evaluated; however, his theological presuppositions

⁹Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 27.

¹⁰John R. W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Nottingham, United Kingdom: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 208.

¹¹The makeup of an audience, both believers and unbelievers, influences the development and delivery of the sermon, particularly the invitation. See Michael Duduit, *Stop Preaching and Start Communicating* (Pickering, Ontario: Ontario Castle Quay Books, 2010).

were not considered. Third, Streett did not encourage one form of preaching over another, so the type of sermons Wilton preached, whether textual, expository, topical, or narrative, will not be evaluated. Wilton's preferred manner of preaching was systematic preaching through a book of the Bible.

Additionally, the mode of the invitation was not examined since the recorded messages ended prior to Wilton offering a method for response to sign a card, raise a hand, or bow one's head.¹² Wilton may have clarified or extended the invitation after asking the audience "Would you bow your heads," a saying he closed most of his messages with. However, for this study, the analysis focused only on the data leading up to this saying since the taping of his messages ended at this point.

Assumptions

Certain assumptions were associated with the research. First, the invitation is needed in contemporary preaching. While this discussion cannot be taken up in this paper, the historical section included in this paper discloses the role the invitation has played over the past two centuries.

¹²After a person responds to the gospel, he or she should be directed toward a discipleship group. Due to the scope of this paper, this issue was not addressed.

Second, the invitation is a necessary conclusion at the end of a sermon. The scope of this research did not allow for the defense of extending an invitation. Other works have defended and encouraged the use of the invitation.¹³

Third, human technique alone is unable to draw unbelievers into a relationship with God through Christ. Streett identified the two distinct calls that are extended during the preaching of the Word: the general call and the effectual call. "Although the evangelistic preacher recognizes that most of his audience will reject his appeal, he persists in issuing an invitation, knowing that the Holy Spirit will take the universal call and turn it into a specific call for some."¹⁴ Concisely, unbelievers are born again through the divine work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Fourth, the examination of a contemporary preacher identifies implementations for extending an invitation.

¹³Mark Tolbert in his article "The Integrity of the Invitation" presented a case for the invitation: "The church needs a revitalized view and practice of the public evangelistic invitation. . . . It is my contention that we need to recognize that the public evangelistic invitation is a tool of great integrity, biblically and historically." See Mark Tolbert, "The Integrity of the Invitation," *The Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 6, vol. 2 (fall 2009): 89-94. See also Street, *The Effective Invitation*, 55-107 and Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 36-59.

¹⁴Streett, 242.

¹⁵See 2 Cor. 2:6-16 and Jn. 3:3-6.

CHAPTER 2

STATE OF RESEARCH

History

The Bible is filled with instances of the Lord calling people to respond publicly. The first instance is God's summoning Adam to step forth from hiding after disobeying his command to avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:8). Moreover, the Lord extended an invitation to Abraham to leave his comfortable surroundings for an unknown place. Upon Abraham's obedience to the call, God fashioned a people for himself (Gen. 12:1-4).

Joshua, facing a similar challenge as Moses did when he persuaded the people to turn from idols and return to Lord, cried out to the people, "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).¹

¹All references are from the English Standard Version.

At the outset of Jesus' earthly ministry, he began by preaching a gospel of repentance and faith: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). Jesus said to would-be followers, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).

Jesus called Zacchaeus to come down from the tree he had climbed, Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and a despised woman to come out of the crowd (Lk. 19:1-10; Jn. 11; and Lk. 8:44). Likewise, the Great Commission speaks of baptizing new believers as a means for publicly identifying with the movement of Jesus. The New Testament is filled with instances of people responding to the invitation to follow Christ.

Great Awakenings

In the same manner, history, supporting the biblical model, is filled with men and women publicly responding to the gospel message. While instances of a public invitation being issued prior to the First and Second Great Awakenings are recorded, extensive documented evidence exists during

this period.² In his article "Invitations with Integrity," Mark Tolbert wrote, "The early Anabaptists helped bring a return to the use of the invitation. . . . They were faithful in calling for repentance of sins, faith in Christ, and the outward sign of believer's baptism."³ At the conclusion of the proclamation of the Word, preachers invited unbelievers to repent and believe.

Throughout the nineteenth century, God used evangelists such as Charles Finney, D. L. Moody, and Absalom B. Earle. The prominent spokesperson of the three was Finney. Finney disclosed the gospel with simplicity and clarity, making his presentation easy for the hearer to respond to his message.⁴ The evolution of the invitation is traceable to Finney's "new measures." W. Glyn Evans described the measures: (1) "Services were held at unseasonable hours and often continued for days in order to break down the congregation;" (2) "Prayers were highly

²David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, eds., *Whosoever Will* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 242-44. Street identified preachers who offered an invitation from the Roman Catholics (twelfth century), the Anabaptists (sixteenth century), and the Reformers (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).

³Tolbert, 92.

⁴Finney has been criticized for his theology and invitation tactics. Due to the scope of this paper, these issues were not covered.

emotional and hortative in content;" (3) "Women were allowed to pray in mixed assemblies;" (4) "The speaker used harsh, colloquial, and direct language;" (5) "The speaker named specific individuals in praying and preaching;" (6) "Prayer circles were introduced, as were inquiring meetings and personal counseling of converts;" and (7) "The anxious bench was used."⁵ In the early years of his ministry, Finney asked individuals to remain after the service for a time of consultation. As a result of the overwhelming response, he was forced to direct responders to small rooms in various buildings throughout the town. During the Rochester campaign, "inquirers were asked to come forward and occupy a front pew."⁶ Finney has been credited as the creator of the invitation system, but Streett disagreed with this assumption: "By the time Finney stepped onto the scene the public invitation had been practiced in one form or another for over a century."⁷

⁵See W. Glyn Evans, "A Survey of Evangelism in America," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (1971): 168.

⁶Robert Lynn Asa, "The Theology and Methodology of Charles G. Finney as a Prototype for Modern Mass Evangelism" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1983), 205-6.

⁷R. Alan Streett, "The Public Invitation and Calvinism," in *Whosoever Will*, eds. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 245.

In a comparable manner, Moody challenged unbelievers to respond to the message by standing to be saved. Commenting on Moody's style, Charles Spurgeon admitted, "I believe that it is a great help in bringing people to a decision when Mr. Moody asks those to stand who wish to be prayed for. Anything that tends to separate you from the ungodly around you is good for you."⁸ Moody incorporated music during the invitation by recruiting Ira Sankey to lead worship for his revival meetings.⁹ In an attempt to unite neighboring churches, Sankey contacted local music leaders with the intention of compiling a choir to supplement his singing.

Baptist evangelist Absalom B. Earle popularized the use of the commitment card by calling people to sign a pledge at the end of the sermon. Commenting on Earle's approach, John Pollock outlined his method: "Each person who came forward signed a card to indicate a pledge to live a Christian life and to show a church preference. This

⁸Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 97.

⁹Sankey left his government job to travel with Moody around the world. He understood the nature of crusade ministry since he was converted at sixteen during a revival meeting at Kings Chapel Church.

portion of the card was retained by the personal worker, so some type of follow-up could be worked out."¹⁰

Twentieth Century

Since the beginning of his public ministry, Billy Graham offered the invitation as his preferred ending to the sermon. Graham masterfully weaved transitions throughout the message as a rhetorical technique for drawing in his hearers. His preferred transitional element was questions.¹¹ Streett outlined the keys to Graham's effectiveness in delivering an invitation: a divine calling, a divine message, a divine arsenal, and a divine enablement.¹² From the outset of the message, Graham called sinners to contemplate their position before a holy God: "He [Graham] consciously issues these initial appeals in an effort to prepare the people for the final call."¹³

¹⁰John Pollock, *Crusaders: Twenty Years with Billy Graham* (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1969), 8.

¹¹Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 117.

¹²Ibid., 121-30. Street clarified the explanation to Graham's effectiveness: "Can charm, good looks, an all-American mystique, hypnotic eyes, or a seductive voice offer an adequate explanation? Obviously not." Graham's ministry proved to be a divine work of God.

¹³Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 116.

Graham has received criticism over his use of the invitation. In defense of his practice, he declared, "Some who are against public evangelistic invitations go to almost any length using the appeal in personal evangelism. If it is right to ask a single sinner to repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ, why is it not right to ask a whole audience to do the same?"¹⁴ Since an individual gospel presentation ends with a call for repentance and faith, a corporate presentation should follow suit.

Works Discouraging the Use of the Invitation

Everyone was not in favor of extending an invitation at the conclusion of a sermon. In fact, Jim Ehrhard, Iain Murray, and Errol Hulse have discouraged the offering of an invitation. Ehrhard identified three dangers associated with calling hearers to respond for salvation at the end of a gospel message. First, preachers should avoid promoting something that is not promoted in Scripture. Second, the preacher can enter into the practice of eliciting an emotional response based upon the persuasiveness or personality of the preacher. Third, preachers should not

¹⁴O. S. Hawkins, *Drawing the Net: 30 Practical Principles for Leading Others to Christ Publicly and Personally* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 59. The author used the word *receive* interchangeably with the word *believe*.

associate walking the aisle with salvation.¹⁵ For the most part, Ehrhard relied upon psychology rather than Scripture to prove his point. While he was not suggesting a complete dismissal of the invitation at the conclusion of the sermon, he nonetheless warned against placing an emphasis on attaching coming forward at the end of a worship service with salvation.

In *The Invitation System*, Iain Murray argued that unbelievers are unable to choose Christ so an invitation to repent and believe should not be offered. He determined, "This [responding to an invitation] is an attempt to work out his own standing before God by his own efforts. It is this natural tendency to do something of merit that prompts many to respond to the evangelist's appeal."¹⁶ In addition to providing a historical study of three continents, David Bennett, in *The Altar Call*, denied the use of the invitation in the preaching of John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards.¹⁷ Categorically, the

¹⁵Jim Ehrhard, "The Dangers of the Invitation System," *Reformation and Revival* 2 (summer 1993): 77-83.

¹⁶Iain Murray, *The Invitation System* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1964), 23.

¹⁷David Bennett, *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

author argued against emotionally charged invitations fortified with manipulative techniques.

Errol Hulse's misrepresentative title *The Great Invitation* could mislead potential readers into thinking he was in favor of an altar call; however, he presented a favorable case for the other side. After providing a historical look at the use of the invitation or lack thereof, the author devoted a portion of the book to contradicting popular passages used in defense of the altar call: Christ's compassionate invitation to the weary (Matt. 11:27-8), Christ's knocking at the door of the hearts of unbelievers (Rev. 3:20), and the gospel invitation to the thirsty (Rev. 22:17).

Hulse stated, "Easy-believism has done incalculable harm to the churches and to the testimony of Christianity. . . . What I have called the 'new evangelical sacrament' could, if combined with the humanism and subjectivism which pervade our Western culture, lead the professing Christian church into another dark age."¹⁸ The author suggested six key problems of extending the invitation to everyone: (1) "Do sinners have the right to believe?" (2) "Is man or woman really responsible?" (3) "Is God sincere in his

¹⁸Erroll Hulse, *The Great Invitation* (Laurel, MS: Audubon Press Edition, 2006), 170.

invitations?" (4) "How can one reconcile the doctrines of grace with the Great Invitation?" (5) "Does God love everyone?" (6) "Does God prepare sinners for the new birth?"¹⁹ Hulse described how one's doctrinal view of salvation plays an important role in the offering of an altar call.

George Sweazey, in *Effective Evangelism: The Greatest Work in the World*, addressed individuals who view the invitation as a tactic for manipulation: "The fear that giving an invitation in a public meeting may lead people to do something for which they are not ready must be balanced against the fear that not giving an invitation may keep people from doing something for which they are ready. . . . To stir people religiously without giving them anything they can do about it leaves them far worse off than they were before."²⁰ He summarized this section by adding, "An evangelistic sermon which issues only in advice to give the matter thought simply strengthens this habit of evasion."²¹ On the whole, the authors argued against the use of

¹⁹Ibid., 53-88.

²⁰George E. Sweazey, *Effective Evangelism: The Greatest Work in the World* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), 174.

²¹Ibid.

manipulative techniques to entice hearers into responding solely on their own works-based righteousness.

Works in Favor of the Invitation

In *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, John Broadus addressed contextual issues in preaching through the development of functional and formal elements of the sermon. Although Broadus did not use the word *invitation* or provide guidance on extending an invitation in his book, he did not dissuade preachers from calling hearers to action. However, Broadus cautioned preachers against forcing the invitation in every message: "It is quite wrong to suppose, as some preachers appear to do, that every sermon must end with a pathetic or overwhelming appeal."²² In his address at the Yale Lectures on Preaching, Broadus suggested that "every sermon must do three things: convince the judgment, touch the emotions, and secure a response from the will."²³

Very few books have been written on the invitation and even fewer books in print support the use of the invitation.

²²John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., rev. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 113. Broadus addressed the invitation in the conclusion section.

²³John Broadus, "Yale Lectures on Preaching" (Louisville, KY: Boyce Digital Library, 1889, photocopied) in *Evangelistic Preaching*, Roy H. Short (Nashville: Tidings General Board of Evangelism, 1946), 65.

In 1945, Faris D. Whitesell wrote an important work focusing on sixty-five ways to extend the invitation. In the preface, he described the scarcity of books about this subject: "I have not been able to find a single book devoted to the topic."²⁴ The diversity expressed in his book allows for multiple methods of the invitation. Before disclosing his methods, Whitesell made a case for the invitation coming at the conclusion of an evangelistic message:

The whole drive of such preaching reaches a logical climax in the appeal. Without the invitation the evangelistic message is incomplete and the effect of the message unknown. An evangelistic invitation is an appeal to make a public response to the claims of Christ. . . . The evangel of God's redeeming love deserves an immediate and whole-hearted response, and the invitation calls upon men to make that response in some public manner.²⁵

Later in the book he stated, "The invitation is the most important and exacting part of the evangelistic service."²⁶

In *Giving a Good Invitation*, Roy J. Fish, Southern Baptist preacher and professor, affirmed, "To my knowledge, only one book has been written which was devoted entirely

²⁴Faris D. Whitesell, *65 Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1947), 9.

²⁵Ibid., 11.

²⁶Ibid., 22.

to the subject."²⁷ Apparently, Fish was unaware of O. Dean Martin, who published a similar work on the invitation.²⁸ Although both books are small in size, they are helpful in outlining a formula for delivering an invitation. Surprisingly, neither author addressed a pattern for developing an invitation. Streett's work, published twenty years later, outlined a framework for the methodology of constructing and delivering an invitation.

Another significant book supporting the use of the invitation is *Stand Up and Be Counted* by R. T. Kendall. Kendall, a well-known Baptist pastor of the Westminster Chapel, argued for the use of the "public pledge."²⁹ "I believe," Kendall stated, "that presenting the opportunity of the public pledge to the non-Christian is one way of bringing people to conversion."³⁰ He argued that the pledge should not be added to the end of the message in the same manner a postscript would be included at the end of a

²⁷Roy J. Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 5. He referenced Whitesell's book *65 Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations*.

²⁸O. Dean Martin, *Invite: What Do You Do After the Sermon?* (Nashville: Tidings, 1973). Martin published his book a year before Fish's came out.

²⁹Kendall interchanged the word *invitation* with the *public pledge*.

³⁰Kendall, 22.

letter. The preacher should plan, ponder, and construct a response with the same fervor used in developing the body of the sermon. Kendall affirmed, "The invitation to stand up and be counted is God's way of saying, 'I want you—now.'"³¹ Kendall made a strong case for extending an invitation by stating its purpose as calling unbelievers to confess Christ. Although he provided a useful appendix devoted to clarifying questions surrounding the invitation, a how-to section focusing on extending the invitation was absent.

In *Call and Response: Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism*, Walter Klaiber explained the need for the invitation: "The call to decision is among the most obvious and most controversial characteristics of 'classical' evangelization. . . . For many, this is the core of evangelization by which the hearers receive that aid to decision which they need in order to make firm their commitment to God."³² The invitation is the aid to which he is referring.

³¹Ibid., 25.

³²Walter Klaiber, *Call and Response: Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism*, trans. Howard Perry-Trauthig and James A. Dwyer (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 204.

Written to a pastoral audience, O. S. Hawkins's book *Drawing the Net: 30 Practical Principles for Leading Others to Christ Publicly and Personally* offers helpful principles for extending both a personal and a public invitation. "The public decision helps seal the personal decision which precedes it."³³ The weakness of this work lies in the lack of attention given to developing the message prior to offering an invitation. If the invitation is a stand-alone item in the message, a book outlining principles for leading others to Christ, as seen in Hawkins's work, would be highly beneficial to the preacher; however, the sermon is an interconnected piece of a broader picture that hinges on aforementioned material communicated in the message.

Author and professor Ramesh Richard is in favor of extending an invitation at the conclusion of the message. Offering practical advice in *Preparing Evangelistic Sermons*, Richard suggested asking three questions about the invitation: "What are you [the preacher] calling for? Are the terms clear? Is the response mechanism or process clear?"³⁴ William Oscar Thompson, in his dissertation "The Public Invitation as a Method of Evangelism," probed the

³³Hawkins, 61.

³⁴Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Evangelistic Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 234.

biblical, historical, and theological origins of the public invitation as a means of evangelism. Thompson identified six major evangelical groups who integrated the public invitation at the end of the sermon, giving specific attention to Southern Baptists.³⁵

R. Alan Streett served as a pastor for ten years prior to assuming his present role as Professor of Evangelism and Pastoral Ministry at Criswell College in Dallas, Texas. He is also the editor of the *Criswell Theological Review*. His book *The Effective Invitation* originally began as his Ph.D. dissertation at The California Graduate School of Theology before being published in 1984. Streett's dissertation is entitled "The Public Invitation: Its Nature, Biblical Validity, and Practicability."³⁶

The book begins by establishing the starting point of every evangelistic invitation, the preaching of the Word. While most books leave the reader wondering how to develop an effective invitation, Streett broke down each individual element by devoting two chapters to defining pertinent

³⁵William Oscar Thompson, "The Public Invitation as a Method of Evangelism: Its Origin and Development" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979).

³⁶R. Alan Streett, "The Public Invitation: Its Nature, Biblical Validity, and Practicability" (Ph.D. diss., California Graduate School of Theology, 1982).

terms such as *preaching, proclamation, gospel, evangelize,* and *evangelist* in order to eliminate ambiguity. The author even devoted an entire section to answering critics of the public invitation.

The appendices located in the back of the book are practical tools to assist the preacher in developing and delivering an effective invitation. Streett offered biblical and practical illustrations dealing with faith and repentance. Next, an entire section is devoted to the motivating themes for the invitation. Some examples of these themes are peace of mind, desire for eternal life, strength to face a crisis, and the wrath of God.

Finally, Streett incorporated an entire section responding to opponents of the use of the invitation at the conclusion of a message. He demonstrated a fair assessment of the argument by explaining weaknesses and strengths of the use and disuse of the invitation.³⁷ Dismantling the idea that the Bible is devoid of examples of the public invitation, Streett identified countless instances of the Old Testament saints, Jesus, and the apostles extending an invitation to follow God. In addition to citing Scripture,

³⁷Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 236. Streett identified three points of contention in this section: historical concerns, theological concerns, and biblical concerns.

he examined the lives of reformed preachers such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, stating instances of both men asking inquirers seeking "salvation to meet with them privately for spiritual counsel."³⁸

In addition to his work on the invitation, Streett contributed chapters for the *Apologetic Study Bible*, *Baker's Dictionary of World Religions and New Religious Movements*, and *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of World Civilization*.³⁹ Streett created the gospel tract *How Do You Plead?*, which was distributed throughout the U.S. and Europe. He is a recognized source on the subject of evangelism and the invitation.⁴⁰

Importance of the Study

Contemporary preachers are eliminating the use of the invitation at the conclusion of the message. Whitesell stated, "Of one thing we can be certain: the gospel

³⁸Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 240.

³⁹Biographical information obtained from http://www.presidentsclass.org/About_the_Teacher/Dr%20Streett%20bio.pdf (accessed 16 January 2011).

⁴⁰Commenting on *The Effective Invitation*, Charles C. Bing wrote, "It will surely be worth the price for those who are privileged to preach the gospel." See Charles C. Bing, "The Effective Invitation," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (1984), online; available from <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/bookreviews/streett.htm> (accessed 10 January 2011).

deserves a response. Christ's call to men expects an answer. We should preach for a verdict just as a lawyer pleads with a jury for a decision in favor of his client."⁴¹ An evangelistic sermon should conclude with a call to respond to Christ, for without proper direction, the audience is left wondering about how to respond to the message.

The debate over the use or disuse of the invitation necessitates a study examining the effectiveness of a particular model in the life of an established pastor. As already stated, dissertations examining Streett's model for extending an invitation are nonexistent. For that matter, a synthesized tool for critiquing a preacher's invitation is absent as well. Moreover, the sermon analysis tool developed from Streett's book will determine whether his model was used in the preaching of a contemporary pastor. Even though Wilton is a popular television preacher and accomplished author, no one has written a dissertation examining his preaching. Through the lens of an established model, the researcher examined Don Wilton's preaching in this study.

⁴¹Whitesell, 44.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will provide an overview of the study. A biography describing the subject of the study will be presented. Next, a summary of the methodology will be disclosed, explaining the process for acquiring and examining the chosen sermons. Finally, a sermon guide, created from Streett's book *The Effective Invitation*, will be explained section by section.

Subject of the Study

The selected contemporary preacher is Don Wilton, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Spartanburg, South Carolina. The church has a membership of over seven thousand people. Additionally, Wilton is president of *The Encouraging Word*, a weekly television program that airs his preaching and teaching of the Word of God across the United States. Before moving to South Carolina eighteen years ago, Wilton served on the faculty of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has occupied seats on numerous

boards and continues to teach on university and seminary campuses.

He has proclaimed God's Word around the world in crusades and revival evangelism, conference speaking, and as a regular speaker for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Schools of Evangelism and at The Cove, the Graham Training Center in Asheville, North Carolina. Furthermore, Billy Graham has gone on record naming Don Wilton as his pastor.¹ He has preached events with Charles Stanley and David Jeremiah as part of their ministries and was elected the annual preacher of the Southern Baptist Convention² as well as President of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.³ Wilton authored *Starting for the Finish*,

¹Don Kirkland, "Billy Graham's 'Big Surprise': Joins Spartanburg First Baptist Church," *Baptist Courier*, December 31, 2008, online; available from <http://www.baptistcourier.com/3052.article> (accessed 11 January 2011).

²According to the website, the Southern Baptist Convention "has grown to over 16 million members who worship in more than 42,000 churches in the United States." The Southern Baptist Convention, "Meet Southern Baptists," The Official Website of the Southern Baptist Convention, online; available from <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus> (accessed 31 October 2011).

³The South Carolina Baptist Convention is made up of Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina and is "autonomous and independent from the local associations." The Southern Baptist Convention, "State Convention," The Official Website of the Southern Baptist Convention, online; available from <http://www.sbc.net/stateconvention.asp?state=SC> (accessed 31 October 2011).

*Totally Secure, The Absolute Certainty of Life after Death, When God Prayed Down, See You at the Finish Line, and A Hope and a Future: Overcoming Discouragement.*⁴ In addition, he has written many publications, manuals, and reviews for the Southern Baptist Convention, *Preaching*, and *Decision* magazines.

Method of Analysis

The selected sermons were generated from a random sampling technique. Over his eighteen-year tenure at First Baptist Spartanburg, Don Wilton has preached 842 messages during the Sunday morning worship services, preaching from the Old Testament 161 times and from the New Testament 681 times. The recorded sermons prior to 2004 are inconsistent in chronicling the entire message; therefore, the study focused on the sermons preached after January 2004.⁵ Between the years 2004 and 2010, Wilton preached 60 sermons from the Old Testament and 264 from the New Testament. Sixty-

⁴In *Totally Secure*, Wilton answered the question, "Am I really going to heaven?" His second book, *See You at the Finish Line*, offers encouragement to finish the race by leading the reader through the Book of Hebrews. In *The Absolute Certainty of Life after Death*, Wilton explained the story of Lazarus and the rich man in a twenty-first-century context. Finally, Wilton taught theological truths from Jesus' high priestly prayer in *When God Prayed Down*.

⁵Audio, video, and written transcripts of Wilton's messages were available for every message examined.

five sermons, 20% of the total number of sermons preached during this time, were selected by proportionally choosing 80 percent (50) from the New Testament and 20 percent (15) from the Old Testament.

Under the direction of Bill Day, each of the Old Testament and New Testament sermons was assigned an integer which was inserted into the sequence generator at random.org. After fifteen Old Testament and fifty New Testament sermons were generated, the sixty-five sermons were analyzed to answer the research question.⁶

Next, a selected sample of sermons was examined through an assessment tool developed from Streett's book *The Effective Invitation*. The analysis tool consisted of two major sections: theological terms and preparatory elements. Each of the sixty-five sermons was analyzed twice. The first observation concentrated on the sermon as a whole, looking specifically for the theological terms. The second observation concentrated on the conclusion of the sermon, prior to the closing prayer.⁷

⁶Bill Day, Gurney Professor of Evangelism and Church Health at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, affirmed that 20% of the total number of sermons was a sufficient sampling of Wilton's preaching.

⁷Wilton ended the majority of his messages with the words "would you bow your heads with me?"

Theological Content

As previously mentioned, the first section of the sermon analysis tool focused on the content of the message. The theological content section, as cited in Streett's book *The Effective Invitation*, identified the use of two words essential for salvation: *faith* and *repentance*.⁸

Repentance

Repentance carries the meaning of the Old Testament word *teshuva*, signifying "to go back again or to return."⁹ It means to change one's mind about something or to change one's direction. The prophets used this word as a clarion call to return to God. "A reversal of one's thinking," according to Roland Q. Leavell, "will result in an alteration of one's way of living."¹⁰ Repentance is found in two forms in the Bible: repentance unto salvation—starting

⁸When Jesus began his earthly ministry, he explained the kingdom by combining two theological terms: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; *repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mark 1:15, emphasis added). Streett explained these two terms in his chapter on the theological content of the invitation.

⁹Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 996.

¹⁰Roland Q. Leavell, *Evangelism: Christ's Imperative Commission* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 49.

a relationship with Christ, and repentance unto sanctification—continuing a relationship with Christ.¹¹ “The first call the gospel preacher must give in his invitation,” declared Street “is that of repentance.”¹² Only repentance preceding salvation will be examined in this study.

Faith

Faith is conviction based on the testimony that something is true. The verb form of the word *faith* is used 242 times in the New Testament. The Greek word *pistis* can be translated as “belief,” “trust,” or “reliance upon someone or something.” *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines faith as “considering something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust.”¹³ The object of one’s faith is the good news of Jesus Christ dying on the cross, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven. Like repentance, faith prior to salvation was examined for this study. Streett highlighted the importance of

¹¹Paul explained repentance in 1 Thess. 1:9.

¹²Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 43.

¹³William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 816.

identifying these two terms: "Repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are the two steps every person must take to be saved. For this reason, every invitation should call upon hearers to take these required steps."¹⁴

Preparation of the Invitation

Moreover, the second section examined the preparation of the invitation. The four divisions of this section are: the transition, theological instruction, persuasion, and motivational theme.¹⁵ The researcher analyzed these four elements during the conclusion of the message.

Transition

A vital and often overlooked aspect of the invitation is the use of transitional statements to draw people to the Lord. An invitation linked to the end of a sermon eliminates distractions that otherwise exist from using a delayed approach. Streett believed the challenge

for many preachers is moving from the main body of the message into the invitation without an abrupt

¹⁴Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 40.

¹⁵Six elements comprise this section. Since the researcher assumed that the preacher prayed prior to preaching the sermon, this element was omitted from the study. Additionally, the type of response Wilton extended was not analyzed because the sermons ended prior to the closing prayer.

break. . . . It is important that this transition be smooth. An apparent disjuncture in the sermon will distract the audience, drawing their attention to the sermon's structure and away from the message. If this happens, you will be forced to win back their attention. The way to avoid this is to use a connective or transitional statement.¹⁶

Streett identified four types of transitions: a connective question, a challenge, a choice, and a promise.

Connective questions aid the preacher in moving the audience from the body of the message to the invitation. One avenue for inserting a question is to pose a scriptural question to the audience such as "What do you think of Christ?" (Matt. 22:42) and then to answer it biblically the way God would. "The use of connective questions," declared Streett, "is especially adaptable to evangelistic sermons which have as their central theme the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ."¹⁷

Streett offered a few examples of a choice: "You have heard the truth. What are you going to do about it? You have to make a choice. You cannot remain neutral. . . . You may wish to ask a scriptural question such as, 'What think ye of Christ (Matt. 22:42) or 'How long halt ye between two

¹⁶Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 154.

¹⁷Ibid.

opinions?' (1 Kgs. 18:21)."¹⁸ Highlighting a scriptural statement from the Bible is an example of a transitional promise.

Theological Instruction

In addition to transitional statements, theological instructions are equally important. "Once the transition has been successfully completed," commented Streett, "it is imperative that you instruct your listeners how to be saved."¹⁹ According to Streett, three concepts must be present in every gospel invitation: repent, believe, and follow. Proper illustrations and biblical evidence are "for the sake of clarity. . . . If people do not know what *repent* means, they will be confused and intellectually unable to take the necessary step toward salvation."²⁰ Clear instructions guide the hearer in responding to the message.

Persuasion

Explanation and instruction alone may be insufficient for a person to respond to an invitation to follow Christ.

¹⁸Ibid., 154-55.

¹⁹Ibid., 155.

²⁰Ibid., 155-56. Appendices A and B in his book contain illustrations and Scriptures dealing with faith and repentance.

After the message is delivered, the preacher should persuade the hearers to respond. The Apostle Paul, highlighting the motivation behind his ministry, divulged to the Corinthian church, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we *persuade* others" (2 Cor. 5:11). The invitation should "persuade men to repent of their sins, trust in Christ to save them, and openly confess him before men."²¹ Two major divisions comprised this section: First, the audience is made aware that Jesus is the only way to salvation, and second, the invitation must be personal.²²

Two questions were asked: Was the audience made aware that Jesus is the only way to salvation, and was the invitation personal?²³ Streett believed the aim of the invitation should be "to obtain a favorable verdict on the spot, calling each individual in your audience to embrace the truth of the gospel and yield to Christ as Lord and Savior."²⁴ The preacher can personalize the invitation by speaking directly to the hearers. Using personal pronouns

²¹Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 157.

²²Ibid., 156.

²³A question addressing unifying Scriptures was not asked since it was covered in another section of the analysis tool.

²⁴Street, *The Effective Invitation*, 159.

such as *you* or *your* in place of *they* and *them* concentrate on the person rather than the group.²⁵

Motivational Theme

The final element in the preparation of the invitation is the use of a motivational theme. "A topic of interest [motivational theme]," believed Streett, "will help the hearer to see his need for salvation and lead him to make the appropriate response."²⁶ The author recommended introducing a motivational theme in every invitation which connected to the central theme of the message. Introducing a new concept at this point, one that was not addressed in the body of the message, disconnects the message from the invitation.

Building the invitation around a theme, suggested Streett, develops continuity and bridges the gap toward the invitation. Examples of this can appear in the form of an "illustration from the pages of the Bible, such as the parable," or an "exhortation with an illustration from contemporary life." Streett provided reasoning for building a theme: "Let us say you choose, for example, the danger of delaying a decision for Christ. You have already completed

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

developing a transitional statement and drafting instructions about the necessity of repenting, trusting, and confessing so that the people will clearly understand what is expected of them. Now, through the motivating theme, you will attempt to move them to the appropriate action."²⁷ The theme of the invitation was examined to determine continuity with the theme of the message.

The methodology for this study has been shaped by various dissertations. In preparation for his dissertation, Jim Shaddix created an analysis tool to analyze the elements in the preaching of Richard Allen Jackson to identify implications for sermonic delivery.²⁸ Likewise, Tony Merida created a sermon analysis tool from Bryan Chappell's book *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Merida examined John Piper's sermons through a tool to determine whether there was a Christocentric element in his preaching.²⁹ Reginald Bridges, in a similar fashion, formed a research instrument from Ramesh Richard's evangelistic preaching

²⁷Ibid., 162.

²⁸James Lynn Shaddix, "A Critical Examination of the Decisional Preaching of Richard Allen Jackson" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996).

²⁹Tony Merida, "The Christocentric Emphasis in John Piper's Expository Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006).

work, which he used to evaluate Robert L. Hamblin's preaching.³⁰ Comparably, the researcher investigated the effectiveness of Streett's methodology by analyzing a contemporary preacher.

³⁰Reginald L. Bridges, "A Critical Examination of the Evangelistic Preaching of Robert L. Hamblin" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007).

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Sermons

The purpose of this chapter is to report on the findings of Wilton's use of the invitation using two major categories: theological content and preparation of the invitation.¹ Two subdivisions make up the theological content section: repentance and faith. Within the preparation of the invitation section, four subdivisions are identified: (1) transition, (2) theological instruction, (3) persuasion, and (4) motivational theme. Finally, Wilton's use of the invitation is examined to determine whether or not he connected the central theme of the message with the theme of the invitation. The results of each section will be explained before providing a summary of each category.

After contacting First Baptist Spartanburg, the researcher could not locate "God's Eternal Timeline" and "Ultimate Motherhood." "The Greatest Lesson Ever Learned"

¹The words *sermon* and *message* are used interchangeably.

was preached only once but was included twice in the church's master copy list under the dates April 15 and 22 of 2007. Also, two other sermons were cited twice on the master list, "The Impact of the Spirit" and "The Lord's Supper." Therefore, the total number of New Testament sermons was reduced from fifty to forty-five, which reduced the total sermons evaluated to sixty. The number of Old Testament sermons remained the same at fifteen.

Theological Content

Locating the frequency of the words *repentance* and *faith* in the body of the message comprised this section. Although the analysis specifically focuses on the invitation, the theological content of the sermon identifies the framework of each message. Whether Wilton instructed the audience to believe, repent, and follow Christ was examined in another section of the tool.

The researcher examined whether or not Wilton used the words *repentance* or *faith* leading up to the invitation, which provided a framework for the preacher to build upon prior to offering an appeal at the conclusion of the sermon. By identifying these words, the researcher recognized connections between the body and invitation of the message.

Whenever the text included the words *repentance* and *faith*, Wilton was more likely to incorporate these terms in his message. When the words were absent from the passage, he rarely used the words in his message. Wilton incorporated two other words interchangeably with *repentance*: *turn* and *confess*. Additionally, he substituted the words *belief* and *trust* in place of *faith*.

Repentance

Wilton mentioned the word *repentance* in 16.6% of the sermons. Within the body of the message, only two of the Old Testament sermons contained some form of the word *repentance*: "God Bless America" and "Where are You?" In "Where are You?" Wilton used the word *repentance* four times, providing the audience with Scripture references and a detailed explanation of the term. He declared, "The Bible says, 'repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out,' and the word *repentance* there literally means that you and I are in the presence of a Holy and a Righteous God."²

Eight sermons in the New Testament contained some form of the word *repentance* for a total of 17.7%. In "Who Really

²Don Wilton, "Where Are You?" Sermon based on Gen. 3:1-24. DVD. May 23, 2010.

Killed Jesus?" Wilton explained the need for his hearers to recognize the enormity of their sin. He closed this section by stating, "That's why I cannot come to know Jesus Christ unless I first recognize my own sin. It's impossible to be saved unless I confess that sin to the only one who paid the wage for my sin."³ In place of repentance, he highlighted the need for confessing one's sin to God. The same substitution was incorporated six times in his message "The Lord's Supper." In the middle of this sermon, he walked the hearers through a prayer: "I confess my sin through the Lord Jesus Christ to God my Father. I'm sorry for my sin."⁴

Wilton used the word *turn* interchangeably throughout "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" After disclosing a clear presentation of the gospel, he deliberately explained in detail the necessity of and process for repentance.⁵ The words *turn* and *repentance* were used seventeen times throughout this message, with most of the occurrences

³Don Wilton, "Who Really Killed Jesus?" Sermon based on Lk. 23:1-49. DVD. February 22, 2004.

⁴Don Wilton, "The Lord's Supper." Sermon based on 1 Cor. 11:17-34. DVD. November 23, 2008.

⁵Don Wilton, "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" Sermon based on Jn. 14:1-6. DVD. July 31, 2005. Of all the sermons examined, this message was the clearest explanation of the gospel.

appearing in a span of three minutes. Using an illustration from Billy Graham to explain his point, he quoted Graham as saying, "It is necessary when you give your heart to Jesus that you turn away from yourself, and you turn toward Jesus Christ. That is repentance." He further clarified the term for the audience by explaining repentance as a "complete about turn."

Even though an explanation of the term *repentance* was found in only one of the Old Testament sermons, Wilton offered a thorough description. Using Gen. 3:1-24 as his text, Wilton underlined the need for repentance as a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden. Before charging the hearers to repent, he provided a litany of consequences from the fall, presenting the need for repentance as one's only entrance to a relationship with a holy God.⁶ Only three of the nine sermons where he used the word contained an explanation of the term. For the most part, Wilton mentioned the term without leading the audience through a process for returning to God.

⁶Wilton, "Where Are You?" The list of consequences included banishment from the presence of God, separation from him, ruined fellowship, damnation for eternity, and a disconnected relationship.

Faith

The word *faith* was used in 70% of the sermons examined. The majority of the sermons came from the New Testament (35). Wilton mentioned some form of the term in seven of the Old Testament sermons. In his message "God Bless America," Wilton described how a person grounded in his or her allegiance to Christ should vote in this country. As with repentance, Wilton coupled the word *faith* with *trust* by challenging the audience to put "faith and trust in him [Jesus] alone."⁷ The other Old Testament message that stood out in this category was appropriately titled "When Your Faith is Tested." This message addressed the testing of Abraham by following the command of God to sacrifice his son. Thirty-two times the word *faith* was interspersed throughout this sermon.⁸

Moreover, the three prominent sermons integrating the word *faith* from the New Testament were from chapter 11 of Hebrews. From 2002 to 2005, Wilton preached through the Book of Hebrews, slowing down in chapter 11 to preach twenty-five sermons. He diverted from systematically

⁷Don Wilton, "God Bless America." Sermon based on Is. 1:10-31. DVD. October 31, 2004.

⁸Don Wilton, "When Your Faith Is Tested." Sermon based on Gen. 22:1-19. DVD. August 27, 2006.

preaching through the Book of Hebrews to preach on different topics or special events. In his message "The Decisive Dead," Wilton used a form of the word *faith* twenty-eight times, with most of the occurrences appearing during the invitation as he summarized the message.⁹

The term was used twenty-two times in the message "The Super Dead." On multiple occasions, the audience was given a detailed explanation of the term. In the middle of the sermon, he explained, "Faith is doing even though I do not see. Faith is obeying even though I cannot comprehend what's going on. Faith is being willing to take God at his word."¹⁰ Even though Wilton provided a detailed explanation in these two messages, he normally avoided clarifying the term. In the New Testament, he provided an explanation of faith in 13% of the sermons he preached. Of the fifteen Old Testament messages, Wilton did not explain the term in any.

Preparation of the Invitation

After determining whether or not the words *repentance* and *faith* were found in the introduction and body of the sermon, the invitation portion of the message revealed

⁹Don Wilton, "The Decisive Dead." Sermon based on Heb. 11:23. DVD. February 29, 2004.

¹⁰Don Wilton, "The Super Dead." Sermon based on Heb. 11:8-10. DVD. February 1, 2004.

continuity and clarity between the body of the sermon and the invitation. Four subcategories of the preparation of the invitation were included in this group: transition, theological instruction, persuasion, and motivational theme. The researcher predominately focused on the invitation of the sermon, analyzing the instructions Wilton extended to his hearers.

Transition

Connective Questions

The first subcategory under the transition section was connective questions. The shift from the body to the invitation can be an abrupt break, so seamless transitions are helpful in eliminating distractions. Of the five transitions examined, Wilton utilized connective questions more than any other method. Questions were used to transition the audience into the invitation in 77.7% of the New Testament messages and in 73.3% of the Old Testament messages. The average of both the Old and New Testament sermons was 76.6%. Wilton used questions in varying degrees throughout the messages.

In "The Roaring Lion," Wilton moved into the invitation with a succession of eleven questions. Contrasting his former life to his present walk with the

Lord, he explained, "Where did this love in my heart come from? Where did all these friends come from? Where did this precious family that I have come from?"¹¹ The obvious answer to the questions was Christ. A stark contrast to this message was "When God Speaks to the People of God," in which Wilton used only one question to transition from the body to the invitation, "What happened?"¹²

At times, Wilton summarized the points of the message through a series of questions as he did in "Back to the Beginning—God's Ultimate Purpose." After restating the points, he probed the congregation: "Where are you? Where are you right now? Do you know that you know that you know that you know that you know that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord? Folks, where would we be without the Lord Jesus? Where would we be?"¹³ Wilton used the phrase "do you

¹¹Don Wilton, "The Roaring Lion." Sermon based on 1 Pt. 5:8-9. DVD. June 27, 2010.

¹²Don Wilton, "When God Speaks to the People of God." Sermon based on 1 Kgs. 9:1-9. DVD. June 18, 2006. Wilton delivered explicatory comments without appealing for a response from the audience.

¹³Don Wilton, "Back to the Beginning—God's Ultimate Purpose." Sermon based on Gen. 2. DVD. May 16, 2010. The questions functioned as a springboard from the body of the message to the invitation, providing a fluid shift for the audience.

know that you know that you know that you know that Jesus Christ is your Savior?" in many of his messages.¹⁴

Wilton offered the shortest invitational transition of questions in "The Super Dead" when he announced, "What about you? Do you know him?" As a method for advancing the audience through the invitation, Wilton used the words *alright* and *O.K.* As he recapped the points of his message, he introduced the points, stating, "Alright? Go Slow. Just choose something tomorrow. Would you do that?"¹⁵ He went on to say, "Just watch out. He's [Devil] going to come after you. He's going to take chunks out of you. Alright?"¹⁶

Wilton intertwined his personal life into the message as he asked a series of questions at the conclusion of "The Second Key to Contentment." He led the audience through issues pertaining to life, future, career, and relationship with God and others.¹⁷ A concluding statement summarized all

¹⁴Wilton, "Back to the Beginning—God's Ultimate Purpose."

¹⁵Don Wilton, "The Key to God's Heart." Sermon based on Is. 58:2-14. DVD. March 1, 2009.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Don Wilton, "The Second Key to Contentment." Sermon based on Phil. 4:10-20. DVD. January 10, 2010. Questions that he asked were "Who am I? Where should I live? Where am I going today? Where am I going tomorrow? and Where am I going forever?"

the inquiries: "You can be satisfied because God answers every question, he knows every answer, and he points all of us to the Lord Jesus."¹⁸

In "Who Really Killed Jesus?" Wilton utilized a series of questions to gain the attention of the audience; however, upon further examination, the questions were disconnected from the central theme of the passage. Shifting from the gospel to Mel Gibson's portrayal of the final hours of Jesus' life in *Passion of the Christ*, Wilton declared, "Why even make a movie? Why spend so much money? Why do something? Who is this anyway? What right have you got to say that?"¹⁹ Although the questions were engaging, the audience was not called to respond, namely to put their faith in Christ. Nonetheless, Wilton asked one question at the conclusion of every message. He transitioned from the invitation to the final prayer with the saying "Would you bow your heads with me this morning?"²⁰ Overall,

¹⁸Wilton, "The Second Key to Contentment."

¹⁹Wilton transitioned to these questions after *The Encouraging Word* broadcast ended. He said, "Now friend, listen, we've gone off the air; television is no longer with us, not that that matters."

²⁰Wilton consistently used this saying to transition into the final prayer.

transitional questions were his preferred method for transitioning into the invitation.

Connecting the Theme of the Death,
Burial, and Resurrection
of Christ

Wilton spoke of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection in eight New Testament sermons, but he connected all three terms during the invitation in only one sermon. Also, he did not connect this theme in any of the fifteen Old Testament messages.

As a transition into the invitation, Wilton connected the theme of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in "One Glorious Day." Wilton proposed, "And so it is that in Adam we die, but it is in Christ Jesus that we are all being made alive. Death has lost its sting. The grave has lost its hold. It's the most magnificent, wonderful truth about the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the grave. Where would we be without the resurrection?"²¹ Wilton transitioned from the Old Testament to the New Testament by highlighting the doctrine of the resurrection.

Moreover, Wilton devoted a portion of his message to describing the importance of the death, burial, and

²¹Don Wilton, "One Glorious Day." Sermon based on Lk. 24:1-8. DVD. March 27, 2005.

resurrection of Jesus in the sermon "The Lord's Supper" from 1 Corinthians 11; yet he did not unite the theme by offering an invitation to the audience. In his defense, the message focused exclusively on the Lord's Supper, so he closed with a challenge instead of an invitation: "It's a time when you just stop, and you just focus in on the Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps in a particularly special way. I know that, and I'm sure this has been a real blessing to you. I believe that the Lord Jesus will bless your heart and your life."

Similarly, in "The Greatest Vision Ever Seen" Wilton described the resurrection, in "The Apple of God's Eye Part 2" he identified the death of Christ, and in "Under God" he focused on the deity of Christ as it related to the cross; however, he never transitioned into the invitation by fusing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ into one theme.²²

Challenge

The second most popular transition utilized by Wilton, incorporating this method in 65% of the sermons, was a

²²Don Wilton, "The Greatest Vision Ever Seen." Sermon based on Matt. 17:1-9. DVD. April 8, 2007; idem, "Under God." Sermon based on Gal. 5:16-25. DVD. July 5, 2009; idem, "The Apple of God's Eye, Part 2." Sermon based on Rom. 3:1-10. DVD. November 27, 2005.

challenge offered to the audience. The challenges he offered varied in scope and structure, instructing his hearers to respond in 60% of the New Testament sermons and 80% of the Old Testament sermons.

In Wilton's message on Rom. 3:9-12, "A World without Christ," he unapologetically called the audience to respond to Christ by offering a question: "Do you know him today? I'm going to invite you to trust Jesus as your personal Savior. I want to invite you to come today and make Jesus the Lord of your life."²³ With the same goal in mind, Wilton beckoned the audience to respond to Christ by saying,

How about you today? What are you doing about this? That's why I'm challenging you. There are some of you here today. You've gone off elsewhere, and you're so far off. You've gotten away from the Lord. You put him on the back burner. You're sitting here saying to yourself, 'I've got to get back.' Well today, you're back! You can declare the victory of Christ Jesus. I want you to do that, and I want you to know that he is King.²⁴

In this message alone, he used the words *faith* and *trust* fourteen times.

²³Don Wilton, "A World without Christ." Sermon based on Rom. 9:20. DVD. January 22, 2006.

²⁴Don Wilton, "When Under Attack, Part 2." Sermon based on Eph. 6:10-18. DVD. March 19, 2006. Wilton devoted the entire sermon to outlining the schemes of the Devil and the opposition that distracts people from coming to Christ before he offered an invitation.

Wilton's preferred challenge to the audience was the saying "give your life to Jesus," which were his final words to the congregation in "Back to the Beginning—God's Creation." Leading into the invitation by quoting and then explaining Jn. 3:16, Wilton closed with these words: "Steve is going to come and lead us in a wonderful hymn of invitation this morning, and I want to invite you personally because of Jesus to give your heart to Him today." Additionally, Wilton incorporated a challenge in "God's Ultimate Purpose," where he provided a list of the benefits of God sending Christ to die for all before saying, "Give your life to Jesus Christ."

The challenge at the end of Wilton's sermons did not always instruct the hearers to put their faith in Christ, as seen in "The Key to God's Heart." Wilton offered suggestions instead of challenges, saying, "Four suggestions I want to give you: Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! (1) Make sure you have given your life to Christ, (2) Go slow, (3) Watch Out – the devil won't like this at all, (4) Plan ahead." Wilton cleverly created points around the acronym F.A.I.T.H. (Forgiveness, Available, Impossible, Turn, and Heaven) in his message "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" to invite those listening to "give their heart and life to Christ."

Seeking commitment from his members in areas of ministry, Wilton challenged the audience to respond by signing a card, something he had not done in any other message. He closed the message with these words: "What can I do? I have given every one of you a card that looks like this! I want you to take it out. It's in your bulletin. I want every person, young and old, to take this card. Come right now, come systematically, just come, turn, and go back to your seats. Start coming from upstairs. You folks start coming."²⁵

Choice

The least used transitional method was to offer the hearers a choice. Wilton offered a choice in only one of the New Testament messages, and out of the fifteen Old Testament sermons, he did not offer a clear choice in any of the messages. In "When Your Suffering Makes Sense,"

Wilton explained:

Do you know Jesus Christ? The Bible tells us that God loved us so much that he gave us Jesus. He gave us Jesus because Jesus is the cornerstone. He's the rock. When we build our house on the rock, when the wind and the waves come, the house on the rock stands firm. When we build our house on the sand other than the Lord

²⁵Don Wilton, "Sharing the Blessings." Sermon based on Lk. 14:15-24. DVD. September 5, 2004.

Jesus Christ, the wind and the waves come, the house on the sand falls flat because we cannot make sense.²⁶

He finished the message with a question, "Do you know Jesus?" Even though Wilton incorporated questions in many of his messages, he never provided a Scriptural option for the audience to choose from during the invitation.

Promise from the Word

Wilton explained a promise from the Word in nine of the forty-five New Testament sermons and four of the fifteen Old Testament sermons. In a message describing the privileges of voting, Wilton used 2 Chron. 7:14 to encourage people to follow the pattern of Scripture as a directive for their lives. Summarizing the verse, he proclaimed, "I must humble myself. [Instead] We're not humbling ourselves. We put ourselves at the center of everything we do."²⁷

After discounting one's own selfish desires at the expense of God's, he added, "We ask, 'What's good for the American people' is the wrong question. What we should be asking is not what's good for the American people, but

²⁶Don Wilton, "When Your Suffering Makes Sense." Sermon based on 1 Pt. 1:3-9. DVD. October 1, 2006.

²⁷Wilton, "God Bless America."

what's good for God."²⁸ The final challenge from the text, which was to seek the face of God, came in the form of a promise: "God will heal this land." In a sermon on creation from Genesis 1 and 2, Wilton connected the life God gave in the garden with one's new life in Christ. He supported this claim by citing Jn. 3:16 and Jn. 10:10.²⁹

In his message "An Unmarked Envelope," Wilton constructed his message around the title, asking the audience to identify a time when they had received an unmarked envelope. Using Jn. 3:16 as his text, he reiterated this promise throughout the message, finishing with these words: "This is why God sent His Son—because he wants the very best for you. He wants the very best for you. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."³⁰ He concluded by inviting the hearers to "give their heart to Jesus today." A more simplistic approach to

²⁸Wilton, "God Bless America."

²⁹Wilton, "Back to the Beginning—God's Creation." Wilton did an excellent job of bridging the gap between the Old Testament and New Testament.

³⁰Don Wilton, "An Unmarked Envelope." Sermon based on Jn. 3:16. DVD. May 10, 2009. The sermon was divided into two distinct sections. The first half of the message was devoted to explaining the importance of receiving an unmarked letter and how it reminded him of his mother's love. The latter half of the message connected the unmarked letter with God sending his Son.

delivering a promise was seen in "Taking a Stand." After summarizing the message in a few sentences, Wilton stated, "If God be for you, who can be against you?"³¹

Wilton extended the strongest invitational promise in "God's Commissioned Officer." He charged the audience to obey the instructions of the commanding officer: "Jesus Christ has paid the price, and the offer has been made. All who would come to Jesus must come. They that call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved."³²

For the most part, Wilton rarely read a promise from the Word or mentioned the verse and chapter when reciting Scripture. His preferred procedure was to quote or paraphrase the text, as seen in "Why Was Jesus Born" in which he concluded by quoting the verse apart from the reference: "Greater is he that is in you than the one who is in the world."³³ Wilton offered a promise from the Word in "God in-God out" but did not explain the verse. He proposed, "Jesus makes the difference. He'll give to you what you cannot give to yourself. He'll give you life with

³¹Don Wilton, "Taking a Stand." Sermon based on Phil. 2:7-30. DVD. April 26, 2009.

³²Don Wilton, "God's Commissioned Officer." Sermon based on Rom. 1:1. DVD. April 10, 2005.

³³Don Wilton, "Why Was Jesus Born." Sermon based on Lk. 1:76-2:7. DVD. December 19, 2010.

a capital L.”³⁴ He alluded to Jn. 10:10 but did not expand this truth for the audience who were unfamiliar with the verse.

Theological Instruction

In this section, the researcher examined the connection between the theological terms in the body of the message and the terms used in the invitation. Introducing, identifying, and explaining the words *repentance* and *faith* was helpful; however, Wilton did not instruct the audience to *repent* and *believe* in every message. Four questions made up this section: (1) Did the preacher instruct the hearers to repent? (2) Did the preacher instruct the hearers to believe? (3) Did the preacher instruct the hearers to follow Christ? and (4) What were the preacher’s final remarks to the congregation? These questions ascertained links between the body and the invitation of the message.

Did the Preacher Instruct
the Hearers to Repent?

Wilton instructed the hearers to repent during the invitation in three of the forty-five New Testament messages and in none of the fifteen Old Testament messages.

³⁴Don Wilton, “God In—God Out.” Sermon based on Phil. 4:8-9. DVD. November 29, 2009.

Upon further examination, Wilton used the word *confession* interchangeably with the word *repentance*. Subsequently, Wilton mentioned the word *repentance* and/or *confession* in seven New Testament sermons and two Old Testament sermons for an average of 15% of the messages in this sample.

In "The Key to God's Heart," he summarized the process of coming to Christ: "Make sure that you belong to Jesus Christ. Make sure. None of this is going to make sense if you haven't given your heart to Jesus. Make certain. Make sure. Give your life to Christ. Pray in your heart something like this: 'Lord Jesus, right now I confess my sin and by faith I receive you into my heart.'"

The Old Testament sermon with the clearest explanation of repentance, as well as an instruction to repent during the invitation, was "Where Are You?" Wilton posed the question to the audience during the invitation: How can I have peace with God? He offered three suggestions under the acronym A.C.T.: acknowledge your sin, confess your sin to Jesus, and trust Jesus as your Savior.³⁵ "Where Are You?" was the only Old Testament sermon in which Wilton spoke of repentance in the body and then challenged the hearers to

³⁵Wilton, "Where Are You?" He said, "You've got to acknowledge you are a sinner—that you've been cast out of his presence. You've got to confess that sin to Jesus because Jesus is the way, and you've got to trust him."

repent during the invitation. He mentioned repentance in "God Bless America" but did not call the hearers to repent during the invitation. In "The Key to God's Heart," Wilton did not mention repentance in the body of the message, but he explained the importance of repentance at the end of the message.

The message entitled "After Jesus Was Born" was delivered the day after Christmas. Two distinct statements were used to connect the body of the message to the invitation. In the middle of the message, Wilton mentioned, "And because Jesus was born you can repent of your sin and confess that sin to Him, and by faith trust him as your personal Savior and Lord. And give your life to him."³⁶ During the invitation, he clarified his expectations: "I want you to trust him as your personal Savior and Lord. The greatest gift ever given is the gift of a heart and life. When you repent of your sin and by faith you trust in Jesus Christ, you know what he does? He comes to live in your heart, and he dwells in your heart and in your life."³⁷

The only other message in which Wilton described the word *repentance* in the body and then charged the hearers to

³⁶Don Wilton, "After Jesus Was Born." Sermon based on Matt. 2:1-12. DVD. December 26, 2010.

³⁷Wilton, "After Jesus Was Born."

repent was appropriately titled "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" Throughout the message, the words *repentance* and *turn* were interchanged. Wilton substantiated the connection when he said, "It is necessary when you give your heart to Jesus that you turn away from yourself, and you turn toward Jesus Christ that is what repentance is. It is a complete about-turn. That's what happens. Turning means repent." Some form of this word was used seventeen times in this message. Unlike most of his messages in which he delivered the invitation at the conclusion of the message, Wilton invited the hearers to repent before explaining the final point of the sermon. He began with a question: "So, what must be done? 'T' Turn means repent, turn away from sin and self and turn toward the Lord Jesus Christ."³⁸

During a Lord's Supper service, Wilton devoted an entire message to expounding 1 Cor. 11:23. He made the audience aware of the necessity of examining themselves before partaking of the elements by concluding, "If we confess our sin, the Lord will cleanse us of all our unrighteousness."³⁹ Following an explanation of the

³⁸Wilton, "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" Wilton used the acronym F.A.I.T.H. for his outline. The T stood for turning or repenting.

³⁹Wilton, "The Lord's Supper." 1 Cor. 11.

significance of the service, Wilton, in the middle of the message, returned to the previous Scripture: "One of the things you might want to do right now is just have a time of quiet meditation. Speak to the Lord. Tell him about yourself. Confess your sin to Him. Just say it openly."⁴⁰ He introduced the concept of confession earlier in the message and then revisited this command later in the sermon.

Were Illustrations Used to Explain the Term?

Wilton incorporated illustrations in one of the seven New Testament sermons and in one of the two Old Testament sermons in which the terms were used. In "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" he illustrated repentance by recounting an incident at a Billy Graham Crusade: "Mr. Graham literally walked on that platform in front of hundreds of people, thousands of people, and he said, 'It is necessary when you give your heart to Jesus that you turn away from yourself, and you turn toward Jesus Christ.'" Wilton concluded by saying, "That is what repentance is. You turn away from sin and self, and turn toward someone, and that someone is the Lord Jesus Christ."⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Because of their close friendship, Wilton illustrated his messages often with stories of Billy Graham.

"Where Are You?" was the only Old Testament message in which Wilton explained the term *repentance*. As mentioned earlier, Wilton explained the term in the body of the message but did not instruct the hearers to repent during the invitation. However, he used the word *confession* in its place by calling the audience to "confess that sin to Jesus."

Was Biblical Evidence
Incorporated?

In the body of the sermon, Wilton incorporated biblical evidence to validate the necessity for repenting; however, he did not offer scriptural verification in the invitation in any of the New Testament or Old Testament sermons. He alluded to parts of Scripture, but he never quoted or read a passage of Scripture to support the term during the invitation.

*Did the Preacher Instruct
the Hearers to Believe?*

The frequency of usage significantly increased from the word *repentance* to *faith*. Wilton instructed the hearers to *believe* in twelve of the forty-five New Testament messages and in five of the fifteen Old Testament messages for a total of 31.6% of the messages.

In "Ultimate Sacrifice," Wilton offered the invitation in the middle of the sermon. After recapping his message up to that point, he said, "When you give your heart to Jesus Christ, it's Christ in you. You invite Jesus to come into your heart and life. You receive what Jesus did upon the cross. You look into his face and you say to him, 'I know that I'm a sinner and I confess my sin to Jesus, and I put my faith and my trust in you.'"⁴² Wilton used the words *faith* and *trust* interchangeably, concluding with a charge to the hearers to trust in Jesus Christ as Lord.

The word *trust* was used in place of *belief* in three other Old Testament messages: "Well Done Faithful Servant," "Where Are You?" and "The Key to God's Heart." Wilton focused on the faithfulness of Samuel in "Well Done Faithful Servant." During the invitation, he explained how the first steps of the Christian life begin with a relationship with Christ. "Do you know him? Do you trust him as your Savior? Have you received him into your heart and life?"⁴³ The audience was invited to respond to the message by placing their faith in Christ.

⁴²Don Wilton, "Ultimate Sacrifice." Sermon based on Gen. 3:21. DVD. May 30, 2010.

⁴³Don Wilton, "Well Done Faithful Servant." Sermon based on 1 Sm. 12. DVD. April 11, 2010.

In a similar way, Wilton called the audience to believe in Christ in "The Key to God's Heart." Asking the audience to make sure of their relationship with Christ, Wilton announced, "None of this is going to make sense if you haven't given your heart to Jesus. Make certain. Make sure. Give your life to Christ. Turn your heart over to him right now. Pray in your heart something like, 'Lord Jesus right now I confess my sin and by faith I receive you into my heart.'" This series of short sentences displayed the urgency in making a decision today. During the conclusion of the message, Wilton summarized the importance of repentance and faith before instructing the hearers to put their faith in Christ in "Where Are You?" Wilton closed the message with a series of imperatives: "You can do that. You can trust him as your Savior. You can give him your heart." In one-half of the Old Testament messages in which Wilton offered an invitation, the hearers were challenged to believe in Christ.

Wilton instructed the audience to believe by inserting the word *trust* in the form of a question in his message on the Lord's Supper. "Have you trusted him as your personal Savior?"⁴⁴ Likewise, the same word was used in "A World

⁴⁴Don Wilton, "The Lord's Supper." Sermon based on Lk. 22:7-20. DVD. November 20, 2005.

without Christ," in which he outlined how to respond to the invitation: "I'm going to invite you to come this morning to trust Jesus as your personal Savior. I am going to invite you to come today and make Jesus the Lord of your life." Wilton, explaining one of the benefits of trusting in the Lord, stated, "When you trust Jesus as your Savior, you have the peace of God which passes all understanding. That's why I want to invite you to give your life to Christ."⁴⁵

The phrases "put your faith in Christ," "receive Jesus into your heart," "ask Jesus into your heart," "give your life to Christ," and "do you know him?" were variations Wilton used to instruct the hearers to follow Jesus. In the sermon "The Greatest Vision Ever Seen," he mentioned the word *faith* twice in the message but not in the invitation. "The Bible says," stated Wilton, "when you receive Jesus into your heart and life, you receive eternal life. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, have no fear, but will receive eternal life." While he did not use a form of the word *faith*, he did use the same phrase in the message "An Unmarked Envelope." Wilton concluded by saying, "Do you

⁴⁵Wilton, "Why Was Jesus Born?"

know Jesus today? I want to invite you to give your heart to Jesus today."

Furthermore, in Wilton's message "God's Strategy," he celebrated God's blessings in his church by highlighting the importance of faith in an individual's own life. Reminding the hearers of the Christmas service, the Lord's Supper, and "Building Together in Faith," a campaign to retire debt, Wilton called the congregation to pray with thankfulness for the faith God had given them. Wilton moved into the invitation by pointing out the importance of strategically "giving your heart to Jesus." He walked the hearers through a prayer: "Dear God, I know Jesus died for me upon a cross. I confess my sin. I repent of my sin, and by faith, I receive Jesus into my heart."⁴⁶

In two of the sermons, Wilton mentioned the word *faith* multiple times in the body of the message but did not reinforce the concept by instructing the hearers to place their faith in Jesus during the invitation. In "When under Attack, Part 2," in which he used the words *faith* and *trust* fourteen times, and in "When Your Suffering Makes Sense," in which Wilton used the word *faith* thirty-three times in the message, Wilton did not explicitly ask the audience to

⁴⁶Don Wilton, "God's Strategy." Sermon based on Acts 17:2-4. DVD. January 6, 2008.

place their faith in Christ. However, he did ask the audience, "Do you know Jesus Christ?"

As mentioned already, Wilton preached through the Book of Hebrews during the years 2002 to 2005, slowing down in chapter 11 to highlight certain individuals in the text. Three sermons from chapter 11 were examined during this study: "The Decisive Dead," "The Magnificent Dead, Part 4," and "The Forgiven Dead." In "The Decisive Dead," a form of *faith* was mentioned twenty-eight times in the message. During the invitation, Wilton used the word *faith* seven times in the closing remarks; however, he did not instruct the hearers to put their faith in Christ. Instead, speaking of faith in general terms, he declared, "What does it mean to be bold in faith? Bold in faith means that you open your heart, open your eyes, open your ears, and if God says do it, you do it. Bold in faith is this thing that we struggle with most of all, because faith means that I don't see, but I believe; I accept." Even though he defined the term, he did not ask the hearers to believe in Christ.

Moreover, in "The Magnificent Dead, Part 4," Wilton imitated the same pattern during the invitation. He closed the message by stating, "If the mighty hand of God was revealed at a moment of great faith, the mighty hand of God was also removed at a moment of godless opposition. Do you

think that God might take his mighty hand off us, or are we going to be people of great faith? Rise up, O men of faith."⁴⁷ Citing the word eighteen times in the message, he spoke of *faith* only in terms of faithfulness, not faith in Christ that leads to salvation. Instead, Wilton challenged the audience to remain faithful in their Christian life, as seen in his final words: "Stand and be counted."⁴⁸

The final message examined from the Book of Hebrews contained a form of the word *faith* twenty-one times. Unlike the other two, Wilton cited the importance of believing in Christ by emphasizing a personal decision on the part of the individual: "Believe in my heart. That's the faith part. I've got to believe it. I've got to believe in my heart that God is gonna do what God does."⁴⁹ Even though he mentioned *faith* in the invitation, Wilton did not instruct the hearers to put their faith in Christ. Overall, Wilton challenged the hearers to believe in Christ in 31.1% of the New Testament sermons.

⁴⁷Don Wilton, "The Magnificent Dead, Part 4." Sermon based on Heb. 11:24-29. DVD. April 25, 2004.

⁴⁸Ibid. Wilton integrated different methods of inviting the hearers to respond to the messages. In this sermon, he beckoned the audience to take a physical and spiritual stand for the Lord.

⁴⁹Don Wilton, "The Forgiven Dead." Sermon based on Heb. 11:31. DVD. May 16, 2004.

Were Illustrations Used to Explain the Term?

Although Wilton used a form of the word *belief*, he did not illustrate the concept in any of the Old Testament messages. Nevertheless, Wilton used illustrations to explain the term in two of the fifteen New Testament messages in which he used the word *belief*. Both messages were from chapter eleven of the Book of Hebrews. In "The Decisive Dead," Wilton described the importance of possessing "bold faith." Bold faith, according to Wilton, means to "open your heart, open your eyes, open your ears, and if God says do it, you do it." He extended an invitation to possess faith by describing the faith Moses' parents possessed by placing him in the river.

"The Magnificent Dead, Part 4" concluded with Wilton recapping what belief in action looks like. He illustrated the importance of belief by drawing the audience's attention to the Red Sea. "The mighty hand of God, according to the life of Moses, was revealed at a moment of great faith. Here they [Israelites] come up against this unbelievable obstacle, the Red Sea. You have a demonstration of faith like you and I cannot imagine." Even though Wilton mentioned the concept earlier in the message, he reintroduced the concept during the invitation. Wilton

did not instruct the hearers to believe in Christ in either of the two messages in which the term was illustrated. He called the hearers to possess faith but in the context of the message, the connotation implied faithfulness rather than faith that leads to salvation.

Was Biblical Evidence Incorporated?

Out of the fourteen messages that included the word *faith*, two New Testament messages contained a Scripture reference to support faith in Christ. None of the Old Testament messages included biblical evidence pertaining to *faith, belief, or trust*. In "The Greatest Vision Ever Seen," Wilton mentioned belief in the context of Jn. 3:16; otherwise, the word was not mentioned in the invitation. He transitioned from the Scripture reference by assuring the hearers, "If you and I die before Jesus comes in the clouds, we're going straight to heaven to be with him." The invitation addressed the fear Christ removed from the lives of believers as a result of the resurrection. He concluded by challenging the hearers to "respond to the Lord Jesus today."

The only other New Testament message including a Scripture reference to support the word *belief* was "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" This message on Jn. 14:1-6

focused on the importance of placing one's faith in Christ. All of the points were in the form of the acronym F.A.I.T.H. Wilton paraphrased the text: "When Thomas was perplexed by what Jesus said here in John 14, Thomas said, 'But Lord, we don't know the way. We don't understand.' Jesus said, 'Listen, I'm the way. Turn away from yourself and turn to me. Look at me. Follow me. Put your faith in me. I'm going to lead you. I'm going to show you. I'm going to hold you. I'm going to save you. I'm going to forgive you.'" Wilton assured the audience that Jesus was worth believing in for salvation.

Did the Preacher Instruct
the Hearers to Follow
Christ?

Wilton used this method of theological instruction more than the other two. He used this method in 40% of the New Testament messages and in 40% of the Old Testament messages. In the Old Testament message "The Key to God's Heart," Wilton declared, "Give your life to Christ. It's the greatest thing you could ever do." Although the message was about fasting and prayer, Wilton called the hearers to follow Christ. In his final plea to the audience, Wilton, in an urgent manner, used some form of the phrase "I'm going to invite you to respond today" on three occasions.

The same urgency was perceived in "Where Are You?" in which Wilton coaxed the audience through the invitation with phrases like, "You can do that. You can trust him as Savior. You can give him your heart."

After instructing the congregation to give their lives to Christ, an idiom synonymous with following Christ, Wilton listed advantages of following Christ and disadvantages of not following Christ in "God's Ultimate Purpose." He explained, "Give your life to Christ. He's the best friend that you will ever have. He's the Savior of the world. He's God's solution to man's problem of sin. Without him you are on your own. Without him you don't have a magnificent place to live. Without him you do not have power over the earth. And without him, you will battle to find the perfect partnership because it's God's plan." His final words of the message entreated the congregation to come forward instantly. He varied the invitation in "Back to the Beginning—God's Creation" when he said, "I want to invite you to personally—because of Jesus—to give your heart to him today."

In "The Seven Blessings," Wilton outlined benefits of the Christian life. The hearers were shown three ways a believer can be saved: believers have been saved, believers

are being saved, and believers will be saved.⁵⁰ Wilton revisited this concept during the invitation as he instructed the hearers to follow Christ: "You need to come ready. People don't get there based on their sincerity, their good looks, their giving, their earthly citizenship, their ability to preach, or their political persuasion. Only one way: Jesus Christ."⁵¹ After conducting the Lord's Supper, Wilton seized the opportunity to invite his hearers to come to Christ: "I'm going to invite you to come this morning. I'm going to invite you to seek God's face, to go public to make this proclamation."⁵² Wilton instructed the congregation to respond by coming forward to speak with one of the pastors located at the front of the church.

In addition to an invitation to come to Jesus, Wilton added the phrase "make Jesus Lord of your life" in the message "A World without Christ." Furthermore, in "When under Attack, Part 2," he asked the hearers to "declare the victory in Christ Jesus." Wilton cleverly connected the invitation with an image from the message, in this case a fishing net. After describing the restoration of Peter in

⁵⁰Don Wilton, "The Seven Blessings." Sermon based on Heb. 12:22-24. DVD. August 8, 2004.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Wilton, "The Lord's Supper," Lk. 22.

John 21 on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and identifying the various types of fish that were caught in the net that day, he explained, "I'm going to invite you to get into the net in his name. I can't make you get in the net, even if I tried."⁵³

Next, Wilton gave a detailed explanation of how he expected the hearers to respond: "I'm going to ask you to state that, do what he told us to do, get up, move, stand up, step out, stand up, because he has no secret service agents in the kingdom of God." The message concluded with the words "We're waiting on you."

Because of the success of the movie the *Da Vinci Code*, Wilton devoted an entire message to disproving the claims of the movie. Using various Scriptures throughout the message, Wilton summarized the message with four challenges: "Know who man [or woman] is, know what the Bible teaches, know who our Savior is, and know who you are."⁵⁴ He summarized the message with these words: "I am a sinner saved by the grace of God. How was this made possible? All because of the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior

⁵³Don Wilton, "The Greatest Lesson Ever Learned." Sermon based on Jn. 21:1-11. DVD. April 15, 2007.

⁵⁴Don Wilton, "The DaVinci Code." Sermon based on Lk. 9:18-36. DVD. May 7, 2006.

and Lord, and I'm here to tell you today that what Jesus Christ has done for me, he will do exactly the same for you."⁵⁵ Wilton used indicative language to describe what God did in his life rather than offer a command to respond to Christ.

Were Illustrations Used to Explain the Term?

Wilton did not use illustrations to explain the term in any of the New Testament or Old Testament sermons. Wilton simply stated how he expected the audience to respond: "Give your heart to Jesus" or "come to Jesus today."

Was Biblical Evidence Incorporated?

Consequently, Wilton did not incorporate scriptural evidence to strengthen the call to come to Jesus during the invitation. Even though he instructed the hearers to follow Christ in 40% of his messages, he did not use scriptural support during the invitation in any of the Old or New Testament messages.

⁵⁵Ibid. Wilton interjected humor throughout the message. Toward the end of the message, he said, "Here we find the Apostle Paul who was still Saul of Tarsus, on the road to Damascus. Tucked under his arm was a copy of the 'Da Vinci Code.'" "

What were the Preacher's
Final Remarks to the
Congregation?

This question focused on Wilton's final comments before the closing prayer. He instructed the hearers to respond in some fashion—to repent, to believe, or to come to Christ—in twenty-five of the forty-five sermons he preached in the New Testament for a total of 55.5%. Moreover, Wilton instructed the hearers to respond in some form or fashion in 83.3% of the sermons analyzed. On the whole, he extended an invitation in fifty of the sixty messages.

Wilton's final remarks varied in structure and style depending on the theme of the Old Testament message. On Father's Day, he encouraged the men to commit their lives to God. In the message "The Man of God," Wilton connected Moses' throwing down his staff with realizing the potential, future blessing that God had for him. In the same vein, he concluded by calling all the men to stand and throw down the hindrances in their lives that get in the way of a relationship with God. "Right throughout the generations in this church," declared Wilton, "we've been led at every level by great men of God. Gentlemen, it's our turn."⁵⁶ On

⁵⁶Don Wilton, "The Man of God." Sermon based on Ex. 4:1-5. DVD. June 19, 2005.

another occasion, he affirmed the hearers' identity by reminding the hearers that they "are the people of God." In "Overcoming Discouragement, Part 1," his closing remarks were, "Claim the victory. You've got to do it right now. You've got to claim the victory."⁵⁷

In addition to inviting the hearers to come to Christ, Wilton instructed the congregation to become members of First Baptist Spartanburg. A common phrase he used was "come put your roots down." In his message "When Your Faith Is Tested," Wilton closed by stating, "I sense God speaking to us, refreshing us, giving us a fresh encounter of his grace. I'll ask you today, will you come? No fanfare. Just, would you come? Would you come and put your roots down? Would you?" The majority of his sermons ended with him inviting the hearers to respond to the message. Wilton offered closing questions during the invitation of the "Ultimate Sacrifice": "How about you today, my friend? How about Jesus?"

In the New Testament messages, Wilton offered a variety of endings. Some of the messages ended with declarative statements as seen in "Who Really Killed Jesus?": "You see friend, I don't know what I'm doing. You

⁵⁷Don Wilton, "Overcoming Discouragement Part One." Sermon based on Neh. 4:1-23. DVD. September 20, 2009.

don't know what you're doing, and so I run back to the Word of God. And then I discover that God knew exactly what he was doing. And all of this is about one thing, the love of God. What love. What love." The hearers were reminded of a promise from God in "The Forgiven Dead." Wilton comforted the audience with these words: "Now friend, listen to me. If you have confessed your sin to Jesus Christ, you are forgiven." In "When Your Prayers Have Purpose," he ended the sermon with a challenge to spend time in prayer before returning for the night service.⁵⁸

Wilton recapped the message by introducing two new points during the invitation in "The Apple of God's Eye, Part 2": "What do the words of God do for us? What does the Bible do? Number one, it convicts. Number two, it cleanses us." Nonetheless, Wilton did not offer an invitation to the hearers after these statements.

He concluded his message "See You at the Finish Line" with a series of questions for the audience to consider: "Are you ready? Are you finishing well? Did you know that all of us are finishing? You never thought about it that way, did you? Do you know that the moment that you're born

⁵⁸Don Wilton, "When Your Prayers Have Purpose." Sermon based on Eph. 3:14-21. DVD. October 22, 2006.

you begin to finish?"⁵⁹ After charging the graduating seniors to trust the Lord in every area of their lives, specifically finances, Wilton presented every graduate with a twenty-dollar bill and then encouraged them to give 10 percent back to the Lord in the form of a tithe. He closed the message with the words, "Write God's Word upon your heart and make a decision today that you're going to graduate God's way. Watch what God does. Watch what God does."⁶⁰

In one of the sermons evaluated, Wilton instructed the hearers to fill out a commitment card to signify participation in the church. He subsequently invited the congregation to respond by placing the card on the altar. He emphatically commanded the audience to respond by saying the word *come* over and over. "I'm going to ask you to come quietly and lay what you've said to the Lord on the altar of God's grace. Do it right now. Just start coming. Just start coming. Come right now. Come systematically. Just come, turn, and go back to your seats. God bless you as you come. Start coming from upstairs. You folks start coming. I

⁵⁹Don Wilton, "See You at the Finish Line." Sermon based on 2 Tim. 4:7. DVD. May 20, 2007.

⁶⁰Don Wilton, "Graduating God's Way." Sermon based on Matt. 6:25-34. DVD. May 18, 2008.

see many of you. The upstairs people start standing up and coming. Start coming right now."

Furthermore, in thirteen of the forty-five sermons, Wilton instructed the hearers to step out of their seats and come forward. Successively, the congregation was directed to pray with a pastoral counselor at the front of the church. In "God's Commissioned Officer," he closed with a one-sentence charge: "I'm going to ask you to come this morning." He intensified the response during the invitation time of his message on the Lord's Supper by stating, "We're waiting on you."⁶¹ Moreover, he clarified his reasoning for responding in "A World without Christ" by declaring, "I want to invite you to come today and make Jesus the Lord of your life." In his sermon "When Suffering Makes Sense," he directed the audience to "stand together, and you come as we begin to sing." "Step out of your seats wherever you are and come" was how he concluded "The Greatest Vision Ever Seen."

Wilton, as seen earlier in "When Your Faith is Tested," invited the hearers to partner with the church by becoming members. Instead of asking the hearers to "put their roots down," he directly asked, "Do you have a church home? Are

⁶¹Wilton, "Lord's Supper," Luke 22.

you worshipping regularly? Are you an active, functional member of a local Bible-believing church? If you're not, I invite you to come." In "God's Strategy," he directed the congregation to stand for a "closing prayer." Wilton devoted the majority of this message to reminding the congregation of the vision God gave First Baptist Spartanburg. After thanking the hearers for their faithful support in retiring debt, he charged them to be faithful in seven ways over the next year. Wilton did not instruct the hearers to repent, believe, or follow Christ in this message due to the nature of the topic.

Wilton's preferred final comment was delivered in the form of a question: "Would you bow your heads with me?" Wilton used this transitional method to move the audience from the body of the message into the final prayer in 66.6% of the Old Testament messages and 65% of the New Testament messages.

Persuasion

Was the Audience Made Aware
that Jesus was the only
Way to Salvation?

Even though Wilton mentioned the importance of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the need for placing one's faith in Jesus for salvation, he stated that

Jesus was the only way to salvation during the invitation in only two of the New Testament messages. He did not emphasize this truth in any of the Old Testament messages.

At the beginning of "Overcoming Discouragement," Wilton alluded to the fact that Jesus is the only way to salvation. In this message, Wilton identified seven principles from the life of Nehemiah that aid the believer in overcoming discouragement from outside attacks. Although Wilton did not preach an evangelistic message, he made a connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. "I actually have no other purpose in the things that I share with you today," commented Wilton, "that find any significance outside of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In "The Seven Blessings," Wilton, using Heb. 12:22-24 as his text, highlighted seven blessings available for every believer. Moving into the invitation, he asked the question: "Why should I become a Christian?" After summarizing the sermon points, he explained how one becomes a Christian: "People don't get there based on their sincerity, their good looks, their giving, their earthly citizenship, their ability to preach, [or] their political persuasion; only one way: Jesus Christ."

In his Easter Sunday message, Wilton reminded the congregation of the hope they have as a result of the

resurrection of Jesus. Although Wilton never mentioned that Jesus was the only way to salvation, he did say "Jesus is the only one" in the context of salvation. He concluded this section by reciting Rom. 10:9.⁶² In 5% of the sermons, he mentioned that Jesus is the only way to salvation.

Was the Invitation Personal?

Wilton incorporated this preparatory method more than transition, theological instruction, and motivational theme. As a persuasive technique, he personalized the invitation in 86.6% of the sermons by using personal pronouns, questions, and life application.

Wilton made the invitation personal in 86.6% of the Old Testament sermons. In "God Bless America," he commanded the hearers to claim ownership for "their" country, reminding them of the urgency of praying for "our people." Speaking to fathers, he used questions to personalize the message: "[Has] God told you anything? Is he speaking to you?"⁶³ Prior to issuing a plea for becoming a godly father, Wilton singled out the men by asking them to stand before

⁶²Wilton, "One Glorious Day." Wilton made reference to Rom. 10:9-10, but quoted only v. 9, which states, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

⁶³Wilton, "The Man of God."

the congregation. Moreover, during the invitation of "The Key to God's Heart," Wilton used a personal pronoun eleven times in succession: "Give your life to Christ. Turn your heart over to Him right now. Pray in your heart something like this."

Moreover, Wilton, with a sense of earnestness, instructed the hearers to respond by saying, "You've got to do it right now. You've got to claim the victory."⁶⁴ This determination was exhibited in "Where Are You?" when Wilton assured the audience, "You can do that. You can trust him as your Savior. You can give Him your heart." Instead of offering an invitation, Wilton reminded the hearers of the decision they made previously.

Wilton's normal approach to the invitation was to offer an encouraging word to the audience. He strayed from this approach in "God's Ultimate Purpose" by outlining the negatives of failing to make a decision to follow Christ: "Without him you are on your own. Without him you don't have a magnificent place to live. Without him you do not have power over the earth. And without him you will battle to find the perfect partnership."⁶⁵ His pastoral heart was

⁶⁴Wilton, "Overcoming Discouragement."

⁶⁵Before disclosing the negatives, Wilton devoted time to explaining God's purpose for creating human beings.

revealed in "Well Done Faithful Servant." Wilton's final words to the congregation before asking them to stand were "I love you so much."

The invitation was personal in 86.6% of the New Testament sermons. In his message "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Fathers," Wilton used Heb. 12:5-13 to highlight the importance of being a godly father. He spoke of the importance of raising children in a godly environment: "I want to make an announcement to you, my dear friends: 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'"⁶⁶ Although not blatant in his call for action, Wilton did instruct the hearers to do the same by revealing the decision he made to trust in Christ many years ago.

In some cases, Wilton shifted back and forth between speaking to the group and speaking directly to the individual. As seen in "One Glorious Day," he explained, "We so easily forget, don't we? Sometimes we go from one Easter to the next, and in between, we forget. Have you remembered who Jesus is? Do you know him?"⁶⁷ Although he

⁶⁶Don Wilton, "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Fathers." Sermon based on Heb. 12:5-13. DVD. June 20, 2004.

⁶⁷Wilton extended an invitation to follow Christ during the fourth point of the message. He recapped the message by offering a two-sentence invitation: "Have you remembered Jesus? Do you know him?"

began with speaking to the church as a whole, he shifted into speaking to the individual. In "God's Commissioned Officer," he announced, "What I'm about to put onto you is the gospel about a God who always is. [It is] the gospel of the beginning. I'm about to talk to you about the Alpha and the Omega, the great I Am, the only one, the righteousness and the holiness of God." Wilton devoted the remainder of the invitation to describing two promises of the gospel of God.⁶⁸

In "God In—God Out," he compared what God had done in his own life with what he will do in the lives of the hearers. "I want you to know," announced Wilton, "what Jesus has done for me, he'll do the same thing for you."⁶⁹ Likewise, Wilton bridged the gap between his faith and the audience's faith in "Servants, Saints, and Salvation." After describing servanthood, sainthood, and salvation, Wilton concluded, "God has called me to be a servant. God has called you to be a saint, and God has called all of us to be saved."⁷⁰ In another message, he ended with questions

⁶⁸The two promises described the gospel as a gift offered and a command to be obeyed.

⁶⁹Wilton, "God In—God Out."

⁷⁰Don Wilton, "Servants, Saints and Sinners." Sermon based on Phil. 1:1-2. DVD. February 8, 2009.

pertaining to his own faith: "So, what must I do about it? I must give my heart and life to him."⁷¹ Although Wilton presented a full explanation of the steps to following Christ, he did not instruct the hearers to put their faith in Christ.

Additionally, Wilton did not instruct the audience to respond for salvation in "The Heart of a Leader"; however, he did end with a compassionate remark: "I want you to know today that I love you with a passion because literally hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of you exemplify every day the heart of a leader."⁷² Another message devoid of an invitation to follow Christ was "The Impact of the Spirit." After summarizing the points of the message, Wilton finished with a personal synopsis: "I present to you God's precious Spirit. What an impact. Without him we can do nothing."⁷³

Out of the two messages Wilton preached on the Lord's Supper, only one of them concluded with a personal invitation. In his message on Luke 22, Wilton, after

⁷¹Wilton, "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?"

⁷²Don Wilton, "The Heart of a Leader." Sermon based on Rom. 1:8-15. DVD. June 5, 2005.

⁷³Don Wilton, "The Impact of the Spirit." Sermon based on Rom. 8:9-11. DVD. June 26, 2005.

passing out the elements and praying with the congregation, invited the congregation to follow Christ: "Do you know Jesus? Have you trusted him as your personal Savior? Won't you do that today? I'm going to invite you to come this morning. I'm going to invite you to seek God's face, to go public, [and] to make a proclamation."⁷⁴ In contrast, his Lord's Supper message on 1 Corinthians 11 addressed the importance of repenting before partaking of the Lord's Supper; yet, Wilton closed by thanking the congregation for participating in the service.

In "When Under Attack, Part 3," Wilton personalized the invitation without instructing the hearers to make a decision to follow Christ. In this message, Wilton, using Eph. 6:10-18 as his text, identified the armor believers possess. Ending with an explanation of the sword of the Spirit, he transitioned immediately into the invitation. Instead of asking the hearers to respond for salvation, Wilton said, "God has made his Word available to us. Quote the Word of God. Study the Word of God. Speak the Word of God. Put the Word of God out there. Stand upon the Word of God, and when you take hold of the Word of God, you've got in your hand the sword of the Spirit." Though not verbally

⁷⁴Wilton, "Lord's Supper," Luke 22.

spoken, he implied the personal pronoun *you* with each command given to the audience.

Wilton connected with the audience in "The Greatest Lesson Ever Learned," reminding them of how "precious" they are in the sight of the Lord, before instructing them to place their faith in Christ. What was his reasoning for wanting them to step out of their seats? "God," announced Wilton, "has got a hold of your heart." Moreover, Wilton demonstrated this personal touch as he invited the hearers to "Say yes to Jesus and join the scores and scores of others who are saying, 'That's me.'"⁷⁵ Wilton expressed his gratitude for those graduating in "Graduating God's Way." He did not offer an invitation, but he did personalize the conclusion by saying, "I'm so proud of every one of you today. You have brought so much joy to our hearts. We love you. We pray for you. We celebrate with you." Furthermore, Wilton displayed the same love for his people by concluding "The Heart of Our Vision" with these words, "I love you with all the love I have in my heart today."

Likewise, Wilton related to the audience in his message entitled "Temptation." He began with the words of Jesus in Matt. 6:13, "Lead us not into temptation," and

⁷⁵Don Wilton, "Heaven on Earth." Sermon based on Matt. 6:10. DVD. July 8, 2007.

ended with a discussion on the effects of pornography. He pledged to the church, "I'm gonna tell you right now. I'm going to make a commitment to you because I love you. But folks, I cannot do that in my own strength. I've got to cry out to the Lord. You've got to ask God to help you. You've got to stand up."⁷⁶

Overall, Wilton directed the audience to respond individually by saying, "Would you come? Would you give your heart to Jesus?" The only sermons in which Wilton did not personalize the invitation were those in which he offered no invitation; however, one exception was "The Magnificent Dead, Part 4." In this message, Wilton spoke to the church as a whole: "Folks, we need to be men and women of great faith, but there is something else we can't leave alone because if the mighty hand of God was revealed at a moment of great faith, the mighty hand of God was also removed at a moment of godless opposition. Has God called us to rise up, O men of faith?" Instead of speaking to each person in the audience, Wilton addressed the whole church.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Don Wilton, "Temptation." Sermon based on Matt. 6:13. DVD. August 26, 2007.

⁷⁷In addition to the membership at First Baptist Spartanburg, Wilton's sermons are broadcast on Direct TV and Dish Network to millions of homes. On occasion, he addressed the television audience specifically.

Motivational Theme

Although the final subcategory was divided into two questions, the researcher condensed the two into one: Did the theme of the invitation match the central theme of the message? By identifying the main point of the message, the researcher identified continuity between the body and the invitation. The theme of the invitation matched the central theme of the message in 41.6% of the sermons.

Six of the fifteen Old Testament sermons utilized some connection between the theme of the message and the theme of the invitation. In the message "Ultimate Sacrifice," Wilton built the sermon around the sacrifice of the animal in Genesis 3 as it related to the covering of the sin of Adam and Eve. Subsequently, this theme was carried into the invitation. Wilton declared, "I beg of you to give your heart to Jesus because some of you could die today. You could be dead this afternoon. We could be having your funeral today. Give your heart to Jesus. You've got to. You've got to be covered in Jesus Christ. If you're not covered by him, your nakedness will live with you for all time and eternity. You'll go to the grave in your shame." Wilton highlighted an aspect of shame, a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. This message concluded with Wilton's final words, "And when you go back to the beginning where it all

happened, the Lord God made garments of skin. He decreed that blood had to be shed and pointed us to Jesus."

Also, Wilton connected the theme of the message to the theme of the invitation by restating the points from the message in a different manner. In "The Key to God's Heart," he outlined the points of the message into four new points during the invitation: make sure, go slow, watch out, and plan ahead. The first point of the invitation, make sure you have a relationship with Christ, described the importance of confessing one's sin and believing in Jesus. After expounding upon these points, Wilton summarized the four points before closing with a final prayer.

The servant theme was carried from the body of the sermon into the invitation seamlessly in "Well Done Faithful Servant." Wilton began the invitation by asking, "How about you, well done, faithful servant?" Next, he explained the trap in which believers could fall by striving to succeed in worldly undertakings: education, athletics, and materialism. "Well done good and faithful servant. You see it all begins with your relationship with the Lord Jesus. Do you know him? Do you trust him as your Savior?" Then Wilton reminded the audience of Samuel, an example he used earlier of a faithful servant of God, during the invitation: "Samuel had a personal relationship

with this God. He walked by faith. He trusted him.

Everything he did came from the heart of God.”

Overall, Wilton did not regularly connect the themes. In fact, 60% of the sermons analyzed revealed otherwise. In “God Bless America,” Wilton, reciting 2 Chron. 7:14 as his proof text, challenged the hearers to seek after God during the invitation. While the Scripture challenged the audience, the invitation was disjointed from the theme of the message, which focused on voting in a Christian manner. Wilton could have created a link by inserting a biblical text within the body of the message and then highlighting it during the invitation.

In “Defying the Odds,” Wilton demonstrated a simplistic and easy-to-follow outline; however, the theme did not match the invitation. The theme of the message focused on God’s work in the life of Noah. After identifying nine words of encouragement from Genesis 6, 7, 8, and 9, Wilton closed by stating, “Alright watch this. God loves you. He does. And I want to make a declaration to you today: Your circumstances will always be there, but your struggle is over. Your pain is over, and God is the one who gets all the glory.”⁷⁸ The points of the message

⁷⁸Wilton, “Defying the Odds.” Sermon based on Gen. 6-8. DVD. June 4, 2006.

were "God sees, God grieves, God knows, God directs, God establishes, God follows through, and God remembers." Even though the invitation was short, it seemed rushed and appeared disjointed.

Wilton used the life of Abraham to answer the question, "What do you do when your faith is tested?" Throughout the sermon, Wilton led the hearers on a journey up to Mount Moriah with Abraham as he offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. Furthermore, the word *faith* was used thirty-two times in the message. Wilton concluded the message "When Your Faith Is Tested" with these words: "I sense God speaking to us, refreshing us, giving us a fresh encounter of his grace. I'll ask you today, will you come? No fanfare. Just, would you come? Would you come and put your roots down? Would you?" Instead of calling the hearers to put their faith in Christ, he invited them to join the church.

In some of the messages, Wilton used one of the points of his message, usually the final one, as a final challenge or encouragement. In "Overcoming Discouragement," he launched into the invitation from his seventh point: claim the victory. "Any questions? Claim the victory. You've got to do it right now. You've got to claim the victory. Would you bow your heads with me this morning?" At the beginning

of the message, Wilton mentioned his purpose was to show that individuals have no "significance outside of the Lord Jesus"; yet, he did not connect that implication in the message. Additionally, the words *repentance* and *faith* were absent from the message.

Wilton connected the invitation to the theme of the message in nineteen of the forty-five sermons. Wilton made a definitive connection between the body of the message and the invitation by summarizing the sermon in "The Forgiven Dead." After recapping the eight sermon points, he reminded the hearers, "If you have confessed your sin to Jesus Christ, you are forgiven."

In "An Unmarked Envelope," Wilton introduced the congregation to an illustration at the beginning of the sermon, and then he later reintroduced the concept during the invitation. He devoted a majority of the sermon to describing the feelings one senses after receiving an "unmarked envelope" in the mail. Next, he equated those feelings with the love letter God sent through the arrival of his Son, Jesus Christ.

The theme of the invitation matched the message as Wilton concluded with these words: "You see, he [God] gave us an unmarked envelope. That's what God has done. Just open it. He said, 'You give your life to me. I want the

very best for you. I want you to have a full and meaningful life. I want you to prove me and to try me.' How about you? And it begins right there with your salvation." Finally, Wilton instructed the hearers to respond by offering a question: "Do you know Jesus today? I want to invite you to give your heart to Jesus today."

In "Under God," Wilton connected the invitation to the body of the message by incorporating a patriotic theme. He used Gal. 5:16-25 to describe a nation under God. After using three points to summarize the text—when you encounter God, he will reveal sin; when you encounter God, he will release his love; and when you encounter God, we will reflect his character—Wilton recited the pledge of allegiance before the congregation. He linked the two sections by stating, "America the beautiful. May God shine upon us. May God reveal our sin. May God our heavenly father release his love. May we reflect his character." Wilton justified the need for Christ and the purpose of the cross during his second point; however, he did not instruct the audience to place their faith in Christ for salvation during the invitation.

In a few of the sermons, Wilton used his final point to move into the invitation. In "After Jesus Was Born," Wilton did an excellent job explaining the meaning of both

repentance and *faith*. His final point, summarizing the purpose for the coming of the wise men, was "gifts were given." Using gifts as the theme, Wilton identified two gifts: the first gift was the gift of salvation and the second was the gift of one's children. Before transitioning into a baby dedication service, Wilton instructed the audience to come to Christ: "Do you know why Jesus gave himself? So that you would give yourself back to him. I want you to give your heart and life to Jesus Christ. I want you to trust him as your personal Savior and Lord."⁷⁹ After the invitation to come to Christ, Wilton instructed the children to come forward with gifts for underprivileged children in the community. This visual action connected the free gift of Christ with a physical gift for other people.

Again, Wilton used the final point of the acronym F.A.I.T.H. to move into the invitation in "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" Illustrating this point with a personal story of recently losing a friend, Wilton assured the congregation of the absolute certainty of heaven. He concluded his message by saying, "We will see her again. Our friendship will be knitted for all time and for all

⁷⁹Wilton, "After Jesus Was Born."

eternity. So what must I do about it? I must give my heart and life to him.”

The theme for the invitation in “Servants, Saints, and Salvation” mirrored the theme of the message. By reinstating the points from the message, Wilton reminded the hearers of his calling: “God has called me to be a servant. God has called you to be a saint, and God has called all of us to be saved.” Unfortunately, Wilton did not provide the audience with instructions on following through with this charge. In place of explaining the gospel or illustrating *repentance* and *faith*, he described the benefits of salvation without clarifying the process to be saved.

Wilton transitioned from the body of the message to the invitation with a connective question in “Why Was Jesus Born?” After asking the hearers “Do you fear death?” he disclosed the importance of peace in this world. Validating that a relationship with Jesus Christ is the only means for realizing peace, he revealed his desire for the hearers: “That’s why I want to invite you to give your life to Christ. My prayer is that you will know the peace of God in Christ.”

Likewise, Wilton used a connective theme by reintroducing the theme of the resurrection, something he

alluded to earlier in his message on the transfiguration of Christ. As already mentioned, connective questions were Wilton's preferred method of joining the theme of the message to the invitation. He used two questions in "The Greatest Vision Ever Seen" to move into the invitation: "Why did he say, 'fear not,' folks, and why did he appease them?" He answered these questions by drawing the audience's attention to the doctrine of the resurrection: "He [Jesus] appeased them, my friends, because that's the power of the resurrection. That's the good news of a day like this. That's what it means to know Jesus Christ." His final instruction was for the hearers to "step out of their seats and come."

Using the life of the Apostle Paul in Phil. 3:1-10, Wilton outlined personal credentials every Christian should possess. In "Christian Credentials," the theme of the message flowed into the invitation with the description of an American ambassador. Wilton used a series of questions to conclude the message: "How about you? What do your credentials look like? Do you know Jesus? I want to invite you today to leave your seat, come down to the front, and lay your life before the Lord Jesus."⁸⁰

⁸⁰Don Wilton, "Christian Credentials." Sermon based on Phil. 3:1-11. DVD. August 8, 2009.

The majority of the messages were disjointed in connecting the theme of the message to the theme of the invitation. Wilton devoted an entire message to outlining the marks of a healthy church. Using 1 Thess. 5:12-28 as his text, the points, which came right from the text, were, "It's [the church] built for the Lord, it's blessed by the Lord, it's protected by the Lord, it is founded by the Lord, it's energized by the Holy Spirit, it's instructed by the word of God, it's occupied by changed people, it's fueled by divinely granted gifts, and it's led by God-called pastors." Without offering a transition, Wilton quickly moved into a three-sentence plea for the hearers to come to Christ: "Is there someone here today who needs to give their life to Christ? Hundreds of people are doing it all the time just like you. Would you come today?"⁸¹ The terms *repentance* and *faith* were not mentioned in the message, nor was the audience instructed to repent, believe, or come to Christ during the invitation.

Nevertheless, Wilton followed a different pattern in "The Key to Contentment, Part 2" by asking the audience three questions: "Who am I? What am I to do? Where am I going?" Wilton summarized by reminding the audience that God knows the answers to these questions, and they all

⁸¹Wilton, "The Marks of a Healthy Church."

point to Christ. The questions, although thought provoking, did not instruct the hearers to repent and believe.

Wilton's invitation to respond to Christ did not always retain a salvific theme, as seen in his message on "The Magnificent Dead, Part 4." Even though he mentioned the word *faith* five times during the invitation, he was inconsistent in instructing the hearers to believe in Christ. Instead, he invited the audience to "rise up, O men of faith." His final words were, "Stand up and be counted."

Similarly, in "Who Really Killed Jesus?" he reintroduced the original question that he posed earlier in the sermon as a means for connecting the body to the conclusion. The answer, according to Wilton, to the title of the message "Who Really Killed Jesus?" was God. He then weaved the sovereign plan of God in sending Jesus to die for the sins of the world with the love that God has for all; however, he did not instruct the hearers to respond to this loving God through repentance and belief. He left the hearers with two indicative statements: "What love. What love."

Additionally, in "Sharing the Blessing," Wilton devoted the entire sermon to inviting lost friends and family to church. He summarized the points for the audience, and then walked into the audience to role-play with a

member of the congregation. This illustration of the simplicity of witnessing to others was a ploy by Wilton to motivate the congregation to sign up for a fourteen-week Faith Evangelism Strategy class.

The invitation directed the congregation to lay commitment cards on the altar as a symbol of their commitment. He concluded by instructing the hearers to come forward: "Listen carefully, folks. I'm gonna ask you, the entire congregation, upstairs, downstairs. It doesn't matter. I'm going to ask you to get up, and I'm gonna ask you [to] come quietly and lay what you've said to the Lord right here on the altar of God's grace." Furthermore, the invitation in "The Super Dead" lacked a central theme as well with Wilton spending minimal time connecting the message to the invitation. He abruptly closed the message with two questions: "What about you? Do you know him?"

During the invitation in "The Apple of God's Eye, Part 2," Wilton introduced a new concept that was disconnected from the central theme of the message. After disclosing seven points from Rom. 3:1-10 confirming God's intimate relationship with Israel, he moved into the invitation by highlighting the importance of the Word of God. Each of the two points was supported with Scripture; yet, they were not connected to the theme of the message. Wilton's two

concluding points were "Number one, it [the Word] convicts us (2 Timothy 3:16), and Number two, it cleanses us (John 17:17)."

Moreover, a connecting theme was absent in "Heaven on Earth." Wilton preached the entire message on one verse in Matthew 6: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). After describing the benefits of heaven, Wilton dedicated the remainder of the sermon to describing how a believer is able put God's will above one's own will. He concluded by summarizing various strategies for praying. His invitational theme was created around the hymn that was sung at the close of the service. Wilton concluded, "We're gonna sing a great hymn of invitation this morning. I love these words, 'Come just as you are.' When you hear the Spirit call, come just as you are. I'm going to invite you to come today and to say 'Yes' to Jesus Christ, and join the scores and scores of others who are saying, 'Yes that's me.'"

The most unique connection to the theme of the message was observed in "The Greatest Lesson Ever Learned," in which Wilton preached on the restoration of Peter in Jn. 21:1-11. He reintroduced the idea of fishing for men, a concept he explained earlier in the message, during the invitation by instructing the hearers to get into the net.

"It doesn't matter," commented Wilton, "if there's one fish in the net, twenty-five fish in the net, one hundred and fifty-three fish in the net, or no fish in the net." A few moments later Wilton urged, "I'm going to invite you to get into the net in his name."

Comments

Wilton offered an invitation to the hearers in 82.2% of the New Testament sermons and 86.6% of the Old Testament sermons. On the whole, he instructed the hearers to respond in 83.3% of the sermons. Out of the thirteen Old Testament messages, Wilton extended an invitation to follow Christ in seven of the messages. Subsequently, he instructed his hearers to follow Jesus in 53.8% of the sermons in which he offered an invitation. Out of the thirty-seven New Testament messages in which he offered an invitation, Wilton instructed the hearers to respond for salvation in 59.4% of the messages. An invitation was not extended to the audience in ten of the sixty messages. He either ended the sermon with a declarative statement or transitioned immediately into the final prayer.

In his defense, Wilton could have instructed the audience to respond after he asked them to "bow their heads." Also, he may have refined or rephrased the appeal

for salvation after the prayer was spoken; however, since the analysis focused on words spoken prior to the invitation, the research was beyond the scope of the study.

The only message that Wilton provided insight into the events that took place after someone responded to the message was in "When Your Suffering Makes Sense." Wilton outlined the process for those responding:

Steve's going to come. Steve is our Minister of Music, he's my brother and friend. We have a little time at the end of the service like this where we sing a song together just before I dismiss the congregation. I've got to ask you: Do you know Jesus? I would love to show you how to give your life to him today. I've got a bunch of friends here. We serve the Lord together. I'm going to ask you when we stand up, if God has spoken to your heart, would you leave your seat and come? I'll tell you what will happen. We'll take you by the hand. We'll show you how to invite Jesus Christ into your heart and life. Would you come?

According to Wilton, the pastors at the front of the church were instructed to share the gospel before walking through the process of becoming a Christian with men and women responding.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to perform an analysis of the invitation of Don Wilton in order to answer the question, To what extent does the preaching of Don Wilton utilize the elements of R. Alan Streett's model for extending an invitation? After examining sixty sermons according to the tool previously outlined, the researcher identified distinctive elements utilized in Wilton's preaching, which are described in the following section.¹

Summary of the Findings

A summary of the results of the research revealed Wilton's emphasis on instructing his hearers to respond to Christ during the invitation. Wilton offered some form of

¹As mentioned already, the researcher could not locate "God's Eternal Timeline" and "Ultimate Motherhood." "The Greatest Lesson Ever Learned" was preached once, but it was included in the church's master copy list twice. Also, two other sermons were cited twice on the master list: "The Impact of the Spirit" and "The Lord's Supper." Therefore, the total number of New Testament sermons was reduced from fifty to forty-five, which in turn reduced the total number of sermons evaluated to sixty. The number of Old Testament sermons remained the same at fifteen.

an invitation in fifty of the sixty sermons analyzed. He reflected the methodology presented by Streett in both his Old Testament and New Testament messages.

Theological Content

The first hypothesis concerning Wilton's preaching was that he would use the theological terms outlined in Streett's book in every message preached. Although a consistent pattern was established, Wilton did not use the terms *repentance* or *faith* in every message preached. He mentioned one of these terms in 46.6% of the Old Testament messages and in 61.6% of the New Testament. He incorporated one of the terms in 73.3% of the messages analyzed. The Old Testament percentage was lower than the New Testament percentage, mainly because of the nature of the texts he preached.² He was five times more likely to use the word *faith* than the word *repentance* in the New Testament and four times more likely to use the word *faith* in the Old Testament.

Even though he used one of the two terms in seven of the Old Testament sermons, he explained the terms in one of them. In the New Testament, Wilton provided an explanation

²Some of the New Testament texts explicitly addressed faith and repentance.

of the term *repentance* or *faith* in 18% of the sermons in which he used the terms. The number is consistent when the terms are separated. When Wilton mentioned some form of the word *faith*, he explained it in six of the thirty-five sermons. He explained, illustrated, and offered biblical evidence for repentance and faith when the text explicitly mentioned the terms, as seen in "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" and "God's Strategy." In both messages, he cited *repentance* and *faith* in the body of the message and then called the hearers to repent, confess, and believe in Christ.

Furthermore, Wilton stated the word *repentance* in eight sermons and explained the term in two of the New Testament messages. The numbers differ slightly in the Old Testament. Wilton mentioned *faith* in seven of the fifteen sermons but did not explain the term in any of the messages. Repentance was mentioned in two of the messages and explained in one of them.³

The second hypothesis examined whether or not Wilton would integrate the same theological terms in the conclusion section of his sermons in every case. Wilton did

³Because of the lack of illustrations and scriptural support in explaining both *repentance* and *faith*, one can assume that Wilton preached to a church audience.

not instruct his hearers to repent or to believe in every sermon. Wilton offered a theological instruction in 30% of the sermons. This figure includes only the terms *repentance* and *faith*. By broadening the scope to include instructions to follow Christ in addition to the terms *repentance* and *faith*, the number increases to 35% of the messages preached.

Preparation of the Invitation

The third hypothesis was to examine whether or not Wilton incorporated all four of the elements for preparing an invitation in each of his messages. According to Streett, four methods are significant in preparing the invitation: (1) transition, (2) theological instruction, (3) persuasion, and (4) motivational theme. Although, Wilton did not incorporate all four of the elements in the invitation, he used one of the preparatory techniques in 86.6% of the Old Testament messages and in 88.8% of the New Testament messages.

The researcher examined the use of transitions during the invitation in this section. According to Streett, a preacher can include five different transitional elements in a sermon: questions; summarizing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; a challenge; a choice; and a promise. Whether he offered a question to recap the message

or a rhetorical question to draw the audience in, Wilton preferred this transitional technique in the New Testament above the other four. He transitioned into the invitation using questions in thirty-five of the forty-five New Testament sermons. In the Old Testament, transitional questions were the second most preferred method for moving into the invitation. Wilton employed them in eleven out of fifteen sermons. He used evangelistic, personal, and summary questions to move into the invitation.

Wilton mentioned the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in the invitation in only one of the sixty sermons analyzed. He mentioned the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ separately in a number of sermons, even connecting two of the concepts on a few occasions; but Wilton connected the three concepts together only in "One Glorious Day," a message explicitly describing the resurrection of Christ. In both messages dealing with the Lord's Supper, Wilton spoke of the death and resurrection of Christ but did not transition into the invitation by reminding the audience of the importance of this reality. The least used transitional method was the choice. Wilton offered a choice in one New Testament message and in none of the Old Testament messages examined.

Moreover, Wilton issued a challenge of some kind in 60% of the New Testament messages. The varying instructions to the audience were to "give their life to Jesus," "get on your face to seek God," and "give your life to Christ." Wilton did an excellent job connecting the body of the message with the invitation through the use of a theme. When he offered a challenge, it matched the theme of the message in most cases. Wilton offered a challenge in 80% of the Old Testament messages. Again, most of the sermons in which he offered a challenge instructed the hearers to come to Jesus for salvation, but Wilton did recap his sermon points as a way of calling his audience to come to Christ.

Further, Wilton extended a promise from the Scriptures in nine of the forty-five New Testament sermons and four of the fifteen Old Testament messages. Offering positive comments during the invitation, Wilton used the Scriptures to encourage his hearers, even incorporating varying alternatives in extending a promise. For example, he would quote Scripture from memory, recite Scripture directly from the Bible, or paraphrase the Scripture in his own words as he applied personal experiences to the audience.⁴

⁴Wilton's least preferred method of issuing a promise was to read directly from the Bible.

Although a section devoted to theological content was explained briefly in the second hypothesis, the findings of this category are worth noting again. These three questions examined whether or not Wilton instructed the hearers to repent, believe, or follow Christ. Under each question were two clarifying questions: Were illustrations used to explain the term? and Was biblical evidence incorporated? During the invitation, Wilton illustrated the word *repent* in only one of the two Old Testament sermons in which he called the audience to believe. He did not provide an illustration for the words *believe* or *follow Christ*. Moreover, Wilton did not provide the audience with scriptural evidence to support his invitation to repent in any of the messages examined.

In the New Testament, Wilton provided an illustration for one of the seven sermons in which he called the audience to repent and four of the fourteen sermons in which he instructed the audience to believe in Christ. Of the three possible methods for instructing the audience through the use of theological content, Wilton incorporated the invitation to "follow Christ" eighteen times. Unfortunately, he did not offer an illustration to explain the concept in any of the messages preached.

Furthermore, Wilton did not provide scriptural support for repentance or following Christ. He did, however, offer biblical evidence to support his instruction for belief in Christ in three of the fourteen messages. Two of the three messages also included illustrations explaining the concept. When the message plainly explained the gospel, Wilton was more likely to use the words *repentance* and *faith*.

Two questions made up the next section: Was the audience made aware that Jesus was the only way to salvation? and Was the invitation personal? During the invitation, Wilton made the audience aware that Jesus was the only way to salvation in two of the forty-five New Testament messages and in one of the fifteen Old Testament messages. Wilton spoke consistently about Jesus being necessary for salvation; however, he overtly mentioned Jesus being the only way in only three (5%) of the sixty messages analyzed.

On the other hand, Wilton regularly personalized the invitation. He utilized this preparatory method more often than transition, theological instruction, and motivational theme. The invitation was personalized to the audience in 86.6% of the sermons by using personal pronouns, questions, and life application. Wilton made the invitation personal in 86.6% of the Old Testament sermons and in 86.6% of the

New Testament sermons. He spoke directly to the hearers in order to diminish any fears they may have in responding to the message. An example of calming the fears of the audience was seen in "When Your Suffering Makes Sense." Wilton explained the process to the audience by outlining who will receive them as they come forward, what the pastors will ask them as they come forward, and how the pastors will respond to them.⁵

The final two subcategories were condensed into one question: Did the theme of the invitation match the central theme of the message? By identifying the main point of the message, the researcher was able to ascertain a connection between the body of the sermon and the invitation. The theme of the invitation matched the central theme of the message in 40% of the sermons examined. Wilton connected

⁵Wilton, "When Your Suffering Makes Sense." The actual words he spoke were, "I would love to show you how to give your life to him today. I've got a bunch of friends here. We serve the Lord together. I'm going to ask you when we stand up, if God has spoken to your heart, would you leave your seat and come. I'll tell you what will happen, we'll take you by the hand, and we'll show you how to invite Jesus Christ into your heart and life." He masterfully explained the process in order to eliminate fear in the hearts of unbelievers desiring a relationship with Christ. During an interview, Wilton mentioned that every counselor at the front of the church was instructed to ask the person coming forward the same question: Would you like to give your heart to Jesus? Having these men at the front of the church during the invitation may explain why Wilton did not explain the gospel in every message.

the theme by summarizing the points, restating the main theme of the message, and incorporating Scripture to restate the same concept a different way. Wilton's appeal to come to Christ was clearer when he summarized his points during the conclusion of his message.

In "God's Commissioned Officer," he recapped the points before ending with Rom. 10:13: "Those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." In "Ultimate Sacrifice," Wilton extended an invitation in the middle of the message, and in closing, he reminded the hearers of the challenge to follow Jesus. Succinctly, when the content of the message was evangelistic, dealing with repentance, faith, or the gospel, the transition between the body of the sermon and invitation was natural.⁶

Implications

This study provides several implications for preachers seeking to refine their process for extending an invitation at the conclusion of the sermon. The implications flow out of the hypotheses as well as the analysis of Wilton's sermons. This section will provide a summary of the implications.

⁶His sermon entitled "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" was an example of all three elements being present in the message.

First, preachers should consider devoting attention to the invitation as one would devote attention to developing and delivering the functional elements or formal elements of a sermon. Streett's structured model provides a checklist for preparing and delivering an effective invitation. Indeed, the benefits of incorporating this model are advantageous theologically and effectually.

In the area of theological content, the terms *repentance* and *faith*, two terms essential to the gospel, must be included at the conclusion of every evangelistic message.⁷ Additionally, illustrating the terms will not only clear up ambiguity for unbelievers who are present in the audience but also edify and solidify truths that believers already know. Scriptural support in conjunction with these terms provides a solid foundation for building a case in favor of the need for and sufficiency of repenting and believing in Christ.

Furthermore, integrating the preparatory methods outlined in Streett's book in the invitation will provide a seamless shift from the body of the message to the conclusion. As seen in Wilton's sermons, the use of

⁷In Mark 1:15, Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

transition, theological content, persuasion, or a motivational theme delivered a connective bridge leading seamlessly into the invitation. Another helpful method for establishing unity in the text is found in recapping the points prior to instructing the hearers to respond. By summarizing for the hearers the central theme of the message, the preacher is able to provide cohesion for the invitation.

Second, preachers should consider presenting a clear explanation of the gospel at the conclusion of the message. Before instructing the hearers to repent of their sins and believe in Christ, the preacher should explain the gospel so the audience has a clear understanding of what they are being asked to do. Streett suggested explaining the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as a means for transitioning into the invitation.

Although the message of the gospel is not mentioned in every passage of Scripture, the preacher, using biblical evidence to support his claim, can highlight the importance of the gospel before issuing a challenge to respond with repentance and faith. In the message "One Glorious Day," Wilton transitioned effortlessly into the invitation by reintroducing concepts he explained earlier in the body of the sermon. Nevertheless, the theme of the invitation was

connected easily when the dominating theme of the sermon emphasized the gospel.

Third, preachers should contemplate connecting the theme of the message with the theme of the invitation. Streett's section for inserting a connective theme is practical and helpful. The dominant preparatory method in Wilton's messages was a personal instruction. He interspersed personal pronouns, questions, and life application throughout his sermons. Instead of speaking to the church as a whole, the preacher should consider addressing the individual person with the pronoun *you* instead of *we*. Joining this concept with connective questions is an effective method for offering an invitation, as demonstrated in Wilton's sermons. He personalized the connective questions leading into the invitation in thirty-five of the thirty-nine occurrences in the New Testament.

Suggestions for Further Research

Upon completion of this study, the researcher identified two areas for further research. First, an analysis of the use of the invitation in Wilton's itinerant preaching through a tool created from Streett's book would be beneficial. Since Wilton has spoken for Billy Graham at the Cove in North Carolina as well as at crusades and

revivals around the world, he would be an exceptional person to examine. This analysis would determine whether or not Wilton used the theological content and preparatory methods outlined in Streett's book in his itinerant preaching.⁸

Second, a comparison between the sermons Wilton preached in a revival, crusade, and itinerant setting and the sermons he preached on Sunday morning at First Baptist Spartanburg would identify similarities and differences in the preparation and delivery of the invitation. Although Wilton delivered an invitation at the conclusion of his sermons over 80% of the time at First Baptist Spartanburg, he instructed the hearers to follow Christ in only 53.8% of those sermons. This study would determine whether or not setting and context play an important role in delivering an invitation for salvation. The study would be advantageous to determine whether or not these percentages could be increased in itinerant preaching versus pastoral preaching.

⁸According to Neal Michell in *How to Hit the Ground Running*, pastoral preaching focuses on "caring and nurturing" the congregation. This systematic approach to preaching "equips the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12). In contrast, itinerant preaching, popularized by men such as John Wesley and George Whitefield, is characterized by men traveling from church to church to preach the gospel. See Neal Michell, *How to Hit the Ground Running: A Quick-Start Guide for Congregations with New Leadership* (New York: Church Publishing, 2005), 134.

Third, because Wilton introduces the invitation prior to concluding his sermon, an analysis of the entire sermon determines the extent that he employs the elements of Streett's methodology. With this in mind, an analysis of Wilton's sermons determines if he incorporates preparatory elements for the invitation during the introduction and body of the sermon.

APPENDIX 1
SERMON ANALYSIS TOOL

Sermon Information

Preacher:

Sermon Title:

Text:

Date Preached:

Place Preached:

Sermon Analysis

I. Theological Content

A. Did the preacher use the word *repentance* in the content of the sermon?

1. If so, how many times?

2. Was the term explained?

B. Did the preacher use the word *faith* in the sermon?

1. If so, how many times?

2. Was the term explained?

II. Preparation of the Invitation

A. Transitions

1. Did the preacher use connective questions?
2. Did the question(s) connect to the theme of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ?
3. Did the preacher offer a challenge to the audience? If so, what were the hearers challenged to do?
4. Did the preacher give the audience a choice? If so, what were the options given?
5. Did the preacher explain a promise from the Word? If so, what was the promise?

B. Theological Instructions

1. Did the preacher instruct the hearers to repent?

- a. Were illustrations used to explain the term?
 - b. Was biblical evidence incorporated?
2. Did the preacher instruct the hearers to believe?
 - a. Were illustrations used to explain the term?
 - b. Was biblical evidence incorporated?
 3. Did the preacher instruct the hearers to follow Christ?
 - a. Were illustrations used to explain the term?
 - b. Was biblical evidence incorporated?
 4. What were the preacher's final remarks to the congregation?

C. Persuasion

1. Was the audience made aware that Jesus is the only way to salvation?

2. Was the invitation personal?

D. Motivational Theme

1. What was the theme of the invitation?

2. Did the theme match the central theme of the message?

III. Comments

APPENDIX 2

SELECTED SERMONS

- Wilton, Don. "After Jesus Was Born." Sermon based on Matt. 2:1-12. DVD. December 26, 2010.
- _____. "The Apple of God's Eye, Part 2." Sermon based on Rom. 3:1-10. DVD. November 27, 2005.
- _____. "Back to the Beginning—God's Creation." Sermon based on Gen. 1:2-13, 2:1-2. DVD. April 25, 2010.
- _____. "Back to the Beginning—God's Ultimate Purpose." Sermon based on Gen. 2. DVD. May 16, 2010.
- _____. "Being Satisfied." Sermon based on Phil. 2:14-15. DVD. June 28, 2009.
- _____. "Christian Credentials." Sermon based on Phil. 3:1-11. DVD. August 8, 2009.
- _____. "The DaVinci Code." Sermon based on Lk. 9:18-36. DVD. May 7, 2006.
- _____. "The Decisive Dead." Sermon based on Heb. 11:23. DVD. February 29, 2004.
- _____. "Defying the Odds." Sermon based on Gen. 6-8. DVD. June 4, 2006.
- _____. "The Forgiven Dead." Sermon based on Heb. 11:31. DVD. May 16, 2004.
- _____. "God Bless America." Sermon based on Is. 1:10-31. DVD. October 31, 2004.
- _____. "God In—God Out." Sermon based on Phil. 4:8-9. DVD. November 29, 2009.

- _____. "God's Commissioned Officer." Sermon based on Rom. 1:1. DVD. April 10, 2005.
- _____. "God's Strategy." Sermon based on Acts 17:2-4. DVD. January 6, 2008.
- _____. "Graduating God's Way." Sermon based on Matt. 6:25-34. DVD. May 18, 2008.
- _____. "The Greatest Lesson Ever Learned." Sermon based on Jn. 21:1-11. DVD. April 15, 2007.
- _____. "The Greatest Vision Ever Seen." Sermon based on Matt. 17:1-9. DVD. April 8, 2007.
- _____. "The Heart of a Leader." Sermon based on Rom. 1:8-15. DVD. June 5, 2005.
- _____. "The Heart of Our Vision." Sermon based on Matt. 22:36-39. DVD. November 16, 2008.
- _____. "Heaven on Earth." Sermon based on Matt. 6:10. DVD. July 8, 2007.
- _____. "The Impact of the Spirit." Sermon based on Rom. 8:9-11. DVD. June 26, 2005.
- _____. "The Key to God's Heart." Sermon based on Is. 58:2-14. DVD. March 1, 2009.
- _____. "Let's Roll." Sermon based on Heb. 13:1-3. DVD. September 12, 2004.
- _____. "The Lord's Supper." Sermon based on Lk. 22:7-20. DVD. November 20, 2005.
- _____. "The Lord's Supper." Sermon based on 1 Cor. 11:17-34. DVD. November 23, 2008.
- _____. "The Magnificent Dead, Part 4." Sermon based on Heb. 11:24-29. DVD. April 25, 2004.
- _____. "The Man of God." Sermon based on Exod. 4:1-5. DVD. June 19, 2005.
- _____. "The Marks of a Healthy Church." Sermon based on 1 Thess. 5:12-28. DVD. June 22, 2008.

- _____. "One Glorious Day." Sermon based on Lk. 24:1-8.
DVD. March 27, 2005.
- _____. "Overcoming Discouragement, Part 1." Sermon
based on Neh. 4:1-23. DVD. September 20, 2009.
- _____. "The Roaring Lion." Sermon based on 1 Pt. 5:8-9.
DVD. June 27, 2010.
- _____. "Salvation at Bethlehem." Sermon based on Mic.
5:2. DVD. December 9, 2007.
- _____. "The Second Key to Contentment." Sermon based on
Phil. 4:10-20. DVD. January 10, 2010.
- _____. "See You at the Finish Line." Sermon based on
2 Tim. 4:7. DVD. May 20, 2007.
- _____. "Servants, Saints and Sinners." Sermon based on
Phil. 1:1-2. DVD. February 8, 2009.
- _____. "The Seven Blessings." Sermon based on Heb. 12:
22-24. DVD. August 8, 2004.
- _____. "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Fathers."
Sermon based on Heb. 12:5-13. DVD. June 20, 2004.
- _____. "Sharing the Blessings." Sermon based on Lk. 14:
15-24. DVD. September 5, 2004.
- _____. "The Super Dead." Sermon based on Heb. 11:8-10.
DVD. February 1, 2004.
- _____. "Taking a Stand." Sermon based on Phil. 2:7-30.
DVD. April 26, 2009.
- _____. "Temptation." Sermon based on Matt. 6:13. DVD.
August 26, 2007.
- _____. "Ten Prayer Requests." Sermon based on 2 Thess.
3:1-18. DVD. September 21, 2008.
- _____. "Ultimate Prayer, Part 2." Sermon based on Matt.
6:9-14. DVD. May 27, 2007.
- _____. "Ultimate Sacrifice." Sermon based on Gen. 3:21.
DVD. May 30, 2010.

- _____. "Under God." Sermon based on Gal. 5:16-25. DVD. July 5, 2009.
- _____. "An Unmarked Envelope." Sermon based on Jn. 3:16. DVD. May 10, 2009.
- _____. "Well Done Faithful Servant." Sermon based on 1 Sm. 12. DVD. April 11, 2010.
- _____. "When God Speaks to the People of God." Sermon based on 1 Kgs. 9:1-9. DVD. June 18, 2006.
- _____. "When under Attack, Part 1." Sermon based on Eph. 6:10-18. DVD. March 12, 2006.
- _____. "When under Attack, Part 2." Sermon based on Eph. 6:10-18. DVD. March 19, 2006.
- _____. "When under Attack, Part 3." Sermon based on Eph. 6:10-18. DVD. March 26, 2006.
- _____. "When Your Faith is Tested." Sermon based on Gen. 22:1-19. DVD. August 27, 2006.
- _____. "When Your Life Stinks." Sermon based on Jon. 1:1-17. DVD. October 8, 2006.
- _____. "When Your Prayers Have Purpose." Sermon based on Eph. 3:14-21. DVD. October 22, 2006.
- _____. "When Your Suffering Makes Sense." Sermon based on 1 Pt. 1:3-9. DVD. October 1, 2006.
- _____. "Where Are You?" Sermon based on Gen. 3:1-24. DVD. May 23, 2010.
- _____. "Who Really Killed Jesus? Sermon based on Lk. 23:1-49. DVD. February 22, 2004.
- _____. "Why Was Jesus Born?" Sermon based on Lk. 1:76-2:7. DVD. December 19, 2010.
- _____. "A World without Christ." Sermon based on Rom. 9:20. DVD. January 22, 2006.

_____. "Would You Give Your Heart to Jesus?" Sermon
based on Jn. 14:1-6. DVD. July 31, 2005.

APPENDIX 3

ANALYSIS SUMMARY

Old Testament

I. THEOLOGICAL CONTENT			
	Out of 15	%	Comments
A1	2	13.3	
A2	1	6.6	
B1	7	46.6	
B2			
Total	10		
II. PREPARATION OF THE INVITATION			
Transitions			
A1	11	73.9	
A2			
A3	12	80.0	
A4			
A5	4	26.6	
Total	27		
Theological Instruction			
B1	2	13.3	
B1-A	1	6.6	
B1-B			
B2	5	33.3	
B2-A			
B2-B			
B3	6	40.0	
B3-A			
B3-B			

	Out of 15	%	Comments
B4	13	86.6	
Total	27		
Persuasion			
C1	1	6.6	
C2	13	86.6	
Total	14		
Motivational Theme			
D1	11	73.3	
D2	6	40.0	
Total	17		
III. DELIVERY OF THE INVITATION			
3	13	86.6	Invitation for salvation in 6 sermons
Total	13		No invitation in 2 sermons

New Testament

I. THEOLOGICAL CONTENT			
	Out of 45	%	Comments
A1	8	17.8	
A2	2	4.4	
B1	35	77.8	
B2	6	13.3	
Total	51		
II. PREPARATION OF THE INVITATION			
Transitions			
A1	35	77.7	
A2	1	2.2	
A3	27	60.0	
A4			
	Out of 45	%	Comments
A5	9	20.0	
Total	72		

Theological Instruction			
B1	7	15.5	
B1-A	1	2.2	
B1-B			
B2	14	31.1	
B2-A	4	8.8	
B2-B	3	6.6	
B3	18	40.0	
B3-A			
B3-B			
B4	41	91.1	
Total	88		
Persuasion			
C1	2	4.4	
C2	39	86.6	
Total	41		
Motivational Theme			
D1	38	84.4	
D2	18	40.0	
Total	56		
III. DELIVERY OF THE INVITATION			
3	37	82.2	Invitation for salvation in 22 sermons
Total	37		No invitation in 8 sermons

APPENDIX 4

PERSONAL INTERVIEW

1. Why do you offer an invitation?

I offer the invitation because Jesus told his disciples to be "fishers of men." A fisherman baits the hook, casts the line, and jerks it when he feels a bite. But no fisherman can make a fish bite! To eliminate the public invitation is to disobey God's instructions. Why would God have sent Jonah to Nineveh to call people to repentance if, in fact, there was no need to call people to repentance?

2. Who influenced you to extend the invitation?

The Word of God offers me all the influences for the invitation. No man does. Preaching is the power of God, by the Word of God, to the people of God, via the man of God, through the Spirit of God!

3. What components must be necessary in the invitation?

Four components of the invitation are critical: (1) acknowledgement of sin, (2) confession and repentance of sin to Jesus alone, (3) acceptance of God's Word by faith, (4) demand for a verdict (either for or against).

4. Should the preacher call people to action?

The preacher should call people to action from the beginning of the message to the end of the message. This is inherent in Christian preaching, which must point to the cross of Christ Jesus. Any preaching void of Jesus Christ and him crucified is not Christian preaching. The invitation is not an afterthought. It is the message of the cross.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles

- Coleman, Robert E. "Preaching for a Verdict: Evangelistic Preaching in Wesleyan Tradition." *Preaching* 15, no. 2 (September-October 1999): 53-54.
- Davis, D. Clair. "Altar Call: Evangelism." *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 2 (summer 1978): 57-59.
- Decker, Bert. "How to Get Your Message Across." *Leader Life* 1 (fall 2003): 12-30.
- Dollar, Truman. "The Invitation: Is It Really Necessary?" *Fundamentalist Journal* 4 (April 1985): 66.
- Ehrhard, Jim. "The Dangers of the Invitation System." *Reformation and Revival* 2 (summer 1993): 76-94.
- Evans, W. Glyn. "A Survey of Evangelism in America." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (1971): 165-72.
- Ford, Leighton. "How to Give an Honest Invitation." *Leadership Journal* 5 (spring 1984): 105-8.
- Fraze, Randy. "Reviving the Altar Call: How Our Contemporary, Postmodern Worship Is Positively Old Fashioned." *Leadership Journal* 24 (winter 2003): 71.
- Hamstra, Sam, Jr. "Altar Calls and Effectual Calls." *Modern Reformation* 7 (July 1998): 19-22.
- Henry, Jim. "Preparing the Evangelistic Message." *Preaching* 6 (March-April 1991): 16-18.
- Johnson, Ron W. "Thank You, Lord: An Inductive Approach to the Invitation." *Preaching* 9 (November-December 1993): 27-29.

- Lain, Gil. "Planning and Giving an Effective Invitation." *Church Administration* 30 (April 1988): 31-32.
- Laurie, Greg. "What Ever Happened to the Clear Invitation?" *Leadership Journal* 16 (spring 1995): 52-56.
- Lay, Kathryn. "Kingdom Invitations." *Outreach* 5 (January-February 2006): 61.
- Loscalzo, Craig A. "How Are They to Hear? Evangelism and Proclamation." *Review and Expositor* 90 (winter 1993): 101-13.
- MacDonald, Gordon. "What to Do with a Stranger: What Invitation Do I Offer: 'Pray This Prayer,' or 'Follow Me'?" *Leadership Journal* 31 (summer 2010): 84-87.
- Mains, David. "From Application to Action." *Leadership Journal* 7 (October 1986): 64-68
- McMinn, Don. "Rethinking the Invitation." *Church Administration* 28 (March 1986): 19-21.
- Mulligan, Stuart. "Giving an Altar Call (Pulling in the Net)." *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology* 3 (fall 1989): 40-42.
- Murchison, D. Cameron, Jr. "Preaching for Conversion." *Journal for Preachers* 15 (1992): 21-25.
- Paulson, Bob. "Jacksonville Billy Graham Crusade: Personal Invitation." *Decision* 42 (January 2001): 8-13.
- Shultz, Thom. "Altar Calls: Effective Evangelism or Manipulation?" *Group* 14 (February 1988): 10-12.
- Staires, Clay. "Evangelism: Private Ministry." *InSite* 13 (July-August 2009): 39-40.
- Stansberry, O. George. "Gospel Invitation." *Christian Standard* 125 (May 1990): 189-90.
- Stogsdill, Skip. "Altered Calls." *The Reformed Journal* 36 (February 1986): 7.
- Stone, Sam E. "The Invitation." *Christian Standard*, September 29, 1996.

- Streett, R. Alan. "The Public Invitation and Calvinism." In *Whosoever Will*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, 233-51. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- Tolbert, Mark. "The Integrity of the Invitation." *The Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 6, no. 2 (fall 2009): 89-94.
- Walker, Billy. "What Ever Happened to the Invitation?" *Fundamental Journal* 5 (October 1989): 34.
- Warren, Rick. "Why Don't You Have an Altar Call at the End of Your Services?" *Ministry Tool Box Issue* 7 (spring 2005): 1-2.
- Watkins, Forrest H. "Giving the Invitation." *Church Administration* 26 (January 1984): 13-14.
- Weeden, Larry K. "Effective Invitations: Six Fresh Ways to Awaken People to Commitment." *Leadership Journal* 9 (October 1988): 124-28.
- Willis, Richard W. "Restoring a Biblical Invitation." *Christian Standard* 133 (February 1998): 94-95.

Books

- Aldrich, Joseph C. *Gentle Persuasion: Creative Ways to Introduce Your Friends to Christ*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988.
- Allison, Lon, and Mark Anderson. *Going Public with the Gospel: Reviving Evangelistic Proclamation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Bennett, David. *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000.
- Berkley, James D., ed. *Preaching to Convince*. Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1986.
- Broadus, John. *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. 4th ed. Revised and edited by Vernon L. Stanfield. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

- Broadus, John. "Yale Lectures on Preaching." Louisville, KY: Boyce Digital Library, 1889. Photocopied. In *Evangelistic Preaching*, Roy H. Short, 65. Nashville: Tidings General Board of Evangelism, 1946.
- Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000.
- Carter, James E. *Help for the Evangelistic Preacher*. Nashville: Broadman, 1985.
- Davis, Ozora S. *Evangelistic Preaching*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1921.
- Diehm, Floyd L. *Winning with Word Power*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Duduit, Michael. *Stop Preaching and Start Communicating*. Pickering, Ontario: Ontario Castle Quay Books, 2010.
- Fasol, Al, Roy Fish, Steve Gaines, and Ralph Douglas West. *Preaching Evangelistically: Proclaiming the Saving Message of Jesus*. Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006.
- Fish, Roy J. *Giving a Good Invitation*. Nashville: Broadman, 1974.
- Ford, Leighton. *The Christian Persuader*. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1966.
- Galli, Mark, and Craig Brian Larson. *Preaching That Connects*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.
- Gresham, Charles, and Keith P. Keeran. *Evangelistic Preaching*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1991.
- Griffin, Emory A. *The Mind Changers: The Art of Christian Persuasion*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publications, 1979.
- Hawkins, O. S. *Drawing the Net: 30 Practical Principles for Leading Others to Christ Publicly and Personally*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993.
- Hendricks, Howard G. *Teaching to Change Lives*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1987.

- Henry, Jim, and Jay Dennis. *Dangerous Intersections*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004.
- Hulse, Erroll. *The Great Invitation: Examining the Use of the Altar Call in Evangelism*. Laurel, MS: Audubon Press, 2006.
- Jackson, Edgar M. *A Psychology for Preaching*. Great Neck, NY: Channel Press Inc., 1961.
- Kendall, R. T. *Stand Up and Be Counted: Calling for Public Confession of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.
- Klaiber, Walter. *Call and Response: Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism*. Translated by Howard Perry-Trauthig and James A. Dwyer. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Larsen, David L. *The Evangelism Mandate: Recovering the Centrality of Gospel Preaching*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992.
- Leavell, Roland Q. *Evangelism: Christ's Imperative Commission*. Nashville: Broadman, 1979.
- Lewis, Ralph L. *Persuasive Preaching Today*. Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1982.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971.
- Lorentzen, Melvin E., ed. *Evangelistic Preaching: A Self-Study Course in Creating and Presenting Messages That Call People to Jesus Christ*. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990.
- Loscalzo, Craig A. *Evangelistic Preaching That Connects: Guidance in Shaping Fresh and Appealing Sermons*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- MacArthur, John. *Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- _____. *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2005.
- Martin, O. Dean. *Invite: Preaching for Response*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987.

- McLaughlin, Raymond M. *The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979.
- Michell, Neal. *How to Hit the Ground Running: A Quick-Start Guide for Congregations with New Leadership*. New York: Church Publishing, 2005.
- Murray, Iain. *The Invitation System*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964.
- _____. *Revivals and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998.
- Nevin, John Williamson. *The Anxious Bench: The Mystical Presence*. New York: Garland Publications, 1987.
- Packer, J. I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1961.
- Perry, Lloyd M., and John R. Strubhar. *Evangelistic Preaching*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.
- Pollock, John. *Crusaders: Twenty Years with Billy Graham*. Minneapolis: World Wide, 1969.
- Reisinger, Ernest C. *Today's Evangelism: Its Message and Methods*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Craig Press, 1982.
- Richard, Ramesh. *Preparing Evangelistic Sermons*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.
- Short, Roy H. *Evangelistic Preaching*. Nashville: Tidings Press, 1946.
- Stanfield, V. L. *Effective Evangelistic Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Contemporary Christian*. Nottingham, United Kingdom: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- _____. *The Preacher's Portrait*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961.
- Streett, R. Alan. *The Effective Invitation*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004.

- Sweazey, George E. *Effective Evangelism: The Greatest Work in the World*. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953.
- Taylor, Frederick E. *The Evangelistic Church*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927.
- The holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton: IL. Crossway Books, 2002.
- Thompson, D. P., ed. *The Modern Evangelistic Address*. New York: George H. Doran Co., 1925.
- Thornbury, John F. *God Sent Revival: The Story of Asahel Nettleton and the Second Great Awakening*. Grand Rapids: Evangelical Press, 1977.
- Tracy, Joseph. *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976.
- Tyler, Bennett. *Nettleton and His Labours: The Memoir of Dr. Asahel Nettleton*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996.
- Vines, Jerry, and Jim Shaddix. *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*. Chicago: Moody, 1999.
- Walker, Alan. *Evangelistic Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983.
- Whitesell, Faris D. *Evangelistic Preaching and the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1947.
- _____. *Sixty-Five Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1945.

Dissertations

- Asa, Robert Lynn. "The Theology and Methodology of Charles G. Finney as a Prototype for Modern Mass Evangelism." Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1983.
- Bridges, Reginald L. "A Critical Examination of the Evangelistic Preaching of Robert L. Hamblin." Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007.

- Burkholder, Melvin I. "Persuasion in Preaching." Ph.D. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1953.
- Dooley, Adam Brent. "Utilizing Biblical Persuasion Techniques in Preaching without Being Manipulative." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006.
- Eads, Jeffrey Shannon. "Enhancing the Project Director's Skill in Giving a Public Invitation to Specific Age Group Worship Services at First Baptist Church, Brandon, Florida." D.Ed.Min. project report, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008.
- Kitchens, Lester David. "An Examination of the Degree of Effectiveness of Expository Preaching in Obtaining Evangelistic Results." Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989.
- Lee, Jonggil. "A Critical Examination of the Evangelistic Exposition of Stephen F. Olford." Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003.
- Miller, William M. "Preaching in a Postmodern Setting: An Analysis of the Apologetic Preaching of Mark Driscoll." Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011.
- Olive, Howard Goodlett. "The Development of the Evangelistic Invitation." Th.M. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1958.
- Shaddix, James Lynn. "A Critical Examination of the Decisional Preaching of Richard Allen Jackson." Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996.
- Streett, R. Alan. "The Public Invitation: Its Nature, Biblical Validity, and Practicability." Ph.D. diss., California Graduate School of Theology, 1982.
- Sunukjian, Donald Robert. "The Homiletical Theory of Expository Preaching." Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1974.

Thompson, William Oscar. "The Public Invitation as a Method of Evangelism: Its Origin and Development." Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979.

Tolbert, Mark, "Equipping Ministers in Extending Public Evangelistic Invitations." D.Min. project report, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991.

Web Sites

Bing, Charles C. "The Effective Invitation." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (1984). Online. Available from <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/bookreviews/streett.htm>. Accessed 6 January 2011.

Kirkland, Don. "Billy Graham's 'Big Surprise': Joins Spartanburg First Baptist Church." *Baptist Courier* December 31, 2008. Online. Available from <http://www.baptistcourier.com/3052.article>. Accessed 7 January 2011.

Loscalzo, Craig A. "Can These Bones Live? Identification and Sermon Delivery." *Preaching Magazine* (May 1994). Online. Available from <http://www.preaching.com/resources/articles/11563719>. Accessed 6 January 2011.

The Southern Baptist Convention. "Meet Southern Baptists." The Official Website of the Southern Baptist Convention. Online. Available from <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus>. Accessed 31 October 2011.

The Southern Baptist Convention. "State Convention." The Official Website of the Southern Baptist Convention. Online. Available from <http://www.sbc.net/stateconvention.asp?state=SC>. Accessed 31 October 2011.

VITA

Robert F. Gallaty III

PERSONAL

Born: 20 September 1976, Jefferson, Louisiana
Parents: Robert and Margaret Gallaty
Married: Kandi Gallaty, 18 December 2004
Children: Rig Gallaty, 9 September 2008; Ryder Gallaty, 27
September 2010

EDUCATIONAL

Holy Cross High School, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1994
B.G.S., William Carey College, 1998
M.Div., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007
Th.M., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010

MINISTERIAL

Ordination: 26 March 2006, Immanuel Baptist Church, Morgan
City, Louisiana
Highpoint Camp Pastor, 2004
Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, Morgan City, Louisiana,
2006-2008
Pastor, Brainerd Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee,
2008-present

PROFESSIONAL

Teaching Assistant to Dr. Walter Brown, Professor of Old
Testament and Hebrew, New Orleans Baptist Theological
Seminary, 2007
Teaching Assistant to Dr. Dennis Phelps, Professor of
Preaching, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary,
2008